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Citizen Artist: Examining a Community-Based Studio Art Program

Artiste citoyen : Examen d'un programme d'art en studio communautaire

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Abstract

Background: *Many adults with cognitive and/or developmental disabilities (henceforth CDDs) have never been given the opportunity to fully engage in regular artmaking visual arts activities outside their residential environments due to educational, social and financial barriers. The aim of this multi-methods study was to understand how to operationalize the studio environment to support the art experiences of adults with CDDs in an urban studio environment as well as to find ways to commend and credit their knowledge.*

Methods: *Sixteen artist-participants over 21 years of age who enrolled in art classes at Creative Village Studio participated in narrative interviews, shared their artmaking processes and artworks as well as co-wrote artists' statements about their portfolios over an eight-month period. The study included interviews with three parents, three instructors, three studio volunteers, one lead studio facilitator and one gallery owner who exhibited the artist-participants' artwork. The researcher created artwork alongside the participants and in the studio.*

Conclusion: *A safe, welcoming studio environment with predictable routines, and supportive staff with sociable personalities who respect artists' goals and offers facilitation of artmaking without undue influence or intervention, leads to uninhibited artmaking. Frequency and duration of studio time builds artists' skills, vision, personal style, and self-confidence, resulting in the belief that art is a vocation. Artmaking can act as a piece of a socio-political-cultural jigsaw puzzle that can be assembled to enhance the lives of adults with CDDs. Through art creation the humanity and communication capacities of people with CDDs can be rendered more visible to parents and health and social services professionals. Creative Village Studio's presence in the urban community and regular art exhibits help to break down barriers about what it means to have a disability.*

Résumé

Contexte : De nombreux adultes vivant avec des déficiences intellectuelles et/ou de troubles de développement (DI/TD) n'ont jamais eu l'occasion de s'engager pleinement dans des activités artistiques régulières en dehors de leur environnement résidentiel en raison de barrières éducatives, sociales et financières. L'objectif de cette étude multi-méthode était de comprendre comment opérationnaliser l'environnement du studio d'art pour soutenir les expériences artistiques des artistes-participants dans un environnement de studio urbain, ainsi que de trouver des moyens de féliciter et de valoriser leurs connaissances.

Méthodes : Seize artistes-participants âgés de plus de 21 ans et inscrits à des cours d'art au Creative Village Studio ont participé à des entretiens narratifs, ont partagé leurs processus de création artistique et leurs œuvres d'art, et ont coécrit des déclarations d'artistes à propos de leurs portfolios sur une période de huit mois. L'étude comprenait des entretiens avec trois parents, trois instructeurs, trois bénévoles du studio, un animateur principal du studio et un galeriste qui a exposé les œuvres des artistes-participants. La chercheuse a créé des œuvres d'art aux côtés des participants et dans le studio.

Conclusion : Un environnement de studio sûr et accueillant, avec des routines prévisibles, et un personnel de soutien avenant et bienveillant, qui respecte les objectifs des artistes et facilite la création artistique sans influence ou intervention indue, conduit à une création artistique sans inhibition. La fréquence et la durée du temps passé en studio renforcent les compétences, la vision, le style personnel et la confiance en soi des artistes, ce qui leur permet de croire que l'art est une vocation. La création artistique peut être une pièce d'un casse-tête socio-politico-culturel qui peut être assemblé pour améliorer la vie des adultes vivant avec une DI/TD. Grâce à la création artistique, l'humanité et les capacités de communication des personnes peuvent être rendues plus visibles pour les parents et les professionnels de la santé et des services sociaux. La présence de Creative Village Studio dans la communauté urbaine et les expositions régulières d'œuvres d'art contribuent à abaisser les barrières et mieux saisir ce que signifie être une personne vivant avec un DI/TD.

Mots-clés : création artistique, facilitation artistique, voix d'artistes vivant avec de déficiences intellectuelles et/ou de troubles de développement, studio d'art communautaire, pratique du studio pour les personnes vivant avec un DI/TD.

Introduction

This article is based on a study designed for my dissertation, *The Right to be an Artist: Operationalizing Studio Art Practices for People with Cognitive and Intellectual Disabilities (https://yorkspace.library.yorku.ca/xmlui/handle/10315/38147).* The dissertation examined the practical, philosophical, fiscal, and social policy realities of people with intellectual disabilities who want to live as artists in the community, and it investigated the art practices of 16 local artists working in an urban studio endeavouring to realize their dreams. The present article focuses on the voices and artwork of artist-participants who have experienced artmaking in a supported studio environment.

