

Social Engagement Through Crafting

ITAC THINK TANK: April 2019

Hosted by Jessica Howarth (Scotland, United Kingdom) and Guests

This is the transcript of one of ITAC Collaborative's monthly Think Tank sessions. Each session focuses on a new theme and is hosted by someone from a different country.

In April of 2019, Jessica Howarth and several of her crafting colleagues from Scotland, United Kingdom came together for a round table discussion. Over the course of the session, each teaching artist spoke to the impact that crafting can have on participants and communities, especially those who are typically underserved.

Instances in which the text is in [brackets] or (parentheses) indicates when the transcriber was not certain of the speaker's original word choice. Ellipses in parentheses or brackets indicate when the sound was indecipherable for transcription.

(Introductory Music)

Jessica 00:10

So, hello and welcome. I'm Jessica and along with some other designers and makers, we would really like to have a lively discussion on the impact that craft and design can have as a socially engaged practice. I was lucky enough to be part of ITAC4's conference, which took place last September in New York. It was incredibly exciting and inspiring to be around so many artists from such diverse disciplines. However, what I did notice was, compared to other areas within the community of teaching artists, there were very few that represented designer makers and their socially engaged practice. So, here we are together today to discuss craft and design and its impact it has on individuals, groups and communities we work with.

Jessica 00:55

The current definition of craft by the Oxford dictionary is an activity involving skill and making things by hand. I am aware that defining craft is another subject for another time as it carries different meanings depending on who you are. For this talk, however, I want to explore the relationship of the hand, heart, and head and the role craft plays in developing these connections. There are so many dimensions to the practice of craft, but for this session I'll be focusing in on how the sector can improve health and wellbeing.

Jessica 01:29

Starting out on my journey as a teaching artist, I've seen how effective it is in building resilience, patience, developing empathy, developing resourcefulness and creating flow. It can provide a platform for building social capital in the form of networks, support systems and friendships. Craft encourages a multidisciplinary learning process. For example, in jewelry making, you need knowledge of math and chemistry. It can encourage one to rethink their own knowledge and ways of learning. I, for one, struggled with math and science at school, and now have a different perspective on it, due to how jewelry has made me re-engage with it.

Jessica 02:08

Craft can cross cultural and social barriers, bringing people together through the act of making. The people I brought together today have all come from an art college background in design and craft and now work mostly in the field of health and well being along with education. We also have Margaret Barron, who will speak about her experience perhaps if she wants to as being a participant in a craft activity, which is really nice as it gives a different angle on everything. The designer/makers I've invited are Lisa Arnott, Cassandra Barron, Fiona Hermse, Rose Murray and Sally Price. (...) We are all from Edinburgh, and we're all sitting around a table. We're going to discuss our practices, issues and challenges around it and then we're going to talk about the possibility of crafts on prescription.

Jessica 03:04

In the meantime, you would love to know what three words you would use to sum up your practice. Mine for example are color, time and curiosity. And if you guys want to type in into the chat box, we could explore those descriptions.

Jessica 03:21

So, what I'm going to do is I'm going to move on to who I am, but we've all met and, and that's just my work - my website there. And then I have a lot of my practices now on Instagram. And this is my jewelry. So, it's my own kind of artistic expression. And I use lots of metals - quite a lot of precious metals, and along with enamel. So, I was working as a jeweler in my studio for quite a while just making jewelry but I felt quite frustrated because I love working with people and I feel that there's so many things you can teach a person, about life through the through the act of making.

Jessica 04:05

So, my first kind of job as a teaching artist was to assist a very disabled young man who could barely move any parts of his body due to a degenerative disease. And he basically was determined, as he'd been physically able to till the age of like nine. So he made when he was little, because of his disease, it prevented him later on - going into adulthood, but being able to physically kind of execute his ideas and concepts. So I became his making assistant and artist, and that was very challenging in terms of being able to, I guess, work out a collaborative way of working together. Because I'm obviously an abled person. I've got a training in making. And so,

there was a bit of a kind of exploration of what could be achieved. And I was very aware of, you know, wanting to represent him in his work not wanting to represent me as a maker.

