

Inclusive Practice Portfolio

Delivering a community-based workshop

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Introduction

In this paper I will focus on inclusive practice for young people and older adults, given my interest in working with both groups in the future. I will consider what it means to adopt inclusive practices in the context of applied drama, explore existing provision and evaluate the effectiveness of four workshops I facilitated.

Inclusive Practice

Inclusion can be defined as any opportunity in which individuals or groups are able to participate in an event, dialogue or process that recognises their value and right to be treated equitably (Marsh, 2020).

Inclusive education in schools and inclusivity in the workplace are widely promoted, but why is this so important? Vobruba (2000, p 601) suggests that:

“Within modern societies, membership is regulated by institutions. The selectivity of institutions constitutes a realm of normality. This... is characterized by living conditions which are seen by the overwhelming majority as better than the conditions outside. Exclusion from and inclusion into this realm of normality are driven by interests in belonging to it and participating in its advantages.”

To surmise, embracing inclusivity is to value diversity but it requires challenging societal views on what is considered ‘normal’ and addressing exclusion. Exclusion can have far reaching implications on health, wellbeing and even economic status. Research suggests that older adults are at higher risk of depression, anxiety, and suicide, due to issues around isolation (Mayfair agency, 2022); while marginalised groups can be disadvantaged by a lack of community support services (NYA, 2021), impacting future educational and employment opportunities (Braic, 2022). These examples show inclusivity is fundamental and rationalises the necessity to protect certain characteristics (including age) from discrimination (Equality Act, 2010).



Image 1: Infographic
(Futurelearn)

In the context of applied drama, inclusive practice can be seen as a democratic tool, involving collaborative creation, and shared artistic journeys amongst participants regardless of their differences (Storsve, 2021). Practitioners concerned with social change see these opportunities as a way of giving people a platform, empowering those that are either under-represented or marginalised from society. Therefore, work done with and for the community allows all members' voices to be heard, incorporated, and strengthened (Kramer, 2017).

Existing provision

Lots of research highlight the benefits of inclusive arts-based practices. Here, I review two specific public reports; one on provision for older adults and the other for young people.

Older Adults

To understand the scale of current provision for older adults, I reviewed The Baring Foundation's "*Older and Wiser?*" Report (2019).

It summarises the broad profile of provision across the UK, the impact of funding and the fragmented distribution of provision in certain areas of the country.

Notably, provision for older people is growing, however, arts organisations are often working in isolation and there is no clear national strategy to support arts engagement more broadly.

Creative activities for older people (50 or over) can enrich lives, combat loneliness, and improve health and wellbeing. There is also a positive impact on older individuals with medical conditions, such as dementia, helping them feel valued and connected.

Community-based arts engagement in later life can also improve social skills, build confidence, and give people something to look forward to each week. Friendships can also be fostered through new shared experiences.

The report considers the value of different types of activities, noting that creative music opportunities enhance wellbeing and restore mental health; while painting and drawing activities help improve self-esteem, relaxation, and coordination.

The report surmises creative activities as being more meaningful when they are people-centred and high quality.

Young People

The National Youth Agency's (NYA) "*Time's Running Out*" report (2021) acknowledges that community-based activities help to support young people with personal and social development, life skills and overall wellbeing. However, since the pandemic, services were at risk, with funding cuts being the main concern, and provision varying wildly by area.

The NYA regard community-based services for young children (18 and under), as crucial to those deemed as vulnerable or disadvantaged, providing a safe environment as well as regular fun and educational activities.

While it does not specifically address the benefits of creative arts, it acknowledges that community centres provide opportunities for children to experience new skills including the arts, a space to be heard, and a place to feel valued.

Studies into the benefits of community-based activities identify that young people felt more self-confident; less isolated and less stressed when engaged in open-access services.

Summary

Arts-based projects are one distinct way of embedding inclusive practice in communities. The key question is whether projects are effective at making their target audiences feel included in a way that is relevant, interesting, and meaningful. I was keen to explore the extent in which inclusive practice can be achieved through creativity, adopting different methods as a tool.

People Speak Up

People Speak Up is a charity founded by Eleanor Shaw, which organises social, art and wellbeing activities for all ages in the local community in Llanelli, Carmarthenshire. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to do a 6-week placement as a volunteer with the company between January-March 2023, supporting several of their projects (see my journal, **Appendix 1**).

Groups

PSU provide inclusive activities for all ages and abilities. Some groups have designated sessions (such as the Over 50s group or the youth group) and others are open to all (such as the Choir). On my first day, I spoke informally to the participants about their experiences of attending PSU and soon realised that for some it was more than just a warm space to visit on a week day - one confided: *"PSU felt like a second family"*; this immediately indicated how vital PSU was in bringing communities together; providing a safe, inclusive space for individuals.