About the Author-Researcher

I have worked as an elementary and secondary visual art and special education educator and artist for the last 30 years in the public school system. The topic of interest, operationalizing studio art practice for people with CDDs, emerged through my early employment with a city Parks and Recreation department from 1987 to 1992. The response to deinstitutionalization in the 1970–1980s, and the propagation of the *normalization-concept* [1] (Wehmeyer, 2013; Wolfensberger,1972), prompted the sprouting of alternative or *adapted* recreation programs in West Toronto communities. Through this transitional phase of deinstitutionalization, individuals with CDDs moved from institutions to heavily staff-supported placement in the community. Segregated programs ran in parallel with more integrated settings. A "same but different" approach permeated staff training sessions, as the integration of people with CDDs into mainstream community programs became common place. Through this era, I worked in recreational programs for people with CDDs like *Claireville Day Camp* – a large city-run day camp offering integration placements for children with CDDs; *New Strides* – a summer camp for special needs participants aged 14 to 21 years; *Friday Nighters Teen Club* whose premise was to encourage teens with CDDs to socialize; and *Kingsway Club*, a segregated adult social club. Some of the participants in my study had attended these city programs or similar Community Living activities in their youth or early adulthood. These work experiences informed my undergraduate teaching practicums as I completed undergraduate degrees in Visual Art, French and Education. They acted as a springboard for my Master of Education thesis research about students with physical disabilities in the Visual Art classroom (https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/1371/) as well as my PhD research examining the desire for artists with CDDs over age 21 to engage in artmaking. Today I consider myself an artist-teacher-researcher.

What the Literature Says

Critical Disability Studies and Defining Language

The terms used to identify a population of persons with CDDs are not self-evident "natural kinds" or unproblematic and indeed result in the "labelling" of people in a normative society. To situate the language use in this paper, I draw on critical disability studies theorist, Lucy Burke (2008), who suggests the importance of maintaining critical suspicion of the uses of language in, *ways in which particular models and tropes articulate the boundaries between typicality and atypicality, health and illness, normality and disability* (p. i). Burke believes that *cognitive difference* or *cognitive disability* is more appropriate when referring to people with intellectual disabilities. Moreover, I also draw on critical disability theorist, Licia Carlson (2009), who employs the "person first language" phrase – *persons with intellectual disabilities*, or *intellectual disability* – to refer to attributes traditionally associated with conditions such as Down syndrome. Carlson's work reflects the professional and political shift away from negative terminology. In

[1] *Normalization-concept* refers to the belief that all individuals with disabilities regardless of severity are entitled "to establish and /or maintain personal behaviours which are as culturally normal as possible" (Wolfensberger, 1972, p. 28) "experiencing the rich stimulation of being involved in their community, in living with family members, and of experiencing friendships," stressing contact with people without disabilities across all age ranges (Wehmeyer, 2013, p. 227).

this article, I use the person first phrase – person(s) with cognitive and/or developmental disabilities (i.e., with CDDs), or people labelled with a CDD – as opposed to cognitively or developmentally disabled people because these terms refer to different effects and conditions emerging from medical models of disability.

Why Study Art and Cognitive and Developmental Disabilities?

According to the Inclusive Art researcher and practitioners from the United Kingdom, Alice Fox and Hannah Macpherson (2015), many people with CDDs are never given the opportunity to study art as their lives have often been characterized by a high degree of compliance with the goals, schedules, and agendas of others. They argue that people with CDDs are denied access to any regular creative activities outside their residential environments, despite proven benefits of such activities for health, well-being, and resilience. They assert that art programs in the community can provide relief from controlled environments encountered in residential supported living and day care facilities.

Although there are numerous studies about art education for children and youth with CDDs, there are few published studies focusing on the social policies and art supports for adult artists with CDDs (over age 21 years) and artmaking as personal choice and lever for citizenship. Crystal Finely, author of the manual, *Access to the Visual Arts History and Programming for People with Disabilities* (2013), says most studies concerning art and disabilities are limited to people with mental illness or physical disabilities and do not specifically focus on people with intellectual and developmental disabilities within an art studio setting.

Art and disability advocate, parent of a child medically diagnosed with an intellectual disability, art practitioner, founder and president of Cool Arts in Kelowna, British Columbia, Sara Lige (2011) contends that even within the realm of "Disability Arts" artists with CDDs have been neglected or forgotten, arguing it is imperative that work be done to establish and authenticate their legitimacy as artists. Lige asserts that people with CDDs are arguably some of the most marginalized members of our society experiencing exclusion from contemporary art structures of art education, art criticism, and art exhibition in gallery settings. They are not traditionally accepted as legitimate artists outside the disability arts movement because the neo-liberal art gallery exhibition circuit privileges art education, artists' biographies, and communication capacities of artists.

