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RAND EUROPE

Vital Communities

Review and analysis of the research

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RAND EUROPE

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Preface

RAND Europe was commissioned by the Vital Communities Partners to review and analyse the data generated by the Vital Communities programme between October 2005 and August 2007. In particular, RAND Europe was asked to:

- Evaluate the available evidence and data from a rigorous and analytical point of view in order to examine the effects attributable to the Vital Communities programme.

- Provide recommendations on how best to take forward the research element of Vital Communities.

This was envisaged as a retrospective study that conducted no new primary research, relying instead on the considerable qualitative data generated by the programme and on a quantitative research study undertaken by the consultancy Business of Culture.

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Contents

Table of figures

Table of tables

Executive summary

What is the Vital Communities programme?

The Vital Communities programme provides creative and artistic activities for children, their families and wider communities in nine locations across Cambridgeshire and in Peterborough. The project commenced in Autumn 2005, and between November 2005 and December 2006 a total of 187 creative practitioners/deliverers organised 747 events and workshops. These events were attended by a total of 13,968 people, of whom 10,103 were children and 3,865 were adults.[1] Vital Communities is also a research project that aims to generate evidence of positive impacts of the arts on individuals and the wider community.

The design of the Vital Communities programme

The arts have often been associated with beneficial effects and impacts; however, the measurement and quantification of these effects appears to be a more recent preoccupation. Vital Communities builds upon previous research conducted in the field of the social impacts of the arts by stating that 'Vital Communities is … a long-term study that sets out to investigate the impact of arts on communities and to demonstrate whether the arts have a positive impact on the aspirations, achievements and attitudes of those communities'.[2]

Vital Communities claims to be unique because of four elements in its design: it provides evidence of the impact of its arts programme on communities; provides qualitative measurement of its effects; combines this with quantitative measurement of its effects; and adopts longitudinal focus. A selective search of the literature on arts impact studies suggests that:

- some other projects do employ one or more of the design elements above

- probably no other project currently combines two or more of the elements in the same way as Vital Communities.

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[1] Data provided by Vital Communities in F1-Quantitative Data October 2005–December 2006.

[2] Vital Communities (2006) *Business Plan: Pilot Phase 2005/7* p.3.

Therefore, although Vital Communities is probably not a unique project in an absolute sense, it appears to be **distinctive** in aiming to combine all the elements above in the way it does.

Quantitative data on the effects of Vital Communities

The main source of quantitative data available to examine the possible impacts of Vital Communities activities on participants and the wider community is a report by Business of Culture. The Business of Culture research project[3] set out to report on the wider social impacts of the Vital Communities arts projects on participating children, their families and their communities. However, our analysis raises serious concerns about the quality of the baseline measurements in that report, the low attendance at community discussion groups, and the high rate of attrition on participant diary returns. These quality concerns mean that the Business of Culture report and data do not enable robust conclusions to be drawn regarding the effects of Vital Communities. Vital Communities also generated quantitative data on numbers of participants attending a range of events.

Qualitative data on the effects of Vital Communities

RAND Europe analysed a wide range of qualitative data related to the project, most of it generated by participants and the project's administrators. This information included: notebooks produced by the participating artists; records of termly evaluation meetings; parents' statements on their impressions of the project; and evaluation forms submitted by teachers and artists in three locations: Peterborough, Ramsey and Fulbourn (see Appendix A). We have picked up a wide variety of messages from the evaluation forms regarding the possible impacts and effects of the Vital Communities activities. It is, however, problematic to make generalisations from these messages because they consist of anecdotal evidence from which firm, objective and definitive conclusions cannot be drawn. Anecdotal evidence can hint at possible positive associations between factors, yet to claim the existence of effects on the basis of this evidence would generalise beyond the possibilities offered by the data. The value of anecdotal evidence can be increased by 'triangulating' it against other sources, to check for corroboration, but such sources were mostly not available for the data we received.

Evaluation forms were designed and collated by the Vital Communities project manager as a means of internally evaluating the creative programme only, rather than for external research purposes. Furthermore, given the rotation of artists and the fact that class teachers do move on, it is very difficult to assess temporal changes: there is no sustained consistent analysis, nor is there a baseline against which effects can be measured. In addition, the wording of the questions on the evaluation forms raises concerns about the reliability of the data. The statements derived from these evaluation forms should therefore be treated with caution.

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[3] Business of Culture (2007) *Vital Communities: Research Report* London: Business of Culture.

Nevertheless, the evaluation forms do raise many interesting issues regarding the apparent associations between different elements of the programme and reported effects. Given that these apparent associations were interesting in their own right, we have included an analysis of the issues to which they relate.

Conclusion and recommendations

The future progress of the project depends, obviously, on attracting sufficient funding, but also on applying the methodological and conceptual recommendations arising from the first phase. These are to:

- Expand the baseline analysis. Incorporating in the research arts interests and participation in the arts by the active and control families would generate very important information required to evaluate any changes in attitudes and behaviour.

- Shift the focus from causal relations to associations. This may make the research methodology more robust because a focus on causal relations is complicated, and causal relations are difficult to prove.

- Use effective data collection methods and ensure cooperation of research participants. Attrition has been substantial and further stages of the research design could incorporate strategies to prevent attrition and increase participation.

We also highlight many substantive questions arising from the qualitative data that could form the basis for future research projects.

CHAPTER 1   **Introduction**

Vital Communities has been designed as an active programme of arts interventions in schools and communities, together with a research project. The arts programme consists of the provision of professionally led creative and artistic activities for children, their families and wider communities in nine locations across Cambridgeshire and in Peterborough. The project commenced in Autumn 2005, and between November 2005 and December 2006 a total of 187 creative practitioners organised a total of 747 events and workshops. These events and workshops were attended by a total of 13,968 people, of whom 10,103 were children and 3,865 were adults.[4]

As a research project, Vital Communities aims to generate evidence of positive impacts of the arts on individuals and the wider community. The Vital Communities Partners commissioned a consultancy called Business of Culture to design and conduct research into the first year of Vital Communities activities. Business of Culture collected data from families participating in the Vital Communities activities, as well as from three control groups, in order to measure the impact of Vital Communities on participants. Furthermore, Business of Culture organised discussion groups with members of the nine 'active' communities to gain a clearer understanding of attitudes towards the level of social cohesion within the selected communities.

The local authorities involved in planning and running Vital Communities ('the Partners') commissioned RAND Europe to undertake a research project comprising two tasks:

1. to review and provide analysis of the data from the Vital Communities programme, October 2005–August 2007, and
2. to provide recommendations on how best to take forward the research element of Vital Communities.

RAND Europe was asked to interrogate the data in order to state as explicitly as possible what measurable, objective associations are evident between the Vital Communities arts activities and the aspirations, achievements and attitudes of individuals and selected communities. RAND Europe was not commissioned to conduct any new primary research; rather, we were asked to analyse the data provided to us. This data comprised:

- Business of Culture's Final Report on its quantitative research study, Jan–Dec 2006 (includes baseline information participants, family diary

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[4] F1-Quantitative Data October 2005–December 2006.

findings, community discussion group findings); this was issued to us in August 2007;
- Evaluation forms provided by schools and filled out by class teachers/ headteachers (see Appendix A)
- Artists' notebooks and evaluation forms (see Appendix A)
- Participants' comments and feedback (usually verbal and collated by project manager, occasionally on contact sheets at events)
- Photographs of activities (Project Manager and Schools)
- Products of workshops (for example, audio recordings of activities)
- Filming of activities by the NESTA-funded 'Spotlight' research team
- The Draft Interim Report of the 'Spotlight' research team

Owing to the volume of this data and the constraints on time, our work was necessarily based on a sample of the data. The Partners agreed that we should consider data relating to three of the 'active' locations: Peterborough, Fulbourn and Ramsey. Their rationale was stated thus:

RAND Europe will be looking at a sample of the evidence collected throughout the 2 academic years of the Vital Communities project. Much of the evidence is stored/filed by location, and in order to maximise the time of RAND Europe researchers, therefore, it was agreed that the sample would be selected on a location basis. (This is for logistical reasons to do with time constraints, in order to maximise the expertise of RAND Europe, and in order not to place too heavy a demand on the project manager in making available all of the evidence.) We agreed that a small selection of 3 of the active locations would be used as the sample for the whole project (9 active locations, 10 communities). We agreed that 3 contrasting locations would provide a reasonable sample and consulted the original grid of the cohort groups and the selection criteria.

Evidence from Eastfield (Peterborough), Ramsey (Huntingdonshire) and Fulbourn (South Cambridgeshire) will be used as the sample. These 3 specific locations have been suggested by Susan Potter and Joanne Gray, and have been agreed by the Partners, for the following reasons:
* the 3 locations provide a representation across urban, suburban and rural
* the 3 locations represent a spread across the districts that are not benefitting from Spotlight research (i.e. Huntingdonshire and South Cambridgeshire had no intensive research)
* the 3 locations provide a spread of level of engagement in the project (i.e. the response of the schools in each case is a leading factor in the attitude and response of participants, these 3 have demonstrated contrasting levels of engagement)

No 3 locations could provide a perfect representation as there are too many variables.

> Evidence relating to the 3 locations will be used to research the impact across all active locations.
>
> *Joanne Gray and Susan Potter, 30 July 2007*

RAND Europe was asked to review the evidence the project has on the inputs and outcomes and to assess the robustness of that evidence. The Partners were particularly interested in findings relating to the impact of the Vital Communities project on:
- Community cohesion
- Fear of crime/safety – real or perceived
- Sense of place and belonging
- Increased self-esteem/confidence
- Understanding and tolerance of diverse cultures
- Increased awareness of and participation in arts activities
- Increased awareness and participation in community activities
- Educational attainment – probably available in the form of anecdotal comments from teachers and parents

RAND Europe met the project steering group several times to explain the work and update the group on our progress and interim findings, and we had a number of contacts with the project manager throughout the work. We had discussions with the Spotlight lead researcher on two occasions.

In this report, we have set out our findings in the following sequence. In Chapter Two, we examine the design of the Vital Communities programme, and the Partners' claim that it is a unique project. This is followed by a discussion of the wider debate of the impacts of the arts on communities. In Chapter Three we examine some of the interesting issues regarding the apparent associations between different elements of the Vital Communities programme. Finally, in Chapter Four we address the design and methodological issues that face future research projects that the Partners might wish to plan and undertake.

In this introductory chapter there are three important points to raise. One concerns the quality of the data for analytic purposes; one concerns the question of causality; and one concerns the longitudinal design of the project.