Jessica 05:20

So, we found lots of different materials to work with. He could barely move his hands. He was on an oxygen machine and he was in a kind of very high tech wheelchair, but he could move his fingers. So, we would work with very light materials, and we had to be very inventive. And these are, this is another of his garments, he had a real passion for fashion, and he loved design. So, we would work with the kind of light fabrics and paper and that was in order that he had finished both of what we were doing. And he, yeah, it was. And I mean, there's some text here. But he basically... this was a - it turned out to be the last year of his life. So, there was quite a lot of his illness bought quite a lot of bouts of not being able to come in and make but when we did, it was, I think, with a great sense of being quite aware of time. So, I think that created a real depth, determinate determination between us as a as a creative team. And I think it challenged both of us in lots of different ways. You know, as I said, for his project, (...) it was tough for him to express his creativity. But for me, it's a real realization of what can be achieved when one is flexible and imaginative with materials and methods and when one is open to any level of creativity.

Jessica 07:09

So that was one and (...) I think it really made me want to do more with making and people and and I'm currently doing a quilting group with women at the moment. And it's not just about product. I think when you're with people and making for me, it's much more to do with process and (...) what can be got out of that and what could be created through that. So I will move on swiftly to Lisa and I will let her have a little chat about what she does.

Lisa 07:56

Hi. So I'm Lisa, and Lisa Arnott. And I've been working as a teaching artist or socially engaged artists for over 20 years in a range of different projects. I started off as a volunteer and that's when I came to realize that - in a huge project - that I wanted to work with people in a community based setting rather than working as an art teacher in a school because I really felt that the arts had an opportunity to enable people to voice their views on the world or express themselves in a different way than formal education does.

Lisa 08:42

So, that led me to go off and study community development and I've worked in a range of different projects and organizations across Edinburgh and internationally in Melbourne too. But, I thought I would share with you the State of Flux project which was a project that I did in collaboration with an organization, which is called COMAS and, unfortunately, because of funding, they no longer exist. But it was a project that I developed as part of my MFA in design at Sheffield Hallam, which is a really kind of progressive and art school which encourages and supports artists and designers to engage at a community level as well. The project was to work with women in recovery and look at different ways of enabling them to develop their own self

confidence and and look at how it was impacting (...) their mental health and their journey and recovery.

Lisa 09:56

Hopefully you've seen the film, which - my apologies (...). It was done by me and I'm not a filmmaker, unfortunately.

Guest 1 10:03

It's great.

Lisa 10:05

But, one of the things that they were saying, for the women that maybe identify - the challenges that they faced was they were working with materials that they traditionally never had access to. So, being a jeweler, or even engaging with the kinds of equipmen - hammers, (solders), flames - was completely out of their traditional way of, I suppose, to be in creativity. It wasn't - they didn't engage with it at school. They had never experienced any kind of make and, I suppose, my goal, currently as a designer maker, is, particularly through the work that we do at the studio at Silver Hub, is how do we enable people to engage with and the act of making in our context as jewelry when, currently, people don't actually have access to those kinds of professions. Because traditionally, jewelry design was a very artisan... working class kind of profession. And we're seeing less and less resources going into those kinds of fields at school or in college settings. And I think in the long term that has an impact,

Jessica 11:15

I think that's also because the scene in Britain at the moment is all like service based. It's not skill based.

Lisa 11:24

Yeah, possibly, definitely. So the women that were involved in the State of Flux had never engaged with copper or hammers before. So for them, it was very liberating to engage with that, but also it was a level of self confidence, and developing that as you go along. And, and it did have an impact on their recovery and, hopefully in the film, you will have picked up (...) on those elements.

Lisa 11:52

We do lots of different other kinds of socially engaged practice through the studio. And we've supported people who have come through veteran organizations and young carers projects. And for us, it's not necessarily about that they're all going to become jewelers. It's about the process of developing self confidence, resilience and about belief in the themselves, which then become transferable skills into other aspects of their life. And we're not doing this in the term of it being therapeutic. Although it has a therapeutic quality, and I think the skills that people learn from the (projects) enable them to think about how they can engage a community level in lots of different ways. So, that's what we do. I'm going to stop talking.

Jessica 12:51

Thank you, Lisa. Next, we have (...). This is Lisa's work.