A landmark study by artist, and art educator Florence Ludins-Katz and clinical psychologist Elias Katz, founders of *Creative Growth Art Centre* in Oakland, California developed one of the first models of an art centre in the United States specifically designed for adults with CDDs. Their book, *Art and Disabilities: Establishing the Creative Art Centre for People with Disabilities* (1990), outlined the basic, operational components of a functioning art studio that supports people with CDDs. While their landmark study was highly informative, it did not include the voices of artists with CDDs artmaking experiences. Disability theorist Tobin Siebers (2008) states that, "the *presence* of disabled people [sic] in any discussion changes not only the culture of the discussion but also the nature of the arguments in the discussion" (p. xx). Fox and Macpherson (2015) say that there are few studies that rely on the narrative input of participants with learning disabilities (the term for people with CDDs in the United Kingdom). The current article seeks to contribute to the body of knowledge about visual art and artmaking, forms of cultural citizenship for people with CDDs in Canada.

What is Cultural Citizenship?

Cultural citizenship is the embodiment of art at the heart of public life emphasizing the expression of diverse cultural practices and identities alongside full participation in and access to culture. It envisions conditions for diverse artists to thrive and to engage with arts and culture as a gesture of personal and collective freedom (The Canada Council for the Arts, 2018). “Being in community” is not just about where we live, it is about our human need to belong and participate with others in families, neighbourhoods, networks, and groups. The community is many different things to each person (Dingwall et al., 2016). Cultural participation can be a tool that people use to build their sense of attachment and connection to each other. Cultural participation can also bridge fault lines and build common understanding where sometimes only difference seems to exist (LaRocque, 2005). Art and artmaking have a powerful potential to influence citizenship and the social fabric of Canadian society (See Figure 1).

Figure 1: Ngo, Quyen. (2019). *Flowers on a Sunny Day*, [Acrylic paint on canvas]. 18 ″ x 12 ″. Photograph of a painting by an artist-participant created at the Creative Village Studio. Quyen shows me his artwork. He says that coming to the studio is part of his weekly routine along with working in the community. He wants to sell this new artwork.

What is Art Facilitation?

In a discussion about artists with disabilities, the topic of art facilitation comes to the forefront. According to practicing artist and art facilitator Jan Swinburne (2005), the theory of art facilitation emerged from insufficiencies of both the educational and social systems to appropriately adapt to needs of artists with disabilities and the social structures which disadvantage them. There is a clear distinction between art educational and therapeutic models and art facilitation. Formal art educational systems tend to convey knowledge of historical, theoretical, and technical models to instruct students for professional art practices. Art therapy addresses clinical outcomes including “relieving distress, gaining psychological insights, controlling behaviour, and the like” (p. 2). The objectives of art facilitation are to provide functional and pragmatic practices that support artists for whom the educational and therapeutic systems are inadequate. Art facilitation addresses individual needs when pursuing artistic endeavours, creating opportunities and alternatives for people who face barriers in the mainstream arts and arts education communities.

Swinburne (2005) underlines that there can be overlapping features of the various models. For example, art facilitation can inform technical skills in artmaking and historical background information present in various styles of art in the educational model. It can offer therapeutic and social benefits, but instructors need to be conscious that the emphasis should be on individual art production by the artists with CDDs.

Art and disabilities education specialist theorist Doris Guay’s (2003, 2006) research further expands and critiques concepts of *support* by paraprofessionals, paraeducators and support workers for artists with disabilities in visual art classrooms. In one study Guay (2006) observed paraeducators creating student artists' art for them – hiding, or covering up, minimizing, or

suppressing difference rather than adapting or differentiating instruction to meet diverse student needs. She frequently witnessed art students' artistic trials thrown away by paraprofessionals during cleanup rather than submitting them to the teacher for assessment or display. Guay concluded that authoritarian, interactive patterns of paraprofessionals that dominated many of the visual art classes she researched, resulted in defining student-artists with disabilities, "as having few ideas or experiences, little or no knowledge or ability to solve problems and no opinions" (p. 38). Art facilitators should reflect upon the extent to which they may unwittingly disempower artists through their role as *expert*, through the authority of their knowledge inadvertently communicating to the artist that they cannot do or fully engage in the task presented. I refer to this process as *art sabotage*. Art educators or art facilitators can provide guidance or instruction for individual artists if asked to do so by the artist (Di Maria cited in Rich, 2015).

Methodology and Methods

Participants

Sixteen artist-participants, nine identifying as males and seven identifying as females, were recruited using a snowball sampling poster. Artist-participants were over 21 years of age and enrolled in art classes or frequently attended visual art programs at Creative Village Studio in Toronto, Canada. All participants were medically diagnosed with a cognitive, intellectual, or developmental disability such as autism, Down syndrome, dementia, brain injury and/or multi-exceptionalities.

Location

The accessible studio space is located at 4895 Dundas Street West intersecting Burnhamthorpe Road in Islington Village approximately a 10-minute walk from the Islington subway station in the west end of Toronto. The facility includes a large mechanic's garage storefront window, wooden floor, moveable tables, and chairs. Cabinets hold art supplies at the back of the studio with minimal counter space. A counter with a sink for hot beverage preparation as well as a small bar refrigerator for artists' perishable food and beverages are located near the front of the studio. Nearby, a multi-row card display and shelves are mounted holding the cards and artwork made by the artists of Creative Village Studio's artists to sell to the public (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Yarmol, C. (2020). *Creative Village Studio's interior view facing north*. (Digital photograph). This photograph depicts the interior working space of the studio where tables and chairs can be moved around to accommodate different programmes.

