# I’m Me – Inclusive Facilitation

## **Kelsie Acton**

Hello, and welcome to conversations on social justice, the podcast series for the institute for social justice. Today we are chatting about I’m Me, an AHRC funded collaboration between the Institute for Social Justice and Mind the Gap, one of England's leading companies in learning disability performance and live arts. I'm Me uses creative methods to explore artists with learning disabilities and autism's understandings of identity, representation and voice. In this project, artists at Mind the Gap develop a Doodle Book, a book of creative prompts which is then shared with a network of six other learning disability performance companies across the UK. These companies then generate their own creative responses to these prompts on identity, representation and voice. This podcast series consists of conversations about topics arising from the project.

I’m Kelsie Acton, the postdoctoral researcher on I’m Me. In this podcast I talk to Gavin and Ryan from Lung-ha and JoAnne and Jess from Mind the Gap about facilitation.

So, welcome everyone. Let's just start with a round of introductions. Who are you and what company do you work with?

**Gavin:**

I'm Gavin Yule, I work with Lung Ha Theatre Company as a performer and, and as part of the I am Me project, represent, I am the lead artist for the company.

**Ryan:**

My name is Ryan. I'm er also working with Lung Ha, I work as a freelance performer and on the I'm Me project I am the lead facilitator for Lung Ha.

**JoAnne:**

Hi I’m JoAnne Haines. I'm a lead... I'm a Mind the Gap artist. I've been working with I’m me.

**Jess:**

Hi, I'm Jess Boyes. I'm a producer at Mind the Gap.

**Kelsie:**

And I'm Kelsie Acton. I'm the postdoctoral researcher on I’m Me. Could you tell me a little bit about your artistic practice?

**Gavin:**

My artistic practice is I primarily work with the Lung Ha ensemble. I am one of 20, 23 to 25 actors. I have been for about six, seven years now, I occasionally work for them as a playwright.

**Kelsie:**

So Gavin, could you describe for me how you've approached making theatre through I'm Me?

**Gavin:**

The way I sort of approach it as lead artist is I look at the Doodle Book, and usually in, in the days leading up to one of our sessions and I don't necessarily stick to the book like it was the Bible, and so I, what I tend to do instead is I, I look at the book and see if there's anything, within it that spikes my interest, be that an exercise, or maybe a sentence that could spark something off. Er and what I do is I sort of adapt a, a session around a certain exercise or as I say a certain word in the Doodle, in the Doodle Book. So, the way I sort of approach it is, I sort of loosely base things that that that that we do with our own artists, er they are loosely based on the Doodle Book as opposed to being um completely… What's the word, completely, I suppose I don't stick to it religiously I think would be the phrase I would use.

### **Ryan :**

Gavin's, you, you’ve spoken in the past about how you see your role erm not as teaching as well, but as to sort of promote the idea and promote other people and their ideas and bringing out their thoughts and, and I suppose that's also my role.

**Gavin:**

I'm not a teacher per say as Ryan was saying, although right at the beginning, it or, of the project, I thought I was a teacher, but as we’ve sort of gone through the sessions that opinion has changed, I think, because it's more, it feels to me like more independent learning and so my, my role I guess is a guide for our artists to explore their identity and representation through, through the different cycles and also, their voice through the cycle that we're going into in the future. I don't necessarily give people tasks to do, I just, the tasks are just really something to get people, sort of thinking, and, and a way to express their selves and I guess explore who they are as people.

**Kelsie:**

JoAnne, do you want to tell me a little bit about your general artistic practice?

**JoAnne:**

Yes, I'm a Mind the Gap artist. I worked independently, led my own work,

Dancing with Colours, and I facilitate with Mind the Gap one day courses. I do shows, work with the artists. I do visual art as well, which Dancing with Colours is visual art, but use my own things, I want to get people to know that they can be art, do art, be an artist.

**Kelsie:**

You facilitated a bit outside of I’m Me, can you tell us a little bit about that practise?

### **JoAnne:**

Yeah, I facilitated with Leeds University. Leadership… er what's it called?

**Jess:**

It’s called facilitation for social change.

**JoAnne:**

Social change, they do there, and then I did it in Hong Kong, for working with their company.

**Jess:**

What did you do in Hong Kong?

