

**‘What methods of arts engagement are successful in enriching the lives of older people, and what evaluative and research models effectively capture this work?’**

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Last but not least I would like to thank my wonderful daughters for believing in me and supporting me in in my travels and my passion for the work I do.

## **Professional experience**

I have worked in the field of community arts since my twenties in the 1980's. I started out by volunteering with various groups at a community arts and crafts centre in Nottingham as a student volunteering with girls groups and then later working on play schemes with children in a women's refuge. I did a degree in Psychology and continued my interest in Arts and Crafts with a Diploma in the 1990's. I also taught primary school children for a little while having completed a PGCE a few years after my degree. I then undertook an MA in Feminist Theory and History and Criticism of the Visual Arts which took me to intellectual heights that I had never been aware of and decided following this, that I wanted to return to where my heart was, in the field of community arts.

I have been involved in arts and health in all of its various guises for most of my adult life. The real life experiences of mental health from people very close to me made the relevance of art as a tool for wellbeing and recovery even more poignant. As my daughters grew so did my career. I worked on freelance arts projects in schools in Health Action Zones, and organised major festivals in Leeds and Yorkshire through both Euro 96 and Photo 98. I worked as an Arts Project Co-ordinator in Hunslet and in North Yorkshire and then finally came to Artlink West Yorkshire, where I have been for over fourteen years.

Using the arts as a tool for recovery is key to everything we do. It has been the motivator that has kept me fueled all of my working life, and I continue to believe passionately in the power of art to bring about positive changes in people's lives.

## Executive summary

My fellowship was to answer the question;

*'What methods of arts engagement are successful in enriching the lives of older people, and what evaluative and research models effectively capture this work?'*

In order to do this I visited participatory arts projects in New York City delivered by Elders Share the Arts, the Interpreting MoMA programme at the Museum of Modern Art and people with chronic health conditions delivered by the Creative Center. At MoMA I was also privileged to meet one of the Programme Directors to discuss methods of evaluation.

In Vancouver I visited the University of British Columbia to discuss methods of practice based research methods with people with dementia at the School of Nursing and with a post Doctoral student funded through the Alzeihmers Society. I met up with the head of department for Arts For Social Change at Simon Fraser University and visited participatory arts projects working with older people funded by the Vancouver Parks Board and held at West Point Grey and the Roundhouse Community Arts Centre

Major findings;

- That research-based practice can have a major impact on the way we learn about the process taking place for people with dementia or those with little ability to communicate verbally.
- That using empowering techniques such as story-telling through reminiscence for intergenerational projects based on the techniques of Augusto Boal is a powerful tool for participants to take ownership of life experiences which are often discriminatory towards them.
- Ensure that the people at the very top of an organisation are enlisted to

experience workshops first hand in order to bring about change and influence managers.

- That the use of close observational (ethnographically inspired) techniques of evaluative practice are an important means of offering a rich narrative of what is taking place within participatory arts practice, and is essential to giving a full picture.
- Recognising the historical and contemporary context of arts intervention, research and delivery is crucial in understanding the benefit of arts intervention with older people and marginalised groups. That what we do now is not a coincidence, and is based on many years of considered research and practice.

## **Background to the project**

When I applied for the Winston Churchill Travel Fellowship I was primarily interested in visiting projects from around the World using the arts as way of engaging elderly people. My background in arts and health meant that I knew very well the power of arts to transform people's lives. Artlink works with a significant range of disadvantaged and vulnerable people including those with learning and physical disabilities, mental health issues including dementia, people with eating disorders and women who are part of the criminal justice system as well as young people who are at risk of exclusion from mainstream school.

I was interested in the Fellowship because I felt that it would take me out of the context of my everyday work and offer me a different insight. I was hoping to be inspired and was interested to see how other people worked with the elderly and whether they dwelt very much on issues relating to reminiscence or whether they were engaging with issues that were pertinent and contemporary to the people involved. I was also interested in how they captured and evaluated their work. All of us working in this field know it has a major impact on people, but demonstrating this is key to conveying that message. More than anything I wanted the experience and the challenge of visiting somewhere completely new and seeing things from a different perspective, and to

discover how this would inform my work and practice at home.

It was a long time coming for me, since two weeks before I was due to leave in 2014 I was taken to hospital with a life threatening auto immune platelet condition called ITP. The morning after my platelet transfusion my first question to the consultant was; 'Can I go on my trip?' I was devastated to learn that I would have to cancel all of my plans.

It took me two years to go on a plane again, but in June 2017 I took my first long haul flight to New York City and in October 2017 completed my trip by going to Vancouver.

## **Aims, Objectives and purpose of the project**

In my original application to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust I outlined the above as follows;

- The aim of my project is to have an international perspective on work taking place with older people.
- To identify methods of evaluation and to discuss with others what has worked and what has not worked.
- To identify good practice that can be replicated and fed back into the settings that I work in.
- To achieve affirmation and challenge regarding ways of working with older people suffering from hugely challenging conditions.

My summary question was;

*'What methods of arts engagement are successful in enriching the lives of older people, and what evaluative and research models effectively capture this work.'*

## **Approach and methods**

I will present my report in chronological order of my travels since this seems to be the most logical way of outlining the journey that I took both literally and metaphorically. I started off in New York visiting three organisations over ten days. Some of these consisted of project visits and some consisted of meetings with key organisers and deliverers. The next phase of my Fellowship took place in Vancouver where I focused my visits on key academic contacts I had made as well as project and organisational visits.

I will offer a summary of the two phases of my Fellowship with recommendations in the conclusion.



## **New York City**

### **Elders Share the Arts**

In June 2017 I met Susan Perlstein the Director of ESTA. She was the founder in 1979 and had returned as Director after taking retirement due to lack of available managers. ESTA is funded by New York State's Council for the Arts, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Since 2001 they have carried out a significant amount of training with artists, and people who work in residential care settings with older people. It is a collaboration with Creative Aging under a scheme called SU-CASA which is a programme offering training for artists in residence as well as staff at senior centres across New York city. To do this work she told me that they had three-year funding from New York State Council, but that like us when the money ran out they had to re-apply for something completely new, and thus faced huge challenges with fundraising. She also made it clear to me that it was not easy to obtain private funding as is often the myth which we are conveyed here in Britain; that in the U.S philanthropic funding is easy to obtain.

In a significant piece of work which Susan shared with me titled; 'A Stage of Memory: A guide to the Living History Theatre Programme of Elders Share the Arts, written by Renya T H Larson (1)' the introduction talks about the historical basis of reminiscence. In the 1960's two researchers, psychologist Erik Erikson and gerontologist Robert Butler suggested that in order to have closure in the life of an elderly person, they needed to have a process of 'Life Review' and thus came about the process of reminiscence (p.9). They saw this very much as a way of 'maintaining self-esteem, reinforcing a sense of personal and collective identity, resolving grief and helping to assuage the anxiety of physical and mental decline.' The document also talks about the need to retell the oral histories particularly of women and people of ethnic backgrounds since these are the stories that are not current in main-stream history.