Methodology

Questions Posed for the Study

The study was guided by the following three questions:

1. How can successful studio art practices for people with CDDs be operationalized to support people with CDDs to exercise their right to become artists and achieve an aspect of cultural citizenship?
2. How can people with CDDs be supported in new contexts to enhance their lives as artists?
3. How can the knowledge of visual artists with CDDs who communicate with their artwork be commended or credited?

The dissertation employed a multi-methodological approach forming a bricolage or "a complex, dense, reflexive, collage-like creation that represented the researcher's images, understandings, and interpretations of the world or phenomenon under analysis" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 3) answering innumerable questions teeming around the inquiries arising from the practical and social issues experienced by artists with CDDs. The project was laterally designed as a series of interrelated studies conducted to address one programmatic aim (Morse and Niehaus, 2009) learning about the operationalization of studio practices for people with CDDs giving the research its theoretical thrust. Responding to the feedback from the artists participating in the study, the researcher freely altered the direction of the study after the research process had started to generate meanings from the data set(s) collected, identify patterns and relationships, and build a theoretical contribution from the observations at the end of the research process. This multi-methodological approach applied narrative inquiry, and arts-informed inquiry, including a/r/tography to best capture the rich, multifaceted, lived art experiences of the participants to address the questions posed. The methodologies sometimes overlapped and intertwined. The qualitative methodologies used, the rationale for each design choice, the sources, methods of data collection, and analysis methods are outlined below each subheading so the reader can easily gain an understanding of the researcher's theoretical groundings.

Narrative Inquiry as a Methodology

Narrative research is the study of stories (Polkinghorne, 2007). The philosophical underpinnings of narrative inquiry are situated in John Dewey's (1938) views of experience who posits that humans are not simply "subjects" or "isolated individuals," they are originally and continually tied to their environment, organically related to it, changing it even as it changes them; they are deeply attached to what surrounds them. I applied the paradigm outlined by narrative researcher and social work theorist Gabriela Spector-Mersel (2010) as a structure to guide the questioning strategies and analysis of the narratives [2]. Advocacy and activism are part of the narrative process as the researcher is cast in the role of participant and facilitator in this process or an interactive voice aiming at expressing the mutual influence between the researcher's and the narrator's voices while at the same instance focusing on the researcher's interpretations and personal experiences. In Spector-Mersel's *participant/narrator posture*, the narrators are at the

[2] Spector-Mersel's narrative inquiry grows out from the ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions of narrative inquirers Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly (1998).

centre of narrative inquiry – however, not as informants, but as active agents inseparable from the phenomenon under inquiry. Narrative Inquiry meshes well with arts-informed inquiry and arts-informed methodologies.

Arts-Informed Inquiry and A/r/tography Methodology

Arts informed and narrative theorists Cole and Knowles (2008) believe that deep "Knowledge" can be ascertained from everyday experiences and conversations; hence much can be learned about the lives of people with CDDs from conversations at the studio over coffee and tea, and thus field visits to the studio were part of the methods for this study. Arts-informed research is linked to a broader commitment to recognize individuals in societies as, "knowledge makers engaged in the act of knowledge advancement (p. 60)," to acknowledge "the multiple dimensions that make up the human condition including the physical, emotional, spiritual, social, cultural – and the myriad ways of engaging in the world – oral, literal, visual, embodied" (p. 60). Disability Arts researchers Fox and Macpherson (2015) believe that arts practice as a form of research is valuable in exploring the material, performative, embodied, ephemeral, habitual and conceptual aspects of what it is to be human (p.146). It is also useful for actively making forms of meaning and knowledge through art.

The study also used arts-informed inquiry of a/r/tography developed by Rita Irwin and Stephanie Springgay (2008) that acknowledges the inseparability of making, knowing, and being in the artworld to best capture the rich, multifaceted, lived art experiences of the participants, and addresses the questions posed to achieve the stated study objectives. The use of a/r/tography employs the artist, teacher, and researcher identities as aspects of the researcher's positionality that play a role in interpretation of their research. Interestingly, my life as an artist, art educator as well as a researcher played an important role in this study because artist-participants wanted to know about my qualifications, background, style, and subject matter of my art before consenting to participate in the study.

