Method:	Creative expression

Description: Creative methods differ from 'traditional' evaluation techniques like surveys and interviews as they are less formal and more engaging, and designed to transfer power to the participant. Creative expression is used here to encompass a subset of Creative Methods with a focus on encouraging people to express their own thoughts and feelings freely in a creative way. Examples, could include using drawing/pictures, role-play and drama, graffiti walls, or 'Vox Pops'/video booths and story-telling to collect perspectives, or using materials like LEGO, tinfoil, clay/plasticine for modeling activities. Options in the context of online delivery could include utilizing technical solutions such as Voice notes, Padlet, Blogs Cameras, and Screensharing applications.

Application: Some activities lend themselves to creative expression.

Type of evidence: Qualitative. OfS Type 1 (narrative)

Strengths: Creative methods can lead to different ways of thinking and expressing which enable the issues to be explored in a more nuanced way. The contributions of participants are less restricted by the criteria of the evaluator. The methods can capture feelings that may not have been articulated in words.

Using creative methods can help you to understand learner journeys from the individual's point of view, and because they are more inclusive can help to get a wider range of perspectives.

As well as putting the participants more at the centre of evaluation, creative methods may also help to overcome barriers for some who may struggle with surveys, interviews or focus groups, whether because of disability, language barriers or lack of confidence. Using drawing/pictures for example can be useful with younger children.

The activities can usually be built in as part of the project/intervention design in an informal fun way. Some methods such as plasticine modelling and LEGO building are like playing. Therefore, using creative expression can help to embed evaluation, and at the same time can enhance activities whilst facilitating reflection.

Some of the methods, such as vox pops, story-telling, artwork or photo diaries, can be used longitudinally to capture events which illustrate change over time.

Weaknesses: There can be challenges in getting everyone involved, especially people who are nervous of the medium or are fearful of their efforts being judged, thereby running the risk of self-selection bias. Fear of the unknown can be a barrier to creativity.

There are challenges in telling the whole story or giving a complete picture, and therefore representations can be only partial, plus those who do participate may choose to represent themselves in particular ways, thereby running the risk of partial perspectives.

The usefulness of the information provided through free expression can vary and interpretation of the information can be challenging. For example, interpreting the meaning of visual or other representations can be difficult.

Because the outcomes of the free expression are highly individualized it can be hard to aggregate the results of creative expression, or to generalise the conclusions. The methods can provide insights into learner journeys but cannot imply a causal relationship between the intervention and any changes observed.

Mixed Methods: It can be useful to complement the use of creative expression techniques with more traditional methods. In particular, semi-structured interviews work well alongside visual methods to help in interpret and make sense of the visual representations.

Expertise: High

Requirements: These methods are most appropriate for people who have a sufficiently high level of creative confidence that they can engage with the research. The use of creative expression techniques needs to be carefully

thought through, and the tools chosen need to be appropriate to the particular context and feasible within the space and time constraints. Importantly, the evaluator needs to create the right conditions for creativity to surface and ensure a good rapport.

Ethical considerations: Consideration of anonymity and confidentiality of participants need to be carefully handled because with creative methods there is a risk that if the creative materials are disseminated (for example in reports or presentations or other dissemination) that they could be traced back to the participant.

There is also an ethical imperative in reporting to make sure that the findings and conclusions you draw are supported by the evidence (i.e. try to be as objective as possible and do not leap to conclusions without evidence).

Permission is needed to use people's creative expression outputs in reports. If you are including images and photographs of other people, then their permissions will also be needed as well.

Work planning: For accuracy, the time chosen for the evaluation activity is usually during or close to the activity you are evaluating (unless the reflections are part of a rolling programme or you are asking people to reconstruct events after the fact). If the evaluation is built into an activity then there needs to be ample time for people to receive instructions and express themselves.

The process needs to be facilitated. The facilitator may actively need to give encouragement to participants who are less engaged and seek out voices that are not being heard.

Attention needs to be paid to making sure that the evidence is valid and credible. You will need to build in work to help to interpret and capture the meaning, through probing and note-taking, or use of formal methods such as interviews and structured observation. Either way it is useful to prepare questions in advance that can be used to examine the creative contributions. It's usually helpful to build in questioning and reviewing the evidence which emerges on a rolling basis rather than leaving it until all information has been collected. There needs to be enough time allowed for meaningful interaction with the participants.

Give some consideration in advance to what you will do with the materials. Often visual images can be captured digitally if you have the right equipment so you can access it later without relying on memory.

Analysis: The key to analysis is to draw out the meaning of the representation for the learner journey from the person's point of view.

The type of analysis will depend on the method. When working with visual data, identifying different categories of response and then identifying how these can be grouped can be one way of undertaking analysis and drawing conclusions. For verbal or textual data there are some software packages that can be used to analyse (software for example can identify the most commonly used words, which can help you to identify broad categories of responses).

Some methods (e.g. using video diaries) generates a large collection of material, which can become overwhelming. Having shorter periods of data collection followed by analysis and then further refined data collection can help to manage the data.

Reporting: Reporting might involve for example systematic quantitative analysis combined with qualitative analysis to pull out the patterns. When reporting results, judgement may be needed about how representative the participants were. Stories and case studies can be used to present specific cases for illustration purposes.

Useful link(s): Artworks Creative Communities, Creative Evaluation Toolkit. Details a selection of creative techniques that can be used to enable participants to share their feelings and opinions in a reflective manner. http://www.artworkscreative.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Creative-Evaluation-Toolkit.pdf

At Oxford Brookes the Student Ambassador Evaluation Strategy aims to better make better use of data and evaluation to inform the delivery of the student ambassador scheme alongside gathering more insights into the impact of the scheme on Student Ambassadors. One part of this evaluation looked at student perceptions of become an ambassador and what qualities they think are important. The approach was included in a standard survey, during which all students were asked to email the Evaluation Team some sort of creative response to the following question 'what do you think makes an excellent ambassador?'. The responses varied greatly as seen in the examples here.