Lisa 13:00

That's my work. Yeah, I forgot to say I would say my work is passionate, energetic and thoughtful. And this work was developed as a project that I was doing about grief and loss. It's really an associative project.

Jessica 13:13

And remember guys, if anyone wants to type in their three words they can. And then this is the jewelry studio that Lisa runs and the students' work that comes through.

Jessica 13:28

And actually, next is Cas, who is a wonderful bookbinder and does a lot of work in community settings, and has quite an environmental stance on what she does. And we met through North Edinburgh Arts, which is the community arts center that I'm currently running a project in. And we were actually working today together; I was assisting her on a workshop with a group of women - a health project (...) in an area that's quite - what would you say? Yeah, quite (...) a deprived area. So, it was lovely to see a lot of engagement happening this morning. But Cas is also, in a former life, you've worked in the art sector (...) in the voluntary sector. Yeah. So here's a straight path.

Cassandra 14:31

So what I (...) will say might not necessarily match what's on the screen, so I'll (...) - I am trying to think how I came to where I am. So, I studied sculpture (at) art school and always volunteered working with people so (I) helped with the local workshop and project at the local gallery. I knew that I wanted to work with people but didn't want to be a teacher necessarily. And I think I come across a lot of people that class themselves as not being creative because that's drilled into them in school. And because they can't draw that means they're not creative and that just jarred with me a little bit.

Cassandra 15:19

So, after studying sculpture, and knowing that I wanted to work with people, I worked in after school groups. I went away to Canada; I run an art department for summer camp in Canada, and we're actually quite resourceful because we're on an island and there was only so many materials I could work with. So, it meant that I had to learn lots of different ways to work (and) worked with some children that were really into the arts and some children that thought they weren't creative at all. So that was a nice kind of platform (...) for me.

Cassandra 15:55

When I came back, I went and did a master's in Art Museum and Gallery education in Newcastle, which led to me working at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park in the arts education team,

which was a fantastic experience. And, ironically, as a result of doing that degree, I realized I didn't want to work in a gallery. It was really nice at the sculpture park because, and I worked with groups of children and adults, and it was very much about being able to touch the sculptures - about being able to run and make a lot of noise and not be quiet and not touch the artwork and that was really liberating, I think for me, but also... I'd often - I was telling the story the other day - I often would have a group of children and the teacher would come up to me and say, "Oh, watch out for such and such. He can be a bit of a pain to let you know." And those were the children that flourish in that environment and that was really nice to see that a classroom environment isn't necessarily the right environment for some people. And so I kind of went on from that Master's experience realizing that I wanted to work in the community rather than in a institution necessarily. And then I lived in a caravan for six weeks, and worked on a lantern project on the west coast of Scotland, where we were going into schools, community groups, doing willow lantern-making. And again, worked with a lot of people that had never done a willow work before. And we worked towards creating a community lantern parade. So there was something really lovely about working individually but then being part of a bigger thing.

17:47

(...)

Cassandra 17:50

Yeah, and I think it was an area as well, but I think it (...) was a seaside town. It was a really, you know, a softer place, and it's one of those places that was just a bit left on its own, and there wasn't much sense of community. So this was a really nice way to bring that together. And, and then like Jess said, I went on to work in Edinburgh for eight years with an organization called Voluntary Arts Scotland where I was a development officer, so I didn't necessarily lead the creative workshops, but I supported community groups that had a creative element to them. So, I'd help them find funding or I'd help them recruit volunteers and give them ideas about how they might work together and involve more people in what they're doing. But, alongside that, I've always had my own practice, which kind of went from big sculptures when I was in art school to making books. Because it was - for me, I kind of did bookbinding when I was at art school, but it was making my own sketchbooks and my sculptures were really Big. And then it got to the point where I couldn't make big sculptures, but for me, bookbinding and artists books are almost like portable sculptures?

Jessica 19:09

And is it, Cas - is it something to do with, Kind of, the handmade quality of your projects?

Cassandra 19:18

Yeah, yeah, completely. So, I work a lot with recycled materials. And I really like that process of repurposing something. So, the workshops that I teach, we often work with discarded materials and create something new out of them. And, I think through that process is a nice process for people that might feel that they are discarded in some way but can kind of - it's reflective. I've

seen people that feel like they can't make or they've kind of not found their place and through the bookbinding workshops, they've -

Jessica 19:58

Given a new lease on life?

