

BA CCC  
Assignment Cover Sheet

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# **Curating Care**

## **Integrating Art Therapy Principles into Educational Workshops for Adolescent Wellbeing**

Research Question: How do we curate wellbeing for teenagers with the use of art to improve mental health crisis for young people in the UK

## **Abstract**

This article explores how participatory curatorial practices might convert art into an instrument to address UK adolescent mental health crises. Through a close analysis of two case studies – the Zinc Arts ArtZone Programme and Arts on Prescription in Schools, from the perspectives of cultural theory and curatorial praxis, the article contends that successful mental health interventions necessitate a decolonizing of hegemonic art hierarchies, co-curating spaces of agency and transformation. Although there is empirical evidence that art can be healing, the systemic problems of cultural alienation and its instrumentalisation by neoliberalism compromise its potential. The article closes with a call for critical curation frameworks that emphasize intersectional accessibility and resist biomedical reductionism.

### Introduction: Crisis as a Curatorial Challenge

UK youth are living through a “silent pandemic”: one in five has clinical levels of anxiety or depression (NHS Digital, 2023). A communication gap has formed alongside that, with many adolescent’s claiming to feel isolated and misunderstood, and maintain negative emotions bottled up behind both closed school doors and when they come home. On the other hand, social media has escalated pressures related to identity, appearance and performance, leading to intensified anxiety and self-comparison. These problems are exacerbated by a generalised cultural and structural erosion of spheres of dialogue. Authority figures such as teachers, counsellors, and parents, even are commonly perceived as out of reach, irrelevant to our own issues, leaving us with a void for emotional sharing and growth, which is then either silenced or pathological. Somehow, it is slowly dawning on teenagers that when it comes to their emotional lives, more often than not, they are on their own, institutionally and interpersonally unsupported. For example, Giroux (2014) argues that

under neoliberalism, with the corrosive effects of public pedagogy, young people are dispossessed of collective sites of meaning-making and become relegated to individualised modes of coping (which are conducive to silence). Following an austerity based approach, this crisis has been intensified with a 40% decrease in the funding of youth services since 2010 (YMCA, 2022). Mental health services are overstretched, resorting to long waiting lists and clinical thresholds so high that they exclude preventive care. Those who are marginalised (working class, BAME and LGBTQ + ) also experience excess mental health concerns as a result of structural inequalities and cultural exclusion (Marmot, 2020). This results in a landscape where many young people face internalized distress and externalized systemic silencing, restricted access to culturally relevant support, and stigma which inhibits these important conversations.

This article critiques how curatorial practices which engage with co-design and participatory programming might reconfigure the relationship of art to mental health support. It contests the biomedical gaze commonplace to discussions on mental health, rather centring cultural agency, lived experience and collective care. The concept of cultural capital (Pierre Bourdieu 1986) illustrates how the ability to engage with arts practically re-produces hierarchies of class. I ask in this essay whether arts-based interventions replicate or challenge these dynamics. It raises Paul O'Neill's (2012) question of "who curates for whom" and when it also comes to marginalised communities, as passive receivers. Paulo Freire's (1970) pedagogy places art as dialogic and emancipatory tool — one which enables critical consciousness and participatory agency. Lastly, we can look through the door provided by Foucault (1973) to examine how art spaces work as resistances against clinical medicalisation. Those bodies of theory, however, cannot end their lifework at the level of surface applications. For example, Bourdieu's model is used not only to demonstrate how cultural access is unevenly distributed, but how participatory programmes can unwittingly prop up symbolic domination by valuing particular tastes and forms of expression.

When youth are invited to participate in this way, but only within the institutionally safe norms of acceptable creativity, the system has effectively reasserted itself. Cultural capital is not just about making sure everyone is included, it is about which types of cultural productions are legitimated as having value. As Skeggs (2004) suggests, classed and racialised aesthetic preferences are often read as being uncultured, thereby reiterating existing relations of power even in the more inclusive nature of these spaces. Developing this analysis further enables a more subtle critique of the extent to which curatorial practice is obliged to face, not just access, but valuation.

