



A local vibrant market © Arts-ED

## OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM: ICH AS A PLATFORM FOR CULTURAL LEARNING

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Arts-ED is a Malaysian non-profit organization operating out of George Town, Penang, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It aims to provide innovative community-based arts and culture education in both rural and urban communities. With programs focusing on the arts, culture, and heritage, Arts-ED uses creative educational approaches that encourage learning around real issues.

Its flagship program is targeted towards young people ranging from age 10 to 17. Christened the Cultural Heritage Education Programme (CHEP), it is run in collaboration with George Town World Heritage Incorporated (GTWHI). It started out in 2016 and remains the largest program in Arts-ED's roster.

### CHEP Objectives

CHEP was conceived to strengthen young people's awareness of cultural heritage, cultural diversity and identity in a world where technology and its algorithms encourage insularity. Marketed to schools within the Northeast District of Penang, CHEP is a push to advocate sustainable culture heritage education efforts among schools in and around the historical George Town city.

Working closely with schools for the past three years has also made Arts-ED aware of the challenges faced by the Malaysian education system as it struggles to develop students that are well versed in communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity (4Cs) to keep up in the twenty-first century. CHEP has incorporated the 4Cs of the twenty-first Century Learning into the development, execution, and promotion of its programs. Taking it a step further, CHEP also now aims to train teachers to develop cultural heritage education that incorporates twenty-first Century Learning, broadening the pool of advocators for this type of learning.

### CHEP's Approaches

CHEP workshops are designed in a way to provide students with an authentic learning experience that involves real people and real issues. Learning happens through student-centered observation, experience, inquiry, exploration, and reflection. Rather than spoon feeding them, students are given opportunities to make meaning by integrating knowing and doing. The programs help students to comprehend the relationship between their personal self, their community, and their environment.

Using both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, CHEP consists of teams of programmers, artists, coordinators, and volunteer facilitators that work to produce themed programs that run throughout the year. Programs have used historical settlements, traditional games, craft, local culinary arts, and local wet market trades and vendors as inspiration to create exciting workshops for young people to engage with ICH.



Participant learning from a vegetable vendor © Arts-ED

### Youth Arts Camp

The Youth Arts Camp (YAC) is one of CHEP's highlight programs. Lasting eight days, YAC uses one of George Town's oldest wet market, Chowrasta Market, as a site for workshops that help teenagers engage with ICH using the arts. Over 120 years old, Chowrasta Market used to be dominated by Indian vendors, but due to a change in demographics, today's vendors are a mix of Chinese and Indian traders. Many of them have been in the business for at least two generations, using local wisdom and community networks in response to changing times.

Student recruitment for YAC is done at schools that fall within the ten kilometer radius of Chowrasta Market. The demographics of this area are urban and semi-urban. Based on these factors, YAC aims to bring together a young, modern group of students with a traditional wet market community. The objective of YAC is to document the livelihood of traditional market traders in a contemporary way that is expressive and brings about appreciation towards the cultural value of the site.

Past workshops have used illustration, woodblock printing, movement, board-game design, object puppetry, and music to document and present topics that range from trade histories, community stories, local practices, traditional market management, and food miles.

### Sound and Music

Music is one of the recurring ways in which artist-programmers help students express their learning after engagement with ICH. In 2016, students used collected sounds from vendors' stalls and recreated them using found materials. These were then incorporated into the arrangement of the song written based on interview data collected from said vendors.

Based on the experience from that, an improved music workshop was designed in 2017 with a more manageable level of songwriting for participants and a higher focus on vendor-student interaction. Titled "Go, Go, Chowrasta",\* the workshop highlighted vendors' background, daily routines, and challenges through the act of lyric writing and song performance. Students spent time getting to know their assigned vendors through interviews, observations, and shadowing.

### The Method

Through a quick exploration of the market via a treasure hunt, students get to know the various sections of the market and the key vendors there. A first interview is conducted with their assigned vendor. The interview covers the vendor's background—how long they have been running the business, how did they start, what they enjoy about it, what are some of the challenges? After the experiential exercise, students come back to the studio to process the data they have collected. They categorized their data and write down their first impressions of vendors.

The next day, students spend time shadowing their vendors. The day starts very early and students learn the basic skills of the trade. In the beef section, some squeamish ones get used to handling raw meat. At the drink stall, students learn special techniques to make local tea; they also take orders and collect payment. Vegetable vendors even left some students to run their stalls when they had to attend to something.

Students also use this time to take down details like customer demographics or what the fastest-selling vegetable is. They learn, first hand, about the nitty-gritty of running a market stall at Chowrasta—what times do produce get unloaded, the amount of rent for a stall, what the peak hours are. At the same time, they also had the chance to chat more casually with the vendors as they now shared a common activity working together.

After the shadowing experience, students continue with their data processing and extract keywords or points that they wanted to include in their song about their vendors. They then learned about song structure, music dynamics, and how to write lyrics for a song. Musician-facilitators help them as they start their song-writing journey, some picking up instruments for the first time or learning new instruments. Once the song is written, performance coaching starts. Students improve on their performing skills by watching video exemplars, performing for their peers, giving and receiving structured feedback.

### The Outcomes

The workshop ends with two performances—one for the community of vendors and one for the public. Students give a summary of their learning experience before presenting their song live in front of the vendor's stall. They also present a token of appreciation to vendors for their time invested in this workshop. The public performance is opened to invited guests and the public. It is done in a walking tour format that takes audiences through the market and showcases various student exhibitions and performances by various workshops under the YAC umbrella.

In a comparison between pre- and post-program surveys, students report an increase in their interest towards Chowrasta Market and their awareness of how their decision making impacts their environment, their ability to convey their ideas and views to others, to understand other people's ideas and views, and to confidently approach and talk to people who are not within their social circle.

We can see here that, although YAC's strength seems to lie in helping students discover and improve their interpersonal skills, it also raises interest in local traditional assets and widens students' perspectives about the impact of their personal choices towards their surroundings and the natural resources in it.

### Moving Forward

As YAC matures and heads into its fourth year, Arts-ED hopes to continue pushing for higher quality programming that allows students to actively engage with ICH and use an art form to communicate their thoughts, ideas, and interpretations from that experience.

A few challenges that need to be kept in check are making sure Arts-ED's engagement with the local community is one that is mutually beneficial, that artist-programmers are well-trained to design workshops that tackle global issues in a way that makes sense for participants and that students walk away not just with more knowledge but changed perspectives and attitudes towards ICH and their relationship to it

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