Susan also talked to me about the importance of external evaluation and their work with Dr Gene Cohen (author of *The Creative Age: Awakening Human Potential in the Second Half of Life* 2001(2)) as Principal Investigator on the 'Impact on Older Participants of Professionally conducted Cultural Programmes'. Cohen continued to develop his theories of aging and in 2006 wrote a book titled *'The Mature Mind: The Positive Power of the Aging Brain'*(3), highlighting the flexibility of the human brain as it ages. It is all of this discourse, which has influenced the foundation for the practice of working for Elders Share the Arts. Susan is also influenced by the work of Augusto Boal and his theory of 'theatre of the oppressed', which was a technique he devised in Brazil. *'In Theatre of the Oppressed Boal develops a theatrical method based on 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed'*(4), a book by the Brazilian educator and writer Paulo Freire (who was also a good friend of Boal).

Boal's method of theatre implemented in the 1970's was very much a response to an oppressive political regime and influenced by Paulo Freire, he wanted the spectators in a theatre piece to become active participants in the theatrical experience.

## **Project visits**

### **Elementary School in Brownsville**

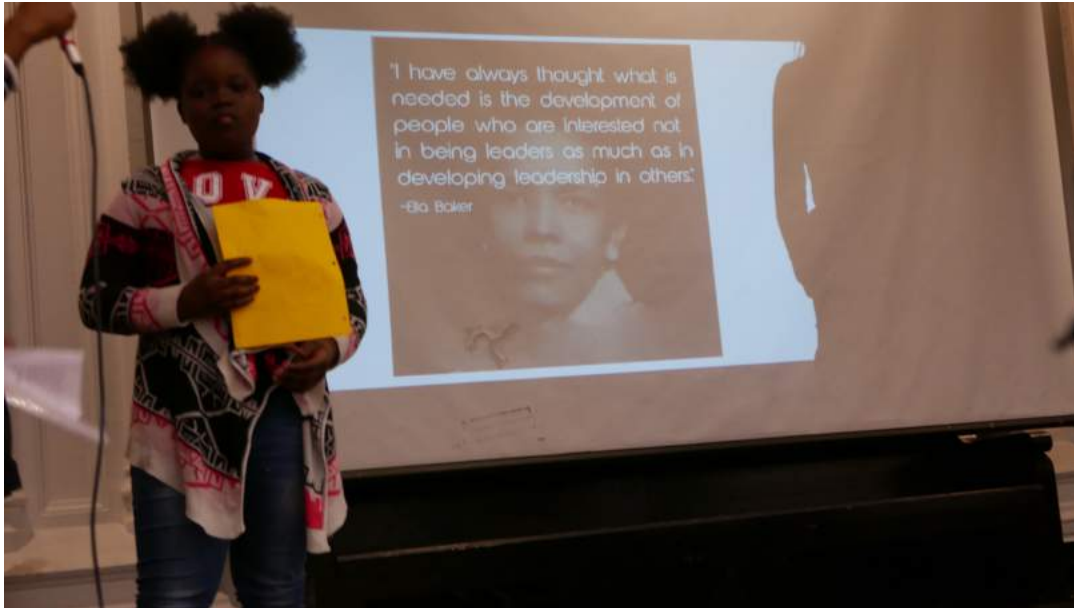
The first project I visited with Elders Share the Arts was an intergenerational project in an elementary school in a deprived area of New York State called Brownsville. Even before I had come to New York people had told me to be careful when visiting this area of New York, and I was determined to visit the project in spite of various tales of caution.

*'When I arrive it is an old Victorian building set in a multi-cultural area. I am told to go down to the basement where the stage is being set for the morning's performance, which is the culmination of a project in which the children have been working with elders in the community. The format of the morning is the re-enactment of a real life historical moment that one of the women has conveyed to the children over the weeks of the project.'*

The project was aimed at ensuring that children in the neighbourhoods did not forget the history of struggle that the elders in their communities had fought for and experienced over their lifetimes. Pearls of Wisdom, was a group established to do just this and consisted of a group of elderly women who were story tellers of real life historical events. Susan Perlstein the Director of Elders Share the Arts told me it was vital to *'honour the history and culture of older people, since they are the keepers of the culture'*. When I visited, one of the women talked eloquently about; *'Her first job in 1959 and how they would get food during their lunch hour at the local Woolworths, but were not allowed to sit at the counter because it was 'whites only'. There are archive images of protests, which took place, and a cause, which was finally won in 1960. She said 'Every movement needs a leader,' and a girl re-enacted the account, leading protesters with placards. I learnt that in Greensboro, North Carolina, hundreds of students, civil rights organizations, churches, and members of the community joined in a six-month-long protest. Their commitment ultimately led to the desegregation of the F. W. Woolworth lunch counter on July 25, 1960. The children re-enacted protests that took place over the years against the segregation and there are slides depicting the leader of the movement Ella Baker with a quote saying; 'I have always thought what is needed is the development of people who are interested not in being leaders as much as in developing leadership in others.'*

It is interesting to reflect now on the context of the project. The fact that the work of Elders Share the Arts is very much based on Erikson and Butlers notions of 'Life Review' and Cohen's theories of aging and the flexibility of the human brain.





### **Stanley Isaacs Neighbourhood Centre**

The second project I visited was still with Elders Share the Arts and was an elders drama project in the Upper Eastside of Manhattan based at Stanley Issacs Neighbourhood Day Centre. This was quite different from the school I visited in Brownsville and was based in an affluent neighbourhood, in a state-run day centre for elderly people from local neighbourhoods. The group were an amazingly lively and interactive group, working with a lead artist John, who had experience of Theatre of the Oppressed technics of engagement. It was interesting to see this technique being used in action and the notion that the 'oppressed become the artists', and indeed this is what I saw happening with this lively group of elderly people.

They were re-enacting a real-life event that had taken place with one of the women titled the 'Burger King Scene'. *One lady recounts the true to life story of how her and her friend decide to go to Burger King, in which one has a stick and the other is using a frame. She recounts how they walk slowly, slowly to the counter, all the while being stared at by the young man behind the counter. When they reach the counter, he tells them that they are closed! And to add insult to injury, a young man walks in after them*

*and is served straight way! She has a flash of inspiration and says, 'Do you know who I am? I am the undercover boss!' And so the story unfolds of them suddenly being treated with the respect they deserve. She says, the story is about discrimination towards older people, and more relevant because it is her own story.*

This project was so heart-warming and empowering and I was really interested to see how John's drama techniques gave the participants in the group control over the direction of the piece as it was developed, with much support as well in terms of the bouncing off of ideas with each other and general discussion about how the story should unfold. John later told me that he also worked with refugees using this technique.



Stanley Isaacs Neighbourhood Centre drama group.