### Literature Review: Curating Beyond the Clinic

A wave of “Arts on Prescription” schemes has swept in during recent years, in which creative engagement is prescribed as a therapeutic cure. Whilst such programmes show measurable effects in terms of supervisors reduced anxiety, they also run the risk of mainstreaming creativity and instrumentalising engagement with culture (Belfiore, 2023). As McRobbie (2016) suggests, this move is part of a wider neoliberal tendency that is also evident in the way, that art is understood as a form of self-help to create more resilient subjects, rather than tackle structural forms of injustice. This is most evident in policy documents, like the 2018 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport’s report on culture and sport statistics which presents wellbeing as an individual responsibility, reflecting an austerity discourse which outsources state care to culture. Participatory curation, on the other hand, attempts to redistribute power. Projects such as Zinc Arts’ Artzone where children are put at the centre of the design of an programme, not seen as yet more patients but as co-creators. This subverts the conventional hierarchy of institutions and communities (Zinc Arts, 2021). Art helps our mental state, research confirms Workshops, galleries contribute to overall health, studies show Arts engagement can even result in a 25% decrease in cortisol (stress hormone) levels, and an increase in self-esteem (Fancourt & Finn, 2019). However, such measures

frequently pay scant attention to cultural contexts and subjective experience. Arts Council England (2022) highlights the worth of youth-led evaluation techniques, including journals, questionnaires and visual storytelling, which make it possible for emotional honesty rather than biomedical facts to surface. But primary methods such as interviews and co-creative workshops are still not well used academically. Including first-person interviews of young participants, or even some ethnographic research of youth-led art groups, might provide richer and more situated accounts of curator influence.

The arts are still highly stratified. Just 68% of state-school children receive regular access to arts provision, compared with 92% of private school pupils (Arts Council England, 2022). Some cultural expressions such as graffiti, hip-hop, or henna are excluded from formal arts programming, maintaining cultural elitism. This reduces the healing power of art by overlooking the ordinary aesthetics of working-class and ethnic minority youth. Further, aesthetic norms may be more subtly inculcated, even within participatory contexts. Cultural institutions, for example, may privilege forms of self-expression that coincide with dominant aesthetic values reinforcing symbolic violence while professing inclusivity. As both Skeggs (2004) and Bourdieu (1986) point out, this discriminated legitimisation of taste is a form of social stratification. A rigorous curatorial standard must question not only whose in, but under what conditions and through which media.

#### Case Studies: Curatorial Praxis in Action

##### Zinc Arts ArtZone Programme (Essex) VS. Arts on Prescription in Schools (Bradford)

The ArtZone project involved young people aged 11–25 by painting murals, digital media, dance, and storytelling. In a departure from the normal model of artistic instruction and a surprising success for the tiny, notoriously conservative neighborhood. The program followed a co-curation method: teens picked their own themes and mediums, and professional artists served as facilitators

rather than guides. Among projects undertaken as a commission, murals of images from climate anxiety, a concern for Gen Z painted across a once abandoned community centre. This converted the room into a “safe canvas,” providing participants with psychological safety as well as public witness. The programme was rated to have reduced participant stress (mean stress reduction 42%) and a forum where they “felt heard” (Wilson and Sharpe, 2017). Yet program sustainability was hampered given short-term funding. Moreover, the local council had been repacking the murals as part of a scheme of urban regeneration, the unintended consequence of which was negating the youth’s political subjectivity.

By contrast, the Ao project saw GP’s prescribe discrete arts sessions provided by GPs to pupils in a secondary school. The workshops, which were on-site (by artists and facilitators) rather than digital (by computer), employed such tactile materials as clay and textiles to tackle digital saturation and foster mindfulness. Outcomes were mixed. Efstathopoulou and Bungay(2021) reported improvement in 57% of individuals on the Mood and Feelings Questionnaire, and teachers noted greater classroom participation. However, some students fought against the idea of “art as medicine,” apprehensive of stigmatisation or the trivialisation of their problems. Others criticized the cultural exclusion that guided the activities, and that did not include their own aesthetic traditions, for example, South Asian students reported a preference for henna and textiles crafts. This example demonstrates how clinical models could easily be coopted into replicating cultural blindness, or could even potentially distance themselves from those they seek to be beneficiaries.

### Critical Debate: Curating Contradictions

Art spaces, particularly those curated in collaboration, provide opportunities for young people to see themselves and their world anew. Such settings, I have argued, drawing on Foucault (1973), may serve to deflect the pathologising gaze of the clinic, by allowing for other, non-diagnostic

expressions of distress. In Lewisham, All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing (APPG, 2021) funded hip-hop workshops have allowed Black young people to express themselves, share experience of racism, violence and resilience through culturally connected media. And cultural interventions, besides, are economically rational. Such is the estimated return on investment in arts and health (reduced NHS costs and enhanced productivity), at £4.20 for every £1 spent (APPG, 2021). But optimism needs to be balanced with critique. Belfiore (2023) cautions that marginalised young people, can easily become positioned as “curated subjects”—invited to engage but not to take the lead. Similarly, contend that in the current research funding landscape, scores on stimulating resilience fund and outcomes fund metrics are as or more valued by funders than resilience demolition, playing into rather than disrupting the neoliberal frame. This each-time/culturally-specific expectation that cultural programs are going to pick up the slack that was once provided by public services is particularly thorny. The laying off of mental health care onto art institutions exemplifies what Peck and Tickell (2002) call “roll-out neoliberalism”, in which cultural and social spheres are mobilised to absorb the blow of austerity. Art is not a medical substitute for trauma-informed clinical care. Stickley et al. (2017) warn that creative interventions are useful, but not a replacement for mental health services. There is danger too, of tokenism: A single workshop does nothing to change the power dynamics ingrained in cultural institutions.