**JoAnne:**

I facilitated with Joyce and Bee, we did lots of work, it were a lot hard to focus because of, our language barrier was quite tricky but...

**Jess:**

What were the sessions about that you were running?

### **JoAnne:**

One of them was my own project and that worked, they really didn't expect that, they were really shocked that I could do that, because I didn't think that person with disability could do that, their expectation, people with disabilities, that they can’t lead work and they were really gobsmacked with it. They take not taking me, they wanted to keep me. They said “I want to keep you” and I said “I can’t. Got to go back home, my mum wants me as well.”

**Jess:**

Can we talk a little bit about Dancing with Colours as well?

### **JoAnne:**

Yeah, I'm, it's my own project called Dancing with Colours. I've got the, I've got some funding to do a little one, a couple of years ago and that worked really well, I did two shows, actually, it’s more than two, done quite a few shows. It's a bit messy and fun. And you don't see art that way normally, you don't get involved normally that way, full body movement and paint.

### **Jess:**

And the audiences do?

**JoAnne:**

The audience interact and take part. They don't just sit and watch. That's what I, when I go see a show, I don't want to sit and watch, I want to go get involved. So that's why I thought, want them to get involved too. So I had, I had three audience planters to help them, to encourage them to go in and that really worked. Yeah. I had a live musician called Henry. He was really good. He helped the environment, get the music. Fast music. Slow music. Lots of cool music.

### **Jess:**

And what sort of facilitation did you do with Dancing with Colours?

**JoAnne:**

I led. I, it was my own piece so I, it was me that wanted to do this so if I had something to say, I would say it. None of the people that were working with me, they had, they had decisions, top choices, but I made the final choice, it was my own project.

**Kelsie:**

I just want to back you up just a little bit JoAnne because the folks who’ll listen to the podcast won't necessarily know what Dancing with Colours is. Can you tell me what the idea behind that piece is?

**JoAnne:**

Oo, that's good. That's good. Me and my friend, Paul Wilshaw had a discussion, long, long time ago, saying you’re good at art, you’re good at movement, so why don’t you make a performance with it? So then I talked to my line manager, Charli Ward and said “I want to do my own project” and the name was, the first day it was Colorful, and then we did another workshop, which I asked to, but then we had to think about renaming it, I thought Dancing with Colours, which is more like a movement, visual movement and art, you make art anywhere, at any part of your body.

**Kelsie:**

So, if I was to go to the, to Dancing with Colours, what would I experience?

### **JoAnne:**

You would experience making art, any, anyhow you like, you can use a paint brush, you can use your fingers, you can even use your feet - if you want to. It don't have to be just a paint brush or you can even use, we had last time we had toy cars, which kids love playing with cars and paint sticks so if you didn't want to get messy, you can use paint sticks. It's just making art in a different way.

**Jess:**

Is it a performance or is it a workshop?

**JoAnne:**

It's a performance. My art is a performance this time. Yeah, so I performed few times. And it went really well, the audience are, the audience gave me some very good feedback about it. And they said, one person said this, “My autistic boy, he’s really struggling with over, sensory overload, until he met your Dancing with Colours”, he went. “Thank you,” said, “thank you for letting me join in”. He really enjoyed it. And one boy came back. With goggles.

### **Kelsie:**

Is there a difference between the kind of facilitation you do in the performance and the kind of facilitation you might do in a workshop?

### **JoAnne:**

I don’t think there’s anything different really. I do what I was, I would do what I do in the workshop, get them involved, encourage them and be myself.

### **Jess:**

What are you always looking out for kind of in the workshop and in the performance with the audience?

**JoAnne:**

How they react. If there's, if there's something like too much, like if the music's too much, I'll just say cut music or just play it gently and then encourage it back slowly. It's too, because a few times, I can, I can sort of sense overload, sensory overload. If it’s too much noise going on, I can ask the audience, they can take a seat if they need to sit down again, they don't have to come up straight away.

### **Jess:**

I think you're really brilliant at that as a facilitator, kind of spotting what people need, and making sure whatever you do just sort of responds to that.

**JoAnne:**

Yeah, I forget about myself though. Well, that's not, I’m reading the audience, not myself. That's why I got people to help me, who care, to support me.

