Community Arts:
Where Might the Boundaries Lie?

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Abstract:
A small scale study using a World Café and questionnaire approach to gain insight from those engaged in Community Arts on setting boundaries, handling dual relationships and engaging in supervision in order to contribute to building a picture of what best practice might look like in the field.

Literature Review:
Webster & Buglass (2005;p69) state that *"Community Arts can be, and has been a catalyst for positive change but it needs to be administered with a rigorous attention to its values, philosophy and ethics."* There is, however, a lack of literature on ethics in Community Arts despite the importance attributed to this topic. Banks (2003;p19) provides some generic values from the SCEC for community practice and The Health Development Agency (2000) offers more specific guidance on good practice for artists working to benefit health and well-being that can be adapted to other community arts work. It can be argued that there is a greater need in the field of Community Arts for clarity on values, principles and ethics in relation to practice.

This research attempts to start building a picture of what best practice might look like regarding Dual Relationships, Setting Boundaries and Supervision. This will assist Community Artists in developing their ethical practice through discussion with other Community Artists captured within the primary data collected using a World Café approach with follow up questionnaires.

Norman's (2012) research considered the tension between building relationships with participants on a Community Arts project and setting boundaries when working as a Community Artist. She recognised that this was a particular issue for those who work and live within the same community. This means that practitioners can be forming 'dual relationships' with participants on

projects, which a number of other professions flag up as a cause for concern and advise on practice to safeguard the practitioner and also the client (refer to Galbreath, 2005; Syme, 2003). However, there is little guidance directed at Community Artists on handling dual relationships.

Norman (2012) discovered that some Community Artists found setting boundaries in order to separate work and personal life difficult. Those that felt that they were successful in setting boundaries from the outset believed that it reduced negative outcomes within projects.

Setting boundaries is generally forged through an introductory session in which practitioners generate a set of ground rules with participants to frame the work within the project. These ground rules usually include detailing the project inclusive of any health and safety guidance and agreeing on how to work with one another in a mutually respectful way. This might also include dialogue about contact outside of the community art project sessions to address dual relationship issues.

Practitioners working with communities can find that complexities arise within working relationships (Banks, 2004). It can be helpful to discuss practice with others in order to develop strategies to address such complexities. Supervision can aid with reflecting on ethical and moral dilemma's that occur within practice and provide support and challenge in how best to address issues. Within a range of helping professions, Supervision is deemed best practice in order to develop effective helping skills and knowledge (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006). In some professions Supervision is mandatory in order to facilitate continuous professional development and operate as a safeguard of standards. Participants in Norman's (2012) research indicated that Community Artists felt that Supervision was important but most did not actually have Supervision for their practice. Again, there is little guidance for Community Artists on Supervision, although Norman points to Hamilton & Everitt's (2003) research which concluded that it is best practice within the field.

Norman (2012) recommended further research and guidance to be generated relating to boundaries within Community Arts and that Community Artists should take responsibility for their own ethical practice and related training, as well as being engaged in Supervision for their practice. Based on the findings from Norman's (2012) research, this follow up research has been generated through a World Café discussion with other Community Artists on the topics of Supervision, Setting Boundaries and Dual Relationships with the aim to start to gather insight on what best practice might look like.

Research Methods:

A World Café approach to data collection offers "a simple yet powerful conversational process for fostering constructive dialogue, accessing collective intelligence, and creating innovative possibilities for action, particularly in groups..." (Brown & Isaacs, 2005;p3).

Typically a World Café gathering allows for small groups of around four people to discuss an issue and then move onto other discussion groups in order to cross-pollinate ideas as each participant moves around the room and joins other conversations (Brown & Isaacs, 2005). This means that each participant connects with discussion topics and adds to the conversation in order to achieve more of a 'world view' of the situation and future possibilities.

The data collected is qualitative; gaining '*insight*' from participants (Bell, 2010). *"Expressive knowledge is generated by the researcher adopting a receptive rather than proactive stance, allowing an element of the world… to present itself for contemplation, then attempting to construct a text which accounts for that experience in its wholeness."* (Willis, 2008;p50). In this way the discussion data will be collected and summarised by participants facilitating each discussion group. The discussion group hosts for this research were lecturers at Staffordshire University's Creative Communities Unit who are involved in Community Arts.

This was a small-scale piece of research with nine participants from the field of Community Arts taking part in the World Café discussions using a '*purposive sample*' (Glenn, 2010;p96). Despite the small sample size, the findings can start to contribute to building a picture of what best practice might look like regarding Supervision, Setting Boundaries and Dual Relationships.

Consent forms were utilised adopting best practice to outline the intentions of the research and its usage, confidentiality levels and enable informed consent with rights to withdraw from the research (Bell, 2010).

To reduce the issue of 'social relations' as described by Garner & Sercomb (2009;p81) impacting upon the process and the data, a self-completion questionnaire was given to participants at the end of the World Café to offer them the opportunity to share any further information that they might not have wanted to disclose in a group context. Questionnaires are useful tools in uncovering personal experiences and opinions (refer to Simmons in Gilbert, 2001;p86).

Findings:

Dual Relationships:

Participants felt that an '*inclusive discussion*' was needed with those involved in a Community Arts project to talk about relating to one another outside of the group, either face-to-face or through social media. However, there was some debate about when the appropriate time is to have this discussion. Some felt that doing this at the beginning of the project was a good idea. Others raised the concerns that "*people may not have capacity to understand ground rules at the start of the project*" and that using the term '*rules*' in itself can be unhelpful.

