

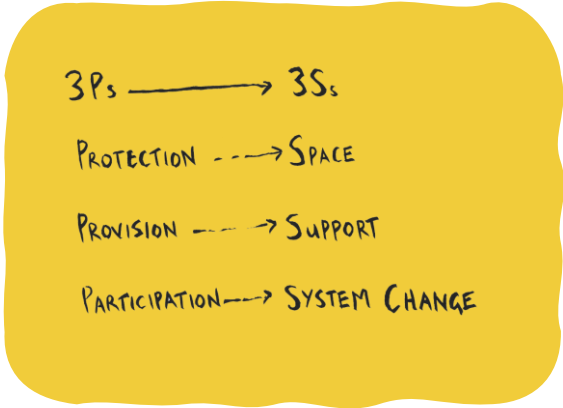
Rejuvenate Dialogue: 23rd February 2022

Setting the scene

The series of Rejuvenate dialogues are intended to foster discussion and debate across a community of practitioners working on child and youth rights.

Dialogue three explored the transformative capacity of creative praxis and how it can strengthen rights and participation for children and young people.

During the dialogue, we highlighted the importance of moving from the UNCRC's [3Ps \(protection, provision, participation\)](#) to the [3Ss \(space, support, system change\)](#).



Safe **spaces** can build confidence and decision-making capacity. **Support** and active listening fosters inter-generational community building. Meanwhile, **system change** involves challenging the social hierarchies that reproduce 'adultism' and exclusionary mentalities towards young people.

On the 23rd February 2022, we gathered online with three key speakers and a diversity of participants from around the world to reflect upon the role of creative practice when working with children and young people. Three key speakers presented their experiences before a short Question & Answers session.

Highlights

(You can also watch the presentations [here](#))

Vicky Johnson (University of Highlands and Islands) introduced the dialogue by welcoming the breadth of participants. She expressed how the dialogues are intended to be a space where we can consider how to work with young people and children in a more meaningful way, essentially co-constructing a different and more inclusive future.

Tessa Lewin (Institute of Development Studies) introduced the three key speakers: Nabeel Petersen, Olu Jenzen and Veronica Yates.

Presentations began with **Nabeel Petersen**. Nabeel, co-founder of the Pivot Collective and Director of Interfer, introduced his background as a participatory, storytelling facilitator focused on developing inclusive collaborations to challenge traditional research-engagement structures.

He expressed his passion for shifting inclusive pathways to reflect the interests of young people, emphasising how storytelling can be an essential node within this process.

Nabeel explained how he established a hub for young people to discover their creative interests while exploring and visualising mental health.

This hub sparked the creation of [Planet Divoc-91](#), a participatory comic book project. He explained how the project encourages the use of creative methodologies that are steered by young people themselves while bridging global and intergenerational divides through storytelling and creativity.



Planet Divoc

[Planet Divoc](#) is a nine-part allegorical comic book project, which tells the fictional survival stories of young people who have been zapped to another planet following the destruction of Planet Earth. It explores art, creativity and expression while linking to issues that have arisen from the COVID-19 pandemic. With a young artist and editorial team hosting over 45 young people from India, South Africa and the UK, the project addresses contemporary challenges around the global pandemic, mental health and social development.

In the next presentation, **Olu Jenzen**, University of Brighton, discussed her range of work with LGBTQ, trans gender and gender diverse young people, where her adoption of creative methods has been vast. Specifically, Olu introduced us to three projects where she has used creative methods with young people to explore gender, sexuality and the role of community. She detailed the diversity of methods, including the use of craft materials such as play dough, glitter, craft paper and post-it notes to respond to prompts through writing, drawing, crafting, mood boards and/or any combination of expressive methods as chosen by the young person.

One of Olu's projects includes the Gender, Creativity and Community project, in collaboration with [Mermaid UK](#), to support trans and gender diverse children/youth and their families. In the spirit of transitioning from the 3Ps to the 3Ss, Olu reflected how Space, Support and Structural Change can be likened to the themes of Interaction, Ideation and Contestation. Not only does the project use creativity to inspire learning and individuality within trans youth communities, but this creative freedom also stimulates agency and contestation:


"We saw some structural contestation within the workshop itself... although they loved the activities, they also made sure to assert their agency... They were testing the boundaries with us as facilitators as to how provocative a shape you can make out of playdough, digressing from the idea of the animal to more free-ranging play... Whilst the official activities were going on, there was a whole stream of unofficial activities taking place at the same time and I found that a lovely and touching example of how important it is for them to assert their agency" (Olu).

Through **interaction** and **ideation** in a safe space, **contestation** brews and agency is built.

Finally, **Veronica Yates**, director of CRIN and co-founder of the Rights Studio, introduced us to her initiative that exists on the intersection of human rights and the arts: The Rights Studio. The Rights Studio is a creative hub and sister organisation to CRIN (Child Rights International Network), which is a creative think tank for research, policy work and analysis. Veronica reflected upon how The Rights Studio arose from a growing frustration regarding the corporate marketing approaches that are so often adopted by NGOs. The team at CRIN felt compelled to use creativity beyond fundraising and marketing, and instead, to allow art to become a process through which we can learn from and challenge our work and knowledge in the field of child and youth rights. This led to the creation of The Rights Studio.