### **Kelsie:**

How's your role in I'm Me grown and evolved since you started? What have you learned?

**Gavin:**

I guess the main sort of thing that I've learned erm is certainly since starting I am Me, is when, when, when we started I Am Me, I come from a drama school background and the one majored primarily with them, acting and performance, there was an element of drama facilitation within that. And so, I already had the experience of that, but I hadn't used it within ten years when I Am Me actually came up. Ad certainly, at the start of the process, er I found that I was relying quite heavily on Ryan, as lead facilitator to make the sessions. Because Ryan and I often have like a check in before every session er, just to run through the plan for the workshop. And certainly the beginning of the process, these check ins were going for quite a long period of time because Ryan, and I would literally have to go through the plan quite, quite literally line by line just to make sure that I wasn't like repeating myself or something wasn't too complicated. It just sort of worked out like that and then over the course of the workshop, I sort of realised that, just with experience of I am Me with, really, I started relying less and less on Ryan, and just kind of, was using my own kind of, not, my own sort of gut instinct to go with what felt right and started kind of opening up a bit more and just exploring things. And, and so, and so what has actually started happening is that I've relied less and less on the Doodle Book. And less on Ryan as we facilitate, I would say. So, it's going in that sense.

### **Ryan :**

Yeah, I think Gavin in the beginning was very bound to his plan as well and, but now he's able to let the plan go a little bit and be confident that he, he knows it and, and now you, and now you're prompting away aren't you in, in the session? If Gavin sees something interesting, you’re like “Ah, let's follow that.” That rabbit hole for want of a better word. And that's been really great to watch. So, I just get to sit here now and join in really and enjoy it.

### **Kelsie:**

Gavin, you talked a little bit about that shift, from thinking of yourself, to teacher to be a little bit of a guide. Can you talk about what prompted that shift?

### **Gavin:**

I, I guess it was really just working with the group, our ensemble, primarily, has always been very open with everybody and, and I think it's because we've got people that have been in the company for years, if not decades, erm some of them have started back in 1984, this is actually our 40th year this year, er and we've been, we still have some people in the company today who were actually in the, those early issues. And we've also got people who've just started really in the last two years or so. But I think, because Lung Ha primarily has always been a very sort of open company everybody, I, I guess has always felt safe. I certainly felt that everybody's always felt safe to be vulnerable. And, and if everybody's always got a problem, there's always people there to help. And so I guess the sort of move from teacher to guide, sort of just happened pretty naturally as I sort of suspected might happen with a project like this book, but also because I knew that, that I were, our company was just naturally comfortable with everybody anyway. I guess that's what just prompted the change, it just happened completely naturally.

### **Ryan :**

Yes, I think that, the idea that, um just to add on to what Gavin said there, at the beginning of, of them feeling like you wanted to teach probably came from a place of like, “Right, okay, so this is what identity is” because when you get the Doodle Book, and you have the little description at the top and, and we talk, me and Gavin talk quite a lot about sort of, of what it means, then you start to go through the session and you realize it means something completely different for everybody, so there's no point trying to teach what that is, you can only guide people to um, to bring out their ideas of what identity is to the Doodle Book.

**Kelsie:**

JoAnne, you've worked in past in a co-facilitation team. Can you tell me a little bit about what you want from co-facilitators? And what makes for a good co facilitation experience.

### **JoAnne:**

I would want support and visual, visual plan clock which is, like it's basically like a big clock with like numbers and then you can have like hands, like visual things, like if you said 10 minutes, introducing yourself, 10 minutes, 15 minutes getting to know people, icebreaker. And then I like to be visual because sometimes loads of words don't make sense to me, so pictures and words help and going for walks. If it's been a stressful day, going out for a walk and talk. That really helps me. Yeah.

**Jess:**

There was a lot of kind of just finding new ways to do things.

**JoAnne:**

Yeah, and one day me and Karen went out for a walk and she got a lot out of me because we went for a walk around the pond in Lister Park and then we found out that actually, what is Dancing with Colours about and then I said, “Well, art is everywhere. Look at the clouds. Look at the bird. Look at the water making ripples, and that is art.” And that's why going for walks energy. Re-energizes, get me going again, cos if not, I'll get like cabin, I call it, I get like caged in like an animal. I can't be stuck in for long. I can’t, I struggle.

