

WORKING PAPERS COLLECTION | 1

THE ART OF (RE)ENGAGING THE YOUNG LEARNER

INSIGHTS FROM INFORMAL
LEARNING WORKSHOPS RUN BY
THE V&A MUSEUM

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CONNECT2ASPIRE

CULTURAL ENGAGEMENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PROFESSIONAL ASPIRATIONS

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1 Introduction

A lifelong learning paradigm marks two fundamental changes with respect to traditional education: First, it recognizes that learning does not occur only in formal education environments, but is spread across formal, non-formal and informal environments each with important contributions to individuals' development. This principle has far-reaching implications in that rather than counting on a unique source, children, young people and also adults will have access to “an ecology of learning opportunities” (Sefton- Green, 2013:5) in diverse social settings, from the traditional schools to their homes, libraries, museums and youth centres. The second implication is that learning does not stop when completing an education cycle and entering the workplace. Learning actually never stops, it is a lifelong activity (Sharples, 2000). Now the rate of change in our societies with respect to the job market and required skills contribute to making lifelong learning not an option, but an imperious necessity: with changing job requirements, the skills needed for these jobs also change, and thus have to be updated or even completely reshuffled throughout the lifetime of an individual.

This first working paper of the AHRC ECR Leadership Fellowship/UKRI Innovation Fellowship *Connect2Aspire: Cultural Engagements and Young People's Professional Aspirations* focuses on the implications of these considerations for museum learning, and in particular on how museums may kindle or rekindle the sort of connection with children and young people that will make the museum a go to place for informal or nonformal learning, rather than a one-off opportunity. Previous research suggests that this connection may be built early in life (Sabiescu and Charatzopoulou 2016), though evidence as to the conditions under which it is actually constructed in time is limited, and would require longitudinal studies on museum attendance and learning choices. This paper focuses on young people that have had disappointing formal education experiences and looks at how museums may rekindle a double connection: with museums as places of inspiration, knowledge and skill building; and with education as a process that includes but goes beyond learning in schools.

The paper draws on research conducted in the frame of the project *Connect2Aspire*, on two editions of a 5-day informal learning workshop offered by the Victoria and Albert Museum's Young People's Programme in December 2018 and January 2020, both themed on photography. The 2018 event was organised in collaboration with the Newham-based charity Community Links with activities taking place alternatively at the V&A and Community Links headquarters. The 2020 event was organised in partnership with The Prince's Trust and course activities were held at the V&A in South Kensington and the Stratford Circus Arts Centre in East London.

The research findings have been interpreted in this paper to shed light on:

- The extent to which participating young people were disengaged with education, and why
- How young people ideally wanted to learn, for an engaged experience
- How did the V&A workshop experience cater to these needs.

The remainder part of the introduction describes the V&A photography workshops and the learning and engagement approach; the research methods and empirical evidence on which this study draws and participants' socio-demographic profile. The next sections detail the key findings in five parts:

1. participants' attitudes to learning in schools
2. how young people would ideally like to learn
3. what they expected from the course before joining
4. how they perceived the V&A workshop learning experience, and
5. what outcomes they derived from it.

The final section offers an interpretation of these findings, and implications for learning in museums.

1.1 The V&A Photography Workshops

The two workshops followed a similar format, having as main objectives to enable participants to learn a range of photography equipment and techniques; gain insight in the photography industry; complete a Bronze Arts Award; and design and create a final product which will be showcased to friends and family at the end of the week.

In both editions, photography skills were taught by inviting participants to relate the practice of photography to their own experience and surroundings, but with a different focus: in the 2018 edition participants were invited to capture a collection of photos to represent the themes of community and belonging. In 2020 the focus was on streetstyle photography and participants were invited to capture the streetstyle of Stratford in their photos.

The informal education format involved intensive training over five days, alternating between the V&A Museum location in South Kensington and East London locations (different for the two editions). Participants visited the V&A photography galleries accompanied by the facilitators, seeking inspiration; practiced different photography techniques from portrait to open-air photography; experimented with disposable cameras; and learned to edit the photographs they had taken, select them and prepare to display them in a public exhibition. On the last day of the course participants had their work displayed in an exhibition staged at the V&A in South Kensington (2018) and at the Stratford Circus Arts Centre (2020). For the 2020 edition, the streetstyle photography exhibition was also featured in the V&A careers festival Making It: Careers in Fashion and Costume, held at the Stratford Circus Arts Centre on 22 February 2020.

1.2 Research methods

The study draws on a dataset gathered around the views and experiences of 27 young people involved in the two photography workshops, through a multi-method research approach. The study was designed to relate among the following analytical categories:

- A. Young people's profiles and motivation patterns
- B. Learning experience (participation, engagement and satisfaction)
- C. Outcomes and benefits