Cassandra 19:59

Yeah, so - I can, you know, teach bookbinding workshops. I do a lot of environmental workshops: I'm working with a community garden at the moment, but what's quite interesting for me is that fine line between a led project and empowering people to to lead their own creative group. So, a bunch of my regular bookbinders, we have a weekly class and they really got into it; a lot of them were socially isolated, and (...) found it very therapeutic to come along to the workshops. I have supported them to establish their own group that now can meet without me and that's been a really nice journey. And it kind of links in the work that I did through my master's, the work that I did through my work with Voluntary Arts... and it's just a really nice community that I can be part of now. So that's been a really nice kind of rundown of the circle. I mean, yeah, I saw that.

Jessica 21:14

And this is Cas's beautiful books. And where are you there, Cassie?

Cassandra 21:19

I think I'm top right in the photographs. I'm teaching some workshops at (...) - I think that was as a community workshop for community garden, actually. And yeah.

Jessica 21:35

Good stuff. Great. And we will go on now to Flona.

Fiona 21:41

Okay.

Jessica 21:41

You I met when you were a studio dealer.

Fiona 21:44

Yes.

Jessica 21:45

And you've developed from - now you've gone down a different route, or maybe haven't. Can you speak to us about your practice?

Fiona 21:52

Sure. Yeah. Can I wonder if everyone can hear me? Okay. Am I close enough to the mic? Yeah? So yeah, I'm Fiona Hermes, as you know, and the three words I choose to try my work are probably patience, connection, and tactility.

Fiona 22:09

So, I'm from a jewelry and crafts background so I studied that at art school. And I studied at a very small art school called (...) in Aberdeen. And because it's quite small, the nature of it was quite mixed media. So it's very easy to pop over to printmaking and maybe try a technique there, even though I was studying design and craft. I then specialized in jewelry making and I did a master's in jewelry silversmithing and related products. And through that it was a (...) fine art sort of course (that) actually allowed me to, I suppose, make a plan of how I wanted my career to be and then, at that stage, I started to think about community projects and this act of making with other people. And I began using a lot of (...) textile techniques (...) with wire and such as knitting and crochet and also working with fiber to make wearable jewelry pieces. So, after that I sort of - I was still making jewelry and I was also starting to do support work for it to sort of keep (...) paying the bills really, to be honest, because I find it quite difficult to make much - make enough money to live off of selling my jewelry.

Fiona 23:40

So, I started with autism initially. I also was volunteering and doing art workshops for a charity called Headway which is a support group for adults with brain injuries. So, and from there, I just started gradually after a little while doing support work, I got a job at a community art center. So I was leading and facilitating (...) art workshops and they were more sort of general. We didn't have a jewelry studio or jewelry making workshop. And it was adults with learning disabilities. (...) I taught a range of techniques, but that was also quite suited to me. I've got a real curiosity about materiality and I love playing with different materials and my practice is quite sort of fine art (...) So in some way, I see myself between craft and fine art because of the way I approach my work in some ways.

Jessica 24:42

I think it's quite restricting sometimes to try and box things in.

Fiona 24:46

Exactly. I know.

Jessica 24:48

You know, does that (fit for) everyone else? You know, how does everyone else feel about that when their practice is put into boxes? Especially with funding, that can be an issue? Mm hmm.

Fiona 24:59

(...) It often is often a box and maybe you don't want to be. So then, I think as makers, we tend to be quite fluid and move through -

Sally 25:10

Different things like awards and funding - it's like if you're an artist, and if you're a craft person, those things aren't mutually exclusive.

Fiona 25:19

They're not. I know that both are involved in both. So from there, I sort of began to get freelance art projects. And I've been full time freelance for a couple of years now. And I've been working with a range of people, but a lot of adults with learning disabilities, women with mental health issues, other adults with mental health issues, and women from abusive backgrounds. And I've been working a lot recently with older people and people living with dementia. So that's (... something) I've been focused on.

Jessica 26:01

I think that's really interesting because I'm not sure - in other countries, but certainly in Scotland at the moment, there seems to be a big push to do with dementia and creativity. And I feel like dementia and materials work really well together. Because it's a (...) huge sensory exploration within that.