## **Museum of Modern Art – MoMA**

My next meeting in New York City was with Carrie McGee who is Assistant Programme Manager for the Education Department at MoMA. She spent a morning describing their project activity and evaluation methods as well as telling me a little about the history of the education department, which goes back to 1925. She told me that MoMA was the first museum to set up an Education Institute and that from 1937-1970 the Director Victor D'Amico was instrumental in establishing the education programme. He was ground-breaking in setting up activities for war veterans in 1944, and significantly, when he left MoMA there was no education programme for over a decade. She told me that currently the education department has 25 staff running the department and a 'ton of freelancers', and is headed up by Francesca Rosenberg who is Director of Community Access and Schools Programmes, with Wendy Woon as the Deputy Director.

On the MoMA website it states that, *'Ms. Woon oversees all areas of MoMA's Department of Education, where she focuses on transforming museum education for the 21st century through experimental, collaborative, and research-based pedagogy. Since joining MoMA in 2006, she has initiated, led, and participated in cross-institutional initiatives that are key to the organization's future.'* When I met Wendy Woon on my way out of the meeting with Carrie, Carrie told her that I had asked who the vision behind the vast and successful department was. It was clear that there is a lot of respect for Wendy's input and Carrie told me that the department had improved hugely since Wendy's appointment ten years previously. Before that education wasn't valued in the same way by the museum. Wendy replied that it was the staff who made the place work. Wendy is also a speaker at many international and prestigious venues, and was speaking at a Paris conference that week.

The Access Programme at MoMA consists of six key activities; Prime Time, Art In Sight, Create Ability, Meet Me at MoMA, Interpreting MoMA and Open Art Space. Prime Time is an initiative to engage older New Yorkers at MoMA; Art In Sight is for individuals who are blind or partially sighted, and they are invited to 'Touch, listen, and discuss'; Create

Ability is for individuals with developmental or learning disabilities; Meet Me at MoMA is for individuals with dementia; Interpreting MoMA is for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing and finally Open Art Space is a free drop-in programme for LGBTQ teens and their allies. The Meet Me at MoMA programme is a World famous intervention working with people who have dementia and Alzheimers. On the website it states that; *'Today more than five million people in the United States are living with Alzheimer's disease. That number has doubled since 1980 and is expected to be as high as sixteen million by 2050. The direct and indirect costs of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias amount to more than \$148 billion annually. According to a 2004 report that analyzed Medicare claims data, beneficiaries with dementia cost Medicare three times more than other older beneficiaries. Based on current estimates, these costs will double every ten years.'* There are also numerous testimonial conversations, including one from Gene Cohen of the Center of Aging, Health and Humanities with and Gay Hanna from the Center of Creative Aging, indicating qualitative outcomes to arts interventions with people with Alzeihmers leading to increased self-esteem, increased socialisation and wellbeing. The MoMA website has comprehensive and informative videos detailing how they engage people with the most common form of dementia, Alzeihmers, and the way in which their works of art are a beneficial and life affirming way of engaging people.

In my conversation with Carrie we started to talk about the type of evaluation that they were using to assess and monitor their work. It was a moment of huge serendipity when I realised that they had also come to the same conclusion as Artlink in terms of the quality and depth of evaluation and had recently employed a Research and Evaluation Specialist called Jackie Armstrong whose background was in Anthropology and Archaeology. Carrie said, 'We gave them questionnaires and they said it was great!', but indicated that, it wasn't enough. What was significant for me was that we had come to the same conclusion at the same time; that is in order to truly see and observe the changes that are taking place there needs to be an approach which involves observation techniques using signifiers of change. For Artlink this has meant working with Dr Anni Raw over the past four years using a form of deep ethnographically



inspired approach to observation of changes within the people we work with over the course of four years. Carrie said that it had taken them a while to come to this decision because they had no funders that required specific evaluation to be disseminated in a professionally presented format. MoMA is 100% privately funded and this therefore is hugely different from organisations such as Artlink and ESTA where we are accountable to our core funders such as New York State Council or the Arts Council of England. When I met with Carrie I asked her whether this meant that the funders had control over what they delivered and she said, they say; 'You can fund us, but you don't have a say.' She also said that they could take the criticism but it didn't mean that they had to do what was suggested.

#### Interpreting MoMA (extract from my blog)

*I move onto to my session at the MoMA and I meet various members of staff and volunteers, including Lara who is the programme manager and Paula who is a freelance deliver for the MoMA. People arrive to the session in dribs and drabs. They greet each other warmly and hold hands almost intimately with one of the older men who is hard of hearing as well as being visually impaired. Young and old they join together, looking delighted to see each other again. I find out later that they meet every two months and I can see that they relish the session. I count twenty-two at one point and many are regulars.*

*We start with an array of cheeses, wines and crackers. Everyone sits and chats and eats, until we are taken up to the second floor gallery where there is an exhibition of 'Rauschenberg Among Friends'. Sadly, Lara tells me I cannot take photos, which is such a shame as I see people using cameras during the session later. Paula takes us to the first display, which is an image of two indistinct bodies superimposed onto photosensitive paper. The group are fascinated and ask many questions about the technique used and why it is blue; with ribald laughter at the end because they realise that the artist posed naked for the works.*

*The three presenting work do it in a team; Paula presents the background and history of the work and the artist in great detail, another lady Debbie stands on a platform and uses sign language to depict what Paula has said, and another woman re-interprets in spoken word the questions that people ask. I am absolutely amazed by the slick coordination and teamwork of these three women. How effortlessly they seem to manage this incredibly complex situation, how kind and patient they are. At one point they are all asking questions at the same time, because they cannot hear each other! Someone says, 'One question at a time!' and they ask Paula to point to each person.*

*Paula takes us to another picture, which is titled 'bed'. Paula tells us that he has used his own pillow and quilt in the painting and apparently it is the start of a movement of using found objects as art. One woman notices the variety of brush strokes on the piece and mentions Jackson Pollock, which we are all very impressed by! She also alludes to the intimacy of the piece as if it has the textures of bodily fluids within it!*

*I am stunned by the groups' attention to detail and their knowledge of art as if they are critics themselves. I spend quite a bit of time 'talking' to Susan who wants to see the 'Woman in Gold' painting (which I had just seen at the Neue Gallery) and takes down details of the museum from Paula's phone.*

*I am the outsider in this group of hearing impaired people. At the end one of the guys signs to me; 'Are you a hearing person?' I smile sheepishly and nod. 'Ah', he says, 'You coming next time?' 'No I am visiting from England' I say.*

*I felt honoured to be part of something so special and it makes me want to learn sign language when I get home!*



Metal plaques embedded in the pavements near the New York Centre Library

## **Creative Center**

I met with Robyn Glazer who is the Director of the Creative Center, at Mount Sinai Roosevelt Hospital. On their website it states that it was, 'Founded in 1994 on the belief that "medicine cures the body, but art heals the spirit," The Creative Center began as a series of free art workshops for women with cancer. 23 years later, with immeasurable recognition in the field of arts in healthcare and the non-profit sector, The Creative Center is proud to have hospital artist-in-residence programmes in more than 30 healthcare sites around the New York metropolitan area, free-of-charge art workshops every day of the week, an online gallery representing professional artists living with illness, and a training program bringing The Creative Center's proven approach to arts in healthcare around the country.'