On the quality of the data for analytic purposes, there are significant obstacles preventing reliable and robust conclusions being drawn from some of the sources of data with which we have been provided. In order to interrogate the data for evidence of possible measurable associations between Vital Communities activities and changes in individual and collective attitudes and behaviour, the data need to be accurately accounted for in the project. Items of data and analysis need to be understood in their correct context, so that anyone could know (a) how representative that item is of its type, (b) whether that item has subjective or objective content, and (c) whether that item has been either replicated or modified or refuted at a later time by the very same source. Without this transparency, attempts at analysis encounter great obstacles. It is not legitimate to extrapolate findings from items that lack this transparency. The Partners of the Vital Communities project requested RAND Europe to evaluate the available evidence and data from a rigorous and analytic point of view. Where evidence is not shown to be representative, firm, objective and

definitive conclusions cannot be drawn. Anecdotal evidence can hint at possible associations between factors, which may indeed be present, and if other data sources support these associations, this can increase confidence. However, to claim the existence of effects on the basis of this evidence is not safe.

On causality, Vital Communities aims to 'investigate the impact of arts on communities and to demonstrate whether the arts have a positive impact on the aspirations, achievements and attitudes of those communities'.[5] Linking 'arts' activities (i.e. not specifically Vital Communities arts activities) to 'aspirations, achievements and attitudes of … communities' represents a claim that a causal relationship exists between the two parts of the statement. However, the literature on the social impacts of the arts[6] warns that such causality is difficult to demonstrate and verify. Matarasso[7] refers to this in saying that '[t]he biggest problem, in relation to … evidence, is showing that a particular outcome is the result of an arts activity – i.e. establishing a causal link. Those involved may say that something happened as a result of an arts project; we, as outsiders, may believe them: but is it so?' For example, it may appear there is a causal relationship between a child playing the violin and higher than average school exam scores, but the improved scores may be a result of many other factors, most notably socioeconomic status. In other words, children who are more likely to play the violin are also more likely to receive higher than average exam scores. Caution is required when looking for causal relationships, especially as evidence to support these claims is very difficult to generate in the real world, where multiple factors interact and influence attitudes, perceptions and behaviours.

Regarding the longitudinal design, Vital Communities has been conceived as a 15-year project, recognising that the potential impacts that the Partners are interested in producing and demonstrating may take many years to show up as definite, sustainable changes associated with the programme's actions. The Partners' intentions are ambitious and exciting. It is neither reasonable nor realistic for the Partners to expect strong evidence of such long-term effects to be discernable at this point in time, after only two years of the programme's existence, let alone to be measurable in a reliable way.

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[5] Vital Communities (2006) *Business Plan: Pilot Phase 2005/7*, p.3.

[6] The difficulty with causality has been noted by many studies in relation to arts and wider effects:

Guetzkow, J. (2002) *How the Arts Impact Communities: An introduction to the literature on arts impact studies* Taking the Measure of Culture Conference, Princeton University.

McCarthy, K. E., E. H. Ondaatje, L. Zakaras, A. Brooks (2004) *Gifts of the Muse: Reframing the Debate About the Benefits of the Arts* Santa Monica: RAND Corporation.

Merli, P. 2002. 'Evaluating the Social Impact of Participation in Arts Activities: A critical review of François Matarasso's Use of Ornament?' *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, Vol 8, no 1.

White, T., R. Rentschler (2005) *Towards a New Understanding of the Social Impact of the Arts*, 8th International Conference on Arts and Cultural Management, Montreal, 3–7 July 2005.

Winner, E. and L. Hetland (2000) 'The Arts in Education: Evaluating the Evidence for a Causal Link' *Journal of Aesthetic Education* Volume 34 No. 3–4.

[7] Matarasso, F. (1997) *Use or Ornament: the social impact of participation in the Arts* Stroud: Comedia.

In summary, we have treated the sample of primary evidence that is currently available with care, considering issues of data quality, causality and the time required to produce effects. Our analysis and observations aim to be objective, accurate and transparent.

CHAPTER 2 # What impacts can Vital Communities claim?

RAND Europe was asked by the Vital Communities Partners to investigate how far the evidence associated with the project supported the notion that 'the arts have an impact on the aspirations, achievements and attitudes of individuals and selected communities'. In this chapter we first provide a brief overview of the literature regarding research into the wider effects of arts, to place the Vital Communities research in that context. The second section discusses the research findings reported in the Business of Culture research report.

Measuring the benefits of the arts

The idea that the arts can have wide positive impacts on individuals as well as society has a long history.[8] The arts have often been associated with beneficial effects and impacts; however, the measurement and quantification of these effects appears to be a more recent preoccupation. For a long time the arts were assumed to benefit individuals and society without the need for any proof of the benefits. However, social and political changes in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s have increased demands for evidence of beneficial effects, principally in order to justify public spending on the arts.[9] Research conducted over the last 20 years or so has begun to establish a new evidence base for evaluating the benefits of the arts.[10]

The primary focus of attempts to quantify the beneficial effects of the arts from the 1980s has been the economic effects and benefits of the arts industries for the wider society.[11] Publications such as the Policy Studies Institute's *The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain* and later publications by Myerscough underlined the economic importance of the

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[8] Carey, J. (2005) *What Good Are the Arts?* London: Faber and Faber.

[9] Selwood, S. (2006) 'Unreliable Evidence: The rhetorics of data collection in the cultural sector' in: Mirza, M., *Culture Vultures: Is the UK Arts Policy Damaging the Arts?* London: Policy Exchange.

McCarthy, K. E., E. H. Ondaatje, L. Zakaras, A. Brooks (2004) *Gifts of the Muse: Reframing the Debate About the Benefits of the Arts* Santa Monica: RAND Corporation.

[10] See, for example, Ruiz, J. (2004) *A Literature Review Of The Evidence Base For Culture, The Arts And Sport Policy*, Scottish Executive.

[11] Reeves, M. (2002) *Measuring the Economic and Social Impact of the Arts: a Review* London: The Arts Council of England.

arts industry to the British economy.[12] Myerscough demonstrated that, through the use of a multiplier, spending in the arts would benefit spending in other sectors of the economy; he thereby provided original evidence to justify public funding of the arts on the basis of economic arguments.[13]

The next focus for assessing the benefits of the arts was on their possible wider social effects on individuals and society. Precise definitions of social effects and impacts of the arts do not exist. However, several effects and outcomes are commonly associated with the social benefits of the arts.[14] Benefits claimed to accrue to individuals include students' improvements in academic performance, basic skills (e.g. reading, maths) and positive attitudes to learning itself. Research literature suggests that the benefits of the arts include the development of critical life skills, such as critical thinking and self-discipline, and the development of pro-social attitudes.[15] Benefits at the community level, including increased interaction among members, leading to increased cohesion and empowerment of the community, were often noted as social effects of the arts.[16]

In Britain, initial research into the measurement and quantification of the social benefits of the arts was conducted by Comedia, with the publication of *The Social Impacts of the Arts. A Discussion Document* in 1993.[17] Throughout the 1990s various other studies, mainly in the UK and in the US, focused on the social impacts of the arts, to identify what the social impacts could be, and how these should be measured.[18]

Interest in measurable impacts of the arts, be they social or economic,[19] has led to a differentiation of the benefits associated with the arts, described by McCarthy et al.[20] Arts benefits can be divided conceptually into two main categories: *instrumental benefits*, which are the measurable benefits of the arts to individuals and the larger society; and *intrinsic benefits*, through which arts can add pleasure and meaning to our lives. The quantifiable

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[12] Myerscough (1988) *The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain* London: Policy Studies Institute

[13] Reeves, M. (2002) *Measuring the Economic and Social Impact of the Arts: a Review* London: The Arts Council of England.

[14] White, T., R. Rentschler (2005) *Towards a New Understanding of the Social Impact of the Arts*, 8th International Conference on Arts and Cultural Management, Montreal, 3–7 July 2005.

[15] McCarthy, K. E., E. H. Ondaatje, L. Zakaras, A. Brooks (2004) *Gifts of the Muse: Reframing the Debate About the Benefits of the Arts* Santa Monica: RAND Corporation.

Guetzkow, J. (2002) *How the Arts Impact Communities: An introduction to the literature on arts impact studies* Taking the Measure of Culture Conference, Princeton University.

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] Landry, C., F. Bianchini, M. Maguire and K. Warpole (1993) *The Social Impacts of the Arts: A Discussion Paper* Stroud: Comedia.

[18] For an elaborate literature overview of global key research on the social impacts of arts see: White, T., R. Rentschler (2005) *Towards a New Understanding of the Social Impact of the Arts*, 8th International Conference on Arts and Cultural Management, Montreal, 3–7 July 2005.

[19] Further benefits have also been described, such as health, cognitive and behavioural benefits.

[20] McCarthy, K. E., E. H. Ondaatje, L. Zakaras, A. Brooks (2004) *Gifts of the Muse: Reframing the Debate About the Benefits of the Arts* Santa Monica: RAND Corporation.

economic and social benefits are called instrumental; the pleasure and meaning people derive from the arts are called intrinsic.

Vital Communities in the context of the research literature

Vital Communities builds upon previous research conducted in the field of the social impacts of the arts by stating that 'Vital Communities is … a long-term study that sets out to investigate the impact of arts on communities and to demonstrate whether the arts have a positive impact on the aspirations, achievements and attitudes of those communities'.[21] This part of Vital Communities' larger goals aims to explore whether there is a link between arts interventions and social benefits, which are considered instrumental benefits of the arts. Furthermore, Vital Communities claims that it is 'unique, combining as it does, quantitative and qualitative measurement, a longitudinal focus and [an] emphasis on communities'.[22] The claim of uniqueness refers to the design of the project, not to the content or analysis of the evidence that the project may collect using that design.

There are four elements to Vital Communities' claim of unique design. Vital Communities' design provides:

- evidence of the impact of its arts programme on communities;

- qualitative measurement of its effects, combined with …

- … quantitative measurement of its effects;

- a longitudinal focus.

A selective search of the literature on arts impact studies suggests that:

- some other projects do employ one or more of the design elements above

- no other project currently combines two or more of the elements in the same way as Vital Communities.

Therefore, although Vital Communities is probably not a unique project in an absolute sense, it appears to be **distinctive** in aiming to combine all the elements above in the way it does.

The design of the Vital Communities project was informed to some extent by an awareness that there are gaps in the research literature about the impact of the arts, and that the Vital Communities project could aim to address some of those gaps. The design adopted by Vital Communities is thus in part a conscious attempt to fill some of the gaps in currently published research about the impact of arts projects.[23]

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[21] Vital Communities (2006) *Business Plan: Pilot Phase 2005/7* p.3

[22] Vital Communities (2006): *UNESCO World Conference on Arts Education: Building Creative Capacities for the 21st Century*, p. 2.

