

## Arts & Culture Research Symposium 2020

21 July 2020, Tuesday, 3-5pm

Zoom Videoconferencing

Theme: Arts & Health

### Conference Proceedings

2.	<b>Dementia and Imagination: Arts as Inspiration, Artists as Researchers</b> Dr Clive Parkinson Director, Arts for Health, Manchester Metropolitan University Reader, Arts, Health and Social Justice, Manchester Metropolitan University
2.1	Dr Parkinson's presentation titled <i>Dementia and Imagination: Arts as Inspiration - Artists as Researchers</i> was focused on the role of the artists in dementia research and explored participant narrative as a way of putting the human being, the human experience, and the individual in the centre of his research on people living with dementia. His work explores how disinhibition can free the imagination to flourish through the arts, as opposed to focusing on memory as often the case with research on the topic of dementia.
2.2	Dr Parkinson spoke about <i>Dementia and Imagination</i> which was a 3-year project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) under the Connected Communities Programme. The project aims to understand the impact of visual arts for wellbeing; and also its impact for connectivity (in communities of interest, communities of practice and communities of place); to understand its economic value; and to maximise the impact of the research by engaging with a wide range of stakeholders. With the arts, the artists involved and people living with dementia as central to this project, two main approaches were employed in the research design: a. Facilitating large forums and small focus group conversations, for all stakeholders to better understand what might work and why, and to co-design the research methodology b. A Realist Synthesis of existing data to see what worked for people within specific context.
2.3	The project looked at the following research questions and worked with 3 research sites across the UK, namely residential care facilities, National Health Service (NHS) hospitals and community venues. The team also had strong strategic cultural partners to work with at each research site. Parkinson focused explicitly on: a. What are the ingredients of an effective arts intervention? b. How do these arts interventions influence wellbeing?  Each artistic session was 2 hours long, involving 15 people living with dementia, and a total of 48, 2-hour sessions at each research site was conducted. The sessions were structured for the participants to first learn to appreciate art and have discussions surrounding how to look at art; followed by making art works that were exhibited at the end of the sessions and in public exhibitions. Data was collected through structured questionnaires, qualitative and open-ended questions, self-evaluation, behavioural observations, and post-project interviews where possible.

2.4	<p>The team collected rich data: 271 full data sets (125 from people living with dementia, and 146 from carers and staff) across the 3 years, with the following highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Visual arts activities had significantly higher scores for attention, pleasure, interest and self-esteem, with significantly lower scores for indexes on negative feelings</li> <li>b. Social return of investments: an estimated £189,498 created a social return on investment of £980,717, results which cultural organisations are well-placed to achieve</li> </ul> <p>Their project also demonstrated that 37% of the participants had not engaged in the arts previously and suggested that the diagnosis of dementia could have brought them to experience the arts for the first time.</p>
2.5	<p>One of the project outputs was a research-informed handbook available as a free online resource for artists. It is a set of ideas and guiding principles for artists to consider when working with people living with dementia, providing suggestions of how to create structured sessions for people to enjoy, how to create social connections and how to create a safe and supportive physical and psychological environment. Dr Parkinson is currently exploring how a resource like this might be developed as an online resource for health and care settings in a time of pandemic. The handbook is freely available here: <a href="https://www.artsforhealth.org/resources/dementia-and-imagination.pdf">https://www.artsforhealth.org/resources/dementia-and-imagination.pdf</a></p>
2.6	<p>The presentation concluded with an edited video of an interview with a participant who had dementia, which extracted the aspirations and passions of a man struggling to make sense of the world, but which amplified his sentience. As an artistic output of the research project this represented a thoughtful reminder that people living with dementia are still very much present, vibrant and vital amid the symptoms of dementia, which dominate traditional research narratives. He reiterated the great potential of human imagination and the very way we connect and listen to one another through the arts regardless of our abilities.</p>