Robyn is passionate about the power of arts and it's impact on cancer sufferers. As someone who has experienced cancer herself she knows first hand about the

challenges faced by people with chronic and long-term illnesses. She has published two main books detailing the work that they do, and in 'Artists-In-Residence: The Creative Center's Approach to Arts in Healthcare (5)' artists write testimonials of the impact of their work on the patients they work with. These testimonials are very reminiscent of the work that Artlink has been undertaking using ethnographic approaches to evaluation and it is moving and inspiring to read these.

When I met Robyn, she told me what hard times it was for people working in the non-profit arts and health sector at the time. Her work in Mount Sinai is funded because of the support of an Oncologist Gabriel Sara who is the Director of Infusion and as it happens also, Robyn's consultant. In my blog I retell how, *'She explains to me that there is a crisis in health care here and that private hospitals are dominated by corporates, insurance and pharmaceuticals.'* She explains that people under the public health care system such as Belle Vue are 80% from immigrant backgrounds, and 50% are uninsured or underinsured. *With Obama Care being cut things will get even worse.'*

Their work is broad and covers 30 sites working with 12 artists. I was lucky to meet one of the artists who is an English woman who has lived in New York for fifteen years, having applied to do a Masters in Fine Art at Hunter College. I was fortunate to be able to ask her how it was living as an artist in New York and she told me that her main source of income is selling her own abstract photographic work to a dealer in Boston. She was involved in a programme funded through the New York Foundation for the Arts to mentor other immigrant artists, and told me they meet three or four times a year.

It is salutary to learn that funding to the National Endowment for the Arts is about to be cut and since Helen is only paid \$30 per hour and her health and dentistry bills are \$350 per month, life for an artist in Manhattan is tough.



### **Reflections and learning from my visit to New York City**

It has been a deeply interesting experience to realise how much of the work of Elders Share the Arts was grounded in historical and academic research on the notions of aging and political oppression. In fact when I interviewed Susan Perlstein there was a definite sense of nostalgia for a movement that spanned Canada the US and Europe. She said 'What we need is a movement!' and I had a feeling that she felt it was better how it was when she was newly developing and discovering her work in the 1970's. In Britain the history of participatory arts goes back to the 1960's and it is salutary to realise that the work we deliver is based on many years of consideration and academic research. A recent publication 'Culture, Democracy and the Right to Make Art; The British Community Arts Movement', Alison Jeffers and Gerri Moriarty June 2017 (6), traces the history of the community arts movement in Britain. There is a call for

academics and interested parties to convene at a meeting in Manchester in April to discuss the findings of the book. Artlink's archive of community arts and health material is held at the Wellcome Trust archive and we are proud that this precious material is being valued and safeguarded in such a prestigious setting. The meetings with ESTA confirmed the fact for me that contextualising the historical and researching the academic background of arts engagement, is a powerful way of affirming the fact that arts and health is a movement that is grounded in research and a vast history of considered global delivery.

My visit to MoMA was profound not least in my observation of the talent for conveying complex artistic practices to a group of highly intelligent interested and profoundly deaf participants. It was also affirming and exciting to realise that the modes of evaluation and practice being developed at the Museum were similar to those being trialled and used by Artlink. Recognition that there is a deep-rooted history in the delivery of arts practice and participation in the Museum is also heart-warming and offers a legacy and role model that will perpetuate into the future. The uniqueness of MoMA is that it is completely privately funded and thus in a very different position than both ESTA and the Creative Center who continually struggle to find new streams of funding. The work which MoMA delivers is a model of excellence which can be learnt from and influences practice across the World. For Artlink, the biggest factor has been the observational use of evaluation, which is an affirmation that we are in synchrony in terms of our evaluative practice. The lessons learnt will be that I will keep in touch with Carrie at MoMA to observe how their evaluation develops in the coming years and to share methods of work

The work of the Creative Center is different again in that rather than working with groups of people, much of their work is focused around one to one engagement with people who relish the possibility of artistic engagement to take them away from physical pain and mental distress of their illnesses. The artists' reports with detailed observation are once again testimony to the fact that this method of reporting captures what is taking place far better than questionnaire response sheets.

In terms of recommendations for what would be useful in Britain the three key points that I would take away were;

- *That using empowering techniques such as story-telling through reminiscence for intergenerational projects based on the techniques of Augusto Boal is a powerful tool for participants to take ownership of life experiences which are often discriminatory towards them.* These techniques could therefore be adapted and used with any marginalized groups of people, since I witnessed the powerful impact adaptation of this methodology had on a drama group of older people working with Elders Share the Arts.
- *That the use of close observational (ethnographically inspired) techniques of evaluative practice are an important means of offering a rich narrative of what is taking place with participatory arts practice, and is essential to giving a full picture.* In my conversations with Carrie McGee at MoMa it became clear that questionnaires were not enough as a means of assessing what is taking place in participatory arts sessions. This corroborated with the findings of Artlink West Yorkshire and our practice-based research into ethnographically inspired methods of evaluation that we have been implementing for the past four years. I have recently submitted a paper to a Parliamentary select committee looking into the impact of participatory arts across the UK. I would recommend this method of observational practice with the UK.
- *Recognising the historical and contemporary context of arts intervention, research and delivery is crucial in understanding the benefit of arts intervention with older people and marginalised groups. That what we do now is not a coincidence, and is based on many years of considered research and practice.* I came to this conclusion following my observations of both projects taking place with ESTA and their use of real life storytelling to maintain the political and oral histories of marginalized groups. I also realised how crucial this was through the

historical and research based work, which both ESTA, MoMA and the Creative Center had undertaken. Back in the UK there is a re-surgence of academic research into socially engaged practice and its historical context. In the UK I believe it is vital that we amass and acknowledge the significant body of work that relates to the current good practice in the UK and abroad and how best to take this forwards.

## **Vancouver**

### **University of British Columbia**

#### **Dr Gloria Puurveen**

In October I visited Vancouver for nearly three weeks. One of my first meetings was with Dr Gloria Puurveen who is a post doc research Fellow at the University of British Columbia, funded through the Alzheimers Society. It was a joy for me to realise that someone at her level and under the supervision of the School of Nursing and the School of Ethics was undertaking research that is based on Qualitative Research Methods similar and yet different to the work which Artlink is also undertaking.

