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**I’m Me Symposium:**

**Inclusive Creative Methods Symposium**

Thursday 19 June 2025

The I’m Me Festival is the culmination of a two-year AHRC funded research project utilising creative methods to work with learning disabled and autistic artists. Alongside the Festival we wanted to provide an academic context to explore the breath of work utilizing inclusive and creative methods in the context of learning disabilities. To find out more about how we framed the symposium, please see the call for paper [hyperlink]

The symposium brings together international speakers from a diversity of disciplinary backgrounds, including theatre, architecture, psychology, education and health.

The following schedule is subject to change:

**10:30 – 11.00am: Registration, tea/coffee pastries**

**11:00 – 11.10am: Opening remarks**

**11:10am – 12:00pm:**

**Paper 1.** Sheila Wildeman (Dalhousie University). ‘My Home, My Rights: Imagining Disability Justice.’

My Home, My Rights is an arts-based participatory action research team from Nova Scotia, Canada. Our core members learn and communicate in ways described as intellectual or learning disabilities.  We will talk about how our diverse team used art (video-making, photo-portraits, collage, music) to explore human rights and disability justice. We will share how we took part in a local and international movement for deinstitutionalization. We will describe our multi-media art installation, which has two key messages: 1) We have the right to live in community (with support if we want it), 2) We have the right to make decisions (with support if we want it). We will reflect on our learning journey and what comes next.

Presenters: One or more core My Home My Rights members (Conar Clory, Isai Estey, Chantel Meister, Melissa Thompson, Simon Snyder, Jennifer Whynacht-Walters) and two My Home My Rights facilitators (Sheila Wildeman (Law, Dalhousie) and David Simmonds (Art & Art History, University of Calgary)).

**Paper 2.** Bojana Daw Srdanovic (University of Plymouth). ‘How can improv games help researchers to be more imaginative in analysis?’

People with learning disabilities do not always receive good healthcare. Although it is important to understand when things go wrong, we also think it is important to understand and promote when things go well. On the research project Humanising Healthcare researchers with and without learning disabilities work together to find examples of good healthcare.

Focusing on positive examples can be difficult, because there is much wrong with how people with learning disabilities are treated in society. In this presentation I will talk about how we have used improv games to help analyse data from fieldwork and help find examples of good healthcare.

**12:00 – 12:10pm: Break**

**12:10 – 1:00pm:**

**Paper 3**. Kirsten Day (University of Melbourne). ‘Designing for Disability: Knowledge Transfer, Ethics, and Co-Design in Architectural Education.’

This presentation shares insights from the *Designing for Disability with the Flying Foxes* studio, part of the Master of Architecture program at the University of Melbourne. The studio paired architecture students with people with intellectual disabilities (ID) to co-design public spaces, focusing on transforming lived experience into practical design ideas.

The project emphasised ethical collaboration, respectful communication, and addressing cognitive, sensory, and emotional needs. Students co-created design briefs exploring innovative accessibility strategies and critically engaged with Australian standards.

The studio highlights how architectural education can advance inclusive design, promoting equitable public spaces by integrating diverse perspectives and addressing real-world challenges.

**Paper 4.** Verity Ward (Leeds Beckett University). ‘Challenging the narrative about neurodivergent learners using Digital Stories’

Short abstract: Digital Stories offer a potential solution to the lack of opportunities neurodivergent students, including students with learning disabilities, face when trying to express their views.  Digital Stories are short, student-centred videos, which can capture children’s educational experiences and identities by focusing on their strengths and agency, rather than their perceived challenges. This presentation will reflect on the process of creating Digital Stories in two different schools across a single multi-academy trust. The presentation will discuss the challenges of working in partnership with staff and students, while negotiating university ethics boards, as well as the learning opportunities for those involved.

**1:00 – 2:00pm: Lunch.**

**2:00 – 2:50pm:**

**Paper 5.** Liselle Terret (University of East London). ‘Breaking the Code of Silence in the making of learning-disabled-led performance.’

Learning-disabled and neuro-divergent-led, award winning production, *Not F\*\*kin’ Sorry!* by Not Your Circus Dog Collective, is produced by Access All Areas and The Hale. Disability Arts and self-representation underpins the work, creating punk, sexy performance that challenges lived experiences of discrimination, trauma and shame.

This presentation says that if learning-disabled and neurodivergent people are not allowed to connect with their own histories and cultures, nor having the opportunity to take on leadership roles, then they cannot truly have control over creating political artistic work. Taking *Not F\*\*kin’ Sorry!* the presentation will explore two areas of concern: Artistic Knowledge versus Disability Knowledge and the ‘Code of Silence’ (whereby information believed to be vital or important, is withheld either voluntarily or involuntarily) that is still experienced in performing arts spaces.

**Paper 6.** Yvette Hutchinson (University of Warwick). ‘Integrated/Integrating dance: disruptions from intellectually differently-abled dancers as they occupy a perceived super-able space in Africa?’

Disability in Africa brings specific challenges, as it is perceived through a social and cultural lens, and from a religious perspective. This paper will explore how specific artists and companies have used contemporary dance as an embodied form to challenge and change some of these perceptions, particularly regarding dancers with Down Syndrome and other learning barriers in our African Dance Disability Network. This includes the work of South Africans Lliane Loots and her FLATFOOT Dance Company and the adult FLATFOOT Downie Dance Company, and the Sibikwa Arts organisation who work with young people with learning disabilities in their dance programs.

**2:50 – 3:00pm: Break**

**3:00 – 3:25pm:**

**Paper 7.** Jess Mannion (Manchester Metropolitan University). ‘Why haven’t we done this sooner? Clashing and Grappling within a Co-Produced Disability Study Using Creative Research Methods.’

We are researchers with learning disabilities and academics. We evaluated if our research practices were inclusive by making comics and having discussions in focus groups. We wanted the researchers with learning disabilities to have more power. The researchers with learning disabilities are experts in creative research methods and taught the non-disabled academic researchers how to use them. We asked each person to find an object to represent how they felt about teaching an academic or being taught by a person with a learning disability. Each person shared their object, and we discussed it. This presentation will share these findings.

3:25 – 3:45pm: Closing remarks and discussion.