### **Jess:**

So how do you like to do planning with a focus in the fate?

### **JoAnne:**

I like to talk and then get a plan, visual plan. ‘Stead of just a lot of words like visual things like pictures and words together and get the clock and put things, it can change around. So, one example, the music round was too, going to be too much for this person that was doing it in this workshop. So, I just pulled it out and said no music, and then put it back in later on for next workshops. So that's helpful and can just go on like blu-tacked on the, not self, not glued on, they’re blu-tacked, that helps me. Yeah.

### **Jess:**

And when you're in the session, how do you like to work with a co-facilitator?

**JoAnne:**

They’re to support me and keep an eye on me. And if I need help, I’ll go up. I’m gonna learn to go up more to ask for help, but that's still a learning thing for me. And support.

### **Jess:**

What might that support look like for you in a session?

**JoAnne:**

Yes. Stay on task. And remind me that it's all right to make a mistake.

**Kelsie:**

So, similarly, Gavin and Ryan. You've developed a really interesting, working partnership over the course of I'm Me. What do you think makes you work well together?

**Gavin:**

I actually think it's because Ryan and I knew each other pretty well before I am Me. Ryan started as a volunteer support worker with Lung Ha, by which time I'd already been an actor with Lung Ha for about four or five years, I think. The thing that makes, Ryan and I work so well together is, I, I think we just get each other’s to humour. My microphone for, for felt like of a better word, but I think we also listen to each other which I think is really important if you're doing a project like this, because you're being vulnerable.

**Ryan:**

Added to what you said there about working together quite a lot, it means that throughout a rehearsal process, we will have quite an open discussions, about our work and quite helpful, if, if you move here at that point or if maybe I can hand you this and you talk about ideas to on stage with each other. I suppose that translates into the way that we plan the session as well. So it means that we can be quite open and go “oh maybe actually this might be better for this person, if we, if we, if we phrase it this way” and that, that openness and a bit, willingness to sort of help each other out, but be helped by the other person as well I think is key. And interesting what JoAnne, JoAnne said there as well, I think that was a big part of it, where yes, Gavin asked me to help him with timekeeping in the session, and I'm not necessarily sticking on task but just keeping an eye on that, how long we've had for an exercise because sometimes, something really interesting comes out of it and so Gavin will want to follow that but, but otherwise, then we're going to run out of time so, I think that's been a big thing for me to learn as well, from Gavin, and Gavin being open about what he needs from me, has been really useful because it means that I can, I can do that.

**Kelsie:**

So, is there any advice you'd give folks if they were starting to co-facilitate together?

**Gavin:**

I would say, make sure it's with someone, if it's someone you don't know well, try and get to know them as best you can before going into co-facilitation, just because when you go into co-facilitation, it’ll make it easier and also, I would say for co-facilitation that, definitely communication’s key.

**JoAnne:**

And going on from what you said, be honest, say what you need, like I've got a Access Rider now, and it's been working, saying what things I need and what I need help I need and get to know them as a person and get to know me as a person too.

**Jess:**

But using your Access Rider has been helpful.

**JoAnne:**

Using my Access Rider has been very, very helpful. And then they know what I need -lots of time spent with the people supporting me and support them as well. I always thought the staff here who support me. I know they’re here to support me but I, they need support too, so work as a team.

### **Jess:**

Do you think time is another important part?

**JoAnne:**

Yes, lots of time together. And time to think as well, process time as well, because sometimes I'm like looking at staying away, but actually, I'm trying to think of a question, to answer the question and sometimes I have to repeat, “Can you repeat that question? I've forgotten it.”

**Ryan:**

I agree so much about what you said there about time. Like Gavin said, at the beginning of er when we were working, we’d worked together quite a bit already, but then when we started doing this project, which is very different from performing together, we spent so long planning our sessions and obviously that's become less and less as we've got to know each other really well and how each other works and learnt the project as well. But you can't have too much time at the beginning, so don't put, don't go “Ah, we should just fit in half an hour of planning” because it's, give yourself the luxury of time if you have it, get to know each other, get to know what you're going to need from each other in the sessions and make sure that you really understand what you're doing in the session as well.

**Kelsie:**

Thank you so much everyone I really appreciate your time and insights.