## **Conclusion**

The UK’s mental health crisis among young people demands a curatorial revolution – one which refuses to treat art as a decorative dressing and instead insists on art as a radical space in which to re-imagine health. Projects such as Zinc Arts and Arts on Prescription provide a neat model, but also illustrate systemic problems. Real transformation resists top-down models in favor of shared authorship, cultural relevance, and infrastructural dedication. It should be mandatory for governing

bodies to enforce co-curation quotas so that at least 50% of steering committees for public arts projects are young people. Criteria for funding should incentivize long-term, relational work as opposed to short-term outputs. Museums should embrace decolonial toolkits which include non-Western art forms – like African drumming, Māori weaving, or Islamic calligraphy – as just as legitimate, just as meaningful ways of expressing themselves. This ensures an inclusive and relevant experience. Collaboration with grassroots colectivos (e.g., Sick of It mental health zine) can contribute to the development of antioppressive evaluation frameworks which span lived experiences. More ethnographic and arts-informed methodologies should be used to supplement statistical assessments.

For curators, educators, and policy makers, the challenge that lies ahead is clear: Curate with rigor, integrity, and a youth-focussed lens that positions young people not as issues to be addressed but as co-creators of new futures.

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# **Industrial writing**

Curating wellbeing workshop - Colourful Souls

# Workshop collaboration proposal

*Presented to Harris Academy Chobham*

*Presented by Grace Li*

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## About This Workshop - Colorful Souls

*Colorful Souls* is a wellbeing-focused creative workshop designed for secondary school students to explore and manage their emotions through accessible artistic practices. At its core, this session promotes self-awareness, emotional regulation, and psychological resilience by introducing students to creative tools they can continue using independently beyond the classroom.

The workshop is designed to respond to the growing mental health challenges faced by young people, particularly in high-pressure academic environments. Through a non-clinical, non-assessed approach, this session offers a safe space for reflection, creativity, and emotional support—without the need for prior artistic experience or verbal disclosures. Each activity is built around fostering a positive, self-guided emotional journey.

Led by facilitator **Grace Li**, the workshop will be co-delivered with guest artist **Alice Tsai**, whose personal practice centres on using visual language to externalise thoughts and emotions. Alice's involvement provides students with an authentic example of how creative expression can be harnessed as a meaningful tool for mental wellbeing. The session will also be supported and supervised by a representative from the **University of the Arts London Mental Health Department**, ensuring that the content remains psychologically safe and age-appropriate.

During the workshop, students will engage with a series of hands-on activities, including:

- **Intuitive drawing and mark-making** to help process emotional energy
- **Visual journaling** as a tool for self-reflection and internal dialogue
- **Collaborative or solo collage-making** as a way to explore identity and communication
- Optional group reflection or creative sharing

The session is structured to allow each student to engage at their own pace and comfort level. It supports the wider PSHE curriculum and contributes to school-wide wellbeing goals by empowering students with tools for:

- Emotional literacy
- Mindfulness and grounding
- Self-expression without performance pressure
- Mental health destigmatisation through creative engagement

This workshop is ideally suited for a class-sized group (20 students) and can be adapted to accommodate different year groups or pastoral needs. All necessary materials will be provided, and the session will be delivered in partnership with school staff to ensure alignment with safeguarding and behaviour policies.

## **Team**

### **Orgnizer - Grace Li**

Central Saint Martins final year student in Culture, Criticism and Curation.

Contacts: [g.li1020211@arts.ac.uk](mailto:g.li1020211@arts.ac.uk)

### **Guest Artist - Alice Tsai**

Central Saint Martins MA Fine Arts graduate, Alice Tsai is a visual artist known for transforming personal emotion into vibrant, intuitive art. Her work explores inner landscapes through sculptures, crochet, live performances and paintings, Alice will guide students through processes that allow them to express thoughts they may not yet have words for.

Artist Website: [Min-Jung Tsai — Bio Site](#)

### **Professional Supervisor - UAL Mental Health Services**

To ensure the workshop is emotionally safe and psychologically informed, I have partnered with the University of the Arts London (UAL) Mental Health department. They will serve as professional supervisors, offering expert guidance on workshop design, delivery, and safeguarding practices.