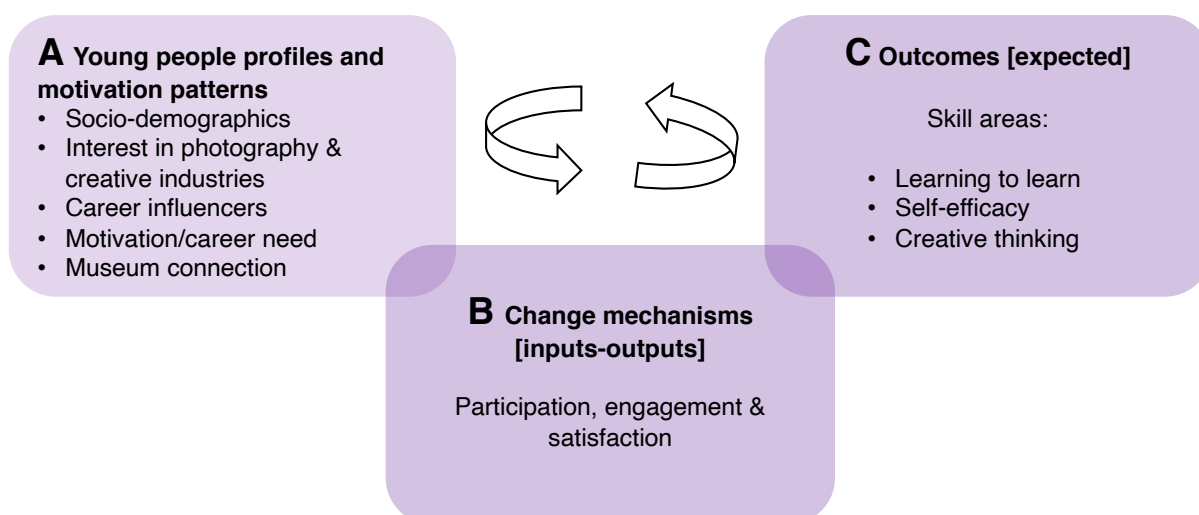


Figure 1. Analytical categories used in the research design

Each category was broken down into measurable units (See Figure 1), and applied to a range of methods including short questionnaires, focus groups, observation of sessions and analysis of artefacts produced by participants and reflections submitted for their Bronze Arts Award (See breakdown in Table 1).

Table 1. Research methods across the two editions

| Method | 2020 edition | 2018 edition |
|--|---|--|
| Focus group | Day 3: Dimensions A. Young people profiles and motivation patterns; B. Change mechanisms; and C. Outcomes | Day 2, Day 5: Dimension A. Young people profiles and motivation patterns Dimensions B. Change mechanisms; and C. Outcomes |
| Questionnaire | Day 5: Dimension A. Young people profiles and motivation patterns | Day 2: Dimension A. Young people profiles and motivation patterns |
| Diary and reflection on practice (Bronze Arts Award reflections; skills share during exhibition opening) | | Dimensions B. Learning experience; and C. Outcomes |
| Observation and informal conversations | On-going | Dimension B. Participation, engagement and satisfaction |

1.3 Socio-demographic profiles

27 participants have been consulted for this research study (16 in 2020 and 11 in 2018). Age ranges are comparable across the two editions, with the majority being 18 to 24 years old.

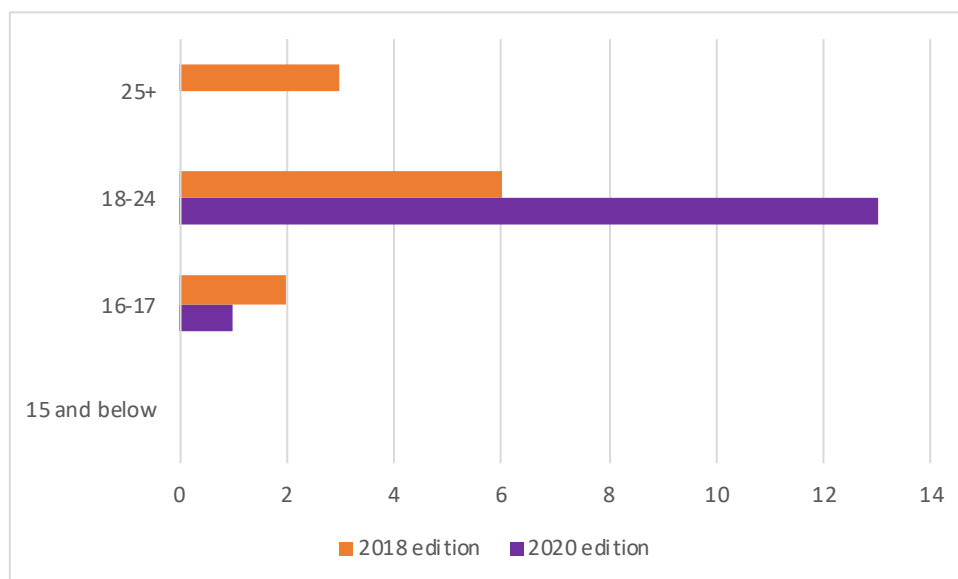


Figure 2. Participants' age ranges across the two editions. (Sample: 14/16 in 2020; 11/11 in 2018)

Regarding gender, there was a majority of young men in 2020 (10/16) and young girls in 2018 (7/11). All participants are London based, however neighbourhood locations are varied. While in 2018 a majority of participants were coming from East or South-East London, in 2020 locations were spread more evenly across different areas of London including East (Redbridge) or South-East London (such as Lewisham), but also North and Northeast/Northwest, South and South-West London.

In terms of **educational qualifications**, the majority had finished their GCSEs; 5 participants (out of 14 survey question respondents, 2020) and 4 (out of 10 survey question respondents 2018) had a Bachelor degree (See Fig. 3).