Fiona 26:23

Yeah, I think it's really complex. I think, because - the reality is dementia numbers or rates are increasing. And they're predicted to continue increasing a lot because of our lifestyles and a lot because people are living longer. There's a lot of reasons for that. But I mean, in some ways, it can be very challenging, because of - I mean, I've worked with people who are (living with) quite early stages of dementia, so they're being cared for by their partners at home. But I'm currently working with patients who are in a locked ward in a psychiatric hospital because of their dementia. So, that serves that other end of the spectrum. And I find, you know the imagination dimension - and because people can sometimes regress back to their childhood... that kind of childhood playfulness and curiosity surface where maybe it hasn't been their normal kind of working living lives from their past.

Jessica 27:15

I think that's a really interesting point. Because I think, as a child, you're encouraged to play a lot
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Sally 27:20

(As an artist, creativity) is what you should be doing.

Jessica 27:25

And you're - it's never judged how you explore that. Whereas, when you become an adult, it's like, oh, you shouldn't play.

Sally 27:32

Yeah, you don't have time to do that. .

Jessica 27:33

You don't have time. And I think that I, certainly when I work with adults, it's almost like you've got to pull (... out) a certain level of playfulness before any of the good stuff can happen.

Fiona 27:44

Yeah. And just I just always try as many things as I can because you never really know what's gonna like, be the hook, for that person, onto something that they can relate or just connect with. Like, for example, I recently, worked with a man. The first session I had with him in the group, he was doing the sort of - I was working with paper cutters and stamps, and he kept folding up a bit of paper, but I couldn't get him to and to do any more to kind of move past that at all, which is fine. But, I sort of then continued working with him and then sort of - with all these kind of rollers with kind of patterns on them so you can roll them in the paint and the same way as you'd roller paint a wall but paint a pattern. All of a sudden that was just like - he did about five or six of A2 sheets of paper on this. And then the following week, I gave him some chalk and charcoal and he started drawing these beautiful drawings of (...) buildings with (...) and he sort of repeated the (...) a few times, and he was actually (...) - that was his occupation. But his friend visiting at the time had never seen him draw or be creative. None of his whole life - they were lifelong buddies, like a brother to him. (...) It was really important that he thought through the smoke coming out of the chimneys and (the roofs) which was really touching as well... so that sort of raises the question is that craft.

Jessica 29:16

Yeah, yeah.

Fiona 29:16

I'm a maker and I draw with these chalks and charcoals.

Jessica 29:20

I think to me crafters - look my own personal thing is: if you build up a relationship with material, to me that can be craft. And I think (...) I think then after that it gets into kind of a bit of a hierarchy.

Fiona 29:36

Yeah.

Jessica 29:38

I don't know, but it'd be great to get some some kind of feed in from from everyone else around. Thank you, Fi. That was great.

Jessica 29:50

So sadly, Nicola couldn't be here tonight. She was in Germany and was delayed. But this is Nicola, who me and (...) Lisa knew (...) as a fellow jeweler. But, Nicola has an amazing job. She runs a jewelry workshop for people with learning disabilities. And, she's also done other projects: she worked in Nepal, teaching (trafficked) women jewelry, which they went on to sell. So I got her to just send me some of her views (...) on the impact of making. She says, "I think making has a profound effect on members are garbled. I try to find an individual approach for each person, enabling them to fulfill their interests and potential, as well as having a common goal and using the craft to bring the groups together socially. In the Garbled Jewelry Workshop, we use all different types of material. Members are able to express themselves through making and take pride in what they have made. What each person gains from the workshop is as an individual - as the person themselves. Some people make very little, but enjoy the space and materials without producing a finished item.

Sally 31:11

And that's a key within my own work as well - making a space that people feel like they want to have it whether or not they're going to be creative. Yes, like a work.

Jessica 31:22

Yes.

Fiona 31:22

Yeah.

Sally 31:23

To doing what they want to do as opposed to doing what they're told they should be doing.

Fiona 31:27

In the process as well, I think.

Jessica 31:29

Not, not -

Fiona 31:30

the product.

Jessica 31:31

Yeah. Yeah.