In my conversation with Gloria she talked about Western paradigm of mind body split under philosophers such a Descartes and Heidiger and it was fascinating to hear her talk of 'ways of experiencing ourselves which go beyond what we are capable of showing'. She also talked of someone called John Corner (School of Media and Communication, University of Leeds, Culture, Media & Film / Critical Essay; Aesthetic experience and the question of "difficulty": A note. John Corner (7)) has studied audience response leading to a concept of 'slow understanding'. That it takes time to appreciate a work of art. That 'aesthetic experience like ethnography, allows you to come to a slow understanding of something.' When I contacted Gloria after my visit she suggests that; 'In this space of 'difficulty' Corner suggests that many 'aesthetic



encounters are exercises in 'slow understanding' rather than immediate comprehension, and all that is being looked for initially is perhaps a 'way in' to the understanding process' (p.2). Corner goes on to develop some aspects of 'difficulty,' which is more relevant to understanding art. But for my purposes, I adopted this notion of 'slow understanding' as this way of making sense of people - particularly those whose ways of communication are not easily understood.' This comment by Gloria resonates so well with what is taking place at Artlink in our work with people who often do not have conventional means of communicating and I am sure would resonate very much with our artists as well.

One of Gloria's recent academic collaborations concerned the use of filming of people with late stages of dementia. The following is an extract from the conclusion of this paper. (Visual Methodologies, Volume 3, Number 2.(8)

*'Auilina and Hughes (2006) so aptly observed that "the idea of dementia is so negative and powerful it makes dementia one of the more terrifying illnesses to envisage" (p. 144). Reflected in some discourse communities, dementia has been equated with the "loss of self" (Behuniak, 2011, p.78). Yet, by using language such as "the living dead," people with dementia are malignantly positioned, deeply damaging their personhood and leading to depersonalized care interactions (Sabat, 2006). Yet, picture this scene:*

*Ella listens to Schubert's Ave Maria. With her head tilted slightly back, her silvery white hair catches the sunshine, setting her aglow. Her breathing is audible and seems to match the rhythm of the aria. As the music slows and the cadences signal the ending of the song, Ella stirs, she pulls herself up in the chair and is about to vocalize. But the music launches into the da Capo, and she resettles; her breath seems once again entrained with the rhythm of the song.*

*This example underscores the powerful insights that video can offer - Ella appears to be aware of, if not engaged with music. It is far from an image of "the living dead." This video excerpt does more than document Ella's embodied experiences. It also invites the audience to share in the profundity of the moment: it invites us to listen with her, to*

*breathe with her, and to enter into our shared humanity. These are important moving images to describe, if not share, and by making visible meaningful moments, video offers a different way to look at the complexity of the lived experiences of those living with, and dying from advanced dementia and the care work involved.'*



*Gloria Puurveen holding the Artlink book of Get Started a three-year participatory arts project with people with learning and physical disabilities, dementia and mental health issues.*

My meeting with Dr Gloria Puurveen led me following my Fellowship to really consider the concept of 'Slow understanding' and the way in which she uses filming and her background in Music therapy to notice subtle changes in behaviour with people living with dementia. In fact at the recent Every Third Minute theatre and dementia festival at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds I made a presentation about this aspect of my Fellowship and its application to the work we are doing at Artlink West Yorkshire. I would suggest this as a proposed methodology, alongside the use of ethnographically based evaluative methods in the UK, to capture to subtle changes taking place with

people who have very little means of verbal communication, when engaging with participatory arts.

### Professor Alison Phinney

I met up with Alison not long after my meeting with Gloria. We had another interesting and long conversation about her work. Alison's official bio states; *'Alison Phinney is a professor in the School of Nursing at the University of British Columbia. She conducts community-engaged research with people living with dementia, with a particular focus on physical and creative activity in relation to social citizenship.'* It was wonderful for me to meet two academics from the University of British Columbia who fully supported the ways of working which Artlink has practiced over the last thirty years. That Alison worked in a similar way in the school of Nursing added a certain weight to this since much of the evaluative models I have seen used by health professionals in the U.K. are very much based around quantitative outcomes rather than ethnography and observational research models. In my blog I talk about a project that Alison had been involved in;

*'Alison tells me of a major project she was a partner in with the Emily Carr School of Art and Design a few years ago. Her question was 'How does art help people with way finding.' This in itself is a fascinating question as it is meant in its' broadest sense with people with dementia. It was a project funded for two years with the Head of Design Landan MacKenzie. The professor was interested in getting some of the students from his School of Art to paint images which would be hung in a transitional care setting for people with dementia. She said that many of the students were resistant to begin with, as they did not see the value that their work could have for the older people. Alison's methodology was to ask one of her PhD students to give the older people a camera and record their journey through their perception of the paintings. She then analysed the recorded conversations. What Alison talks about is very much what we have found through our work at Artlink and work of other Fellows in this field; that the creative*

*centre of the brain seems to expand in people with dementia, and that through looking at art there is no right and wrong and thus a dialogue is possible. She said that they tried to ask the students to create paintings that might be evocative of memories, but in fact (as others and we have also found) it is in an abstract art piece that a woman with dementia sees so many things that we are unable to see.'*

In a more recent research project Alison collaborated with colleagues to explore the use of public art in engaging people with dementia, (Culture Media and Film, Research Article, Social Citizenship, public art and dementia: Walking the urban waterfront with Paul's club, Elizabeth Kelson, Alison Phinney and Glen Lowry, Cogent Arts & Humanities (2017), 4: 1354527 (10)). The report suggests;

*'The impetus for this analysis developed organically over the course of our fieldwork as we spent time "hanging out" with the group and stems from our ability to take advantage of an inductive fluidity that is a hallmark of ethnographic study' (p.3).*

And I am struck once again by the use of ethnography as if it is an implicit methodology, that to quantify what is taking place is not even considered as the norm. It is an interesting and exciting piece of research considering the fact that many people with dementia are now living in the community, it seeks to explore how public space and public art in particular can be adapted to be relevant and engaging to citizens with dementia.

This article also talks of the historical context of participatory art in terms of a political movement which stems from the 1960's;

*'Social exclusion is a concept that relates to notions of citizenship and belonging that gained prominence in France in the 1960s (Warburton et al., 2013). This concern spread across western societies as a policy direction along with its corollary, social inclusion defined through concerns about "equality, rights and social cohesion" seeking to garner "attention to barriers or inequalities that prevent individuals or groups from taking a full role in society" (Warburton et al., 2013). Questions of social exclusion or*

*inclusion have been taken up across disciplines. In Cultural Studies and Art History, the work of French Sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and Henri Lefebvre, along with the work of Michel Foucault and others.'*

This reiterates once again the fact that the development of participatory arts and arts and health comes from a deep-seated historical and well researched background, of academia and political rhetoric.

Alison told me of a project based on the findings of Dr Gene Cohen working with three groups; one a dance group in Chinatown, the other an LGBT group with a writer and the third in East Van using multi media. The two projects I subsequently visited in Vancouver came out of these initial explorations which had taken place in 2005. Alison mentioned three key outcomes from her evaluation of the project;

- That there needed to be meaningful practice
- Ongoing commitment
- And to work towards something big such as a community celebration at the end of the project.