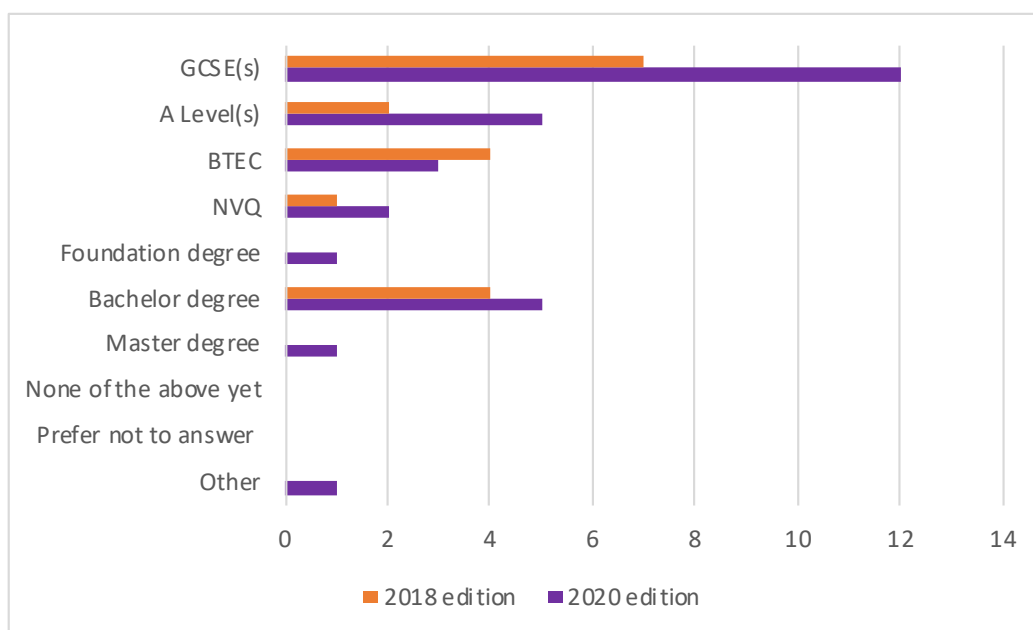


Figure 3. Educational qualifications achieved. (Sample: 14/16 in 2020; 10/11 in 2018)

In 2018, 6/11 participants held a **creative qualification**, and 3/11 wanted to study for a creative qualification. In 2020, just 2 survey respondents mentioned they had a creative qualification. Awarded qualifications include Multimedia Design Technology, Creative Media production, Cultural Heritage, Photography & Art textiles. Some have completed informal education short courses such as Product Design course with Prince's Trust, a 7-week Documentary film making course, and a Sculpture Bronze Arts Award for an informal course offered by Central St Martins. 5 participants in 2020 and 4 in 2018 mentioned they were self-taught artists and learnt an artform or creative practice by themselves.

1.4 Conditions of disadvantage

In both editions the majority of participants declared to be unemployed and looking for jobs. At the same time, a sizable number stated they lacked financial resources to pursue education and careers in creative sectors. Many of them had to get a job quite early after finishing compulsory education. In essence, they had to become autonomous quite early in life, which posed serious obstacles in their creative career plans.

Thus, most of them had to make difficult choices between earning a living and training for creative careers they really wanted to get into. In a focus group, a young girl told about the difficulty of studying aside having a job:

“I don't know if my situation is a bit different. I've got a rent and bills to pay. So I have to work for that, and by the time I go back home I just wanna chill, I'm exhausted already. So for me I need to be a bit more regimented in that. That's a big factor.” (F, 2018)

2 Key findings

2.1 Attitudes toward learning in schools

One of the striking observations across both editions regards young people's deep mistrust in schools. The analysis of their feedback and comments enabled the identification of a series of critical features of the formal education system that young people deemed unsatisfactory:

- Mass instruction: no attention to individual needs
- Educational environments do not inspire and motivate
- Schools lack representation
- Extrinsic motivation and chasing grades
- Teachers lack relevant and recent industry experience
- Being constricted

Mass instruction: no attention to individual needs

In young people's perception, all educational systems they had been trained in shared this feature which was almost unanimously refuted: top-driven educational curricula, inflexible and not open to individual students' needs.

“These courses, they’re too general because even if you’re a good teacher, you’re given these criteria and you have to get students to meet certain things. In my experience, a lot of it is not ending up being helpful.”

(2020)

This goes hand in hand with **teachers’ perceived lack of confidence and belief in the students’ capacities**. Young people do not feel supported and encouraged to trust in and improve their capacities.

“School would have been a good place for us, if we had people that believed in us and said 'Yeah, you can do that and so on'. But when you see that they can't relate with you and you haven't got someone there in school where you can tell these things and get proper advice, it's hard.”

(F, 2018)

“If teachers really thought of the student, what they need, how it works for that student, then the student would be like 'Ok, I understand now', and they could help them pass like exams and be more certain about what they want to do in the future.”

(F, 2018)

Educational environments do not inspire and motivate

Young people thought that schools are unable to inspire and support one’s creative calling and vocation. They do not provide the environment where someone feels challenged to give their best, and able to develop their talents and abilities. Schools lack inspirational figures. In exceptional cases, individual teachers and instructors may fill this gap.

“I suppose the institution isn't gonna do that, but I suppose that's why we have the individual teacher. And it takes for people to genuinely care about their trade and what they are doing, to have passion for it.”

(F, 2018)

While some participants mentioned the exceptional case of a dedicated teacher figure, these examples are rare, and still need to cope with the requirements of a top-driven, rigid schooling system. Thus, for some participants **schools are inspiring rather for triggering a reaction to take matters in their own hands** and cater for whatever schools are unable to provide. One participant told the story of creating a student society that became successful and gathered a lot of attention, and which eventually inspired her to go into cinematography and photography as a way to tell inspiring stories.

“School, I can say it inspired me in the sense that it showed me that I wanted to create stuff that I feel school and formal education doesn't give you.”

(F, 2018)

Schools lack representation

Some young people remarked that one of the reasons for schools being such uninspiring places had to do with the fact that they **lack representation**. This was particularly the case in the 2018 edition, where more than half of participants were Black, and three Indian and Pakistani. Lack of representation means, for young people, that they cannot see successful, inspiring figures coming from their own background, no role models for them to be inspired by, that they can identify with. For example, a young Black girl remarked:

“A lot of the time, it's a lot to do with the lack of representation as well. (..) When you don't see someone that looks like you doing what you want to get into, you don't even consider that as something that you can possibly go into. (..) Some people may not know [what they can do in life] because they don't even think about something that they can go into, because they don't see someone that looks like them doing that.”

(F, 2018)

Extrinsic motivation and chasing grades

The above went hand in hand with an unhealthy shift in motivation, from pursuing learning for the knowledge and skills, to chasing grades, and thus to **extrinsic motivation**. A young girl said:

“I think it's more about the grades, not the individual and what they are trying to do.”

(F, 2020)

Young people seemed acutely aware that this shift in motivation was something endemic to the scholarly system that trained them. It came to be taken for granted, but this was one of the chief reasons for many of their poor educational performance. The unhealthy shift in motivation, from one's genuine learning interests to performing against pre-defined criteria in a competitive environment was, for many, at the bottom of their rejection of schools.