To respond to the third question, how can the knowledge of visual artists with CDDs who communicate with their artwork be commended or credited? an art exhibition was originally planned but due to COVID 19 protocols, the studio was closed. A pivot to an online culminating exhibition project of seven physical handmade books entitled *Coffee Talk* was created. These books hold graphically designed artists' statements written in conjunction with the study's artist-participants. A selection of artworks accompanies the statements commending and crediting their knowledge. All pages can be inserted into the books' concertina bindings to be viewed privately or withdrawn and mounted alongside artists' physical artworks in an eventual formal, public art exhibition. The digital display was also created for online viewing during the pandemic (See exhibition *Handmade Books* and *Inside Coffee Talk Exhibition* https://yorkspace.library.yorku.ca/xmlui/handle/10315/38147).

Note that artists consented to the publication of their artwork and their images as described in the Consent section of this article. Photographs of artist-participants' artwork are added to this article to support the reader's understanding of the concepts presented, the artists' artwork, and a collaborative drawing project.

Methods

Approach

The data collection methods used in this study include narrative face-to-face interviews with open-ended interview questions with artist-participants; observations of participants' artmaking processes through field visits (Figure 3) leading to fieldnote creation; creation of artwork alongside artist-participants and in the researcher's personal studio; co-creation of artists' statements; and a joint drawing project between the researcher and one artist-participant. References to support personnel figured prominently in the narrative accounts of the artist-participants necessitating the interviews of three volunteers, two parents of adult children attending the studio's programs, one parent-instructor, two instructors, one art facilitator and one gallery owner who exhibits artist-participants' work in her gallery space.

Questions

Questions differed for each group of study participants. Artist-participants were asked a few pointed questions relating to classes, frequency of attendance, and how they paid for the classes/studio time. The next questions were open-ended and inquired about what they did in their art classes, how the instructor/volunteers/parents supported them, likes and possible improvements to the programs, the importance of artmaking and the studio art program in their

Figure 3: Yarmol, C. (2019) *Emily Parsonson,* [Digital photography]. Emily Parsonson proudly showing me, *The Cardinal and Blue Jay Bird Cards* she just created in cardmaking class. [Acrylic paint on paper, 7″ x 5″]

lives, and sharing details about their artwork. Aside from duration and kind of program their adult child participated in, questions for parents were also open-ended. These inquiries probed into their involvement in art programs, Creative Village Studio's supports, benefits and drawbacks, experiences with funding processes, and their adult children's journeys as artists. This article focuses on the interviews with the artist-participants to highlight their voices.

Consent

Informed consent is of paramount importance in all studies. Care was taken to ensure that all participants had the ability to consent. Participants signed a consent form when they register in programs at Creative Village Studio stating that their names, artwork or their photographs may be included in publications about the studio.

In addition to CVS's forms, the study's initial assent and consent forms were developed and then approved by the research ethics board of York University, Toronto. When the sanctioned letter of information and written consent forms were presented to participants, there arose a need to develop additional plain language, pictorial supports to ensure participants' understanding of the requests for the project including use of their names, narrative texts, photographs, artmaking processes, artwork, artist's statements, and continual art exhibition. These pictorial supports ensured that participants had a clear appreciation of the potential benefits and risks of participating in the study and could decide what information they wanted to disclose. Participants were also afforded the opportunity to take the letter of information describing the study and the consent forms home to ensure that their support networks could review the parameters of the study.

The idea of Relational Ethics and its tenants including mutual respect, relational engagement, embodied knowledge, creating environment and uncertainty (Pollard, 2015) were enmeshed in the consent process and throughout this study. Relational Ethics asks that researchers act from their hearts and minds acknowledging the interpersonal bonds they develop with others and take responsibility for their actions and their consequences (Ellis, 2007). Participants were involved in the decision-making process about the information they wanted to share about their artmaking journeys, artwork, and artists' statements. If participants did not agree with inclusion of a particular aspect of the project like showing a photograph of themselves, then these facets were not included in the final dissertation project.

Data Collection

Through field visits I connected with artist-participants to examine their artistic process in the studio and view realized artwork in their portfolios. Participants discussed these artmaking practices and the resulting artwork according to their studio processes, subject matter, and styles. Artists worked with me to co-create their artists' statements about their artwork, choosing artwork to photograph that resulted in individual art portfolio cards to be placed alongside their work at future exhibition (See Figure 4 from *Coffee Talk Exhibit Concertina Page* or file:///C:/Users/GOMAK/Downloads/Yarmol_Christina_M_2020_PhD_Inside_Coffee_Talk_Exhibit__2020%20(15).pdf). Cooperatively I created 23 small scale, gesture line vignette portraits of each of the study's participants with artist-participant Evelyn van Duffelen. I drew the sketches in the studio and Evelyn acted as the colourist (See left side page of Figure 4) of the small-scale portraits.

Analysis

Video interviews were transcribed, in person-conversations about artist-participants' artworks were noted in the fieldnotes. Photographic images supported artist-participants' narrative accounts about their creative experiences and resulting artwork.