[23] Vital Communities (2006) *Business Plan: Pilot Phase 2005/7.*

The impact that arts projects and programmes can have on communities has been widely debated over at least the last decade. An initial assessment of the social impacts of the arts by Landry et al. in 1993[24] was followed by a stream of further research. Subsequent publications were usefully summarised by White and Rentschler in 2005.[25] These studies together demonstrated that there are difficulties with the measurement of social impacts of art projects. Designs and methods of projects are crucial to the success and validity of the claims that projects can legitimately make. The literature on studies of the social impacts of the arts identifies several design and methods factors that must all be present for the research to be valid, yet the literature indicates that these factors have been largely neglected in many previous research projects.

The six factors that the literature identifies[26] which can contribute to research that aims to measure the social impacts of the arts are:

- *Clear definitions* (e.g. *arts* and *social impacts*), to allow for (international) comparisons of arts impact research.

- *Clear outline of the scope of the research* (micro or macro level), as the level at which outcomes are expected needs to be understood.

- *Longitudinal research*, as outcomes of interventions are often not immediate and can only be observed over time.

- *Mixed methods* (including both qualitative and quantitative methods), to generate comparable data, yet also to remain sensitive to the context.

- *Focus on treatment and non-treatment groups,* in order to understand the difference that the arts intervention programmes make to their treatment groups.

- *Robust evaluation of evidence*, in order to move beyond anecdotal evidence.

A brief review of other arts intervention programmes reveals several methodologies that share similar traits; however, few seem to combine longitudinal research with mixed methods focused at the neighbourhood level.

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[24] Landry, C., F. Bianchini, M. Maguire and K. Warpole (1993) *The Social Impacts of the Arts: A Discussion Paper* Stroud: Comedia.

[25] White, T., R. Rentschler (2005) *Towards a New Understanding of the Social Impact of the Arts*, 8th International Conference on Arts and Cultural Management, Montreal, 3–7 July 2005.

[26] Matarasso, F. (1996) *Defining Values: Evaluating Arts Programmes* Stroud: Comedia.

Jermyn, H. (2001) *The Arts and Social Exclusion: a Review Prepared for the Arts Council of England* London: The Arts Council of England.

Guetzkow, J. (2002) *How the Arts Impact Communities: An introduction to the literature on arts impact studies* Taking the Measure of Culture Conference, Princeton University.

Reeves, M. (2002) *Measuring the Economic and Social Impact of the Arts: a Review* London: The Arts Council of England.

Selwood, S. (2006) 'Unreliable Evidence: The rhetorics of data collection in the cultural sector' In: Mirza, M., *Culture Vultures: Is the UK Arts Policy Damaging the Arts* London: Policy Exchange.

Large arts intervention programmes, such as the DCMS-led Strategic Commissioning Programme 2003–2004: National/Regional Museum Education Partnerships,[27] may focus exclusively on influencing social inclusion, and may be one-off in design, rather than having a longitudinal element. Such programmes are primarily targeted at marginalised groups in the population, who are encouraged to visit museums and galleries and participate in arts projects.

Action research projects that use a longitudinal design are scarce. Several other research initiatives do employ a longitudinal analysis, although these are mostly more abstract in intent.[28] Similarly, the method employed by Matarasso, in a significant study of arts impacts conducted in 1997,[29] investigated over 60 projects covering a wide range of activities but did not focus particularly on insights about impacts at local and neighbourhood level, which is an aim of Vital Communities.

We now return to the evidence gathered by Business of Culture for Vital Communities to examine what it says regarding possible positive effects of the Vital Communities activities.

Evidence from Business of Culture Research Report

The Business of Culture research project[30] set out to report on the wider social impacts of the Vital Communities arts projects on participating children, their families and their communities. Evidence of social impacts was to be derived from three main sources of data collection: baseline questionnaires, weekly diaries and community discussion groups. Nine 'active' groups and three 'control' groups were recruited into the project. Baseline questionnaires were completed by research participants before Vital Communities activities commenced. Weekly diaries were distributed to the active group families and control group families in order for them to record interests and participation in creative activities over a one-year period of Vital Communities arts activities. Diaries thus recorded information about some of the effects associated with Vital Communities arts activities for active group children and their families as compared to the control groups. The community discussion groups consisted of active group community members and were intended to provide information and evidence regarding the impact of arts activities on the

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[27] Several research reports have been produced regarding the programme:

Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (2004) *Inspiration, Identity, Learning: The Value of Museums* Leicester: RCMG.

Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (2007) *Inspiration, Identity, Learning: The Value of Museums: Second Study* Leicester: RCMG.

[28] 'Social Impacts of the Arts Project' conducted by the University of Pennsylvania. Various reports inc.:

Stern, M. and S. C. Seifert (2002) *Culture Builds Community Evaluation: Summary Report* Social Impact of the Arts Project.

Stern, M. (2000) *Cultural Participation and Communities: The Role of Individual and Neighborhood Effects* Social Impact of the Arts Project.

[29] Matarasso, F. (1997) *Use or Ornament: the social impact of participation in the Arts* Stroud: Comedia.

[30] Business of Culture (2007) *Vital Communities: Research Report* London: Business of Culture.

wider community. Over a one-year period of Vital Communities activities two discussion group sessions were organised. However, the report notes that '[t]he time span between the two Discussion Groups was too short for there to have been any significant shifts in questionnaire responses'.[31]

The review of evidence reported in the Business of Culture report largely follows the sequence in which evidence was presented in the report, with the exception of the baseline research, which is discussed first. In the following sections we describe each section of the Business of Culture report and what can be learned from it.

Baseline research

Results from the baseline questionnaire were reported in Appendix 3 of the 2007 Research Report and in the Business of Culture 'Interpretation of Baseline Analysis' report from June 2006.[32] Although the report provides extensive information on the demographic and socioeconomic background of the research participants in order to check whether they constituted a representative sample of the larger local populations, it does not provide any baseline information on any other characteristics of active and control groups before the start of their involvement with the Vital Communities programme. A baseline of all the effects for which Vital Communities would like to show evidence is necessary prior to the start of activities. This would include arts-related activities, for which a baseline is required to observe and evaluate any claimed changes in attitudes and behaviour. Without a baseline on arts interests and activities, as well as other effects, it is difficult to determine the extent to which Vital Communities activities, rather than any other factors, are responsible for claimed changes to the interests and participation in the arts of active groups over a significant period of time.

Diary findings

Over a period of one year a total of 260 (199 active; 61 control) children and their families were asked to complete diaries on their arts interests and activities in order to monitor and observe any behavioural changes and differences between active and control groups. Results are reported in the main part of the 2007 Business of Culture Research Report. Several questions in the diary address topics that might be able to provide evidence of possible wider social impacts of arts activities on children and their families. Table 2.1 lists these questions, and the reported outcomes.

The questions listed in Table 2.1 relate to activities that occur in the larger community (i.e. beyond the school or the family home) and in a social setting. Attending artistic performances, visiting museums and participating in community organisations are often said to be associated with support for 'civil society' and with helping to build social capital.[33] The reported answers to these questions could suggest where evidence for broader

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[31] Business of Culture (2007) *Vital Communities: Research Report* London: Business of Culture, p.54.

[32] Business of Culture (2006) *Vital Communities: Interpretation of Baseline Analysis* London: Business of Culture.

[33] A well-known example is: Putnam, R. D. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* New York: Simon & Schuster.

associations with the arts activities could be sought, especially if active groups appear to reply significantly differently from the control groups.

Table 2.1: Diary questions selection

No.	Question	Outcome
9	How many times, if any, has the family been to the cinema this week?	Overall, little difference between active and control groups. One peak in the summer.
10	How many, if any, live music performances has the family been to this week?	No real trends can be identified. Overall, control groups appear to attend slightly more often.
11	How many times, if any, has the family been to a library this week?	Control groups appear to visit the library more often, yet it is noted that active groups are recorded as reading more books.
12	How many, if any, live theatre performances, plays and shows have the family seen this week?	No real differences between active and control. Active groups peak at times of Vital Communities activities.
13	How many, if any, museums, historic houses or heritage sites has the family been to this week?	Control families appear to visit these venues more often. For both groups, large peak in the summer.
14	How many times, if any, have you noticed any art outside or interesting buildings or landscape design this week?	No real trends or differences, besides a peak for both in the summer.
19	How many, if any, art exhibitions has the family been to this week?	Active groups appear to attend more often, perhaps linked to Vital Communities activities.
17	Did anyone take part in or join a club or do something with a creative community organisation this week?	No discernable trends or consistent differences between control and active groups.

SOURCE: Business of Culture (2007) *Vital Communities: Research Report* London: Business of Culture

Two factors affect the ability to make legitimate claims and draw valid conclusions from the outcomes of these diary questions. The first relates to the high rate of attrition in diary completion for both groups, especially in the active group. Vital Communities activities started with a group of 199 active children and families returning their diaries; after 52 weeks, 6.5% (13) were still using their diaries.[34] Control groups had a higher rate of return: approximately 60% of control group participants completed diaries in week 52. Due to the rate of attrition of the active group it is not safe to interpret those responses, as it is unclear and uncertain how representative of the larger population the responses continued to be. Even though the confidence intervals affirmed the possible robustness of findings, and analysis showed attrition occurred across all socioeconomic groups in the original cohort,[35] this does not guarantee those remaining in the sample were representative of the whole of the original cohort. It is not clear, for example, whether those families who continued to complete diaries were influenced to do so because of their own prior interests or experience of arts activities, quite independently of Vital Communities; this would have differentiated them significantly from the other participants before the Vital Communities programme even began.

A second difficulty arises from the graphs presenting the responses to the diary questions in the Business of Culture Research Report. It is difficult to come to any certain conclusions

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[34] Business of Culture (2007) *Vital Communities: Research Report* London: Business of Culture, Appendix 4.