Being constricted

Some participants remarked that the general feeling in their formal education was that of being bound and constricted, something which could be related to the fact that learning was driven by extrinsic, not intrinsic motivation. Some young people became quite vocal about their dislike of regimenting systems, being coerced into doing activities they did not really wanted to do. This changed the entire learning environment into a no go place, where they had to go just in order to complete the requirements.

“Oh God! I did not like formal education at all. I don't like classes, I don't like most teachers. Like he said, I don't like, I don't like constriction.”

(M, 2020)

“What makes people not pay attention is because you think someone's telling you again and again. And you think ‘I don't want to do that’ and you focus so much on the fact that you don't want to do that.”

(F, 2018)

Teachers lack relevant & recent industry experience

Some teachers may have good approaches, but still for young people the majority would be cut off from industry realities, and often teaching subjects that are either outdated or irrelevant. A young boy remarked:

“It can still be good teachers, but a lot of the time [they] worked in industry years ago, and now they're just doing teaching, they don't have the actual experience, what it's like right now, what you actually have to do now.” (M, 2020)

One consequence of the above is that **the learning itself ends up being irrelevant to contemporary times** and contexts that young people would end up applying their knowledge to.

“I did college, I've learnt history of photography and I was like well okay, that's cool and everything but I want to learn skills, like new skills and new cameras coming out today, in the 21st century, not 18th, 20th [century] stuff like that, this is outdated.” (M, 2020)

2.2 How do young people (want to) learn?

Young people had firm views about how they wanted to learn and develop skills. Across both editions, there was agreement that learning should be:

- interest-based
- personalised, and
- taught by passionate and knowledgeable instructors who teach by example and inspiration.

Interest-based learning

This was a core belief almost unanimously shared by the young people in the two workshops, that to be effective, learning had to come from a genuine interest. When asked to speak about their creative interests in the focus groups, the atmosphere buzzed with excitement. Many had interests they felt passionately about, and a good number went on to study on their own, when they had no possibility to benefit from training. A few young people had learned photography on their own. Some others were passionate about music, or documentary films, or video game films.

Some of them had become relatively successful at it. In the 2020 edition, a young boy had a large YouTube following for its video game movies. This was something he had done on his own, and he became quite good at it. A young girl from the 2018 had multiple talents: she

was doing stand-up comedy and acting, dance, music and illustration. She was also passionate about social causes and helping out young people, and had founded her own company to deliver art programmes to young people.

“I do comedy and acting, I’ve done stand-up comedy a bit. So I’m in entertainment, and I perform, I dance. I do music. And I do art. So 2 things I’m incorporating now are my art and my youth work. And I’ve got a business called [Anon.]. I like clothing, I like fashion. I’ve got new stuff that’s gonna come, I’ve got my design. And then my brand is delivering programmes to youth, teaching them about art in different stages.” (F, 2018)

The gap between interest-based learning and the perceived rigid education system meant for many of them a complete rejection of the system. The ones who encountered some success were confident that this was a viable path towards a career, a profession or at least making a living.

“Interest will teach you. If you really want to do something you just do it off interest, cause I think everyone kind of knows what they want to do from early, and you may not realise you are experimenting, but may go around it, but eventually you are going to come back to what you wanted, really, when you started.”

(F, 2018)

However, not all of them could make it as self-styled entrepreneurs or creative freelancers. For them, being caught off from the system, the perspectives were dire – most often of ending up doing jobs they disliked, just to get by.

Personalised learning

A derivative of the above was that learning should always be relevant to the learner, relate back to them.

“When you learn the most is when you put yourself in that predicament. So if you read a piece of history and you imagine yourself at that time, you become more interested into it. .. If you try to relate to something, that’s what makes you have a strong understanding of a lot of things, because it’s a challenge if you force yourself to relate to something.”

(F, 2018)

This contrasts to what most learning in schools was perceived to be:

“It’s just [that if] you have to actually pass the course and get the qualification, you have to hit certain criteria. And that’s not necessarily like relevant to you or helpful to you at all.”

(M, 2020)

Passionate and knowledgeable instructors who teach by example and inspiration

Young people described a mentor figure who teaches by example, facilitates the learning process in an accommodating rather than directive way, mindful of learners' views and leaving plenty of space for them to shape the learning experience according to their interests and learning styles. A young girl exemplified with the facilitator figure in the V&A workshop:

“When he was talking about his pictures, he [the lead facilitator] did inspire me. And I learnt from acting and doing and from philosophy, cause [he] teaches in a philosophical way. So, you apply your own knowledge to [bring something to light].”

(F, 2018)

2.3 Expectations from the course

To be able to understand the educational value offered by the V&A workshop, it is important to first look at the pre-existing expectations young people had from the course, which also acted as motivations for joining. Three sets of expectations were revealed through direct questions:

- 1 developing photography skills
- 2 networking and meeting people with similar interests; and
- 3 getting information and opportunities for creative careers.

The rich discussions carried out with participants and the observation of their engagement throughout the course revealed a fourth expectation, which was not uttered in response to a direct question about reasons for joining the course, but rather revealed as a need that many young people had before joining the course:

- 4 the need to find validation for their abilities, talents, and decisions about their future career choices.

These four sets of expectations are fundamental for understanding how the course functioned as a bridging experience between what their former educational experiences offered or failed to offer (as described above) and young people's training and support needs, as they were preparing to make critical professional choices.

Developing skills

Most participants were **motivated to join for developing skills** – e.g., to develop hands-on skills in photography, learn about original ideas and creative techniques, and learn to use photography equipment. Participants with low or no skills wanted to get basic photography skills, while some participants had already taken formal education or informal courses in photography or were self-taught, for them the course was a means to deepen and expand on photography skills:

“I wanted to know more about photography, because I know the basics work, I wanted to see how other people work with photography and how they take pictures, what they

like to do, because I always do landscape photos, I never did portrait. So, it's interesting learning how to do portraits for different cameras."