Sally 31:32

Again, it's quite difficult to get people to realize that the finished product is not necessarily that important.

31:37

Yes. Yeah.

Sally 31:41

Yeah, definitely. It's that I think - I've been working with kids as well. You realize, it's from about the age of six to seven, they kind of think they stop enjoying it and worry about whether or not there's as best, you know? And it's something - it must be something that we're being taught -

Jessica 31:55

I think it's - I think the worst thing in creativity is self consciousness.

Sally 31:59

Yeah. But then we all have that.

Jessica 32:01

Yeah, that's that's true.

Sally 32:01

I mean, I've been doing it for ages and I still feel self conscious.

Jessica 32:05

Yeah. Yeah completely. Next we're going to go to Rose. So, here we go around. You come from a textiles background.

Rose 32:17

Yes, I studied knitted textiles at university in Winchester... a while ago now. But I absolutely love knitting machines. I'm obsessed by them actually... but I don't do so much of that now, so I'll give you a little history on me and then explain a little bit about where I'm coming from and why I'm here.

Rose 32:37

Okay, so I, as I said, I started - I did knitted textiles and then did an MA in knit as well, an obsession. And then I went to work for design studio for about six years and so that involved knitting every day from nine in the morning till six and evening, coupled with quite a lot of travel as well. But a lot of going around and seeing big fashion companies, but what we would bring to them was something that was made - something that was physical. So they could send that off to the factories to be reproduced. So we would be that sort of creative injection into their business. And so I didn't really see it being -having as much longevity as a career.

Rose 33:12

So, then I went and worked in a much more industrial scale. So, I worked for a (supplier to next). So, that involves more going out to Hong Kong and China to get thousands of things made. And then I worked for a quite small UK brand called Great Plains, which is part of French

Connection. And again, (...). So we're making the kind of scale of quantity that I made (at Next), but still not so involved in making things with my hands. I would make some samples and send them off to draw some prints, but it was a different kind of work.

Rose 33:43

And then for life reasons, I ended up living in Italy. And, while I was there, I carried on doing some freelance design work, but I also started to become a bit more interested in education because I needed to get out of the house so I started teaching English because I needed to meet people. It was also how I learned Italian, which was really interesting that I learned by teaching people English that I ended up learning Italian. As my husband worked in an entirely English environment, and he really only spoke English. And he didn't get that learning from it.

Rose 34:12

(...) At the time, there was big oil refinery there. And like any conscious citizen, I would join every Facebook group going with my friends - you know, to complain about the oil refinery. It didn't really kind of start to occur to me for a little while, I should be looking at my own backyard about the impact of fashion and textiles on the world. And I was quite naive about it, actually, and about what a large polluter it is. It's really - it's not really getting any better, I'm afraid. I think people are more conscious now, but it's not necessarily getting better.

Rose 34:42

So, when I came back to the UK, I went to (...) and I did an MSc. So I became a chemical scientists for a couple of years. And it was sort of quite useful when I was pregnant because I wasn't very well. So it was like quite nice to study rather than work. But I realized after doing it that I wasn't really cut out to - I love science, but I wasn't cut out to work in a lab. So I tried to find what angle it was that I was going to take on this. So I started looking at the question of what is needed in education for a more sustainable textile fashion future. And through that I'm did a course in Glasgow where I met Jess, which is why I'm here. And I've just recently been working at a University in England (...), where I've been teaching textiles to the fashion students. I've been teaching them knit, print, drawing, and sustainability.

Rose 35:31

I think what's come out of that, for me, is I went into this research question of kind of, what science do they need to know? what skills do people need to know? And I kind of come out of my university experience really interested as well in what - how we develop the next round of thinkers as well. Because I was quite struck by the fact that I taught the university where people had signed up. This is different to other people at the table that signed up and had committed to pay (...) quite a lot of money because in England, the fees are over 9,000 pounds a year to go to university. And so we'd live in (...), looking at debt 50,000 pounds. So you think they'd just sort of be quite - Actually, because (...) quite a bit of my job, especially with the first years, was to teach the most creative parts... and the drawing and the sketchbook... I thought it would be everybody's favorite bit, and it really wasn't. And it was a real struggle at times. And what we did there was very different to what people had done at school. So even though they've done art at

school, they'd been very much spoon fed things and hadn't - and were very concerned about whether things fitted right onto the page of the sketchbook and whether - ... quite a lot of, "Am I doing it right?" was often the question. "Will I get my marks for this?"