[35] Business of Culture (2007) *Vital Communities: Research Report* London: Business of Culture, p9/19.

from the graphs, because it is unclear exactly which participants were counted to construct the bars. For example, in the graphs it is unclear if the responses represented by a bar for weeks 1–4 come from the same total of individuals as are represented by the bar for weeks 49–52. If these totals differ, this complicates interpretation, since the latter are not comparable. To explain this apparent discrepancy, we have created a table and a chart to summarise the changes in total numbers of responses given over time. This indicates that it is difficult to derive any firm conclusions regarding Vital Communities' effects using the diary evidence as presented.
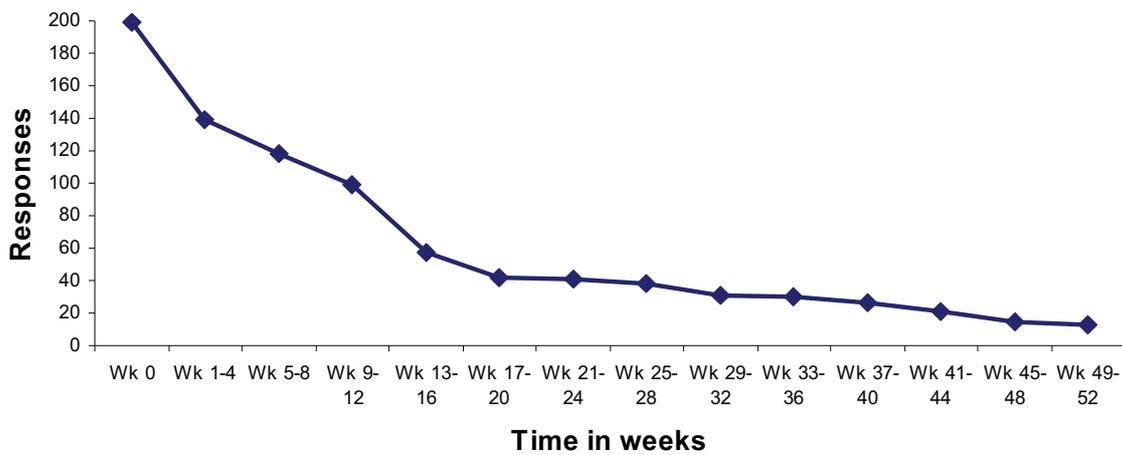
SOURCE: Based upon Business of Culture (2007) *Vital Communities: Research Report* London: Business of Culture, Appendix 4

Figure 2.1: Diary completed responses over time

Table 2.2: Diary completed responses

Weeks	Trumpington	Sawston	Fenland-Payne	Ramsey	Ely North	Sutton	St. Neots	Fenland-Wisbech	East Ward	Fulbourn	TOTALS
0	11	21	14	31	23	26	27	7	20	19	199
1-4	5	19	12	24	18	25	12	3	7	14	139
5-8	3	17	7	21	15	25	9	4	5	12	118
9-12	4	17	7	20	10	21	10	2	2	6	99
13-16	1	9	4	9	6	14	5	3	2	4	57
17-20	0	8	1	6	4	13	3	2	1	4	42
21-24	1	5	1	6	5	13	3	1	1	5	41
25-28	1	6	2	7	3	13	2	0	1	3	38
29-32	0	7	0	5	2	12	2	0	1	2	31
33-36	0	6	1	6	2	10	1	1	1	2	30
37-40	0	4	0	4	1	11	3	0	0	3	26
41-44	0	4	1	3	2	7	2	0	0	2	21
45-48	0	4	0	2	2	5	1	0	0	1	15
49-52	0	3	0	2	1	5	1	0	0	1	13
Final	0	3	0	2	1	5	1	0	0	1	13

SOURCE: Based upon Business of Culture (2007) *Vital Communities: Research Report* London: Business of Culture, Appendix 4

Discussion group findings

Discussion groups, in which active community members took part, were primarily focused on exploring the social impact and effects of arts on their community. In two sessions, which were seven to eight months apart, community members were asked to express their opinions and generally reflect upon aspects of their community, ranging from health and security to creativity and education. At the start of both discussion sessions, participants rated their community on the basis of questions in relation to five topics: safety, education, health, sense of community and creativity, on a 1 to 5 scale:

Question 1: How safe do you feel your community is at the moment?

Question 2: How well educated do you feel your community is at the moment?

Question 3: How healthy do you feel your community is at the moment?

Question 4: How strong is the sense of community here at the moment?

Question 5: How creative do you feel your community is at the moment?[36]

Changes in ratings between the first and the second session were minimal,[37] and Business of Culture acknowledged that changes in opinion and behaviour between the discussion groups would not be expected, given the short time between the sessions. Nevertheless, these questions could theoretically elicit answers that provide evidence of possible associations between Vital Communities and people's attitudes to their communities. But in order to do so in a valid way, the responses need to be provided by individuals who were present on both occasions, and there needs to be an appropriate length of time between the two occasions.

The actual reports of the discussion group sessions and transcripts provide further, more detailed data showing the opinions and feelings of community members about their community. Table 2.3 lists selected points from various groups regarding arts programmes, community cohesion, social networks, etc. Over time, in a future phase of the project, this sort of qualitative data about perceptions of their communities that community members have could be tracked and analysed, to see what valid associations might be observable between the Vital Communities activities and these perceptions.

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[36] Business of Culture (2007) *Vital Communities: Research Report* London: Business of Culture, p585/59.

[37] Business of Culture (2007) *Vital Communities: Research Report* London: Business of Culture, Appendix 5.

Table 2.3: Discussion groups, discussion on arts and communities

Discussion Group	Arts	Community issues
Peterborough (10 Attendees)	cultural provision/access; community culture networking	community cohesion/ social inclusion; community networking; community involvement/ equal opportunities; community representation/social cohesion
St. Neots (5 Attendees)	community arts provision	services – education/ health/ social inclusion; access/ network; access/ network – technology; social cohesion; social cohesion/ youth; likening your community to a car
Sutton (Attendees unknown)	Not discussed	social cohesion/ networks; community investment
Fulbourn (7 Attendees)	art and community cohesion; access/ provision	community networks; art and community cohesion; likening your community to a car
Ramsey (Attendees unknown)	social networks/ access/ arts provision	social networks/ access/ arts provision; social cohesion – integration; education/ community
Trumpington (6 Attendees)	arts provision/ access /social cohesion	arts provision/ access/ social cohesion; community cohesion; likening the community to a car

SOURCE: Business of Culture (2007) *Vital Communities: Research Report* London: Business of Culture, Appendix 16

There are two difficulties with the interpretation of the discussion group data in the Business of Culture Research Report. The first is acknowledged in the report: '[t]he attendance at discussion groups varied hugely between the locations, but overall was disappointing with a weak spread of community members'.[38] Thus it is difficult to generalise the results from the discussion groups, since the views of participants who did attend may have differed significantly from those held by the larger population. The second issue arises from the note in the report that successful transcripts of all of the second session discussion groups were not achieved. The only transcripts and quantitative data reported on are from the first set of discussion groups, held around July 2006; the record of the later groups is not available.[39]

In summary, the data generated and presented by the research of Business of Culture cannot be used to demonstrate or conclude any impacts of Vital Communities activities on participants or their wider community. In Chapter 4 we return to the recommendations that could benefit research on Vital Communities activities. The next chapter will examine the qualitative data generated by the evaluation forms, and will indicate what conclusions can be derived on the basis of this evidence.

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[38] Business of Culture (2007) *Vital Communities: Research Report* London: Business of Culture, p.53.

[39] It is reported in the Business of Culture report (2007) that 'Transcriptions are from the first round of Community Discussions Groups only'.

CHAPTER 3 **Qualitative data about the Vital Communities programme**

Using evidence from project evaluation forms

The Partners of the Vital Communities project requested that RAND Europe evaluate the available evidence and data from a rigorous and analytic point of view. From the evaluation forms we have picked up a wide variety of messages regarding the possible impacts and effects of the Vital Communities activities. It is, however, problematic to make generalisations from these messages because they consist of anecdotal evidence from which firm, objective and definitive conclusions cannot be drawn. Anecdotal evidence can hint at possible positive associations between factors, yet to claim the existence of effects on the basis of this evidence would generalise beyond the possibilities offered by the data. It is possible to increase the reliability of qualitative evidence by using techniques such as triangulation – broadly speaking, studying multiple data sources relating to the same event.[40] However, such sources were usually not available to us.[41]

Evaluation forms were designed and collated by the project manager as a means of internally evaluating the creative programme only, rather than for external research purposes. Moreover, given the rotation of artists and the fact that class teachers do move on, it is very difficult to assess temporal changes because there is no sustained consistent analysis, or a baseline against which effects can be measured. It is therefore difficult to draw firm conclusions for this or wider contexts. In addition, these forms were completed by teachers and parents after each artist's residency had been completed, which means they may have been influenced by the distortions of memory.

Furthermore, the wording of the questions on the evaluation forms raises concerns about the reliability of the data. Several questions could be viewed as 'leading questions' in the sense that they steer the respondent towards a certain answer, rather than leaving all options open. For example, one question asks artists: '*Have any changes/developments occurred within the school as a result of working with you: to the teachers' professional and/or creative practice?*' Such questions may encourage positive answers, while discouraging negative ones. Other questions, such as asking artists: '*Are further developments occurring as*

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[40] Bryman, A. (2004) *Social Research Methods: Second Edition*, Oxford: OUP, p.275.

[41] One possible exception is the set of sessions at St Thomas More school discussed on pages 34–5.

a result of working with you: Children continuing to speak about the project/artist afterwards? may encourage speculation rather than accurate reporting.

The statements derived from these evaluation forms should therefore be treated with caution. However, the forms do raise many interesting issues regarding the apparent associations between different elements of the programme and reported effects. Given that these apparent associations were interesting in their own right, we have analysed the main issues they raised. A consequence of taking this course is that the following analysis incorporates a disproportionate number of comments that reflect positively on Vital Communities. We have tried to provide balance to these comments where possible. Nevertheless, given the characteristics of the data, and the way these data are used in the following section, the resulting analysis does not 'explain' why the possible associations between the Vital Communities programme and other effects exist, but simply notes that these possible associations can be identified from the data.

Data from the evaluation forms come from three locations: Fulbourn, Peterborough and Ramsey.[42] Table 2.4 lists the numbers of evaluation forms completed in each location as well as the total numbers of teachers and artists present, to understand the coverage rate. All the evidence discussed below is taken from the evaluation forms from these locations. Owing to the variations in the completion of evaluation forms (and the quality of the data provided) across the locations, we decided against presenting our findings according to the locations. Rather, we have synthesised data from all the locations in order to examine issues and apparent associations.

Table 3.1: Evaluation Form Count (Nov '05–Dec '06)

	Taster Workshop Feedback Form	Taster Phase Feedback Meeting	Artist in Residence Feedback Form (by teacher)	Artist in Residence Feedback Form (by artist)	Original Artists	Sessions organised
Fulbourn	9	1	7	10	11	14
Peterborough	9	1	4	8	10	12
Ramsey	8	1	6	8	10	13

Effects on the wider community

As we indicated above, the Business of Culture data and report present obstacles to drawing reliable and robust conclusions for investigating possible associations between Vital Communities and changes in attitudes and behaviour in the wider community. The evaluation forms submitted by teachers and artists form a different, smaller dataset. The forms are self-reports and mainly concern effects 'in the classroom'. It is not legitimate to extrapolate from their statements to attitudes in the wider community.

RAND Europe was asked by the Vital Communities Partners to focus on the effects of the Vital Communities project in the following areas:

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[42] This document references the forms in the following manner: F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-22, where 'F1' refers to 'Folder 1', 'Fulbourn Evaluation' refers to the section in the folder, and '22' refers to the page number, which starts at '1' for each folder.

