Design Principles

Adam Cooper, Anna Disley, Lizzie Nixon

September 2018

Contents

A disclaimer from the authors: *This document's purpose is as a thinking tool and flexible framework to explore ways of working – it isn't a set of rules. For brevity and ease we have shied away from some of the complexities inherent in the work. Some of what we've laid out can come across as reductionist, but it is only intended as a starting point.*

Introduction

New Writing North (NWN) has resolved to take a [Human Centred Design](#) approach to their Young People's Programme.

NWN has loosely practiced Human Centred Design up till now, but will further embrace this framework by improving understanding of beneficiary groups and their needs to inform programme design.

This document begins by defining the [Beneficiary Groups](#), moves on to NWN's understanding of the different groups' [needs and drivers](#), then lays out a set of [principles](#) to inform ongoing programme design, and concludes with points on how the principles will be [implemented](#).

Human Centred Design is iterative and relies on continuous immersion with the end users and ongoing experimentation.

Beneficiary Groups

The NWN Young People's team has defined 3 beneficiary groups of the Young People's Programme.

These groups are just a theoretical framework for thinking and planning. They are not an accurate representation of the rich diversity of young people NWN work with, but articulating these groups is a useful tool for looking at the design of the programme.

Group 1: Wellbeing Developers
- Wellbeing Developers can come from a range of different backgrounds and may have access to varying levels of opportunity
- They take full part in the NWN offer immediately available to them, and enjoy that activity, but they have limited drive to seek out further NWN experiences
- Wellbeing Developers have a lot of fun with NWN, but their time with us is not necessarily an artistically serious pursuit. It is a pursuit of self-development, rather than artistic expression
- NWN's impact on Wellbeing Developers is predominantly on their wellbeing, rather than artistic. They have enrichening, social experiences with NWN

Group 2: Active Seekers
- Active Seekers come to NWN from a place of rich opportunity
- They are self-motivated to become deeply engaged with NWN and other organisations offering them opportunities
- They are often brilliant, motivated, and driven to seek opportunity
- NWN is a significant engagement for them, which they take seriously and professionally
- They are often career-minded, so NWN's impact on them is a mix of artistic development and career-development. NWN is their platform to a further professional path

Group 3: Artistic Explorers
- Artistic Explorers usually come to NWN from a place of very limited opportunity. There is little available to them, but they are curious and through this can access some of the limited opportunity around them
- Artistic Explorers are motivated to seek out new things beyond NWN
- They are motivated by artistic exploration, excited to develop their creative practice or cultural engagement. This leads to their heavy engagement with NWN and/or other cultural opportunities
- Some of them have amazing artistic potential, and really inspire NWN staff who work with them
- NWN has rich impact on the Artistic Explorers, most obviously artistically, but through artistic development they are impacted in the broadest sense

Needs and Drivers by Beneficiary Group

	Wellbeing Developers	Active Seekers	Artistic Explorers
Needs (What conditions need to be in place for beneficiaries to engage with the programme)	**Personal Needs** - Praise and recognition - Gentle, not radical experience - Stable, safe, and supportive environment - Group identity/sense of belonging - Peer support **Artistic Needs** - Writer-led - Structured activity	**Personal Needs** - Challenging and radical space - Networking – "a leg up" **Artistic Needs** - Opportunity to Stretch their writing - Professional Development: a money can't buy experience - Industry contacts - Basic professional skills - Platform for their work - Direction and advice - Bridge between non-professional and professional practice	**Personal Needs** - Consistency – in delivery and relationships - Transport, travel - Deeper relationships with staff: flexibility and ability to overcome the things that make engaging difficult/uncool. - Acknowledgement of the complexity in their lives. - Long-term engagement - Meet other young people who are engaged **Artistic Needs** - Being introduced to idea of artistic expression in its different forms - Permission to be an artistic consumer and creator - Range of artistic experiences – new things - Meet writers and professionals, discover there is a creative industry
Drivers (what are the factors which motivate deeper, longer-term engagement)	**Personal Drivers** - A sense of belonging and identity - Positive escape - Opportunity to meet new people like them **Artistic Drivers** - Fun - Opportunity to be creative	**Personal Drivers** - Validation/recognition: Opportunity to be associated with the arts; prestige, being part of a group - Values, courses, socially responsible - Ambitious, and desire to be challenged intellectually - Proactive, driven to make things happen - To find people equally as interested as they are **Artistic Drivers** - Drive to develop writing and/or professional practice - Drive to be artists or writers or producers	**Personal Drivers** - Aspiration, or potential for aspiration - Not necessarily educational or career - Dissatisfaction with their situation - Praise and validation - Drive to overcome the barriers faced by their family and/or community - The opportunity to be expressive and be heard **Artistic Drivers** - Curiosity - Driven to express themselves creatively - Desire to have their voices heard

NWN YP Programme Design Principles

Overarching Design Principles:

