

Art Facilitation As An Inclusive Practice

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Jan Swinburne, *Six Figures*, 2004

Part 1: Defining Art Facilitation

Historical Background:

- Art facilitation evolved out of the inadequacies of educational and social systems to adapt to the requirements of artists with disabilities and social disadvantage.
- Art facilitation is a supportive and pragmatic practice.
- The distinction between educational, therapeutic and facilitating models is one of intent.

Defining differences of intention between 3 models:

- The intention of formal art educational systems is to: impart knowledge of historical, conceptual and technical models. And to prepare students for professional art practices.

- The intention of art therapy is to: address clinical outcomes of relieving distress, gaining psychological insights, controlling behaviour, and the like.
- The intention of art facilitation is to: To assist artists for whom the other two systems are inadequate in addressing their individual requirements when pursuing artistic endeavours.
- To create opportunities and alternatives for artists who face barriers in the mainstream arts and arts education communities.

The emphasis is on making art according to the terms of the individual who is making it.

Overlapping features of the different models:

- Art facilitation can impart technical and historical information like educational model.
- Art facilitation can provide positive therapeutic and social benefits that could be measured if warranted.

Part 2: Inclusive Models of Art Facilitation

Three models:

The Art People Association - Workman Theatre Project:

- Was created for artists who have used mental health/addiction services to have contact with other artists within and from outside the mental health community. The association provides informal monthly meetings in which the members of the group determine the agenda. To date the association has provided guest speakers, information and hands on sessions.
- At this time, membership is comprised of primarily of self-taught artists who want the focus of the model to be information and education based. Workman Theatre Project provides funding, a place to meet, resource materials, and a professional artist-facilitator to coordinate the group and work with the individual members on an as needed basis.
- The baseline goals of the association are to provide peer contact and facilitate professional development. This model provides services that are difficult to access in the local arts community for financial, social, and medical reasons. It is an educational, peer support model.

Art Facilitation at The Jean Simpson Studio - Workman Theatre Project:

- Is a practical facilitation model that provides studio space for artists who use mental health/addiction services and have inadequate or no studio resources. Some art materials are provided. The program is run on an open studio model with a yearlong artist-in-residence (monitor) position.
- Artists work independently and have free access to the space during working hours while in the program.
- The artists and the artist in residence are supported with problem solving by Workman Theatre Project staff (Visual Arts Coordinator), for the smooth running of the studio. The primary goal of the studio is to assist artists through practical means to build up a body of work or to work on projects that require adequate space to complete. It is a practical, peer support model.

Art Facilitation at The Creative Spirit Art Centre:

- Provides individual art facilitation to adults within a cross-disability/universal access model. Facilitation is informal and non-structured, ranging from peer support, practical problem solving related to specific disabilities and providing technical information/problem solving appropriate to developmental/cognitive abilities.
- Facilitation of the shared workspace involves conflict resolution, creating and maintaining a safe, comfortable and welcoming work environment (psychologically and physically), and when appropriate, liaise with support agencies to assist with independent art making beyond the Centre. It is a practical, community education and peer support model.

Summary:

The three models presented are examples of the core objectives of art facilitation as an inclusive, supportive and pragmatic practice.



Jan Swinburne, Stormsky

Linguistic Facility and the Visual Arts

It would seem somehow obvious that visual intelligence (*- in the aesthetic sense: defined by structuring conventions of two and three dimensional forms intent on effective expression.*), is not dependant on linguistic facility since much of visual art is made as an expression to fulfill a need in which words are inadequate. In this there is a fascinating paradox.

Linguistic process in the creation and interpretation of visual art functions as a set of possibilities that orbit around the aesthetic expression, yet the very effectiveness of that expression is dependent on its ineffability. Ironically, the power of the aesthetic expression will generate linguistic processes in proportion to its degree of impact caused by its ineffability. All paradoxes tend to persist in consciousness, in interest and through time.

This very non verbal process tends to generate a lot of verbal activity. To a certain degree, art and art-making can be seen as a mirror to the ultimate frustration associated with having a communication disability. People wish to understand the expression, they feel its urgency and may be absolutely convinced that they uniquely understand the message and become self appointed interpreters, yet when they begin to declare their findings to others they are astounded at their extreme differences of interpretation.

Yet plural interpretation, plural communication is the luxury of aesthetic expression. Unlike the frustration and resulting social isolation that occurs with disabilities of practical linguistic communication, the aesthetic expression allows a unique connection to one's self and ultimately for the artist, to others. One of my instructors used to describe the process of making art as having a conversation with one's self and letting others overhear.

For an artist with communication disabilities this creates an opportunity to let others know one's inner realm and may facilitate social connections that may be otherwise unattainable. The enhancement of this opportunity resides in the quality of the art. Ineffective art does not generate a connection anymore than a disability generates an artist. Strong aesthetic visual intelligence is necessary for effective art and is not dependent on linguistic facility for its production. However, linguistic facility has become a dominant force in the professional art world as a whole, particularly in regard to promotion and associated scholar-ship. This allows fundamental prejudices and barriers to artists with impairments or disabilities of verbal persuasion.



Jan Swinburne, House

This paradoxical relationship of language and the visual arts simultaneously creates the inclusive socio-cultural activities of which language is a vital force; at the same time that very society constructs an exclusivity and inequity through a lack of awareness or critical analysis of the actual role of language in the creation of art. The value of language, as related to the process, becomes confused with the language response generated by the completed work.

In an attempt to further clarify this point, one could describe public/social implications of visual art as being a linguistic dependent activity separate and independent from the non-linguistic, private/ internal creative process/experience shared by the artist and the individual observer.

By discussion of linguistic process in the realm of visual art it is my hope to generate interest in practices of inclusiveness and equity regardless of an artist's degree of linguistic facility. I believe this can begin by addressing the role of language in the visual arts. This means of course, dancing with the paradox.

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