Figure 4: Right Side, Emily Parsonson's co-created artist's statement and portfolio pages in *Coffee Talk Exhibit* Concertina Page. [Graphic art ink reproduction on paper, 8.5 ″ x 11″.] Left Side, Original portrait ink and pencil crayon on cartridge paper of Emily Parsonson by van Duffelen, E. and Yarmol, C. with quote from Emily noted below the drawing and Emily's artwork layered behind. These pages are examples from the digital exhibition. Pages can be removed from the physical books and placed by the artist's work in an exhibition space in the future. The image on the left was part of an inclusive art project with the researcher and artist-participant Evelyn van Duffelen.

Analysis of interviews was grouped into artist-participants, instructors/art-facilitators, volunteers, instructors, and parents to gather the overarching themes for each stakeholder group. The data were coded using Gabrielle Spector-Mersel's (2010, 2011) six mechanisms for constructing narrative identities and story analysis: *inclusion, sharpening, omission, silencing, flattening, and meaning attribution*. Narrative data was globally reviewed using the interpretive schemata to note underlying repetition and patterns across stories and to determine overarching themes or outliers.

Results

Theme 1: Organization of Studio Environment and Supportive Personnel are Essential and Key to Artists' Success

The studio location was physically accessible and a safe environment near transit reachable by all. It was important to create predictable, organized routines for artists including appropriate media set up in an orderly fashion and drying and storage locations for artwork.

Supportive, positive personnel were essential to build a creative working environment.

The studio staff employed a "comfort before skills" approach to art instruction led by the key art facilitator Harold Tomlinson. This approach meant that artists socialized with one another and drank a hot beverage or water before starting their artwork (See Matthew Sheeny in Figure 5). Steve Nicholson a long time artist at Creative Village, highlighted this daily artmaking routine, "Well, after you have a drink you sit, relax with your drink for a couple of minutes and then you try to think, [He put his pointer finger of his left hand to his temple.] either about what you want to do or what you have done, come and search for your painting and then finish where you left off."

Figure 5: Yarmol, C. (2019). *Matthew Sheeny* [Digital photograph]. Matthew enjoys a coffee at a weekly painting class before he starts to work.

Artist-participant Quyen Ngo underlined that he did not like the workshop but preferred the studio environment, "No workshop [He waves his hand no.]. Too loud [He points to his ear with a circular motion...]! Like it here! I paint what I want." This cultural environment not only fostered positive social relationships but encouraged exploration through artmaking without judgement that enabled risk-taking by the artist-participants.

Staff and volunteers who demonstrated patience, sociable personalities, respect for artists' goals and a belief in artists' potential to independently create art were crucial to the artists' artmaking success. Instructors effectively imparted artistic knowledge without undue influence, that is, no hand over hand completion of participants' artwork. Effective art facilitation involved active

communication with the artists. Artists felt free to request assistance with selected tools or the application of selected media to express colours, lines, shapes, textures, or the like at any point in their time at the studio. The art instructor emphasized to volunteers and paraprofessionals who came to the studio that the artists should be left to explore, discover, make mistakes, tell their own stories with media and in short, create by themselves rather than rush to complete the artwork to an external standard.

For the painting classes for participants, the art-facilitators/ instructors set out the canvases and supplies. They scaffolded instructions, gave supports for illustration of the initial subject, exercised a "see-it, say it, do it" model, repeated instructions, showed examples of completed artwork and responded to artists' requests by making accommodations for participants who were unable to use the tools provided. The staff provided emotional encouragement through commentary about successes and practiced art critique models to improve artists' artwork. Artists also provided oral critiques to one another about their work. Staff offered time allowances for artwork completion to match artists' needs (See Figure 6). The key facilitator possessed practical knowledge of the visual arts and experience in the social services domains to support the diverse artistic styles and skills of the artists because many of the artist-participants required varied art instruction ranging from basic skills to semi-professional art coaching on a one-to-one basis with their individual projects.

Figure 6, Matthew Sheeny, *Dandelion.* (2019), [Acrylic on canvas], 14″ x 17″. Matthew shares that he has learned a great deal about making art when he comes to weekly painting classes at CVS but that he also enjoys the social aspects of working with other artists.

Theme 2: Social Aspects of Studio Work of Paramount Importance

Artist-participants spoke about social aspects of artmaking and support they received through their friends, volunteers, and staff. They enjoyed the chance to talk about life issues, and the opportunity to offer critique or advice about one another's artwork. Artists' positive self-concepts are supported by their social circle at CVS and for some artists, the social aspects of the studio were central to their participation in the program. They felt a sense of belonging as artists, knowing artists, like a community within a community.

Theme 3: Duration and Frequency at the Studio Increased Self-Confidence in Artmaking Ability

The frequency and duration at the studio increased artist-participants' confidence-levels, development of personal styles and sureness in expressing subject matter. Artists with more in-studio experience demonstrated a focus and attention on the creative process and had a thoughtful approach to their art practice, knowing what they wanted to create and how to create it. Conrod Skyers, who had tried a range of classes over several years, came to the studio daily to paint. He painted brightly coloured scenes of animals from around the world (See Figure 7),

subjects of either his Jamaican heritage or themes from the media he watched on television. He was not afraid to experiment.