## **Safeguarding and Risk Assessment**

*The safety and wellbeing of all participants is our highest priority, this workshop has been carefully designed to be emotionally supportive, physically safe, and compliant with safeguarding and health regulations when working with students under 18.*

*A full risk assessment document can be provided upon request or prior to the confirmed workshop date.*

*Outlined below are the key areas of risk management considered for this workshop:*

### **a) Safeguarding and Child Protection**

1. All external facilitators will either hold a current Enhanced DBS certificate or background check for the adults in the same room and will be supervised at all times by Harris Academy Chobham staff.
2. The workshop will operate in accordance with the Children Acts 1989 and 2004 and the statutory guidance in *Keeping Children Safe in Education (2023)*.
3. A designated safeguarding lead from the school will be consulted prior to the session and present onsite during the workshop.

4. All facilitators understand the procedures for responding to student disclosures or emotional distress and will report any concerns immediately to the safeguarding lead.

#### **b) Health and Safety**

1. All materials used in the workshop (e.g., collage tools, adhesives, paints) will be safe, non-toxic, and age-appropriate.
2. Potential physical risks (e.g. use of scissors, glue, paper cutters) will be managed through clear instruction and supervision, all tools will be school-approved.
3. Facilitators will ensure a safe physical setup of the classroom or art space, including awareness of fire exits and emergency procedures.
4. Any known student allergies or material sensitivities will be checked with staff in advance.

#### **c) Emotional and Psychological Wellbeing**

1. Workshop content has been carefully designed to be supportive rather than triggering. However, given the emotional nature of self-expression, there will be:
  - Time for individual quiet reflection and a safe space available if needed.
  - An option for students to opt out of any activity.
  - Support from staff or a mental health professional available on site.
2. Emotional risks will be discussed in advance with the school's wellbeing or pastoral team to ensure appropriate boundaries and support.

#### **d) Consent and Participation**

1. Participation will be voluntary and non-assessed.
2. Students will be encouraged to engage at their own comfort level.
3. If required by the school, parental or guardian consent will be obtained prior to the session.

#### **e) Data Protection and Privacy (GDPR)**

1. No personal information will be collected or recorded without prior consent.
2. If documentation of the workshop (e.g., photographs, videos, student artwork) is desired for educational or promotional use, explicit written consent will be obtained from the school and participants or their guardians.
3. All data handling will comply with the UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018.

*We are committed to working closely with Harris Academy Chobham to ensure that all safeguarding procedures align with the school's existing policies and risk protocols.*

### **Proposed timeline**

Duration: 2.5h ( from 12pm - 2:30pm) open to be discussed accordingly

Participants: 20 students aged 13-16

Location: Classroom and outdoor spaces within the community

12:00-12:10 Meet up

12:10-12:30 Introduction: Icebreaker and brief grounding activity, Introduction of ourselves and to the idea of emotions as colours, textures, and natural forms, Explanation of the day's theme: "What does your soul feel like today?"

12:30-12:35 Walk to green area

12:35-12:55 Students finds natural materials to work with (falling leaves, flowers, etc)

12:55-13:00 Walk back to classroom

13:00-13:30 Creative time

13:30-14:20 Optional sharing inspirational ideas to each other; Group discussion about how art can be used to release emotions and create calm.

14:20-14:30 Wrapping up and goodbyes

This workshop is designed as a single-session, half-day (or double-period) experience that introduces students to creative processes for self-reflection, emotional expression, and calm focus.

### **Core Theme: The Colour of my Soul — A Collage of Colour, Nature, and Emotion**

Through guided reflection, found natural materials (fallen leaves), and expressive mark-making, students will create a mixed media collage representing their inner emotional landscape — what their "soul" might look like through shape, colour, and texture.

Students use the collected natural elements alongside their choice of:

- Acrylic paint or watercolours
- Crayons, oil pastels, coloured pencils
- Paper textures or fabric scraps (optional)

The goal is to create a personal visual composition using **shape, colour, and layering** to represent their emotional or inner self.

Students will be given quiet time and soothing background music to encourage mindfulness and immersion.