Once again I was struck by the connectivity between the work that is taking place in New York and that of Vancouver; the fact that they both refer to the research of Dr Gene Cohen. It confirmed the fact that as Susan Perlstein (Director of ESTA) suggested, there was a movement of activism and research that has been and still is the grounding force of arts and health delivery.

It is also worth mentioning that Alison was the first person to really bring to my attention the plight of the indigenous Canadian people and the way in which their community has been persecuted since the first settlers arrived in Canada and particularly how children were forcibly removed from their families in the 1960's and prevented from celebrating their own culture. She told me how the health statistics for the First Nations people were 'shameful' including high rates of suicide. She also told me of the 'Truth and

Reconciliation' process brought in by the current Prime Minister Justine Trudeau to give people the opportunity to say to the Supreme Court the terrible atrocities that had been perpetrated on them. This first conversation with Alison, set a significant backdrop to my explorations of Canada, which are discussed further in my blog. It cannot be ignored however, and in my experience affects much of the work taking place in Canada, and how it is delivered and considered today.

Totem pole on University of British Columbia campus



## **West Point Grey Community Centre**

My blog does justice to my visit to the centre in a way that can only be quoted from it;

*'So today I went to visit West Point Grey Community Centre in Kitsilano. It is an opulent old mansion house based in a wealthy leafy lane neighbourhood of incredibly expensive housing. I am unsure what to expect, but was told that it was an elders dance session commissioned by Arts and Health Vancouver. I am greeted by Danita Noyes who is the Arts Programmer for Vancouver Parks Board. She tells me that the Parks Board funds many of these big community centres and that she has a budget to run certain programmes of work. I am sure I will find out more when I meet Caroline Liffmann from Arts and Health next week. She also tells me that a previous Fellow Susan Palmer, did a residency in Vancouver as part of her Fellowship a few years ago, and I can't believe I haven't heard of her.*

*The group are a wonderful vibrant, considered gathering of older people. They listen attentively to Desiree the dance teacher leading the session. I am introduced to the group and some of them think I have come to join the class permanently; I must admit by the end of the session I wish I could. Desiree warms us up in groups of three doing some massage and relaxation techniques in turn. I am interested to see that she is almost in a meditative state herself; calling on people to invoke the spirit of the leaves outside, and the gentleness of the Autumnal atmosphere. She then asks the group to move from one side of the room in groups of twos and threes in the style of different elements; air, earth and fire. I am so impressed by the agility of these older people. In fact age is meaningless in this room.*

*After a while we have a break, and I get talking to Shirley who is a strong and grounded seventy-eight year old. One of the group (the only man) has commented how when he is watching the performances, there is something about Shirley that captivates him and it is as if everyone else pales into the background. It is an interesting moment, and Desiree takes up the discussion and asks the group and Shirley why they think this is. Shirley says that it might be because often when she dances she closes her eyes and is*

*fully in the moment. She also tells me later that she is a free spirit and doesn't really like to follow instructions, and that it is hard for her to commit to a class because in the winter she likes to travel as it is too cold in Canada, and that she goes off and volunteers in various places. Sadly, we do not have time for me to find out where and what she volunteers as.*

*The second half of the session is about the concept of the mandala. Desiree asks the group if they know what one is. There is much discussion about the intransience of the mandala. One woman tells how she has seen them made by buddhist monks and then scattered by the wind. Desiree says that dance is very much like that. That no piece stays after it has been performed. I am so struck by this opportunity to reflect and listen and to really consider the process of what they are doing. She says that as many of them are building up to a performance, they need to think more about choreography, and thus she talks about creating something based on the theme of the mandala.*

*I am interested in the notion that she instructs this concept. In our work it would often take place more organically as a theme or an idea that is suggested, but that then becomes and develops into something that is the group's own. We each stand in three concentric circles; I am part of the outer larger ring of people. Desiree asks us to choreograph pieces thinking very much on the meditative theme; letting us know that often the less expansive, smaller movements have the most impact.*

*The resulting creations are subtle and beautiful. Desiree indicates that it is harder in the larger group to work together as there are more people and ideas to co-ordinate.*

*I am touched and delighted by this wonderful group of people, and wish that I could also attend their warm and heartfelt group on a weekly basis. 'There is so much going on in Vancouver', they say.'*

After my visit to the dance session I had an extensive conversation and tour round the building with Danita Noyes, Arts Programmer, Arts, Culture and Environment Dept., Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation. She later sent me a whole array of initiatives



taking place in Vancouver, not least a scheme in which the Park Board commission artists to deliver participatory arts workshops on a rotating basis to give everyone the opportunity to have work in the city; *'Artists in Communities <http://vancouver.ca/people-programs/artists-in-communities-program.aspx>.(11). Artists are selected through a jury process and sponsoring community centres where they establish a creative presence in the community. This program encourages and supports artistic projects that leave a physical and social legacy in the community where members create art and learn new creative processes and skills. West Point Grey is hosting a residency in 2018. The jury for this is in November 2017 <http://vancouver.ca/people-programs/artists-in-communities-applying-for-residencies.aspx>'(12). She also gives me details about Arts and Health; Arts and Health Project: Healthy Aging through the Arts <http://artsandhealth.ca/>. The Arts and Health Project: Healthy Aging through the Arts offers seniors weekly arts workshops with a professional artist, an intern artist, and a seniors' worker. These projects are currently hosted at over 13 Community Centres. The project I visited at West Point Grey and the one I visited at the Roundhouse Community Arts Centre are part of this scheme and part of the initial pilot, which Alison Phinney had evaluated in 2005.*



## Roundhouse Community Arts Centre

### Caroline Liffmann

Caroline was on the same team as Danita and managed by the Parks Board.

Caroline told me that they received funding from the Parks Board and the Vancouver Coastal Health on a three yearly cycle and that the partnership came about initially from a conference which her predecessors had attended at which Gene Cohen had presented. Thus Confirming his influence over arts and health practice in both the US and Canada. Out of this came about a 'task team' which still influences the decisions and direction of the artistic programme today.

She also told me that the Parks Board employed artists as programme managers as it was felt that they had an insight in to the artistic practice. One of her own current pieces of work was with a programme for trafficked women, which was a national programme funded through the Salvation Army and City of Vancouver. Caroline was also very vocal about the 'trauma' that the First Nations people had experienced during the 'genocide' that they had undergone when they were taken away from their homes into residential schooling and were not allowed to practice their own cultural traditions by law. What was significant in terms of her work and the work we do at Artlink was that the First Nation elders talk about the trauma as being in the 'present'. This is because the 'body's response to trauma keeps the trauma in the present, and that physiologically our bodies keep returning to the 'fight or flight response.'