- Community cohesion
- Fear of crime and feelings of safety
- Sense of place and belonging
- Increased self-esteem and confidence
- Understanding and tolerance of diverse cultures
- Increased awareness of, and participation in, arts activities
- Increased awareness of and participation in community activities
- Educational attainment

The following sections examine each of these areas in turn.

1. Community cohesion

The concept of 'community cohesion' is still evolving and is the subject of debate. In 2004, the Local Government Association (LGA) developed a four-point definition of the concept.[43] These four points were modified and expanded in 2007 in the Final Report of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion, an independent advisory body created by the government 'to explore how different communities and places in England are getting along, and what more might be done to bring people together'.[44]

Both the LGA and the Commission's definitions give high-level descriptions of community cohesion, which often refer to a shared 'sense' that a community has certain characteristics, or to underlying socioeconomic factors (such as similar life opportunities and access to services).[45] Testing for the presence and weighted effects of such large phenomena would require evidence generated by a large-scale qualitative and quantitative longitudinal study. RAND Europe could therefore only consider evidence of Vital Communities' possible associations with specific aspects of community relations, as mentioned by artists and teachers completing evaluation forms. The aspects are:

- Links between the school and 'the community'
- The relationship between the school and its pupils' parents
- Intra-family relations
- Intra-school relations

We present each in turn.

Links between the school and the 'community'

The data records that schools in Fulbourn, Peterborough and Ramsey had varying degrees of existing engagement with their communities, and faced different opportunities and challenges. In Fulbourn, for example, pupils 'contribute well to their community'.[46] One teacher commented that, after a few months of activities:

> 'Vital Communities has helped us to make better links with some other groups in the village – toddlers, hospital, etc. We have had a few families that have turned

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[43] Local Government Association (2004) *Community cohesion – an action guide*, p.7.

[44] http://www.coventry.ac.uk/researchnet/icoco/a/2471#2006.

[45] Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007) *Final Report: Our Shared Future*, p.42.

[46] Ofsted (2007a) *Fulbourn Primary School: Inspection Report*, p.4.

up to some events during the term that do not have children involved in the project.'[47]

Further research into the nature of the changes reported in these community links could help to understand what underlies the claimed association with Vital Communities. Some of the links made to other organisations, such as those with the Fulbourn Arts group and the West Wratting Historical Society, were based on shared interest in the artistic content of the project, whether outdoor sculpture or photography.[48] Other groups, such as the Home Close residential care home and the Darwin Centre for Young People, made social links with the school because their members attended Vital Communities Final Celebrations and other events.'[49] Fulbourn school was apparently 'made *more* aware of the vast "sea" of talent in the community the school could "tap" into with a little effort', there is now a 'school aim' to generate more links with the community.[50] However, the same teacher wrote that 'as yet – in my experience – apart from a brief visit by some members of the "Care Home", we have not spent a great deal of time with people outside the school environment'.[51]

In Ramsey the school had 'very good' existing links with the community and 'involv[ed] pupils in a range of additional local activities'.[52] The Vital Communities programme 'encouraged [the school] to take "creativity" out of the classroom and into the wider community',[53] and this has reportedly generated new contacts with the local church, Rainbow Guides, the Ramsey Story Tellers, the Choral Society and the Youth Centre.[54]

In contrast, one of the reasons the Partners had for selecting St Thomas More School in the East Ward of Peterborough for Vital Communities was that the programme 'would bring cohesion to a community that is still in desperate need of some means to do this'.[55] The artists at this location remarked that building links between the school and the wider community was 'very very difficult as children come from their own secular community groups … with their own community halls', and would require sustained effort over long periods.[56] Nevertheless, over the course of the Vital Communities programme, some links were reported as being formed with community groups through the efforts of artists, the Vital Communities film festival and attendance at workshops. Apparently these led to links with the local Saxon Centre and Chestnuts Youth Club.[57] One parent commented at a

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[47] F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-43.

[48] F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-77; F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-60.

[49] F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-55; F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-76.

[50] F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-66–7.

[51] F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-67.

[52] Ofsted (2005a) *Spinning Infant School, Ramsey: Inspection Report*, p.18.

[53] F1-Ramsey Evaluation-174.

[54] F1-Ramsey Evaluation-202, F1-Ramsey Evaluation-216.

[55] Selection criteria.

[56] F1-Peterborough Evaluation-123, F1- Peterborough Evaluation-133.

[57] F1-Peterborough Evaluation-123, F1-Peterborough Evaluation-127, F1-Peterborough Evaluation-137.

Vital Communities evening that 'these special events are the times when we really feel part of this community. Outside of here we mainly just mix with our own.'[58]

Relationship between parents and school

Despite active communication activities at St Thomas More School, Ofsted found that 'there is a significant number [of parents] who find it difficult to help children at home and to enter into a partnership with the school'.[59] An early evaluation of the Vital Communities project suggested that for many parents one of the hindrances to developing a relationship with the school was the difficulty of coming to the school premises.[60] St Thomas More is a faith school, selected by some parents for other reasons than proximity.[61] Nevertheless, some families reportedly became 'highly motivated and obviously committed to this project'.[62] Reports of growing parent and sibling participation, either during each individual residency or over the course of the Vital Communities project as a whole,[63] have to be balanced against reports of disappointing attendances.[64] By the Spring 2007 term, the final celebration attracted 40 families, more than any other Vital Communities event.[65] A teacher reported that at one Vital Communities event, 'lots of families' attended who had never been into the school before.[66] These reports support one artist's view that the school and families 'seem[ed] to grow together' and develop 'greater understanding'.[67]

Forms obtained from schools in Fulbourn and Ramsey also provide indications that Vital Communities may be associated with other benefits by providing opportunities for families to visit the school premises.[68] One teacher remarked that some parents appeared to react positively to these opportunities because they 'like the idea of the school being a more "inclusive" and friendly place'.[69] In Fulbourn, this was reflected by higher than expected attendances at Vital Communities celebrations, which parents made 'great efforts' to attend.[70] In June 2006 two parents started attending the Vital Communities sessions

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[58] F4-Summer 2007 Evaluation.

[59] Ofsted (2005) *St Thomas More RC Primary School: Inspection Report*, p.15–6.

[60] Vital Communities (2006) *Evaluation of Spring Term 2006* (Thursday 30 March 2006).

[61] *Ibid.*

[62] F1-Peterborough Evaluation-124.

[63] F1-Peterborough Evaluation-95, F1-Peterborough Evlaluation-118, F1-Peterborough Evaluation-124, F1-Peterborough Evaluation-127.

[64] F1-Peterborough Evaluation-100; F1-Peterborough Evaluation-133; Vital Communities (2006) *Evaluation of Spring Term 2006* (Thursday 30 March 2006).

[65] F1-Peterborough Evaluation-117, F1-Peterborough Evaluation-124, F1-Peterborough Evaluation-133.

[66] F1-Peterborough Evaluation-116.

[67] F1-Peterborough Evaluation-137.

[68] F1-Ramsey Evaluation-174, F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-14, F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-27.

[69] F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-69.

[70] F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-22, F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-24, F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-48, F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-52, F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-55.

weekly to provide support.[71] One teacher remarked that there had been 'much more communication with the parents'.[72]

Intra-family relations

The relationship between parents and the school is intertwined with the issue of intra-family relations. Across the three locations, there may be a connection between children's enthusiasm for the Vital Communities project and whatever factors influence their parents to attend events.[73] One teacher wrote: 'The children were so enthusiastic that it made a difference to the number who came [after school] to see what had been going on!'[74] There were instances of entire families attending workshops,[75] and it appears that some artists were able to take the opportunity to encourage the sharing of cultural activities within families:

> 'I was really impressed with the way in which the artist was able to persuade parents to undertake "dance" activities with their children. Each family group performed on their own at the end of the workshop!'[76]

One artist gave a child two 'I like stories' bookmarks, one for each (separated) parent, 'to save him the dilemma of which parent to give the bookmark to'.[77]

Intra-school cohesion

Artists and teachers have commented on how Vital Communities has given an opportunity for children in different school years to work together, and non-participants appear to be enthusiastic about the project.[78] When a few participant children started singing a Vital Communities song in the school playground, 'then more and more children (and even supervising adults) were joining in' until it evolved into a large event.[79] A question that future research might investigate is whether such participation temporarily overcomes existing distinctions between children. Another artist took a 'flute conducting' activity out into the playground for children to show their parents. A total of six family groups participated in the activity (led by the children), and the artist commented that that this may have helped to 'break down barriers with the families'.[80]

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[71].F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-38.

[72] F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-14; F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-81.

[73] F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-1, F1-Peterborough Evaluation-105, F1-Ramsey Evaluation-207.

[74] F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-6.

[75] Vital Communities (2005) *Artists' Evaluation Meeting* (Friday 16 December 2005), F1-Ramsey Evaluation-176, F1-Ramsey Evaluation-184.

[76] F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-5.

[77] Artist's notebook, 20/11/06.

[78] F1-Peterborough Evaluation-132, F1-Peterborough Evaluation-137, F1-Ramsey Evaluation-226, .F1-Ramsey Evaluation-229.

[79] F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-80-1.

[80] F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-107–109.

2. Fear of crime/safety, real or perceived

No data were available to comment on possible associations between the Vital Communities activities and fear of crime /safety.

3. Sense of place and belonging

The brief given to artists in the programme recommended that they make reference to the 'personal experiences, historical and cultural traditions particular to the group(s) and the selected location'.[81] A series of workshops in Ramsey were based around imaginings of the undrained fen landscape:

> '[The children] really entered fully into the process of imagining the old undrained fen landscape … Although we weren't in an educational setting, all the children and young people learned new things about the history and the stories of the landscape that surrounds them through participating in the workshops – and yet to them it was just a fun afternoon.'[82]

One of the mothers said that that the final workshop had 'made the landscape come alive' for her.[83] One of the teachers subsequently decided to develop work about the fen landscape further in her class, and requested materials from the artist.[84]

There are also some comments that Vital Communities may be encouraging participants and families to discover new aspects of their environment. It was claimed at one evaluation meeting that children were noticing their surroundings more, to the extent of identifying art within their home town.[85] A parent commented that Vital Communities was allowing her family to see 'lots of exciting new things and places – and they're right here on our doorstep!'[86] It would be for future research to investigate what evidence there is about whether the experience of participating in Vital Communities activities might prompt participants and their families to re-examine familiar aspects of their lives – and, if so, how.

4. Increased self-esteem and confidence

Some teachers and artists claim in the evaluation forms that they have seen children's self-esteem and confidence grow throughout their involvement with Vital Communities.[87] These comments cite improvements to the artistic activities the children have undertaken.[88] One artist noted that increased confidence is 'often very apparent when a

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[81] Vital Communities (2006) *Business Plan: Pilot Phase 2005/7*, 'Artists' Brief', p.61.