Rose 36:46

So the two images that I've put on the screen here were two little - they're both student works, so please don't use them for anything. Not that you would, but just - they're not mine. And the one on the left was actually when I was teaching a bit in Glasgow, so that was when I was teaching students about drawing and they were doing a project on dance. So we actually did drawing from the videos of the dances. And that was quite interesting because they're very scared to work on a piece of paper that wouldn't fit inside sketchbooks, but we had a lot conversations about that. And (...) it took quite a lot of breaking down of people's - and just letting go a bit and not being frightened to do something that might not be right.

Rose 36:46

You know, and it sort of makes you realize that we've created an education system, which is very target based. That's exactly the right words. Yeah, it's very target based and even within the sessions where I'd say, "Well, there isn't a right or wrong. You're doing a drawing. All we ask is that you attend and you have opinions on your work." That would still - it took quite a lot of breaking down the barriers.

Rose 37:50

And then the image on the right is from Bournemouth. So this was one of my students who was printing textiles (...) and she really struggled with it and with the idea of what drawing is. It's still so engrained that that involves a pencil and a white piece of paper, which is from art, but I'll be honest: often for me, it does. And I do draw like that. And quite often, but I do that as a bit of a relaxation thing. So, this work was mainly based on like footprints and fingerprints, and tearing up pieces of paper, and all different alternative ways and some photography as well. So alternative ways that we could approach what we call drawing.

Rose 38:27

So what I've taken away from that experience, is that all students - well, as a country, I don't know if we have many international participants, so maybe you have your own views - we seem to struggle with letting go a bit and being creative and not doing things that are necessarily right. And I've been coming to think that that kind of thinking is important for also creating a more sustainable world for having people who will try businesses that are different, that will challenge things and say, "No, we don't have to do it in the same way. We don't have to (...) you shouldn't necessarily bleach cotton if you want to dye it black." I know some of the science about that, but they still do it because it's sort of the way it's always been done which is quite damaging. So, by promoting free thinking, I think it's as much as promoting science. Thank you for listening.

Jessica 39:15

That was really great. And yeah, I mean, I think that there's something to be said for drawing and creativity in education as we know it being a kind of means to an end. So it's like a "Bish, Bosh, Bash". I've done that. Whereas, I think drawing should be about developing a visual language. And, any language has lots of different forms within it. So stuff like the mark making we did was drawing itself. It's doesn't have to be

Rose 39:50

Well, it's not often it's not something that should be (...)

Jessica 39:55

So I invited Sally along tonight. We met, again, at North Edinburgh Arts. And Sally does brilliant things with lots of objects and lots of people. And we first initially met on a program that is all about arts and prescription. So in the UK, it's being rolled out as a way to combat the kind of, I guess, the conventional methods of prescribing people with antidepressants, (...) and you know, all this medicine to do with combating mental health. bBut instead, the government's pledged lots of money, or some money, to invest in activities and communities that then their patients can go to and have an experienced that might create positivity in their lives instead of (...) just, you know, having direct medicine.

Sally 41:11

Yeah, it's more about - it's called social prescribing. So (...) it's looking at the idea that being an active member of community (...) kind of participating in things can have a really positive effects on people's mental health, instead of treating things more as a medical condition, which often - a lot of mental health issues can be treated really medically, instead of looking at more issues to do with (...) social issues and things like that.

Sally 41:41

So I work for - well, one of the things that I do is I work for a group called Art in Healthcare, and they're based in Edinburgh. And they set up groups or one of the things they do is they set up groups around Edinburgh which is - the idea is that it's socially prescribed an (...). It's called Room for Art. And you kind of get - referred from your GP or you can self refer. And it's basically a space to come and take part in some art practices, whether it's something that you have kind of developed yourself and you want a space to do or if you just want to come along and do something relaxing and, and creative. But the idea is that it kind of gets people out the house, it gets people going (...) meet new people, and take (...) part really.

Jessica 42:30

And build things like confidence -

Sally 42:34

Yeah, massively.

