

Why we do the work we do

Malcolm Learmonth
 Arts and Environments Development Lead /
 Lead Art Psychotherapist, Devon Partnership NHS Trust
 Director, Insider Art
 Chair Self Heal Association
 Vice Chair Magic Carpet Arts
 Kings Fund Enhancing the Healing Environment Leadership Network



Devon Partnership NHS Trust



What motivates us? (me? you?)

- Making a living!
- Idealism
- Creative /aesthetic 'buzz' when it works!
- Political/Faith/Moral conviction
- Empire building
- Empathy/ compassion *'What's so funny 'bout Peace Love & Understanding?'*
- 'Shadow' creativity
- 'Shadow' help-seeking
- Personal Journeys



Reflection in a shop window 1982



Y Gamallt Mountain Path 1984

It never ends, because loss, and hope, and
 adapting to loss, and living with conflict
 never ends.

Unpublished Image removed:
 Other images from this sequence are in 'The Bird Table'

Branscombe Birds 2008



Nest of Lost Hopes, Heathercombe Sculpture Trail, 2010

Unpublished image removed.

Work in progress: 'Learning to Walk'

Trissul Prayer Flag 2011

We do what we do because The Arts:

- Help us to shape, contain and make meaning of perplexity and suffering. (Help us not to feel so bad/ sad/ mad)
- Give us experiences of being autonomous, choice making, creative beings. (Help us to feel good)
- Bring us alongside others. (We feel less alone)
- Have the capacity to interrupt certainties. (Help us get 'unstuck' and learn)

Because the Arts:

- Can change the covert messages of healthcare buildings, and change the values of their staff.
- Can be the emotional educators of people working in healthcare.
- Are a human right.

Social Inclusion



'The magnitude of (health) risk associated with social isolation is comparable with that of cigarette smoking and other major biomedical and psychosocial risk factors'

Psychosomatic Medicine 63:273-274 (2001)

Because the arts are among the deepest, oldest, most universal, and most instinctual resources for resilience and adaptability in human beings.

'Nature encourages us to do what is good for us by making it **feel good**'

Because 'It as natural for people to make art as it is for wolves to howl'



Ellen Dissanayake: 'Homo Aestheticus, Where the Arts come from and Why', University of Washington Press, 1992

“Do not imagine that Art is something which is designed to give gentle uplift and self-confidence. Art is not a brassiere. At least, not in the English sense. But do not forget that brassiere is the French for life jacket.”

Julian Barnes, Flaubert’s Parrot, 1984

‘Art is not about art. Art is about life. All art comes from terrific failures and terrific needs that we have. It is about the difficulty of being a self because one is neglected. Everywhere in the modern world there is neglect, the need to be recognised, which is not satisfied. Art is a way of recognising oneself, which is why it will always be modern’.

Louise Bourgeois.



Definitions of health

Panglossian

‘Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity’.

WHO. The Definition has not been amended since 1948

Pragmatic

‘Health designates a process of adaptation. . it designates the ability to adapt to changing environments, to growing up and aging, to healing when damaged, to suffering and to the peaceful expectation of death. Health embraces the future as well, and therefore includes anguish and the inner resources to deal with it.’

Ivan Illich, Limits to Medicine, Marion Boyars publishers, London, 1976, p 273.

My roles in arts and health.

As Art Psychotherapist/ Trainer:

- Working with art and therapeutic relationship to express, contain, witness, validate, transform and heal:
- Distress, disturbance, fragmentation, mental illness, trauma.

As Arts Environments/ Communities worker/trainer:

- Enhancing Healing Environments
- Developing arts routes into, through and beyond mental health services
- Working with community/ participatory arts’ capacity to improve self esteem, social inclusion, reduce stigma...



Devil and the Deep Blue Sea

- Much has been gained if we succeed in turning your hysterical misery into common unhappiness.
- Sigmund Freud, Studies on Hysteria, 1895.



Shiny Happy people

- The effect of beautiful objects, of variety of objects and especially of brilliance of colour is hardly at all appreciated ... Variety of form and brilliancy of colour in the objects presented to patients are actual means of recovery.”
- Florence Nightingale, Notes on Nursing, 1859



‘Art is a wound turned to light’

George Braques.

What Could Possibly Go Wrong?

1. Blanding Out

- 'The art groups I attend, like those I attended five years ago, are a distraction but fail to provide the answers I so desperately want... there is little scope there for working on my problems.
- It is degrading. Are these pointless distractions all my life is reduced to? These groups have the same effect on me as the dirty rooms and the tepid food. They make me feel worthless. They make me wonder what is the point.'
- Melissa Wolf, Service User, writing in Openmind 137, January February 2006.