Skyers said, “I just get an idea, I just…sometimes bump! This phrase means that ideas just pop up in his head from the world around him. He exuded, “It must be working ‘cause people want to buy what I paint!” Bombarded with ideas, he could not wait to get into the studio to realize them on canvas. Harold helped Conrod Skyers to channel this unbridled energy so that each work could be seen to its fruition before beginning the next work. Long time artists developed thematic artwork, iconographic symbols to communicate messages, colour palettes, stylistic and technical syntax in their paintings and drawings that became uniquely their own. One could look at an artist’s work, not see the signature and say, “That work is unmistakably Conrod’s!”

Figure 7: Skyers, C. (2019). *Canadian Scene*. [Acrylic paint on canvas, 24″ x 32″]. *Canadian Scene* shows a large painted canvas in flat coats of acrylic paint, outlining of shapes, use of bright contrasting colours, and frequent patterning of the background landscape typical of Skyer’s individual style.

Theme 3: Frequent Exhibition Legitimizes Artists’ Personae

When their art was exhibited in a public way, the artists communicated a sense of pride that built a positive self-image about their work as artists. Frequent exhibition of artwork enables the public to view the CVS artists as skilled individuals. Donna Worotynec has been at the studio since its opening in 2009; her work sells regularly. On the left side of Figure 8, Worotynec proudly holds up a photograph that the purchasers of her painting forwarded to CVS. The photograph shows where they had placed *People in the Studio,* Donna Worotynec’s painting, in their home. The accompanying letter expresses their love of the painting and thanks the artist for

her work. Worotynec was eager to share details of the artwork's subject matter and style as she proudly held up the photograph for me to see, "I've got them hanging together... And I had one taken away. They bought it from me a while ago… and then I make another one, same portrait like that." Worotynec pointed at her painting to the eight quadrants of portraits and smiled broadly at the former triptych of three paintings. She was thrilled that someone enjoyed her work. The third photograph in Figure 8a shows her painting a replacement for the piece sold in the original triptych. Figure 8b depicts Donna's work at a public exhibition.

Figure 8a: Yarmol, C. (July 3rd, 2019). Donna Worotynec showing a photograph of her painting sold and hung in the buyer's home. Digital photograph by Yarmol, C. Worotynec, D. (2019). *People in the Studio.* [Acrylic paint on canvas, 36″ x 24″]. Digital photograph by Yarmol, C. Yarmol, C. (July 3rd, 2019.). Donna Worotynec creating another *People in the Studio* painting to add to the diptych on the wall to make it a triptych once again. Digital photograph by Yarmol, C.

Emily Parsonson speaks at length about her shows in the community (See right page of Figure 4 and Figure 9). She shares that her mother helped her to organize an art show of her work in the party room in their condominium. She goes on to explain how recently she sold 11 out of 16 Christmas cards at a church bazaar.

Figure 8b: Yarmol, C. (January 2020). Digital photograph by Yarmol, C. This photograph shows Donna Worotynec's *People in the Studio* [Acrylic paint on canvas, 36″ x 24″] displayed at a public show, *Art from the Heart* exhibit (January 16th-April 26th, 2020) at Joshua Creek Heritage Art Centre, Oakville, Ontario.

Emily says, “It amazes me how I see myself as an artist and now I am. [She puts her right hand to her heart.] I am getting more and more creative everyday.” Emily is ready to share details of her art exhibition experiences. Emily also shared that she loved coming to the studio and that it gave her mother a chance to run errands or to be by herself.

Theme 4: Assistance Required to Navigate Social Policy and Financial Matters

There are limited funding opportunities for participants to engage in art activities. Social policy for artists with CDDs is like a patchwork quilt stitched haphazardly together through the *Passport Initiative*, special grants, ODSP or personal funding by families. Tasks such as fund dispersal to programs upon enrolment, careful recording of funds dispersed, receipt retainment, and acknowledgment of cheques from the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services are complicated to actuate and to maintain the continuing subsidies for people with CDDs. The *Passport Initiative* provides some financial access for individuals with CDDs to engage in activities that promote cultural citizenship but all actions to maintain funding must be completed in a timely fashion, or the designated funding will be retracted from a recipient. Highly complex processes require the support of a family member, caregiver or social services aide. The organization of the *Passport Initiative* is so complex that the ministry will provide 10% percentage of the funding to manage the administration of the paperwork (Passport Program Information Package: New Clients; Family Service Program, 2017). Artists in the study often communicated their need for support in understanding of financial issues of paying for studio time or classes and selling their artwork.

Figure 9: Parsonson, E. (2019). *Dancing with the Stars*. [Acrylic paint on canvas, 16″ x 18″]. Emily explains that she painted the stage from her favorite show, *Dancing with the Stars*. She learned how to do perspective and plans to include this work in her next art show.