(M, 2020)

"I've come here because photograph, for me, is a passion I have and I've been getting a lot of shots and I've also had a pass through my exam in GCSE Creative Media so I thought I should take it further and I should learn more the in-depth of it. I thought of coming here and think of where I could get next, cause my future a goal would be to be a photographer and probably a cinematographer, so I thought maybe this could be a helping hand, teach me more about photography, the elements to it."

(M, 2018)

Some mentioned they specifically wanted **photography skills to apply to other career fields**, such as film.

"The reason why I chose the photography course was that I wanted to help me get into the make-up industry, like YouTube videos and make up and have like pictures, modelling make-up"

(F, 2018)

"I want a multimedia career, mainly visual or related to music and sound. I would like to learn more about visual arts and photography"

(F, 2018)

"People think that film and photography are the same thing but although they're similar like mediums they're very different to my understanding. Like, you can be a director of photography in film and you need to know a good base of photography. Because photography would teach you to have an eye and stuff. And then you can apply that to creating visuals. .. So that's why I'm doing the course cause I wanna get some firm knowledge of that to carry on. I myself want to be the creative behind the camera"

(F, 2018)

Among these, participants wanted to **explore photography/visuals as creative medium and a means of expressing:**

"I want to raise awareness for the LGBT community as I am going to start my transgender process soon and show people how it is like as a trans woman."

(Transgender, 2018)

"I am here because I want to know more about photography. I'm interested in visual arts. I'm coming from a background of writing and music but I'm trying to learn more about the visual aspects of it"

(F, 2018)

Networking and meeting people with similar interests

For many participants, the creative environment and atmosphere was the main driver. They were interested in meeting like-minded peers and professionals with similar creative interests.

“I really wanted to meet more people who had similar interests”

(M, 2020)

Some were hoping that networks opened in the course may help them access future job opportunities.

“Also gives you a chance to open a few doors into photography as well”

(M, 2020)

Getting information about and opportunities for creative careers

The belief in the power of interest and passion was only matched by the strong belief young people had, in the power of networks and catching the right opportunity. Thus, the environment and networking they were hoping to get from the course, as discussed above, was also a means for them to explore new linkages to creative environments that may offer job, internship or training opportunities. Young people also trusted the experience of seasoned creative professionals, like the course lead facilitator, and were eager to get advice on progressing their own creative careers. Those young people interested in a photography career indicated they were hoping to get information and tips for advancing in a photography career, and accessing creative professionals for information, ideas and career advice.

“I am taking a gap year because I don't really know what I want to do. And so, I want to know more about the different kinds of careers in photography and also if it was something I might want to do in further study as well like actual information as well.”

(M, 2020)

Boosting self-confidence and recognition of talent, ability and choices

This expectation emerged when participants were asked to reflect on their learning experience and its outcomes. It came out that a key reason for joining in was something that they lacked: confidence in their self-worth and their previous skills and some degree of certainty in the career options they had and their own ability to make valid choices.

Those young people who did have prior skills in photography needed to validate this knowledge and to appreciate their value by being in an environment with people having similar interests, and an instructor with solid industry experience. A young boy with self-taught photography skills remarked how before the course he had to “*second guess [him]self if [he] was sort of good*”, and he needed the course to validate this for him, and boost his self-confidence.

2.4 The workshop learning experience

To contextualise the workshop learning experience, it is useful to first shed light on the relevance of and familiarity with the workshop subject matter for participants. In terms of formal skills, more than half of participants (15/27) did not have any prior training in photography. 7/27 had taken a photography course before (in formal or informal education), and some declared being also self-taught, learning photography on their own. 4/27 appreciated their skills in photography as very good.

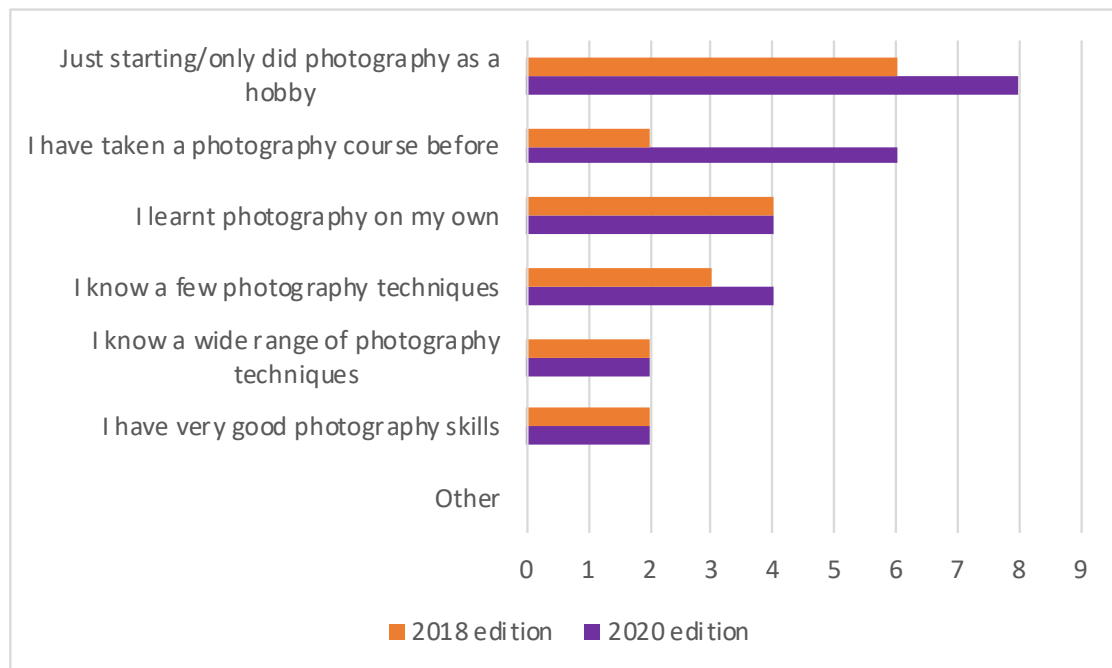


Figure 4. Photography experience and skills. Q: *How would you describe your experience with photography?*