In documentation which Caroline has subsequently sent through 'Community – Engaged Arts Practice with Seniors: A Start Up Guide based on The Arts and Health Project: Healthy Aging Through the Arts by Margaret Naylor and Patricia Fraser (13)' it suggests that:

### *'Social Well-being*

- *The project provided opportunities to develop social connections and fostered a sense of belonging for the participants in the Arts and Health Project and also beyond into the larger community. Increased social connections and belonging were recurring themes in focus group discussions and within quantitative measurements. These findings provide good evidence to suggest that involvement in community-engaged arts can support social health and wellbeing.' P.4*

### *Confidence and Sense of Identity*

- *The project provided seniors with an opportunity to engage in a challenging and valuable experience that led to a sense of confidence and stronger sense of identity. This finding is significant in that it clearly links increased self-esteem and self-identity with being part of the Arts and Health Project.*
- *The seniors involved in the program gained a sense of accomplishment as artists'*

I was privileged to meet Margaret Naylor who was one of the founders of Arts and Health Vancouver, who was my initial contact with the organisation when I was setting up my visit. What is interesting about the above findings is that they seem to be universal in all of the work that is carried out using participatory arts practice and is indeed similar to the evaluation which Artlink has undertaken under the guidance of Dr Anni Raw using ethnographic methods of evaluation (Get Started evaluation Years 1 to 3).

## Judith Marcuse

I met up with Dr Judith Marcuse Adjunct Professor, Faculty of Education, Founder and Co-Director, International Centre of Art for Social Change towards the end of my stay in Canada. One of the previous Fellows (Romi Jones) had recommended that I meet her and it was one of the first meetings I had booked in on a Saturday evening before undertaking my trip. We met after a long teaching day, which Judith had delivered to her cohort of students.

On the Simon Fraser University website Judith states;

*'I am an artist (dancer, choreographer, director, producer) whose creative projects drew me increasingly to the emerging field of art for social change. Early choreographic work often explored social issues (e.g., women and feminism, social roles, consumerism). Later projects more explicitly explored similar issues: teen suicide (ICE: beyond cool); bullying and homophobia (Fire...Where's there's Smoke); and environmental issues (EARTH=home). The far-reaching social dimensions – and responsibilities – of this work brought me into contact and collaboration with a range of community groups, non-governmental organizations and educational institutions in Canada and abroad. This led, in 2007, to a partnership between SFU and Judith Marcuse Projects and the establishment of the International Centre of Art for Social Change. Currently, I am the Principal Investigator of a five-year (2013-18), Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council-funded national research project, The first study of its kind in Canada, this SSHRC Partnership Grant is hosted by SFU and involves 25 researchers, six universities and 15 community partners.'*

One of the key things I came away with was that she 'stressed the importance of making strong relationships with the people at the top from the beginning and to encourage them to participate in workshops if at all possible, as in this way they are able to see the impact of the work taking place.'

Judith was one of the only people I met who was hopeful and positive about the change that was taking place within the First Nations community. In my blog I recount our conversation; *'the 'Truth and Reconciliation' process has started to bring 'hope' and a*

*process of collaboration between the First Nations people and the Canadian settlers. She tells me that she has tried to collaborate with them for over thirty years and this is the first time that it has started to change. At her conference in Ottawa there will be a cohort of First Nations people from the Nunavut territories.’.. ‘She tells me of a project taking place with youth offenders (I think near Winnipeg) with mainly First Nations young people, and how the person delivering the work got the Chief Exec on board right from the beginning and has recently secured a four-year contract.’*

I was impressed with the work that Judith was doing, not least in the amount of funding she had secured to deliver her work and in addition to the funding from the British Council, which enabled the First Nations cohort from the Nunavut Territories to attend. On the website it states that;

*‘The British Council is the United Kingdom’s international organization for cultural relations and educational opportunities. Their global work in the Arts aims to find new ways of connecting with and understanding each other through creativity. Art for social change is one of the British Council’s key pillars, which is showcased through the extension of safe spaces for culture as it builds trust and dialogue to support multiple expressions of cultural identities.’*

What is interesting about the conference in Ottawa organised by Judith, which took place last year, is the fact that it seems to go full circle in terms of my Fellowship and the connection with Britain in that Chrissie Tiller was a key note speaker. On the ASC website it states that; *‘Chrissie Tiller implores those working in participatory and social arts practice to embrace critical reflection. Originally published by [Arts Professional](#), UK (14)’* She is a key player in the Creative People and Places Arts Council funded project working with communities in areas of high deprivation. In Chrissie’s recent paper titled ‘Power Up’ she talks of putting theory into practice. In her article one of the Community Co-ordinators Ruth Shorrock states that; *“... from the moment I left the comfort of Bolton Poly I have constantly felt uncomfortable working in the arts. Whilst working at an art gallery I noticed it was the same culturally educated few accessing the exhibitions, I also remember having an exhibition at a gallery in Stroud and my mum just could not*

*muster the courage to walk through the door.’ (P.55). She suggests; ‘it is not a privilege to be creative nor is it a right it is an absolute necessity within us all that transcends politics, power and privilege.’*

I reflect on all of the groups I have visited and the groups that we work with at Artlink West Yorkshire and this statement summarises it beautifully.

Doors to the lecture theatre at Emily Carr Art and Design University



Carved sculpture at the Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver

## **Reflections on and learning from my visit to Vancouver**

My visit to Vancouver was profound, not least in my connections with the University of British Columbia and the knowledge that under the supervision of the School of Ethics and the School of Nursing, Dr Gloria Purveen was undertaking deep and meaningful research into the concept of 'slow understanding'. She was exploring the ways in which we pre-judge people with dementia and their ability to gain meaningful engagement from artistic interventions, not least in her filming of people with dementia and their response to music. It confirmed and grounded my understanding in the fact that research is key to our understanding of the impact on those with profound and life challenging conditions which offer them little means of communication. Meeting Professort Alison Phinney confirmed for me the value of qualitative means of evaluation and once again the impact that visual arts and public spaces can have on people with dementia. It also confirmed for me the contextualization of participatory arts practice as part of a political movement that has spanned decades, and once again the part it plays in research, particularly in the work of Dr Gene Cohen whose influence spanned the US and Canada.

It was a privilege to observe the detailed and fluid dance practice at West Point Grey, funded through the Vancouver Parks Board free for all citizens over 50. The delight of knowing that these activities were fully supported through government funding was an inspiration, and that the legacy of the work continues through the advisory Board who meet regularly at the Roundhouse Community Arts Centre. I cannot ignore the plight of the First Nations people, which pervades all of the work-taking place in Vancouver, and the deep shame that many non First Nation Canadians have over the historical abuse and continued impact it has on the First Nations people.

Lastly, it was inspiring to meet Judith Marcuse and to see her work in action in terms of projects working with First Nations people who are at risk of suicide and people within the prison system. Her passion regarding the need for arts intervention at a social level to make changes within society, was inspiring.