- What Could Possibly Go Wrong?
 2. Power is always double edged.
 Duty of Care.

'Through the eyes of the law: What is it about art that can harm people?'

'We can now say that the legal view is that art can carry risk and injury is foreseeable if vulnerable people are exposed to it. Art can help people because it has power, but that power is not innately helpful...'

Neil Springham, Inscape, December 2008.

As well as art, it's about relationships:

'One of the most robust findings in psychotherapy research is that a good therapeutic alliance is the best predictor of outcome in psychotherapy'

Jeremy Holmes 'All you need is CBT?', BMJ 2002;324:288-294



What Could Possibly Go Wrong?

3. Workers: Looking after ourselves and others when the relationship is our method...



If there are no boundaries, its not a bath: it's a mess.

The whole of the bathroom floor was covered in a sort of white foam where the hot water had landed on his map of South America. 'It is untidy' he admitted. 'I don't really know how it got like that'

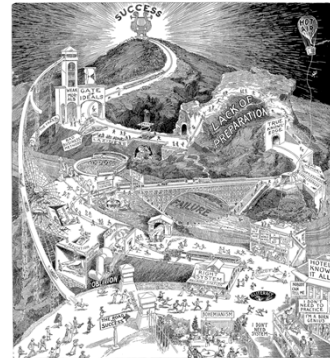
If we do the work we do because we care:

- about people
- about places
- about our communities
- about beauty
- about environments
- about alleviating suffering

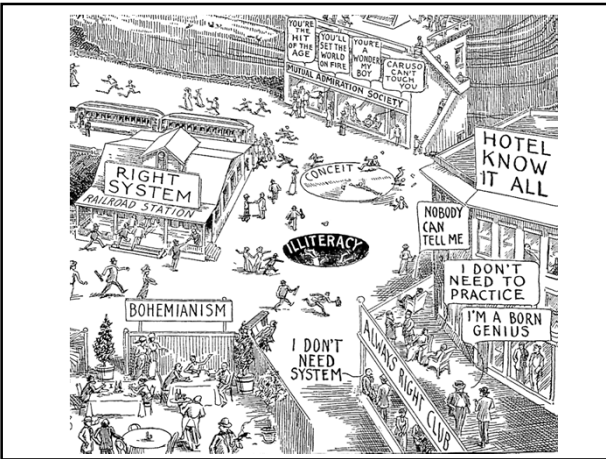
Then we embrace a real joy, and an equally real responsibility to be:

ethical
accountable
informed
reflective
supported
trained

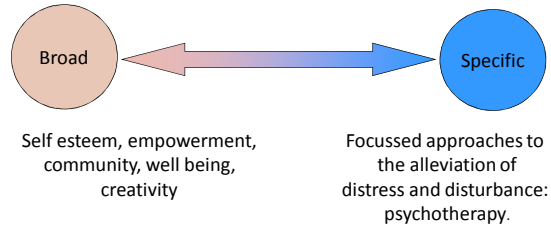
Its about having good maps...



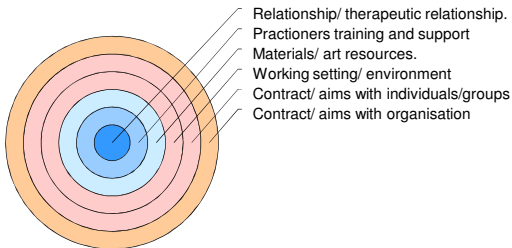
Artist Unknown. Published in 'You are Here: Personal Geographies', Katherine Harmon, Princeton Architectural Press, 2004



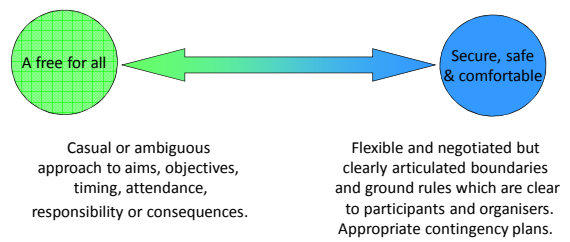
The Participatory Arts and Health Spectrum



The (dis)enabling factors for safe and effective practice: levels of containment.



Containment as a Spectrum



Contacts

- Malcolm.Learmonth@nhs.net
- insiderart@blueyonder.net
- <http://www.insiderart.org.uk>