What is common to all participants, however, is that **photography was deeply engrained in their day to day life.**

“We’re growing up in a generation where pictures are everything I know. Wherever you go, you take a picture, Instagram is the main influence for that. And it’s natural, like a lot of people whenever you go out, whenever you get food the first thing you do is you take a picture of it. Whenever we go with friends, first we take a picture of them”

(M, 2018)

“My family, everyone takes pictures at parties and stuff, and you are weird if you don’t wanna be in the picture so it’s like growing up around cameras”

(F, 2018)

Photography is a means of expressing and skills are acquired naturally, through trial and error, looking at experts, tutorials, learning from friends and informally.

Thus, it is important to consider that the workshop learning experience built on a pre-existing interest in and inclination to engage with photography. And it is in this opening that the workshop learning experience was positioned from the very start.

Having already come to the course with expectations to learn more about an activity that was pervasive and relevant in their lives, respondents found the workshop learning experience fun and engaging and attributed this to some factors, which reflect remarkably well how they ideally want to learn, as described above:

- Interest-based learning
- The industry-experienced mentor figure (Learning from “real people”)
- Practice-based learning
- Balance between structure and flexibility
- Peer learning

Interest-based learning

The course enabled participants to approach photography reflectively, aware of the multiple possibilities it offers, rather than as a one-track activity with its array of techniques to master. This reflective approach was down to the fact that learning applications were related to their own interests, rather than the instructor’s or else pre-defined. The **teaching and facilitation approach** gave them space to express and put their own perspective and views (rather than the instructor’s) in the centre.

“I liked the fact that there wasn't a certain theme, there wasn't like ‘Take pictures of roads, or trees’. It was just take pictures so you've got to explore and do your thing. And in doing that I've learnt how to take pictures of certain scenarios, how to capture people off guard, certain skills that I didn't have before. And today I have learnt how to ..not do much exposure, not do this and that. So, I like the independent thing, just going out and doing your own thing.”

(M, 2018)

“I'm happy that I've got to do my stuff and not what the teachers want me to do.”

(M, 2020)

Some contrasted this experience with the typical ones in schools, where it was the curricular or the teacher’s agenda, not their own, that dictated the activities of the day.

“I liked it, the method is more focused on the individual, it's different than school. This is more freelance, and it's also for free.”

(F, 2018)

A young man who had completed a GCSE in Photography mentioned:

“Compared to secondary school, photography was way way different in a sense where that was more of a 'You're gonna do this, do this, do this', whereas this is more sort

of freelance in a sense where you take pictures, but it's more of in your own way. In your mindset, whereas in secondary school it was more sort of teacher's perspective, whereas this is our perspective, and we're doing it our way."

(M, 2018)

The industry-experienced mentor figure (learning from "real people")

There was unanimous agreement across participants from both editions that the lead facilitator made the greatest contribution to the engaging learning experience. They appreciated, in particular, his industry know-how and industry connections, and the unique insight into photography that he could share, based on these.

"I think obviously [the lead facilitator] was great because he's always professional, he's got experience, so he was able to give us tips that we wouldn't get on all day."

(F, 2020)

Participants remarked that his passion for photography was inspiring and a driver for being present and engaged. The facilitation style resembles the type of learning that participants prefer, which avoids unilateral perspectives from teachers and imposing their views, and instead leaves space for the learner to express and relate the subject matter to their interests. Those young people who took photography courses in formal education remarked that this is something they missed in their formal education experience, where they were rather taught top-down and told what to photograph and how. By being allowed more space for expressing their views and relating learning activities to their interests, they also cultivated different sets of knowledge and skills – such as being aware of multiple ways to approach a subject, the wide range of photography styles and application areas, and the importance of coming to shape their own, unique signature style.

"This is what makes the course good. If he wasn't that passionate about photography, I don't think we'd like photography in this course as much as we are."

Instructor's passion is matched by their knowledge, and young people particularly appreciated the industry knowledge, rather than scholarly knowledge, from the books.

"[The course instructor] is obviously in the industry, so everybody here is really "real". It's actually not sort of like someone that designed the course, [but] isn't a professional photographer, not just like a teacher that does not actually do that much."

(M, 2020)

Practice-based learning

Participants enjoyed the practical, hands-on activities, especially the photo walks in Canning Town (2018) and Stratford (2020), but also going in pairs to shoot in the first day and the museum exploration day.

“My favourite bit was going off in pairs and taking pictures. Cause it was a way to get to know who is in the group with us. And it made me feel more comfortable in the building and improved my relationship and confidence with the camera.”

(F, 2018)

This helped them try out their skills, apply new techniques learnt, and improved their comfort and confidence with the camera.

“What I enjoyed mostly was taking photos of people and focusing on achieving the perfect pictures of headshot. I tried taking pictures of architecture such as flats and apartments, also doing street photography as it was the first time.”

(M, 2018)

There was also consensus on **shooting with disposable film cameras**. For many this was something new; apart from being able to learn to shoot on film cameras, some mentioned the importance of having continuity in activities, *“being able to take the disposable home continued the learning beyond the room”* (F, 2018).

Balance between structure and flexibility

Participants appreciated the flexibility of the course, however group discussions revealed that flexibility alone cannot sustain a viable learning experience. What the course achieved, rather, was that fine balance between structure and flexibility.

“There has to be some semblance of like, structure. (..) But what I like about this is: it's not completely structured, it's just there to make sure that the freedom flows in a certain direction.”