[82] F1-Ramsey Evaluation-225.

[83] F1-Ramsey Evaluation-227.

[84] F1-Ramsey Evaluation-225.

[85] Vital Communities (2006) *Evaluation of Spring Term 2006* (Thursday 30 March 2006).

[86] F4-Summer 2007 Evaluation

[87] F1-Ramsey Evaluation-234; Vital Communities (2006) *Evaluation of Spring Term 2006* (Thursday 30 March 2006); F1-Peterborough Evaluation-116; F1-Peterborough Evaluation-136; F1-Ramsey Evaluation-182.

[88] F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-56; F1-Ramsey Evaluation-168; F1-Ramsey Evaluation-174; F1-Peterborough Evaluation-104.

child looks at the work they have done with a certain pride'.[89] Another commented that the confidence bred from artistic success may have led to increased readiness to engage with new art forms and new ideas.[90] The final celebration at the end of each Vital Communities residency creates a forum for children to receive praise from those not directly involved in the project, including their parents and other school classes.[91] For the performing arts celebrations, a 'definitive' performance in front of an audience is made possible.[92] One teacher suggested that 'after the final performance, the comments from the children "I did it!" showed that they have really built their own confidence, and pride in their work'.[93]

A further question is whether Vital Communities activities might be associated with changes to the self-confidence of children who are not usually 'reached' at school, and may be associated with enabling them to be seen in a different light.[94] Some teachers noted that children whose first language was not English have become more confident in expressing themselves during Vital Communities sessions, while artists reportedly found visual art and music to be good ways of engaging with non-English-speaking children.[95] Future research could investigate the nature of a possible association between this use of arts activities and evidence of changes in teachers' and fellow pupils' attitudes towards the attributes of children who were less fluent in their use of English.[96]

5. Understanding and tolerance of diverse cultures

At St Thomas More School in Peterborough the first language of nearly half the student body is not English.[97] Ofsted noted that: 'Pupils' understanding of life in a multi-cultural society is very good and is enriched very well because the school community is rich in cultural experiences.'[98] The school's teachers did not volunteer comments about the differing cultural origins of the Vital Communities art. Similarly, such comments are not found in Fulbourn and Ramsey evaluation forms, where the percentage of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is much smaller.[99] Only one reference was found: to engaging

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[89] F1-Ramsey Evaluation-234.

[90] F1-Ramsey Evaluation-230; F1-Peterborough Evaluation-116; F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-43.

[91] F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-15; F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-23; F1-Peterborough Evaluation-99.

[92] F1-Peterborough Evaluation-96; F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-47

[93] F1-Peterborough Evaluation-108.

[94] F1-Peterborough Evaluation-104; F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-72; Vital Communities (2006) *Evaluation of Spring Term 2006* (Thursday 30 March 2006).

[95] F1-Peterborough Evaluation-117; F1-Peterborough Evaluation-119; F1-Peterborough Evaluation-125; F1-Peterborough Evaluation-126.

[96] F1-Peterborough Evaluation-120.

[97] Ofsted (2005) *St Thomas More RC Primary School: Inspection Report*, p.10.

[98] Ofsted (2005) *St Thomas More RC Primary School: Inspection Report*, p.10.

[99] Ofsted (2007a) *Fulbourn Primary School: Inspection Report*, p.3; Ofsted (2005a) *Spinning Infant School, Ramsey: Inspection Report*, p.3.

with cultural difference, during Indian Dancing sessions at Ramsey.[100] The evaluation forms did not mention this topic by name.

6. Increased awareness of and participation in arts activities

The evaluation forms generated by Vital Communities report qualitative comments centred around the classroom, and rarely mention children's increased awareness of, and participation in, non-school arts activities. We cannot therefore report further on this question. The section on 'Teaching and Learning', below, considers the question of participants' increased 'artistic awareness'.

7. Increased awareness of and participation in community activities

The evaluation forms do not give sufficient information to comment on participants' increased awareness of, and participation in, community activities. The Vital Communities programme regularly put on 'special' events that were open to all members of the community, which reportedly attracted families from the wider community who had not been involved in the project.[101] During 2006, schools in the three locations put on a total of 28 'special events', which reportedly attracted a total of 2,123 adults (including parents of participants) and children who were not direct participants in the Vital Communities programme.[102] It is unclear how many of these attendees were adults who were not connected with the programme (i.e. from the 'wider' community). Some of these events were aligned to existing community activities: for example Vital Communities participants performed at the Fulbourn Arts Festival in 2006 and 2007, and at the Ramsey Arts Festival in 2007.[103]

8. Educational attainment

The Vital Communities programme's work in Fulbourn attracted comment from the schools inspectorate Ofsted.[104] At Abbey College in Ramsey pupils were able to use the work they produced as part of their portfolio for exam assessment, and it was claimed that participants were 'ahead of their peers' in terms of artistic performance abilities.[105] A teacher reported that participation in Vital Communities had improved children's attainment in a literacy unit on performance poetry, while an artist at St Thomas More School claimed that participants' grasp of English had noticeably improved during his residency.[106]

All the findings that have been cited in the eight numbered sections above are reports of individuals' opinions, not independently verified objective facts. Therefore it would be

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[100] F1-Ramsey Evaluation-198–9.

[101] F1-Quantitative Data Oct 2005–December 2006.

[102] Vital Communities figures, as recorded in F1-Quantitative Data Oct 2005–December 2006. Figures include adults as 'Adults' and 'Parents' and children/siblings marked as 'Attendees'.

[103] F1-Fulbourn, F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-80, F1-Ramsey Evaluation-232.

[104] F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-55, Ofsted (2007a) *Fulbourn Primary School: Inspection Report*, p.5.

[105] F1-Ramsey Evaluation-234, F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-80.

[106] F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-55, F1-Peterborough Evaluation-136.

problematic to generalise from them at all. Establishing the occurrence of particular, measurable associations would require more robust data based upon systematic baseline measurements, comparable subsequent evidence to give longitudinal trends, and a statistically significant sample. The information that the evaluation forms contain can guide future research towards understanding the nature of possible effects and impacts. In the following sections we consider some of the possible research topics arising from an analysis of the evaluation forms.

Issues of teaching and learning

The Vital Communities Business Plan notes that one of the unresolved theoretical and methodological issues in the arts evaluation field is the understanding of 'factors and processes underpinning the effectiveness of arts activity'.[107] Our initial discussions with the Vital Communities project manager and Spotlight researcher indicated that the role of the artist may be an issue that future research should attempt to investigate, in order to understand more about the ways arts activities may affect participants.[108] We were told that the central role played by the artist in a Vital Communities session might create a dynamic that differs from ones often experienced by children and teachers in a typical school lesson. It was suggested that the main characteristics of this new dynamic were a more responsive attitude towards children's input and a less hierarchical approach to working with participants.[109]

The briefing to Vital Communities artists is set out in a Code of Practice, stating that the artist will 'work in close collaboration with the participants' in order to 'encourage, support and develop the following practices in all participants:

- active participation in the development of the creative programme
- openness to new ideas, methods and approaches
- respect for each other and for the emerging creative ideas
- celebration of the shared creative processes
- relationships based upon trust and openness
- self-directed learning – involving goal-setting, planning and evaluation.'[110]

Continuing Professional Development Sessions for artists gave 'assistance and guidance … on delivery to young children and families, including an induction course to introduce the ethos and research methodology of Vital Communities, and "best practice" arts and creativity in education'.[111] An artists' network was established to enable creative

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[107] Vital Communities (2006) *Business Plan: Pilot Phase 2005/7*, p.10.

[108] Interview with Susan Potter, 12 July 2007; interview with Dominique Chadwick, 31 July 2007.

[109] *ibid*. See also Harland, J., *et al* (2005) *The arts-education interface: A mutual learning triangle?* London: NFER.

[110] Vital Communities (2006) *Business Plan: Pilot Phase 2005/7*, 'Artists' Brief', p.61; Vital Communities (2006) *Business Plan: Pilot Phase 2005/7*, 'Artists' Code of Practice', p.65.

[111] Vital Communities (2006) *Business Plan: Pilot Phase 2005/7*, p.9.

practitioners to share experiences and evaluate the project's organisation and methodology. These features may provide potential further sources of material that research could investigate critically.[112]

Effects on participants and teachers

The evaluation forms completed by the teachers and artists offer qualitative information which might allow insight into the dynamic that artists created with children, and the apparent effects of such a dynamic.[113] The forms cite instances of children being given significant agency or responsibilities, particularly during the final performances of a residency. One artist, for example, stated that 'the children practically did [the performance] alone, with very little help from me'. [114] Another artist encouraged them to make individual statements and one asked adults to act as scribes for children's compositions.[115]

Commenting on mainstream lessons, Ofsted found that teachers would 'a few times' impose templates that 'reduce the extent of children's learning'.[116] Headteachers and Year 1 teachers commented on 'the value of observing their children responding to each different role model' and 'challenges to their pedagogical practice prompted by working with the artists'.[117] Artists stated that 'teachers valued the experience as an educational resource offering, in some cases, new approaches to teaching non-arts subjects'.[118]

One way the artists are reported to have aided the teachers is by enabling them to 'take a slight step back and observe the children and really see [things] from a different perspective', a perspective that could even allow them to 'look at the curriculum in a different way'.[119] Having another 'expert in their field' in the room appears to allow teachers to gain critical distance and re-examine their own practice.[120] Teachers confess in the forms that they have realised that the children are more creative than they had thought.[121]

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[112] Vital Communities (2006) *Business Plan: Pilot Phase 2005/7*, p.9.

[113] Multiple examples, including: F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-1, F1-Ramsey Evaluation-203, Vital Communities (2006) *Evaluation of Spring Term 2006* (Thursday 30 March 2006).

[114] F1- Fulbourn Evaluation-29

[115] Vital Communities (2005) *Artists' Evaluation Meeting* (Friday 16 December 2005), Vital Communities (2006) *Evaluation of Spring Term 2006* (Thursday 30 March 2006).

[116] Ofsted (2005) *St Thomas More RC Primary School: Inspection Report*, p.22.

[117] Vital Communities (2006) *Taster Phase Report: October to December 2005*, p.6.

[118] Vital Communities (2005) *Artists' Evaluation Meeting* (Friday 16 December 2005).

[119] Vital Communities (2006) *Evaluation of Spring Term 2006* (Thursday 30 March 2006).

[120] F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-66, F1-Ramsey Evaluation-210, Vital Communities (2006) *Evaluation of Spring Term 2006* (Thursday 30 March 2006).

[121] F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-54.