Jack gets support from his family. He states, “I think that my stepmother organizes the money.”

A few study participants know definitively that they are in line to receive *Passport Program* funding but are simply waiting tirelessly in financial purgatory; some may have given up waiting for it while others do not even know what *Passport Program* funding is or how it works. Betsy has an awareness of *Passport Program* funding because her roommate is a recipient, but she is still waiting to receive it. She shares that her worker helps her to pay for art classes and that sooner or later she will have *Passport Initiative* that they’ve been talking about it.

Johnfredy does not know how he pays for the studio program. He simply shrugs his shoulders making a “no” gesture with his head and throws his hands in the air when asked about funding.

Steve says, “Umm I'm not into the money part you'll have to speak to Harold…. I don't know the money part. I'm only here for the art. The money part is done through Harold so I can’t talk about the finances.” Steve’s declaration indicates his discomfort with financial queries. Like many of his colleagues at CVS, Steve works with an individual who supports him in determining the funding of the activities in his weekly programming. He knows that when his work is sold, he receives a cheque that he deposits in the bank.

Art experiences can open a gateway to social innovation that promotes skill development, social participation, and fosters social inclusion of people with CDDs. This research opens us to question existing social policies to improve service options in the form of community-based art programming and management of direct funding models. More studies are needed to examine social policies as they relate to direct funding and participation in cultural engagement.

Conclusion

Urban art studios can promote individual artistic success and a sense of community through a positive social environment created by knowledgeable support personnel who believe in the artistic potential of artists with CDDs. The studio becomes a social connection point that invites individuals to take risks in artmaking, helping to build self-confidence and a sense of purpose and pride in Creative Village Studio artists. With routines established, artist-participants feel comfortable and relaxed in the positive studio space knowing that they can focus on their artwork and take risks. Duration and frequency at the studio assist in the development of the artist’s personal style and self-assurance in their abilities.

Figure 10:
Yarmol, C. (January 2020). Digital photograph by Yarmol, C. This photograph shows Quyen Ngo proudly posing in front of his artwork displayed at a public show, *Art from the Heart* exhibit (January 16th-April 26th, 2020) at Joshua Creek Heritage Art Centre, Oakville, Ontario.

In the interviews, artist-participants mentioned how important their family’s opinions, acceptance and promotion of their artwork was to them. The encouragement of family networks plays an important role in personal empowerment when they support art activities in the

community that promote social participation. By creating artwork in the studio setting, families declare that their family members see themselves ***as artists*** who experience a sense of pride through social role valorization (Wolfensberger, 1985) in their local communities. Additional assistance navigating the complexities of social policy and flexible approaches to direct funding towards daily activities are required if participants are to attain personal goals. Through its tangible, visible results, its social participation, and emotional involvement, artmaking can foster social inclusion and a sense of belonging in adults with intellectual disabilities.

The studio is a refuge for artists with CDDs who see artmaking as *their vocation*. Anyone who wants to exercise their right to be an artist should be allowed to use their creativity to achieve their goal of becoming an artist in a society. Providing a working space helps to centre artists with CDDs vision and practice. Art exhibition can act as a public celebration to share artists' knowledge in the larger arts community (see Figure 10). When work is exhibited in the community, the public becomes mindful of a multitude of voices and embodied perspectives possible in art. This inclusion can be disruptive of the status quo. Parents, caregivers, social services, and health professionals who encounter the artwork can see the humanity and communication capacities of people with whom they work alongside. Arts activities can be the beginning of the realization of cultural rights as a profound part of human rights.

Key Messages from This Article

Persons with disabilities: You are a creative person and have the right to further develop your unique talents and make art a meaningful activity in your life.

Professionals: An art studio can be a safe space for people with intellectual disabilities who see art as their vocation. Artists' knowledge can be celebrated through continuous art exhibitions.

Policymakers: Minimizing financial barriers that prevent individuals with cognitive and developmental disabilities from accessing studio art opportunities in the community can enrich personal development and social well-being. Art creation can be the beginning of the realization of cultural rights as a part of human rights.

Messages clés de cet article

Personnes vivant avec un DI/TD : Vous êtes une personne créative et vous avez le droit de développer vos talents uniques et de faire de l'art une activité significative dans votre vie.

Professionnels : Un studio d'art peut être un espace sûr pour les personnes vivant avec un DI/TD qui considèrent l'art comme leur vocation. Les connaissances des artistes peuvent être célébrées par des expositions permanentes.

Les décideurs politiques : Il est important de minimiser les obstacles financiers qui empêchent les personnes vivant avec un DI/TD d'accéder aux possibilités d'art en studio dans la communauté peut enrichir le développement personnel et le bien-être social. La création

artistique peut être le début de la réalisation des droits culturels en tant que partie intégrante des droits de l'homme.

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