Activities

PSU run a variety of activities from their main building, many taking the form of regular social gatherings. In these sessions, activities are varied, ranging from art to singing, intended to bring people together through creativity.

They also run activities in homes, care homes, and less conventional outdoor community spaces across the Carmarthenshire area.

Some of the activities I was privileged to be involved in were:

- Storytelling
- "Elevenses" (creative/arts-based activities)
- People Sing Up (Choir)
- Street-play
- Spoken word Saturday.
- Men in Conversation

PSU also work on bigger projects, like "Beyond the Border", Europe's largest story-telling festival. The team are always looking at new and innovative ways to engage different audiences and are currently recruiting a panel for an anti-racism project.

Workshops

In my final week at PSU, I organised and facilitated sessions with four groups.

Over 50s

The Over 50s, are a lively, friendly social group who meet once a week to participate in different activities. I was keen to work with this group to explore the extent creativity can foster inclusivity.

I decided to do a script writing session with them because it reflected my interests as an Applied Drama student but also as it endorsed PSU's core objectives of getting people working together, stimulating them through active engagement and helping to build connections (PSU, 2023).

I developed a brief session plan mapping out the timings and activities:

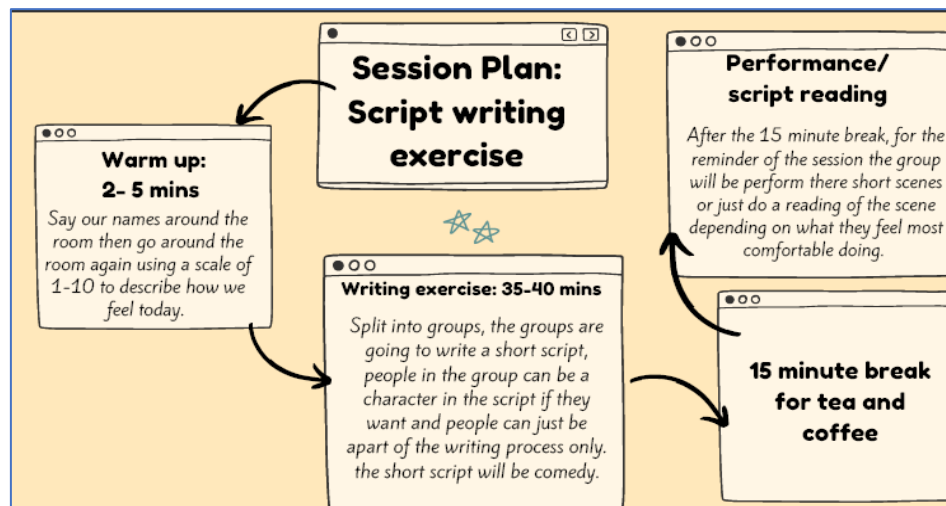


Image 2: Over 50s Session Plan

I split them into groups and gave them approximately 40 minutes to write a comedy script. I decided this genre was best to explore as it encourages high energy, social interaction, and laughter, contributing to the development of better social relationships (Suttie, 2017). Everyone then came together to showcase their scripts. It was wonderful to see their written pieces brought to life and the sense of pride they felt about their work. I was even written into some of the scripts, showing they felt comfortable and connected with me.

I received positive feedback regarding my natural warmth, providing a sense of calm and control over the group. They responded positively to instructions, even if at times they found things challenging; and it was clear that having these opportunities of creative expression and connectivity with others really benefitted their wellbeing. However, I acknowledge that in order to improve the experience further consideration should be given to my session planning. For example, having foresight to note what equipment might be needed and how to arrange furniture helps with issues around accessibility and continuity planning; and breaking down instructions to help steer and encourage individuals to think more creatively (i.e., 'write a location') rather than simply instructing them to 'write a script'. I was also acutely aware that I needed to be more flexible. During the session two latecomers arrived and did not know what was happening. My plan was too restricted to allow for any deviation to accommodate them nor did it cater for others who might not be able/willing to take part in certain aspects. I was also advised to consider the group dynamics. Rather than random assignment, I should try my best to see the friendship dynamics and let those groups work together (especially crucial with groups like the Over 50s to allow them to be their most creative selves).

Overall, it encouraged collaboration and clearly had a positive impact on their mood. The praise received from participants was a measurement of its success.

Young People Speak Up (YPSU)

For my YPSU project, I wanted to engage the participants in a discussion about identity. As the topic is broad and encompasses many factors, I thought it would be interesting to explore.