(M, 2020)

Learning from/with peers

Being in an environment with people sharing common interests was among the reasons for young people to join the course in the first place. Some young people had photography skills and their contribution to tutorials and discussions was appreciated, and created an equal atmosphere of peer to peer learning, as opposed to instructor-led learning.

“Being able to discuss, share your work, I think that's what's been most helpful.”

(M, 2020)

Across both editions, participants remarked how they learnt from each other and seeing the others' work. Peer learning and the collaborative atmosphere were particularly strong in the 2020 edition. A point of novelty was that participants created an Instagram and WhatsApp group chat to discuss, support each other and share tips and helpful information during the course.

2.5 Outcomes: “[We] learn how we want to learn”

Learning outcomes have been modelled around three sets of skills: learning to learn; building creative thinking and enhancing self-efficacy.

Learning to learn

“As much as we've been praising the course, it has been really well organised and everyone has been really supportive. Sometimes we are just like, learn how we want to learn, really.”

(M, 2020)

There are two sides to this skill area:

- 1 actual learning outcomes related to photography practice and industry and photography careers, and
- 2 how the course enabled young people to be reflective about their own learning style and pathways and able to apply these understandings in future learning episodes.

Learning outcomes regarding photography practice, industry and careers.

The learning outcomes most mentioned by participants referred to **photography knowledge and skills**, such as: shooting tips and techniques (types of shots, playing with height, attention to angles and plans, when to use/not use functions such as Flash and Zoom); Visual journalism tips and techniques; Editing skills using Adobe Lightroom; Mapping and creating stories; communicating through photography, using different styles; using photography equipment & functions (shooting with different kind of cameras, disposable cameras, developing film, importance of having a good camera)

“I'll take with me this phrase from [the lead facilitator], ‘You're only as good as your camera’.”

(M, 2018)

Across both editions, participants mentioned that they learnt **how they can apply photography skills to other creative domains**. These included make-up for fashion; film and documentary; media and communication.

In 2018, three of the **most appreciated photography competences developed** regard: editing, using disposable cameras, and learning how to communicate and tell a story through photography.

“I have also learnt how to allow pictures to be spoken out towards the audience and help them to understand what each individual picture is trying to define.”

(M, 2018)

“What I really enjoyed learning was how to use ‘Lightroom CC’ when editing the brightness and colour of photos, as it was the first time I used the software. From then

I tried to use new techniques and effects to be displayed on to the image and have seen a huge difference to it.”

(M, 2018)

“My favourite and most useful part was the photo editing, I had photography experience before but not in photo editing, this was something new.”

(F, 2018)

Participants also mentioned as outcomes **knowledge of the industry and photography careers** and insights into the career options open to a photographer. Most mentioned was the unique insight into photography and the industry that the course and particularly the instructor provide. Participants spoke about getting “*a unique insight*”, how the course “*opened [their] mind[s].*”

“I think hearing [the instructor] talk about things like experience of the industry was really interesting and felt like a really unique insight to the world. I think most courses would be kind of sort of rigid but this one kind of opened my mind, I guess.”

(M, 2020)

Self-reflective learning and improved capacity to learn

Second, we investigated how participants were self-reflective about and improved their capacity to learn through the course. As it came out especially from focus group discussions, **participants already had quite well defined ideas about their own learning styles**, and how they best learned or wanted to learn (aspects detailed in section 2.2 above). The course was an occasion to experience in practice a learning approach they already cherished. Many of them spoke about the value they attributed to interest-based and self-directed learning, and the course was an opportunity to be engaged in a learning process guided by these principles, something that the school or other formal educational experiences did not offer. Thus, they had an occasion to contrast and reflect upon different teaching and learning approaches and to position themselves against them.

For many participants, the Arts Award reflective activities contributed to reflection and self-reflection. Participants had to think about how they got the knowledge and skills, and how that was different from their regular formal education classes. They were able to single out aspects such as the unique facilitation style, the figure of the mentor-instructor, interest-based activities, peer sharing and learning – all elements that helped them to learn and which are part of learning to learn.

Creative thinking

“It helped me to see things in different ways. Before I would see things one way, but now I can see there are different ways to look at things.”

(F, 2018)

The analysis looked at how the course cultivated creative thinking, by breaking it down in two components: multilateral thinking (understanding diversity of styles and approaches in doing photography) and contribution to articulating their own unique photography style.

Participants spoke about how they learnt to **think multilaterally about photography** and understand there are multiple styles and ways of doing things.

"I learnt that there are different styles of taking pictures; there's not one way to take photographs, and there's no right or wrong."

(M, 2018)

For this, it was helpful to get exposed to and *"inspired by other people's work, to see different styles"*. (M, 2018). This, in turns, enabled participants to locate their unique style among different ways of doing photography. Key outcomes for participants with pre-existing photography skills was giving them space to express their individuality, and thus be creative about their own development as photographers.

"It was engaging even if I already have skills in photography. The context was more open. Before, it was like – "Do this, do that". I here it's like, "Do what you want to do." You can do wedding photography or general photography, there are options."

(F, 2018)

"I learnt that there is beauty in everything, and there's always a picture to capture. Pictures are memories."

(M, 2018)

Self-efficacy

"I think for me personally, what I took the best, it's really yeah, just took a confidence boost really, because I'm feeling a lot more confident in my photography and I'm wanting to feel more enthusiastic and wanting to continue doing photography. I'm not sure if that's sort of just as a hobby or as a career, but I really want to do more photography."

(M, 2020)

The components of self-efficacy cultivated build partially on the skill areas covered above (especially the photography know-how acquired), and lead to:

- 1 increased confidence in one's own abilities, judgements and decisions, and
- 2 the capacity to formulate goals and plan to achieve them.

Building self-confidence and camera confidence

The quality most cultivated by the courses resides in building self-confidence associated to the new knowledge and skills developed, summarised by many participants as 'being more confident with the camera'.