The Rights Studio

[The Rights Studio](#) is a creative hub for people and organisations to engage with human rights issues affecting children, young people and future generations in creative and artistic ways. Initiatives involve residencies, a festival, a magazine, an illustrated journal, and exhibitions and collaborations with creatives and organisations. The Rights Studio is about reflecting, building relationships, challenging what we think we know and essentially, *learning* through creativity and collaboration.



Veronica highlighted that The Rights Studio does not solely centre around the production of artwork, but rather, is about the process of *creating*. This process builds connections, in a comparable way to communicating in a different language. By addressing child and youth rights through a lens of creativity, The Rights Studio turns art and creativity into an open and accessible language, which is less didactic and opens a space for diverse, unrestrained collaborations. In embracing all activities under the organisation artfully, Veronica wonders if they can turn The Rights Studio into an artform in and of itself.

Tessa reflected on this as a 'process over product' mentality, linking to performativity. While many of us use creative practice to survive and connect, it can, in fact, be an architecture that displaces pressure away from the need to perform in our day-to-day lives, resultantly fostering genuine participation.

Following the three presentations, **Rashmi Crockford**, facilitator, proceeded to ask a series of questions, primarily linking to the transition from the 3Ps to the 3Ss, after observing connections with the experiences shared by the three speakers.

Rashmi asked **Veronica** how integrating creative practice can contribute to challenging the structural pressures that often push us to perform. Further, she asked how challenging such structures can contribute to **system change** and impact the field of child/youth rights?

Veronica responded that the foundation of The Rights Studio is grounded in three ways of artful being.

1. Art as rebellion: Where critical thinking and challenging assumptions exists. This is where those often on the margins gain the freedom of artful expression to 'do things differently';
2. Art as a skill: As with any practice, skills are developed through experimenting, development and reworking;
"Once you develop your skill, you are then in a place where you can work from a place of humility and openness" (Veronica).
3. Art as improvisation: Our lives are often driven by outcomes, goals and deadlines that may not align with our values or aspirations for meaningful change. However, Veronica argued that developing artful skills provides the space, humility and critical thinking that we need to adapt and improvise in challenging situations. This is important for both adults and children.

Rashmi then asked **Olu** how one can provide **support** for young people without allowing ideologies of protectionism and provision to prevail.

Olu explained that this requires a balance from the practical, safeguarding side and the creative side, which enables freedom of expression and messiness. This requires a willingness to be led by a youth participant even when their decisions may not align with one's unpronounced expectations. The important skill is accepting and allowing this dynamic to continue.

Finally, Rashmi asked **Nabeel** about what the impact of different participatory spaces can be, especially when combined with creative practice. Specifically, she referred to invited and claimed spaces.

Nabeel referenced Veronica's idea of artful creation, where we do not try to predetermine or predefine; rather, we exist within a space of adaptability and curiosity. He explained how in creating the hub, his team focused on establishing an accessible space that allowed young people to use and mould the space as they wish, with or without facilitators. The intention was to create an invited space that was dynamic, free-form and structurally flexible, such that young people had the ability to claim the space for themselves. Despite the intention however, Nabeel realised:

"By inviting them to the table, we are still inviting them to a structure, which means that we still have the power that we don't want" (Nabeel).

In this circumstance, Nabeel encouraged the importance of re-thinking and re-constructing these spaces. He suggested that rather than simply inviting young people into a space, it is important to go back to basics and enable young people to construct these spaces for themselves. Artful intention and reflection makes this possible.

Tessa rounded up the dialogue, thanking all speakers, facilitators and participants for their engagement and expressing her hope for these conversations to act as provocations for future discussion and community building within the field of child and youth rights and participation. She concluded by asking Olu to share an anecdote about affective objects.

Olu expressed how creative methods can be useful for preoccupying the hands and mind. A simple activity with no outcome can be very powerful and meaningful. An affective object works to this effect, as does using creative methods in youth work. Removing the pressure from conversation and preoccupying the hands with crafts or an affective object can take on a talismanic power that reduces performative pressures.

Vicky closed the dialogue with a sincere thank you to all participants and for the active discussion in the chat box. She urged attendees to fill out the Rejuvenate Dialogue survey and invited any ideas or contributions to the Rejuvenate Living Archive.

Building connections

Attendees included adults and youth researchers from across the globe in conversation with a range of decision makers and funders. Organisations can be seen on the map below.



Source: Map data ©2022 Google, INEGI

Continuing the conversation

Blogs – REJUVENATE keep conversations around child and youth rights going through regular [blogs](#). If you have an idea for a blog, please do [get in touch with one of the REJUVENATE team via our website](#).

Explore and submit to our [Living Archive](#) – a collection of organisations, projects and resources all focused on child and youth rights and participation. We've included some examples in boxes in this paper. If you have an item you think others in the field can learn from, please [fill out our submission form](#).

Report DOI: [10.19088/REJUVENATE.2022.002](https://doi.org/10.19088/REJUVENATE.2022.002)