Jessica 42:35

and build personal relationships.

Sally 42:37

Exactly. You know, lots of groups end up being massive friends and things and then it can be a really positive part of people's weeks, you know, especially if someone's doing something that's really, really quite difficult in their lives. Having that space, that literal kind of gap in their week for creativity can have a really, really positive impact and even though it's not and it's not art therapy, exactly. It's got a lot of therapeutic and well being benefits.

Jessica 43:04

I think it's quite nice that it's not art therapy in terms of - I think art therapy is brilliant. I also think that, sometimes, it creates an opportunity to get creative together. And that might not necessarily come from if you're having art therapy.

Sally 43:19

Yeah. And also you're not exploring definite themes or issues that are happening to you. So, you're not necessarily coming in with specific things that you want to explore. It's more of an exploration of, of enjoyment. Really, you know, for some people, it becomes an art therapy kind of an experience, but for some people is just a space in their lives.

Fiona 43:41

A bit of distraction - comfort.

Sally 43:43

Yeah, yeah, or just a time where you don't have to think about all those things that you're struggling with. You just have to look at this plant and draw some stuff you can see you know. Which, you know, for some people is really, really difficult, but once they break through that barrier, it can become such an empowering tool. That's the same with any kind of creativity. I think that once somebody realizes that they can make that choice, they can do something and there is no right or wrong - if they realize that the doors are open for a lot more, you know. And one of the projects that I ran last couple of years, which I think really kind of embodied - this is called Make Your Mark. And somebody mentioned Make Your Mark earlier, which is -

Jessica 44:24

This is the Make Your Mark exhibition.

Sally 44:27

Wuite a common title. But yeah, it was (...) a project where the people of (...), which is a socially deprived area of Edinburgh, came together and made a small scale sculpture, and each person made one or more, and it was all about an exploration of materials. That's something that I'm really, really interested in is approaching things in a really playful way. But they would come together and they would spend time and it would be a social activity as well. And a lot of the

time it would be about just choosing The materials and choosing what to do with them that really helped people take that leap into choosing to do. You know, that's a big difference between choosing to kind of sit back and not take part in choosing to participate. And I think that can have a massive impact in communities and individuals for going on and taking part - choosing to engage in the area... choosing to engage in their families in their own lives and realizing that they can. I think that's one of the best things that art and craft can do - is giving people the opportunity to choose.

Jessica 45:33

To choose, yeah, and have agency, I think. Yeah.

Fiona 45:38

Yeah, not like all the groups I've worked with. It's giving someone that agency. Even if they can't hold a pen, if you maybe -

Jessica 45:44

Yeah.

Fiona 45:45

or can't use their hands, if you know you're asking them where they want something put and then put it there.

Sally 45:50

Well, this one here, the one on the screen just now which is kind of focused like a piece of yellow pipe was made by a woman who was almost completely blind. And we just worked off - She was obviously thinking she couldn't take part in this workshop because she couldn't see anything. But we just placed things in our hands until she found things she liked. And we just worked purely on a tactile basis, you know. So, especially with craft things, you can use the senses. It becomes much wider than whether or not you can see something because visual art, obviously, people often think it's all about how it looks. And that's just not true. And I think craft is one of the most important parts of seeing the connection between those things.

Jessica 46:29

I think that's a really interesting point about giving people choice. Because when I worked with the young man, and I think (...) the way he felt empowered was through having control of what he was planning to do with his materials. And I think it was, you know, a very important aspect of his life because it was about the only time that he had complete control over what was going on. And he didn't have control over his illness. He didn't have control over who looked after - you know, to some extent who looked after him, etc, etc. And, you know, everything was a bit out of control. And I found that that was one of the best things that was kind of happening through being creative for him was that it was choice, and it was his choice.

Sally 47:20

Yeah. And there isn't a right or wrong. Yeah, element to that. And, you know, that's really kind of freeing.

Lisa 47:28

I think one of the key things is also is about having the right space and the right organization to support the kind of approaches to craft that we've all taken and different communities and three of us around this table have all worked at North Edinburgh Art. And they've got a very progressive way of thinking in terms of how art and craft should be and how it engages with people on a one to one basis into a group manner before the support (...) at North Edinburgh. (Fades out to Music.)