1. Praise, recognition, and validation are important to the young people: design to create opportunities for **validation**
2. A sense of identity and belonging is important to the young people: design to give a sense of **shared identity**
3. **Self-identification** as an artist is important: design to encourage and acknowledge this identity
4. Transformative impact takes time: design for **longevity**, for long-term relationships with young people
5. Acknowledge the inequality of opportunities that exist in our complex society and design to maximise **equal access** to cultural opportunities

Special Principles for Wellbeing Developers:	Special Principles for Active Seekers:	Special Principles for Artistic Explorers:
1. The experience should be gentle, stable, and structured 2. The environment should be light, fun, and positive 3. Peer connections and support are important: opportunities for these should be maximised	1. The experience should be challenging and radical 2. Bridge the gap from non-professional to professional: networking, skills, experience, mentoring 3. Design for a money-can't-buy experience	1. Design for complex relationships and circumstances: flexibility is key 2. Depth of relationship and support from specialist staff is crucial 3. Design for long-term artistic discovery and development

Practical Implementation of the Design Principles

Design Principles	Practical Application
1. Praise, recognition, and validation are important to the young people: design to create opportunities for **validation**	• Participants are encouraged to write about what they know, to explore their own life experiences, neighbourhoods, attitudes and values. • That the work is shared with a wider audience – it is assumed (in most cases) they are writing for a readership or audience • Investment is made in production values • Peer and practitioner feedback is encouraged
2. A sense of identity and belonging is important to the young people: design to give a sense of **shared identity**	• There is unified social media and branding for all the work we do. • We promote the idea amongst young people that they are part of a network (and not just part of their particular project or group) • Opportunities for young people from across our work to come together are identified
3. **Self-identification** as an artist is important: design to encourage and acknowledge this identity	• Introducing young people to a range of artists as workshop / masterclass leaders and collaborators, as well as a range of artistic experiences. • Referring to participants as young writers • Supporting them to develop their own artworks, arising from their own ideas and preoccupations
4. Transformative impact takes time: design for **longevity**, for long-term relationships with young people	• That there is weekly, consistent activity, year-round • The group leader / producer model (the supportive, creative person who is consistently present at all sessions working alongside the lead writer/artist) • There is whole staff commitment to the design principles at New Writing North. Staff are present and available for participants • Recognise and promote the richness of opportunities across the arts and cultural sector (not just at New Writing North) so that young people can find their own path as an artist or cultural consumer
5. Acknowledge the inequality of opportunity that exist in our complex society and design to maximise **equal access**	• That NWN staff, freelance writers, artists and project producers are empowered to be adaptable to any barriers that young people face • That funding is flexible to respond to need and circumstances • That the principle of 'progressive universalism' underpins our work (that opportunities are targeted where there is most need, but there are also open access opportunities) • We work in partnership with schools, libraries, local authorities, third sector

to cultural opportunities	organisations etc. • That there is training for freelancers on issues relating to their barriers young people face e.g. mental health
How we keep refining our application of the principles	• We hold 2 meetings with freelancers a year to discuss the thinking behind the work we are asking them to lead, and to discuss practical issues. This will be supplemented by training for freelancers as described above. • Each group leader / producer completes a short evaluation of each session, learning from which will be shared in a fortnightly NWN team meeting. • We hold staff "programme design" meetings every quarter, checking in on the design principles, reflecting on where we are on the design cycle, and making decisions on applying learning from evaluations • The board annually reviews performance of the programme, referring to the design principles and checking they are fit for purpose

Evaluation and our Design Principles

NWN's interpretation of Human Centred Design is as a continuous cycle. Key to the success of the method is a commitment to deeply embedded evaluation and reflection leading to tangible decisions and action.

Speaking to the 3 phases of Human Centred Design (Inspiration, Ideation, Implementation), we consider there almost to be a 4th phase, Evaluation, which runs through each of the other phases.

Driving NWN's evaluation agenda is the question of social and cultural capital and the idea of influencing communities. This is a complex question, and so our evaluation practice is constantly evolving.

Our evaluation approach mirrors the ethos of our design principles – it is simple, flexible, and responsive. The evaluation principles we have defined are as follows:

1. **Define the change** we want to see – we can best reflect on the efficacy of our approach by clearly defining the change we want to see, referring to tools such as our Theory of Change, setting clear goals for projects, and planning how best to assess against these
2. **Collect insight, not evidence** – evaluation is about learning, not advocacy. We aren't collecting evidence of how great we are, we're looking for insight into how we're doing, whether that's well or badly
3. **Embed evaluation** – where we can, we find ways to embed evaluation as part of the work itself, avoiding creating new tasks and admin burden, and involving participants and stakeholders in authentic conversation and reflection
4. **Create momentum** – it is too easy to de-prioritise the analysis of evaluation data and making decisions on that analysis. We will create deadlines for ourselves to apply learning from evaluation by making public commitments to sharing our learning
5. **Be decisive, embrace change** – we will commit to making tangible, practical changes to how we work based on our evaluation. There are always lessons to be learned, improvements to be made. If we aren't changing, we know we aren't being decisive, and aren't making the most of our investment in evaluation