Teachers may adopt certain techniques and activities introduced by the artists for their own practice,[122] and perceive themselves to be influenced by the new ideas and skills of the artists to incorporate more creativity into their own palette of teaching methods.[123] In some cases, the programme has reportedly had a wider effect on the school, 'highlight[ing] the importance of creativity across the curriculum' and spreading its techniques into many different subject areas, to the extent that 'it could be that Vital Communities has inspired the school in a creative way'.[124]

One artist asked the audience to start participating in a dance, in which the Year 1 Vital Communities dancers were able to 'show [the adults] just what to do', using movements they had practised.[125] Other artists noted how those children who chose to lead groups 'seemed to enjoy the responsibility and success in getting the other children to follow their instructions/demonstrations'.[126] Artists have suggested that this method of giving children leadership roles actually increased the children's understanding of, and appreciation for, working as a team;[127] one teacher suggested that this was beyond the bounds of the cooperative working usually found in school lessons.[128] If it is thought that artists' valuation of children's contributions might be associated with children valuing the contributions of their peers,[129] future research could investigate the nature and validity of such a possible association.

Some comments on the evaluation forms associate Vital Communities activities with high levels of creativity, the adoption of experimental approaches, imaginative thinking, the development of observational skills, the production of original material, a responsible attitude to less 'directed' activities, and focused attention on set tasks.[130] In the words of one teacher:

> 'A non-judgemental creative environment allowed the children to gain confidence both with their materials and how they wanted to interpret an idea … an environment where there was no right or wrong fostered levels of experimentation

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[122] F1-Fulbourn Evalution-35, F1-Fulbourn Evalution-51, F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-70, Artist, 13/11/06, F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-94, F1-Ramsey Evaluation-181, F1-Ramsey Evaluation-194, F1-Ramsey Evaluation-197.

[123] F1-Evaluation-4, F1-Evaluation-7, F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-13, F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-94, F1-Peterborough Evaluation-146, F1- F1-Ramsey Evaluation-198, Ramsey Evaluation-201, F1-Ramsey Evaluation-206.

[124] F1-Ramsey Evaluation-173-4, F1-Ramsey Evaluation-181. F1-Peterborough Evaluation-133, F1-Ramsey Evaluation-202.

[125] F2-Spring 2007.

[126] F1-Peterborough Evaluation-126.

[127] F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-6; F1-Peterborough Evaluation-146.

[128] F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-10

[129] F1-Peterborough Evaluation-120.

[130] Vital Communities (2005) *Artists' Evaluation Meeting* (Friday 16 December 2005); Vital Communities (2006) *Evaluation of Spring Term 2006* (Thursday 30 March 2006); F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-75; F1-Peterborough Evaluation-120; F1-Ramsey Evaluation-178; F1-Ramsey Evaluation-177; F1-Peterborough Evaluation-151; F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-26

and a response to ideas, music and words that noticeably developed as the residency went on.'[131]

Two artists claimed that their continuing engagement with children led to advances in creativity and experimentation. Both asserted that these advances were founded on the fact that the children became familiar with the artists, breeding trust that allowed the artist to 'take risks and push ideas further' and 'let some ideas evolve as they happened'.[132] At these sessions it was possible 'to "invent" some new combinations of music/movement exercises'; '[I] was able to stand back and observe as time went on'.[133]

The teachers' evaluation forms also invited them to reflect on the effects that persisted after the artists' residencies. Some teachers reported an increased ability by the children to manipulate the materials they used in the residency in an independent, skilful, creative and focused manner, often during their own free time.[134] One artist suggested that children had built up a general competence that allowed high attainment in her sessions:

> 'I felt that I was able to push both groups pretty hard with both their creative and performing abilities, and I would guess their resilience comes from their now familiar termly encounters with different artists through Vital Communities. They seem already to understand a bit of the discipline needed for, and the nature of, successful performing …' [135]

Some forms claim that children used their growing familiarity with an art activity to identify improvements and opportunities for further development, and sometimes 'realise these with minimal support from [the artist] or the teacher'.[136] One artist wrote that: 'During the project [the children] evaluated every workshop to each other – even suggesting what dances they could do with and in the tasks [they were] set.'[137]

The role of novelty

From the forms it appears that the novelty of a session may be significant to the participants.[138] If so, the Partners would want to know whether that factor might change over the future years of the project, and, if it did, how. In the one instance of a Vital Communities artist returning to one of the schools studied during the year, the teacher reported that the participants really enjoyed the sessions, even though they were a 'repeat'

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[131] F1-Ramsey Evaluation-210.

[132] F1-Ramsey Evaluation-209; F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-79.

[133] F1-Ramsey Evaluation-209; F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-79.

[134] F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-13-15, F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-23, F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-68, F1-Ramsey Evaluation-231, Vital Communities (2006) *Evaluation of Spring Term 2006* (Thursday 30 March 2006).

[135] F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-80

[136] F1-Peterborough Evaluation-127; F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-72; F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-80; F1-Ramsey Evaluation-234.

[137] F1-Ramsey Evaluation-207.

[138] F1-Ramsey Evaluation-210; F1-Ramsey Evaluation-209; F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-79.

from the first residency.[139] As noted above, some Vital Communities artists have suggested that sustained engagement with pupils can lead to deeper, richer encounters and outcomes.[140]

Artists and teachers regularly remark that children have experienced delight through this fusion of learning and fun.[141] There are reports of children taking Vital Communities activities out into the playground where the activities have retained a challenging, imaginative edge, as when the children in one school went on '"journeys" around the playground – telling their friends all about them'.[142] One teacher remarked that the artists' use of fun in teaching 'has encouraged teachers to develop/extend their new skills and experiences into other areas of the curriculum.'[143]

One teacher remarked, 'Children loved the drumming session … The children picked up on the rhythms quickly and loved being allowed to make so much noise!'[144] Some artists remarked on the value of holding Vital Communities sessions in a non-classroom setting when this was possible.[145] The 'buzz of energy' that accompanied a performance at the United Reformed Church for the Fulbourn Festival was attributed by the teacher to the children seeing that the audience '"approved" [the performance] in a venue other than the accustomed school hall'.[146]

Ownership

The forms cite children wishing to be like the artist, or to be artists in their own right.[147] There are reports of the delight children take in fixing their completed work to the wall next to professionally produced picture books and posters,[148] and a claim that 'some of the children already think of themselves as artists, especially with their art work being displayed to the public'.[149] One artist said: 'The children seem to buzz around and take ownership of project and artist – they are proud of this relationship.'[150] Examples include a name against a drawing and a general feeling of ownership from involvement in creating a

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[139] F1-Ramsey Evaluation-229.

[140] F1-Ramsey Evaluation-209; F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-79.

[141] F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-80; F1-Peterborough Evaluation-120; F1-Peterborough Evaluation-126; F1-Ramsey Evaluation-234; F1- Fulbourn Evaluation-26; F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-35.

[142] F1-Ramsey Evaluation-203.

[143] F1-Ramsey Evaluation-198.

[144] F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-6

[145] Artist's notebook, F1- Ramsey Evaluation-207, F1-Ramsey Evaluation-209,

[146] F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-80.

[147] F1-Ramsey Evaluation-203, F1-Ramsey Evaluation-204, F1-Peterborough Evaluation-132, F4-Summer 2007 Evaluation.

[148] Artist's notebook, 16/10/06

[149] Vital Communities (2006) *Evaluation of Spring Term 2006* (Thursday 30 March 2006).

[150] F1-Peterborough Evaluation-137

film.[151] The opinion that performance may be important was emphasised by teachers and artists in all three locations.[152] One remarked that:

> 'The creative element was "owned" by this child and it is perhaps the benefit of performance-type activities which can allow a greater degree of personal impact than some visual art activities which are led by the techniques of constructing the artefact.'[153]

One group of children took part in a fashion show wearing T-shirt designs of their creation. The teacher reported that when they practised in the playground, they were 'checking to make sure they show off their designs to the audience' and 'they put extra effort into their designs knowing the whole school and their parents would see them at the fashion show.'[154] The wish to have ownership acknowledged was mentioned by a teacher as the 'purpose' of the project for her pupils.[155]

Factors possibly contributing to children's perceptions of Vital Communities

Figure 3.1 below is one tentative representation of a spectrum of factors, discussed above, that may be connected with individual and group responses to Vital Communities activities. Future research might investigate whether some participants respond differentially to the private rewards of working on a communal art production as compared to having their name associated with an individual work. The diagram is an initial sketch derived only from the data from three locations, not the whole material that Vital Communities has gathered.

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[151] Artist's notebook, 16/10/06, F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-13, 15, 18

[152] F1-Peterborough Evaluation-105, F1-Ramsey Evaluation-227, F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-68.

[153] Source: artist's notebook. If 'ownership' is strongest with performance, that may be because performance is often indistinguishable from the artefact, as Yeats remarked: 'O body swayed to music,/ O brightening glance,/How can we know the dancer from the dance?' Yeats, W.B. (1979) *The Collected Poems of William Butler Yeats*. London: Macmillan.

[154] F1-Peterborough Evaluation-94, F1-Peterborough Evaluation-96

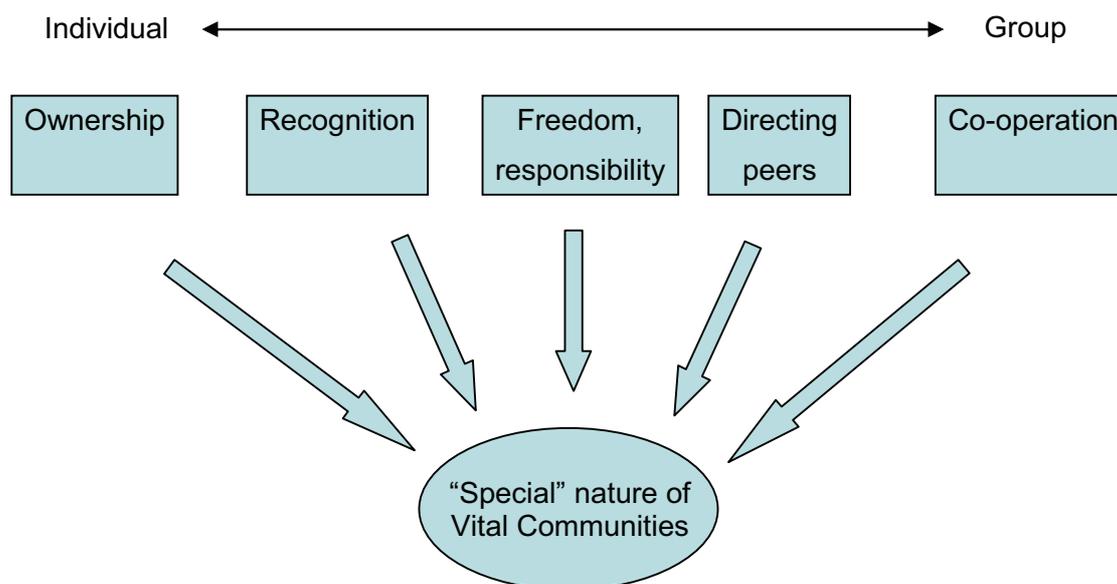[155] F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-68; F1-Peterborough Evaluation-126.