The following are some of my findings, which can be applied to UK based practice;

- *That research-based practice can have a major impact on the way we learn about the process taking place for people with dementia or those with little ability to communicate verbally.* This came about through my conversations with both Gloria and Alison in terms of their work at the University of British Columbia, and their work with adults with dementia. I was particularly interested in Gloria's concept of 'Slow understanding' and her use of film to capture the subtle changes which take place when people living with late stages of dementia engage with music and art.
- *Ensure that the people at the very top of an organisation are enlisted to experience workshops first hand in order to bring about change and influence managers.* This came about through my conversation with Judith Marcuse and it is often something which we all forget by is actually so crucial. That unless the people at the top of an organization actively observe the delivery we are doing, they will have no idea of its impact and therefore are less likely to fund the work.
- *Recognising the historical and contemporary context of arts intervention, research and delivery is crucial in understanding the benefit of arts intervention with older people and marginalised groups. That what we do now is not a coincidence, and is based on many years of considered research and practice.* I am reiterating this statement as it also became clear in Canada that much of the contemporary practice was strongly influenced by the work of Dr Gene Cohen and his research into the impact of engaging with the arts on people living with dementia.

## **Conclusions**

*'What methods of arts engagement are successful in enriching the lives of older people, and what evaluative and research models effectively capture this work.'*

It is almost impossible to put into words the profound impact that undertaking the Churchill Fellowship has had on me as an individual, and my professional development. When I look at the question, which I first set out to achieve in 2013 I feel that I have indeed achieved what I set out to do.

In New York I observed the work of Elders Share the Arts and their use of reminiscence in a powerful and evocative way so as not to let the young people in their communities forget the challenges that their elders had faced before them. I also witnessed the use of approaches inspired by Augusto Boal and his theatre of the Oppressed technique, and the way in which the elders in a group took control of a situation in which they had experienced discrimination, through the use of interactive drama techniques. I was privileged to observe a session with profoundly deaf participants interacting with the work of Rauchenberg through the expert interpretive and curative skills of MoMA staff. I was also able to observe the detailed and careful one to one delivery of work with people at Mount Sinai Hospital suffering from long-term chronic health conditions through the work of the Creative Center and Robyn Glazer.

In Vancouver I was able to witness a dance session with the most vibrant and agile group of over fifties I have ever seen, and the gentle and detailed way in which this was delivered by a dance practitioner. I was also able to learn about practice-based research taking place through links with the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University with recommendations from both, regarding how to deliver similar practice at home.

The second part of my question *'what evaluative and research models effectively capture this work'* was also answered in that my conversations with Gloria and Alison

highlighted the nature of research and practice taking place hand in hand at the University of British Columbia. At both the MoMA and UBC it was inspiring and heart-warming to learn that ethnographic and observational means of evaluation are current and well-regarded forms of capturing artistic interventions, the detail of which is lost through questionnaire based methods. I also learnt through my meeting with Judith Marcuse and others, that the plight of the First Nations people is not separate from political context and historical background, and that arts interventions and acknowledgement and recognition of their persecution can make a difference.

In terms of how all of this influences my work back in the UK I still feel that I am on a journey. I am convinced that all of it in some way can influence the work I do at home and I will highlight this in some of my recommendations.

## **Recommendations**

- I would recommend the use of research-based practice. The notion that it is fine to trial out an idea; such as the photographic documentation of observations of artwork by people with dementia, and the use of filming to observe minute changes in people experiencing and accessing artistic practice who have little means of communication, through the techniques of 'Slow Understanding'.
- I would recommend the use of empowering techniques such as storytelling through reminiscence for intergenerational projects based on the techniques of Augusto Boal.
- I would recommend that people at the very top of an organisation are enlisted to experience workshops first hand in order to bring about change and influence managers.
- I would recommend the use of close observational techniques of evaluative practice as a means of offering a rich narrative of what is taking place within participatory arts practice.
- I would recommend research and joined up thinking in terms of recognising the

historical and contemporary context of arts intervention, research and delivery. That what we do now is not a coincidence, and is based on many years of considered research and practice.

### Research based practice

I have learnt the importance of considered research to uncover techniques of intervention with people with dementia and those who have little ability to communicate verbally. To trial something with the backing of an academic institution and to deliver practice-based research to test out a hypothesis, such as the filmed work which Dr Gloria Puurveen undertook with people with dementia, and the work Professor Alison Phinney undertook with the Emily Carr Art and Design University. It is not that we don't experiment and do this kind of work, but the backing of an academic institution lends it the research-based element which then grounds it in academic theory and practice.

### Storytelling as legacy

Having witnessed firsthand the use of own story narrative as a means of making sure that lived history is not forgotten in a social and political context, I thought it would be interesting to tackle this first hand. Intergenerational work is something I have been involved with over the years but I was interested in the power of the narrative having an element of control to tackle discrimination as well as to pass on a message to the younger generation.

### People at the top

The message from Judith Marcuse is such an obvious one but sadly one that is so often ignored by us people working away developing and delivering work. If the people at the top, the ones who hold the purse strings do not firsthand see the work that we do, how

are they going to understand and support it?

### Close observational techniques of evaluative practice

Once again my Fellowship confirmed for me that we we're on the right tracks; that our use of ethnography was the right direction for capturing the rich and complex interventions that take place in participatory arts practice. What I have learnt is to take this further. To document and record and to analyse through academic and research-based practice. To expand, and to use film as a way of observing and seeing, not just as a means of documentation. To take ownership in the act of observing and analyse and understand what is taking place on a deeper level such as in the concept of 'Slow Understanding'.

### Recognising the historical and contemporary context of arts intervention, research and delivery

One of the biggest lessons I have learnt through this process is the humility of realising that the work, which we deliver now as participatory arts practitioners is grounded in a vast background of contemporary and historical research and political rhetoric. It was no coincidence on my visit to Vancouver that the plight of the First Nations people came up time and time again. From my conversation with Alison Phinney at UBC to Judith Marcuse at SFU it was an issue, which pervaded their thoughts, their work and their practice. This is the same with people with dementia and people with disabilities. It is the same with any marginalised group of people in society, and it is how we address this and inform our practice to enable people at the margins of our societies to have a voice and quality of life, which makes our work insightful and transformative.

### Next steps

- I am already in conversations with academic institutions in Leeds and Manchester to explore how this research and learning can be taken further and

what is possible in terms of funding to develop these ideas.

- Artlink recently secured some funding to work closely with people with dementia to explore the use of filming as a technique of 'Slow Understanding' and recognition of the impact of arts interventions on people with dementia.
- I would like to experiment more with our collaboration with a primary school and the impact on the life of people with disabilities in their local communities. Expanding on our use of drama to empower older people with disabilities to express their thoughts and feelings in collaboration with children at a local primary school, based on the ideas of Augusto Boal.
- I would like to continue to develop the use of ethnographic evaluation as a tool for evaluating our work and to expand and embed this further through collaborations with other organisations and academic institutions using this method of capturing artistic practice.

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