Participants suggested having an on-going dialogue within the Community Arts project about "*ways to behave*" that enable the "*success*" of the project. On-going dialogue would help to reduce any issues with "*changing group membership*".

Participants also highlighted that practice would need to vary depending on the groups of people being worked with. Examples were given regarding working within different cultural settings and also working with people with learning disabilities and difficulties.

Setting Boundaries:

It was acknowledged that there is not always a 'one size fits all' approach. Some participants stated that they try to utilise "*organisational standards where possible*" and others stated that they prefer the group to set their own boundaries/ground rules and opt for a "*consensus*" approach.

Participants articulated that "*boundaries can change*" and what is determined at "*the beginning might be modified*". Again, there was debate about whether to set boundaries at the beginning of working with a group and/or to use continuous dialogue "*as you go along*".

It was identified that there are some people and groups that really struggle with sticking to boundaries. The "*need to be flexible*" in how people are handled if they step over boundaries, inclusive of using "*humour*", if appropriate, was offered as suggestions for best practice. Using a non-authoritarian approach to setting boundaries can help and participants also suggested using creative and informal techniques to facilitate boundary discussions. A participant commented in the questionnaire findings that there was a "*need for sensitivity from all parties in regard to discriminative actions*."

A couple of comments emerged about whether setting boundaries can put "*negative ideas into people's heads*", that is, stimulating poor behaviour. Alternatively, a concern was raised that setting boundaries might "*stifle creativity*" and might be a barrier for some in accessing creative sessions.

A possible solution from participants was to consider the length of the project and what is appropriate to the given context in order to tailor the approach to boundary setting. Setting boundaries might include discussing "*respect*" and also making "*sure people are clear about what will be done when*". Ultimately, reducing "*vulnerability*" needs to be considered.

A particular boundary issue that was highlighted was in relation to the use of "*Facebook*" and giving consideration as to whether you used only one account or whether you have separate accounts that separate personal contacts such as "*family members*" from those you are working with on Community Arts Projects.

Supervision:

Participants summarised that Supervision can help develop practice and establish standards that practitioners can use. It was concluded that a good supervisor challenges the practitioner and helps them to reflect upon practice.

An issue that was identified concerning the cost of Supervision. Solutions generated included adopting co-supervisory relationships with other Community Artists and/or ensuring the cost of Supervision is included within tenders when bid writing to promote professionalism and to generate the funds to pay for a Supervisor. If co-supervisory relationships were to be developed then practitioners stated there would be a need for training on supervisory practice.

Practitioners were "*unsure of where to go to in order to get a Supervisor*?" One participant highlighted that they found a *"trained counselling supervisor"* to be helpful and another talked about a *"co-worker"* who provided a level of supervision. Another participant talked about having an "*Art Therapist*" as their Supervisor. Others discussed how their discipline had trained them to be "*independent*" and "*reflective*" so the notion of Supervision had not been promoted or entertained. It was indicated that there might be *"issues relating to asking for help"* from another and also trusting another with the sharing of practice.

Participants considered the question: "*if there is no supervision how do poor patterns get addressed and should supervision be compulsory?*" One participant stated that they would not want the field of Community Arts to become "*professionalised*". This means that although Supervision is perceived as something that would be positive on the whole, there is concern about it becoming required to practice.

Discussion:

In terms of the methodology there would be advantage in collecting further views from other practitioners in the field of Community Arts in order to expand on the findings generated through the World Café and questionnaire data. This could enable detailed guidance to be produced for Community Artists in relation to ethical practice.

The questionnaire data indicates that approximately one third of participants had under one year's experience in the field. This means that experiences of some of the ethical and moral issues in practice may be limited within the data findings. It also means that some of the participants may have felt less confident in sharing their views.

However, there was little additional information captured within the questionnaire data after the World Café.

With regard to the findings, it is apparent that practitioners in the field of Community Arts have varying views on Dual Relationships, Setting Boundaries and Supervision. Practice also varied and seemed dependant upon connections to other fields of work, organisational practice and prior learning.

There seemed to be general agreement that there needed to be on-going dialogue about boundaries including how to handle Dual Relationships between the practitioner and participants on Community Arts projects. Respecting organisational codes of practice was perceived positively with the recognition that generating agreement on how to work together was best developed through consensus with the group and that this needed reviewing through the project with flexibility for modification. The context of the work, comprehension levels of participants and length of project all need consideration in order to find a way of hosting this dialogue that best suits the needs and goals of the group.

It was considered important for practitioners to think about how they separate work and family/close friends. Having separate work and personal Facebook accounts was suggested as one example of how to address this.

Some practitioners connected with other fields of work in order to develop their practice through reflection and dialogue and related this to receiving Supervision. Having reflective space and challenge was viewed positively by participants in general. However, some practitioners weren't sure how to access Supervision and whether there was a general attitude of mistrust towards sharing practice with others within certain disciplines within Community Arts.

The cost of Supervision was also a concern for practitioners. Building co-relationships was considered a way to overcome this issue. However, practitioners felt training in Supervision would be important.

Conclusion:

From the discussions within the World Café and questionnaire responses it would seem that further research is needed to gain further insight into practice within the field. If guidance is generated from the field to the field it needs to offer flexible suggestions on what can work allowing for variances in practice. The findings suggest that there is need for training for practitioners to develop relevant knowledge and skills so that they can further develop their practice through Supervision.

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