Figure 3.1: Possible factors associated with perceptions of Vital Communities

One question the Partners need to know more about is how far the value and enjoyment that participants may attach to Vital Communities activities are associated with the artist, and how much with the specific art activity. One teacher commented that '[the artist] was well received, liked and respected by the children. They thoroughly enjoyed designing and making their T-shirts and bandanas.'[156] The artist's comment on the same session was: 'The sessions ran very smoothly ... children very focused. The end results – T-shirts and bandanas were fabulous – without exception. I found it easy to work with these children.'[157] One pupil is reported as saying:

> 'Well, [the artist] was actually quite fun, even though she was a writer … I actually liked her, I did. I thought that it was actually going to turn out a bit "eugh" but when I actually tried it, it was actually quite good. We read stories and we drew pictures …'[158]

One participant commented to an artist that 'I didn't have as much fun [this week] but I still like you.'[159] There are reports of participants engaging with the specific art activities they encounter after the artist's residency has finished.[160] At a series of Vital Communities sessions at St Thomas More School, Peterborough, a different artist and a different art

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[156] F1-Peterborough Evaluation-97.

[157] F1-Peterborough Evaluation-98.

[158] Potter, S. (2007) *Investigating the Magic Cup: A study to examine the meaning, purpose and value of* Vital Communities *as experienced by the young participants*, p.11.

[159] F1-Peterborough Evaluation-106.

[160] Many instances, including: F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-44, F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-54, F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-72.

form were offered each week, for five weeks.[161] Artists' and teachers' reporting was fairly consistent over this period, but the data do not permit engagement with the particular art form to be analysed separately from engagement with the Vital Communities session. Comments from the first and fourth sessions indicate that physical activity was a crucial factor in engaging participants. However, as Table 3.1 indicates, it is difficult to make associations between 'sedentary' and 'active' art forms and the success of the sessions in this (very small) sample.

Table 3.2: Possible associations between art form, artist control and participant engagement

Week	Art form	Sedentary /active	Participant engagement (teachers'/artists' reports)	Artist 'control'
1	Music	Sedentary	Children bored	Artist had difficulty dealing with disruption
2	Dance	Active	Children focused and engaged	Artist had firm control
3	Drama	Active	Children restless / out of control	*Notes say 'Hall setting may have been distraction'*
4	Poetry	Sedentary	Children restless	Too many chances for children's minds to wander
5	Painting	Sedentary	Children focused and engaged	Calm, 'hands-on', organised

Any trends possibly suggested by this evidence would need to be substantiated through further research, for example, whether 'control' exerted by the artist could be defined and whether it might be associated with levels of participant engagement. One teacher commented that children could feel 'overwhelmed' by the novelty and choice of the activities and may lack confidence without direction. [162] A teacher thought the 'drum stick exercise' combined improved concentration and group control with the freedom of musical expression.[163] Future research could probe this possible combination of control and freedom, to see whether it helps to understand the nature of the effects that may be associated with participation in arts activities.

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[161] F1-Peterborough Evaluation-84-105.

[162] F1-Peterborough Evaluation-141,143.; F1-Fulbourn Evaluation-7

[163] F1-Peterborough Evaluation-106; F1-Peterborough Evaluation-108.

Future opportunities for research

The analysis we have set out in the preceding chapters of this report emphasises the need to be cautious about making claims for the project that go beyond the data collected thus far. We have pointed out a number of potential associations that these data reveal, which would bear further investigation. The first phase of the project could be regarded as a rich and productive pilot stage, in which the initial design and methods of the project have been subjected to important empirical tests.

The future progress of the project depends, obviously, on attracting sufficient funding, but also on applying the methodological and conceptual lessons from the first phase. In this chapter we first identify some examples of the research questions that might help to shape development of the project. The list is illustrative not comprehensive, and not in a particular order of priority. Then we itemise the methodological features that should be incorporated in designs for the future phases of the project.

Topics

1. What new connections are forged within the community as a result of children participating in the Vital Communities programme? To what extent do these reach across different ethnic groups?

2. How has Vital Communities changed parents' understanding of 'what a school can offer' to their children and themselves?

3. How does joint family participation in creative activities develop the relationships between family members? Do creative activities have more or less of an effect than other types of activities?

4. What is the potential for engaging non-English-speaking children with school through participation in artistic activities?

5. To what extent do children see particular art forms as representative of particular cultures? Does exposure to many different cultures reduce the 'shock of the new' that global art forms can induce, or does the art still carry an impact? If so, why is this (does it in some way present an 'intensified' representation of a particular culture)?

6. To what extent do artists create a 'different educational dynamic' and what effect does this have on children's creativity, adoption of experimental approaches and imaginative thinking?

7. What is the role of 'control' in such an educational dynamic, and how does this relate to the process of artistic creation itself?

8. To what extent does the artists' valuation of children's contributions encourage children to value the contributions of their peers?

9. If the novelty of an experience is integral to participants' engagement, is this sustainable as familiarity with experiences grows? What must be done to ensure that longer involvement with art forms brings deeper and richer encounters, rather than falling engagement?

10. What value do children place on the 'ownership' of art works and how much does performance contribute to this sense of ownership?

11. How do the factors of ownership of art products, recognition of achievement, being given freedom and responsibilities, directing peers and working cooperatively, interact to engage participants? Are there are any other vital factors?

12. How much of the value and enjoyment that participants attach to Vital Communities can be linked to the artist, and how much to the specific art form and activity?

13. Does the fact of whether an art activity is 'sedentary' or 'physically active' influence children's engagement?

Design and methods

Several methodological features could help to further develop the methodology and design of the Vital Communities project. The first relates to the baseline analysis. An expansion of the baseline analysis, incorporating arts interests and participation in the arts by the active and control families in the research, would generate very important information required to evaluate any changes in behaviour. A baseline analysis which controls for arts interests and participation would allow groups to become comparable and would reveal possible biases within the sample.

Furthermore, the research methodology could become more robust if the focus is shifted from causal relations to associations. Seeking to claim causal relations is complicated, as the literature shows, since causal relations are difficult to prove. Therefore, a shift in focus onto associations could generate more realistic and feasible research aims and objectives. Clearly and explicitly defined associations are easier to measure robustly than complicated causal relations, and therefore can more clearly guide the search for occurrence of observable effects. For Vital Communities this would mean a shift from the general idea that arts can cause impacts on society, towards more specific associations between features of specific local arts activities and specific evidence of responses among individuals and groups engaging with those activities. This could underpin realistic and achievable aims and objectives for the project and support a research programme that uses strong evidence.

The final feature relates to ensuring sustainable involvement of participants in the research. Attrition has been a substantial problem with the diary method. Further stages of the research design would need to evaluate alternatives that can generate data reliably over the lifetime of the project, in order to benefit from a more robust longitudinal design.

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APPENDICES

Appendix: Evaluation forms

Artist evaluation form

***Vital Communities:* Artist in Residence Feedback Form (Spring Term 2006)**

Please complete this evaluation form at the end of each half-term residency. On completion, please return to Susan Potter, Project Manager *Vital Communities* in the freepost envelope provided.

NOTE: **Please give specific examples to illustrate your comments wherever possible.**

Name of Artist:

Name of School:

Name of Headteacher/Year 1 Teacher(s):

IMPACTS UPON ARTISTS	What went especially well for you during the half-term residency?
	What might have gone better for you during the half-term residency?
	What have you learned from the half-term residency?
	How (if at all) has the experience impacted upon your professional practice?

IMPACTS UPON CHILDREN	**Have any changes occurred as a result of working with you:** 1. To the children's creative/artistic practice? 2. To the children's attitudes to learning? 3. To the children's confidence and self-esteem?
IMPACTS UPON SCHOOL	**Have any changes/developments occurred within the school as a result of working with you:** 1. To the teachers' professional and/or creative practice? 2. To the school curriculum (art, creativity and/or all other areas)? 3. To the school's broader ethos or philosophy? 4. To the school's relationship with families? 5. To the school's relationship with the wider community?
	Are further developments occurring as a result of working with you: 1. Children continuing to speak about the project/artist afterwards? 2. Children using the project/artist as a stimulus in their play? 3. Children providing suggestions/ideas for the project's further development?
IMPACTS UPON FAMILIES	**Have any changes/developments occurred within the families as a result of working with you:** 1. Numbers of families participating in *Vital Communities* activities/events? 2. Families continuing to speak about the

	project/artist afterwards? 3. Families providing suggestions/ideas for the project's further development?
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	Any additional comments you wish to make about the residency/project so far:

SIGNED: **DATE:**

Teacher evaluation form

Vital Communities: **Artist in Residence Feedback Form (Spring Term 2006)**

Please complete this evaluation form at the end of each half-term residency. On completion, please return to Susan Potter, Project Manager *Vital Communities* in the freepost envelope provided.

NOTE: Please give specific examples to illustrate your comments wherever possible.

Name of Headteacher/Year 1 Teacher(s):

Name of School:

Name of Artist:

ORGANISATION AND CONTENT	Was the artist on time, organised and well prepared?
	What went especially well during the half-term residency?
	What might have gone better during the half-term residency?
IMPACTS UPON SCHOOL	**Have any changes/developments occurred within the school as a result of the artist working with you:**
	1. To your own professional and/or creative practice?
	2. To the school curriculum (art, creativity and/or all other areas)?
	3. To the school's broader ethos or philosophy?
	4. To the school's relationship with families?
	5. To the school's relationship with the wider community?
IMPACTS UPON	**Have any changes occurred as a result of the artist**

CHILDREN	working with you:
	1. To the children's creative/artistic practice?
	2. To the children's attitudes to learning?
	3. To the children's confidence and self-esteem?
	Are further developments occurring as a result of working with the artist:
	1. Children continuing to speak about the project/artist afterwards?
	2. Children using the project/artist as a stimulus in their play?
	3. Children providing suggestions/ideas for the project's further development?
IMPACTS UPON FAMILIES	**Have any changes/developments occurred within the families as a result of working with you:**
	1. Numbers of families participating in *Vital Communities* activities/events?
	2. Families continuing to speak about the project/artist afterwards?
	3. Families providing suggestions/ideas for the project's further development?
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	Any additional comments you wish to make about the residency/project so far:

SIGNED:	**DATE:**