

Toonspeak Case Study

**Art
Works**
Paul Hamlyn Foundation
Special Initiative

Developing
Practice in
Participatory
Settings



ALBA | CHRUTHACHAIL

About the Project

Toonspeak is a young people's theatre organisation. It works with professional artists to challenge and inspire its audience, encouraging them to create performances and projects of their own. The organisation's work is led by young people, some of whom hold seats on its board of directors. Toonspeak values a willingness to take part more than experience, ability or personal circumstance.

The organisation used the toolkit as the basis for a partnership development day, to which partners past, present and future were invited. This small-scale project introduced the resource as a proposed guide for collaboration on future projects. It had first been hoped that partners would use the toolkit to examine every aspect of their work, but it wasn't thought feasible to do so in a single day. Instead, the most was made of having a room full of potential collaborators all eager to communicate.

Using the Toolkit

The development day featured presentations from Toonspeak staff, testimonials from young people on how Toonspeak has benefitted them, and demonstrations from recent partnerships. A partnership speed dating exercise followed and saw everyone encouraged to meet and discuss the question "What could we do together which we couldn't do as well on our own?" Participants are confident that this session planted the seeds for many future collaborations.

Although the toolkit was not applied to current projects, it successfully encouraged conversation. Groups reported that talking through the questions made them discuss aspects of their projects which had not previously been considered, ideas evolving with each new avenue of discussion.

Feedback

Toonspeak was surprised by how much conversation the toolkit generated, and say it was clear that additional time would have seen the emergence of fully fleshed out, realistic and structured projects. Creative participants found the toolkit to be a catalyst for original and innovative thought.

A breakthrough realisation came to Toonspeak's Alan Govan while the project was well underway. ***"I think one of the 'Aha!' moments was when we realised how useful the Compass will be as a tool to collectively examine a project at regular points, to monitor the impact of the project in meaningful terms and to hold each other to account. The groundwork means that we have shared expectations and so we will then have clear indicators to tell whether or not things are going to plan."***

If the toolkit can be faulted, he says, it's for the time commitment required of users. Toonspeak reports that the groups struggled to select the questions which felt most relevant to their projects, that they all seemed to be relevant and choosing felt almost arbitrary. It's easy to underestimate the amount of time which should ideally be put into this process early on in a project.

Conclusions

Alan sums up his experience using the toolkit as follows: ***"We collated a large number of new ideas during the day. We might not find the capacity to bring them all to fruition but there are definitely some follow-up conversations to be had. One of the reasons we decided to test the toolkit in this manner was that almost everything we deliver is done so in partnership. We think that one of the best things about the Toolkit is that it is effectively 'neutral' – not belonging to one partner in particular. This means that our conversations can take place on a level playing field."***