I made a detailed session plan (**Appendix 2**) with notes specifically addressing how to engage latecomers and alternative approaches to activities, such as defining 'Identity' by writing, drawing, or speaking.

We dissected 'identity', thinking about it in terms of various aspects such as nationality, age and religion. Participants were very engaged, providing rich open dialogue particularly when discussing religious identities.

I observed that when given the opportunity to speak openly about the diverse world around them, young people cultivate positive views about others and feel liberated to express themselves as unique individuals (Learning for Justice, 2023).

We also discussed the notion of acceptance and considered where we, as individuals, felt included. Interestingly, a member stated that YPSU was a place they felt accepted. This correlates to research on the importance of inclusivity in helping individuals to expand their social groups to foster a sense of belonging and reinforce positive identity formation (Learning for Justice, 2023).

Although the session was successful, it only skimmed the surface of the topic. I think it would be beneficial to explore other concepts of identity/shared identity drawing from the research by the NYA, as a way to understand more deeply societal values of the youth of Llanelli and their notions of inclusivity.



Image 3: YPSU Poster

People Sing Up!

People Sing Up! Is PSU's intergenerational choir. I thoroughly enjoyed working with them despite personal reservations on my own musical ability, but was keen to include them in a project, given the perceived psychological and social benefits of music-making exercises (University of Oxford, 2023).

I led them through two activities (**Appendix 3**): a humming exercise and a sea shanty. I observed that the group enjoyed the exercises and were comfortable taking direction from me.

I could see the benefits that the singing session had on the group's mood, there was high energy levels throughout and they seemed connected with each other. I concluded that creative song

exploration is a really effective method of improving everyone's sense of belonging and togetherness.



Image 4: Me with the Choir

“Elevenses”

Creative activities bring a sense of togetherness for people with dementia (Baring Foundation). I led a series of warm-up activities with the “Elevenses” dementia-friendly group. Prior to my placement, I had never worked with a group of people with dementia before¹ so it gave me an opportunity to learn how to engage with individuals that typically found social gatherings difficult (NHS, 2020). Given the needs of some group members it was important that the activity was simple but engaging. However, it seemed some activities were still a little too complex, so while I understood that creative activities are most meaningful when people-centred, I should have factored in the quality of provision, as acknowledged in the research.



Image 5: Me with the Dementia-friendly group

¹ The Dementia-friendly group is also open to individuals without dementia and is frequently attended by carers of those living with the condition.

It was difficult to gauge the effectiveness in terms of achieving inclusivity. The group did not seem as engaged as the choir or the Over 50s group, however, this could be a result of my facilitation skills on this occasion.

Conclusion

If planned well, creative activities in community settings can be effective in promoting inclusivity. The act of sharing stories, music and different perspectives in a welcoming environment fosters a sense of togetherness and belonging. Opportunities for social bonding and connectivity can also provide feelings of positive wellbeing. I witnessed great pride and self-worth from those engaged in cognitive stimulating activities, and I too gained satisfaction from these experiences. Organisations like PSU have an incredibly positive impact on local communities, giving a voice to all ages and catering for diverse needs, demonstrating that inclusive practices in the community are essential and are of great value.

Word count: 2197

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Appendices

Appendix 1: PSU Journal

Link to My PSU Journal: <https://collingwoodblogger.files.wordpress.com/2023/03/psu-journal-final-1.pdf>

Appendix 2: YPSU workshop plan

Session Plan: Discussion around identity

Room: The Cwtch

Equipment: Pens/ A4 Papers, Colouring pens, and clipboards. A3 paper for facilitator.

Intended outcomes: To break down and try to understand the word identity.

Introduction: Explain to the group the outcomes and content of the workshop they will be taking part in.

To introduce the group to the workshop use phrasing similar to “hey everyone, for this workshop we will be exploring the word identity and breaking down what it means and exploring what identity means to us.”

Warm up activity: Word dissociation

For word dissociation the aim of the game is to start with any word at all such as “Door” and then going around the circle, the group must each say a word that is completely different to the word they heard before them, in this instance a word that would be dissociated with door may be “roads”, the game will continue for a few rounds, going around the circle.

(Personal notes: If a participant is struggling to find a dissociated word, reset the game again and start from the beginning of the circle, the aim of the game should be to go around the entire circle. If the participants are still struggling with word dissociation, try playing the alternative with word association. Where the following words must now be related such as, “door” and “house”.)

Activity 1: Mind mapping the word identity.

For this activity, have each member of the group prepared with pens and A4 sheets of paper. The aim of this activity is to break down the word identity, it is important to first reintroduce the word “identity” to the group and potentially ask the group to give examples of what they may already think identity means to them. After a brief talk about the word identity, explain to the group that they will now write in the middle of their paper the word “identity”, and you are now going to break down that word with the following prompts. The aim of the prompts is to help the participants before they make their own suggestions so they are not instantly put on the spot.