#### *Optional additions:*

- Prompt cards or words to inspire those who may feel blocked (e.g., “confused,” “hopeful,” “warm,” “floating”)
- Journaling corner with pencils and reflective questions

Creative Materials Provided:

Non-toxic watercolours, acrylic paints, crayons, and oil pastels

Mixed paper (A4 and A3), glue sticks, scissors, brushes

Pre-dried and clean leaves (if outdoor access isn't available)

Optional: magazines, tissue paper, fabric offcuts for additional collage

#### **Alternative/Extended Idea (Optional – Not included in initial delivery):**

We are also exploring a future iteration of this workshop involving **textile-based emotional expression through basic crochet or finger knitting**. However, due to the need for close tool use and additional time, this activity is better suited for a smaller or older group in a focused creative club format. We are happy to explore this option in future collaboration.

## Proposed Budget

Item	Description	Cost
Artist Fee	Honorarium for Alice Tsai (Half day delivery+ Prep)	£100
Workshop Facilitation	Planning, coordinating and facilitation by Grace Li	£100
Art Materials	Paper, Paints, Brushes, Pens, Glues, etc provided by school	£0
Travel	Transport costs for facilitators	£40
Supervision Support	Mental Health supervision from UAL professional	In kind support
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>£240</b>

*Note: This budget outlines the anticipated costs involved in delivering the workshop. We are happy to discuss adjustments depending on the school's available resources or funding support, it may vary depending on duration, group size, and material needs. I can also explore external funding options or reduce costs by collaborating on resources if need.*

### Next steps and Availability

I would be delighted to meet with your team to further discuss how we can tailor the workshop to suit your students' needs. Suggested dates and session lengths can be adjusted based on your calendar, I am available for delivery during June and July, with flexibility on days.

Please find my contact details below should you wish to discuss further or arrange a preliminary meeting.

Thank you for your time and consideration, I look forward to the opportunity to deliver this workshop into real life for your students' wellbeing through art.

With kind regards,  
Grace Li  
07442187228  
g.li1020211@arts.ac.uk  
LinkedIn: [Grace Li](#)

## Consent form for parents

Dear Parents,

We are pleased to invite your child to participate in a creative wellbeing workshop taking place at Harris Academy Chobham. This specially designed session, titled Colourful Souls, will explore how artistic methods can support young people in managing stress, expressing emotions, and improving emotional resilience in a positive, accessible way. The workshop will be led by Grace Li, a Central Saint Martins final student with a background in Culture, Criticism and Curation, alongside special guest artist Alice Tsai, a fellow UAL graduate whose work centres on transforming personal feelings and thoughts into visual forms. The session will be supervised and supported by a professional from the University of the Arts London Mental Health Department, ensuring that students have access to emotional guidance throughout the experience.

Through carefully structured, age-appropriate activities such as visual journaling, intuitive mark-making, simple collage, and reflective drawing, students will be encouraged to:

- Explore their inner thoughts in a creative, non-judgemental environment
- Build tools for self-expression and emotional regulation
- Develop a sense of calm, focus, and self-awareness through art
- Connect with peers through optional group reflection activities

No prior experience with art is needed, and students will not be asked to share personal details unless they feel comfortable doing so. This workshop is not about artistic skill, but about offering students practical, creative techniques for navigating their emotional world.

If your child has any known sensitivities, additional learning needs, or if you have any concerns, please contact the school or the workshop organiser directly at [ g.li1020211@arts.ac.uk or 07442187228 ]

Sincerely,  
Simon Carrasco  
Head of Secondary

Workshop Details:

Date: 6th of June 2025

Location: Harris Academy Chobham

Duration: 2.5 hours

Group Size: 20 students

Supervision: Delivered under school staff supervision, with safeguarding procedures in place

Notes:

All materials will be provided.

Students will have the option to keep their work or leave it confidentially with the facilitators.

I give permission for my child [ \_\_\_\_\_ ] to take part in the Colourful Souls wellbeing workshop at Harris Academy Chobham.

I understand the nature of the activities involved and the emotional support provisions in place.

I give consent for photographs or anonymous images of my child's artwork to be used for documentation or educational purposes. (Optional – please tick only if comfortable)  
I do not give consent for any images or creative work to be shared or published.

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY PLEASE CONTACT

Name:

Address:

Contact:

Email:

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

NAME OF PARENT/GUARDIAN \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this signed form to homeroom teacher by 2nd of June 2025 Monday.  
Thank you for supporting your child's participation in this wellbeing initiative.

With kind regards,

Grace Li

Workshop Organiser

Email: g.li1020211@arts.ac.uk

Phone: 07442187228



Poster for workshop

Collaborating with **ual:** central  
saint martins



# COLORFUL

# SOULS

*Join us to find out how your soul  
looks like in art forms!*

WE WILL MAKE COOL ART, BE FREE, CLEAR OUR MINDS, EXPRESS  
OURSELVES WITH COLORS.

JUN

6

FRI

AT

12PM IN ROOM 202

Flyer for students