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Arts and  
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Research Council

# **I'm Me Symposium: Inclusive Creative Methods**

York St John University  
Thursday 19 June 2025

Symposium organisers: Kelsie Acton, Daniel Foulds, Matthew Reason  
[www.yorksj.ac.uk/Im-Me](http://www.yorksj.ac.uk/Im-Me)

# **I'm Me Symposium: Inclusive Creative Methods Symposium**

Thursday 19 June 2025

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

**11:00 – 11.10am: Opening remarks**

**11:10am – 12:00pm:**

**Paper 1.** My Home, My Rights (Dalhousie University). 'Imagining Disability Justice.'

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

**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.'

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

**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.’

**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?’

**2:50 – 3:00pm: Break**

**3:00 – 3:25pm:**

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

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

**11:10 – 12:00pm**

**Paper 1.**

## **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: Chantel Meister, David Simmonds (Art & Art History, University of Calgary), Jennifer Whynacht-Walters and Sheila Wildeman (Dalhousie University, Law)

## **Biographies**

**Sheila Wildeman** is a Professor of Law at Dalhousie University's Schulich School of Law, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. She is a founding member of My Home My Rights, an arts-based action research collective that centres the voices of people with intellectual disabilities.

**Chantel Meister** is from Halifax, Nova Scotia. Chantel is on the autism spectrum and is a founding member of the arts-based action research collective, My Home My Rights. She is also on the board of Inclusion Nova Scotia, and studies communications at Mount Saint Vincent University.

**Jenn Walters-Whynacht** is from Dartmouth, Nova Scotia and is a founding member of the arts-based action research collective, My Home My Rights. Jenn is also a member of Coverdale Justice Society. She is an expert on surviving poverty. One of her gifts is taking photographs.

**David Simmonds** is a British photographer on faculty at the University of Calgary, Faculty of Arts (Art and Art History). His work explores how photography can create connection between strangers, communities and environments. A founding member of the arts-based action research collective, My Home, My Rights, David's work is featured in private and public collections including the Victoria and Albert Museum, Royal College of Art, and Photographers Gallery (London).

**11:10 – 12:00pm**

**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.

**Biography**

**Dr Bojana Daw Srdanovic** is a researcher on the Humanising Healthcare project at the University of Plymouth. With a background in theatre, she has worked for over 20 years alongside people with learning disabilities in a number of contexts such as social care, drama, and research. Focussing on inclusive and participatory approaches, her work explores care—including health and social care—and the radical potential of co-production.

**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.

**Biography**

**Dr. Kirsten Day** is a Senior Lecturer in Architecture at the University of Melbourne and Principal Architect at Norman Day + Associates. Her research explores professional memory, authorship, and inclusion in architecture, focusing on how standards and regulations can unintentionally exclude disabled and neurodivergent individuals. She co-directs the Design>Disability>Now Hub and serves on the Victorian Equity in Architecture Committee for the Australian Institute of Architects.

**12:10 – 1:00pm**

**Paper 4.**

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

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.

**Biography**

**Verity Ward** is a Lecturer in Education at Leeds Beckett University. Verity completed her doctoral research within the [Autism Community Research Network @ Southampton \(ACoRNS\)](#). She conducts collaborative research based within research-practice partnerships, which brings together lived-experience, and practice-based knowledge to transform educational practice. Her research focuses on neurodivergent children and young people’s educational experiences of co-production using creative and participatory digital methods.

**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.

**Biography**

**Liselle’s** work as a performance artist and director foregrounds her identification as neuro-divergent, disrupting theatrical norms through a crip, queer, collaborative and feminist approach across her creative practice, mentoring, consultancy, teaching, writing, and directing. Most recently she re-staged award-winning theatre production, *Not F\*\*kin’ Sorry!* (NFS!) by Not Your Circus Dog Collective! as co-writer and director for a final national live tour. The project continues in the form of *NFS! The Film!*

**2:00 – 2:50pm**

**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.

**Short biography**

**Prof Yvette Hutchison** is in Theatre & Performance Studies, School of Creative Arts, Performance and Visual Cultures at the University of Warwick, UK. She is associate editor of the *South African Theatre Journal*, on the editorial committees of *Performing Ethos* and *African Performance Review* journals. She is currently working on the project *Encountering disability and citizenship through contemporary dance in Africa* with Dr Lliane Loots (see <https://africandancedisabilitynetwork.org/>).

**3:00 – 3:25pm**

**Paper 7.**

**Jess Mannion (University of Leeds). ‘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.

**Biography**

**Jess Mannion** is a Research Fellow at the University of Leeds. She founded the Relationships and Sexuality Research Team in Ireland, made up of researchers with intellectual disabilities and neurodivergence. The team are collaborating with the University of Cincinnati on the 'Disabilities Without Borders' research project, developing a sexual health education programme for learning disabled and autistic university students. They specialise in action research and visual and creative research methods.

Symposium organisers: Kelsie Acton, Daniel Foulds, Matthew Reason

**Kelsie Acton** is the post-doctoral researcher for I'm Me. She's published on inclusive research with Reason and Foulds in *The British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, on the erasure of American dancers with IDD with Erlikh in RACAR, and on plain language in *Crip Authorship*. She's the author of the plain language versions of McSweeney's *The Audio Issue* and Alice Wong's *Disability Intimacy* and *Year of the Tiger*.

**Daniel Foulds** is a writer and researcher with a learning disability based in Bradford, UK. He has been with Mind the Gap since 2013 firstly as a student, then an Artist and finally as an Associate Artist. He has worked in multiple research led projects including Daughters of Fortune with Royal Holloway University in London, Hidden History, ENGAGE and I'm Me with York St John University and Mind the Gap as a research assistant.

**Matthew Reason** is Professor of Theatre and Director of the Institute for Social Justice at York St John University, UK. He is the principal investigator on I'm Me (2023-25), a creative inclusive research project working with learning disability arts organisations across the UK. [www.matthewreason.com](http://www.matthewreason.com)