"I think the best thing about this course was, it really helped my confidence because previously, I took some courses and was self-taught, but I was never really sure." (M, 2020)

"I've also learnt to look out for certain things when taking pictures. The lines and everything we've mentioned. So I think I've got a slightly better eye, I'm more confident with it, at least. I'm more confident with the camera."

(F, 2018)

"Improved my relationship with the camera."

(F, 2018)

Increased confidence in using the camera also positively linked to confidence to act professionally, as (trainee) photographers.

"I got the confidence that I can just go and stop people and take a photograph."

(M, 2018)

Several participants associated this boost in confidence with increased **motivation** to do more photography, as the opening quote exemplifies.

Importantly, **learning with peers & a mentor/friendly instructor were seen as instrumental to building self-confidence.**

"So the fact that I can take pictures of me to show a bunch of other people that have their own ideas and be like, "Oh, this is good. Maybe you could do this better." And they can show me that they're just like ... and do the same thing. And if all everyone here can take really good shots and since everyone has also said that, my shots are pretty good as well. I can think okay, maybe I am kind of decent, I'm pretty good at whatever. Because being able to discuss, share your work? I think that's what's been most helpful."

(M, 2020)

Devise goals and plan to achieve them

We asked participants how they planned to integrate the learning gathered during the course. Respondents mentioned different ways to use the newly acquired skills, not necessarily for a single-track photography career, but also in different aspects of their personal and professional life, including different creative careers.

"I definitely see myself now taking up photography in my day to day life, mostly for personal professional reasons. For a more professional and official look to my work"

and production. I will now continue with my art and use my new-found skills in photography to add a more professional and valuable look to my work”.

(F, 2018)

“I will start a YouTube channel about make up, and will learn more about editing and use these skills for this.”

(M, 2018)

3 Museums, learning and the art of relevance

In the findings section, we outlined four sets of expectations from the V&A course:

- 1 Developing skills
- 2 Networking and meeting people with similar interests
- 3 Getting information about and opportunities for photography-related careers
- 4 Boosting self-confidence and validation of talent, ability and choices

These are important not only as expectations from a single course, but bear wider significance for how museum learning may become more relevant for young people. To gauge their significance, we first have to acknowledge what young people are missing and not being offered either by formal education or other support entities, as they start formulating plans for creative careers or further creative education. The grand majority of workshop participants had school experiences that left them disillusioned. Many had been disengaged throughout most of their formal education pathways, and showed up in school only as much as needed in order to get a diploma. And for some, their educational experience provided an inverted sense of motivation and drive – rather than be motivated to go further with formal education, they felt they had to make it on their own, pursuing their genuine interests, cultivating their own talents, and looking for networks and opportunities outside the traditional education to work pathways.

However, in this process, young people will miss some valuable ingredients necessary for actually being successful in building the right skills and fetching the right opportunities. They will first miss a community of interest and of practice (Li et al. 2009) in which they can exercise their skills while sharing and learning from the others. Second, they will also miss an entity (whether a person or an organisation) with the right status to be able to provide validation for their abilities, their talent, and ways to improve. The issue of choice is of particular significance. The young people observed and interviewed encountered difficulties in making decisions and getting the certainty that their decision was the right one. Many had multiple talents, multiple interests, and did not know where to head, where to invest most of their energies with some degree of certainty that it was the right one. And third, they miss genuine knowledge about the world of creative work.

Thus, when it is about young people at critical choice moments (looking for jobs, or looking for further education to land desired jobs) their training needs are very complex. They may join museum learning workshops and similar sorts of activities with expectations going

beyond skill-building. And at times these expectations may not even be acknowledged by themselves, just as in the two workshops it took extensive discussions for participants to express they had an unspoken need to get validation for their abilities and choices.

For museums to then shape their learning offering to respond to young people's needs, it takes first an expanded perspective that will consider what is actually relevant (Simon, 2016) for young people. The four expectation patterns outlined above are a snapshot of what a particular group of young people need from a museum learning experience. However, actual needs will differ according to context and young people profiles. The wider significance of this study lies in pointing the importance of taking an expanded perspective on young people's creative education and career support needs. Moreover, what this study suggests is that relevance cannot be built by the museum as a single entity, but as an actor active in an ecology of educational offerings for young people (Sabiescu and Charatzopoulou 2018), or how Sefton-Green (2013) names it, "an ecology of learning opportunities". This ecology of learning opportunities features a variety of actors with their offerings – schools, further and alternative education, communities of interest and of practice, and support organisations for students, workers and young people in need, to name just a few. In this ecology, museums can be featured as brokers of experience and information, enabling young people to get in touch with professional realities and understandings that they may not otherwise have access to.

Within this perspective, the actual skill building experience that museums can offer gets renewed significance. We have discussed above some of the factors that made the V&A workshop an engaging learning experience for young people. Importantly, this is also how young people would like to learn and build skills in other educational contexts, how their educational experience would ideally look like, including:

- interest-based learning activities [in which they are engaged by]
- a mentor figure that gains authority based on their experience and insight,
- practice-based,
- in environments where there is structure but also flexibility [and which encourage]
- peer learning.

Interest-based learning encompasses a fine balance between self-directed learning and the support of mentors and teachers. So on the one hand, interest is the first driver, as this participant concisely affirms:

"You teach yourself, you start off teaching yourself."

(F, 2018)

But at the same time, instructors do play a fundamental role:

"Ok, if you want to become a performer, push the child towards the performance, this doesn't go only for schools and teachers, but at home as well parents in a sense too, always push your child to be passionate about what they wanna be."

(F, 2018)

The instructor figure that young people appreciate is passionate about their work, inspiring and with relevant experience. They are also teaching by example rather than by top-driven knowledge transfer, thus rather filling the role of a mentor and facilitator of learning (Sabiescu and Charatzopoulou 2018; 2015).

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THE V&A MUSEUM

BY AMALIA G. SABIESCU

CONNECT2ASPIRE

CULTURAL ENGAGEMENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PROFESSIONAL ASPIRATIONS

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