With each of the following prompts, get the group to write these words in their own bubbles, connected by a line from the word “identity.”

- Where was I born? (Country and Place)
- Age/Birthday/Star-sign
- Hobbies and interests
- Religion/teams you may support in any sports.

(Personal notes: for the last prompt you can use either religion or teams you may support or you can use both if you the feel group is comfortable enough to include religion as part of their “identity mind map”)

Activity 2: Expanding the mind map, “groups suggestions”.

After the group has been prompted with various suggestions to fill out their mind map about identity, the aim now is to further expand the mind map with suggestions from participants in the room. Prompting the participants to write down more things about themselves on the mind map. After the time to write is finished, encourage sharing what additions they added to their mind map but do not press further if the participants are not wanting to share.

(Personal notes: if participants are still struggling to expand the identity list further, help inspire with further prompts as done in activity 1 or encourage the participants with questions that may get them to think about certain aspects of identity such as “Do you know what country you parents are from or other family members?”)

Activity 3: Identity- “I am”

After the group has finished with their mind map, get the group to add on to their mind map, a sentence to describe themselves using the prompt “I am”, Facilitator should share an example of describing themselves first.

(Personal notes: The prompt for this activity does not have to be exclusively “I am” if a participant wants to use another prompt, then allow for them to do so and say in the space that is okay for another sentence starter to be used instead of “I am”.)

Allow for 5–10-minute break if you feel it is needed.

(Personal notes: if participants do not leave the room during the break, you may play a few rounds of word dissociation or word association or any other drama-based games you may feel are appropriate)

Activity 4: Identity- The final piece

The final aim of the session and this activity is for the participants to express identity in their own way. Use similar phrasing to move onto the final objective of the session with "Now that we have broken down what the word identity means with various suggestions such as where was born, our favourite hobbies and what sports teams we support, I now want you to answer the question What does identity mean to you? this question can be answered by using art, you can draw what identity looks like or you could write a story or even a couple of sentences."

(Additional Activity: if there is time after participants have shared their work with each other and you feel the group has enjoyed the workshop, extend the final activity further by getting the entire group to write a spoken word/story telling piece about "shared identity", try and find the similarities in each piece of work and as the facilitator write all the similarities down on an A3 paper and piece together a story or spoken word piece with the group.)

(Personal notes: Allow participants to express themselves however they want during this activity and help them achieve that if more equipment may be needed such as more colouring pens or a bigger paper such as A3/A4 paper)

(Additional notes: If any new participants may enter the Cwtch and decide to join the workshop part-way through, be mindful and find an opportunity to discuss with them about the content of the workshop and if participants have joined after activities 1 and 2 have already passed, brief the participants on the content of the workshop but also them the opportunity to answer verbally to questions or prompts given such as "what does identity mean to you" during the final activity and the "I am" prompt in activity 3.)

Appendix 3: People Sing Up! Warm-up session plan

Session plan: People sing up Warm up.

Warm up activity: get the group warmed up.

For the warmup get the group to shake out their arms first then slowly start shaking their legs and the rest of the body. After getting the group to shake it out, move onto massaging the face for a short amount of time before transitioning to tapping the face. Afterwards move onto improvising chewing gum with, with large facial expressions and loud sound effects.

After the group has warmed up their faces, get the group to hum in unison then get them to open the hum into a "ahh" and practise using a scale with your hands, when your hands are lower to the ground the group has to go to a lower pitch and if your hands are raised higher then the groups pitch must also go higher.

Activity 1: In the round

Now the group has warmed up, the aim is to now get the group singing short songs or verses in the round.

For the first song, use drunken sailor as practice with the verses:

“What do you do with a drunken sailor” - Three times.

“Early in the morning”

“Way-hay up she rises” - three times.

Use the choir’s set up to your advantage when getting the group to sing in the round, start with the bass section to open with “what do you do with a drunken sailor” which will then be followed by the Alto section, then finally the soprano section. Each section will sing these verses but the bass will be one line ahead of the Alto and the Altos will be one line ahead of the sopranos.

Once the group has practised with that verse, move onto the song “Row-row your boat” using the following lines with the same order of Bass section goes first followed by Alto then followed by Soprano.

“Row-row row your boat”.

“Gently down the stream”

“Merrily-merrily-merrily-merrily”

“Life is but a dream”

(Additional notes: throughout the entire warm up it is important to maintain high energy to keep the group engaged enough to want to sing along with you, as the in round songs are short, get the group to repeat the songs again with a faster rhythm to increase the challenge!)