

Implementation and Reflection on a Workshop as a Dialogical Art for Building Healthier Relationships with People with Disabilities

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Introduction

I have a twin sister with autism and an intelligence disability, so disabilities are familiar to me. (Fig.1) However, there are still some people who have thoughts that advocate discrimination toward people with disability, such as Ableism and Disablism, which are based on stereotypical thinking.¹ Even without obvious bias, people may show unconscious negative behavior—like avoiding, staring, or harassment. In fact, many people with disabilities answered that they had experienced a negative attitude.²

One of the causes is the lack of interaction;³ in a workshop I held, only one of seven participants had close contact with someone with a disability. Our perception of disability connects deep-rooted psychological fear of the unknown and abnormal.⁴ I hope my project could be an opportunity to communicate with people with disabilities in a warm atmosphere and provide the fundamental mindset that we are all different and equal regardless of whether with or without disabilities.



Fig.1: Tomoya Nomizo, My Sister and I, 2006, Photography

¹ Ableism and Disablism', Sense, May 2024 <<https://www.sense.org.uk/information-and-advice/life-stages/ableism-and-disablism/#:-:text=In%20general%2C%20ableism%20can%20be,people%20use%20these%20words%20interchangeably>> [accessed 3 March 2025].

² Aiden, Hardeep Singh and McCarthy, Andrea, 'Current Attitudes towards Disabled People' (Scope, May 2014) <https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/88783477/Aiden_and_McCarthy_2014.pdf>. [accessed 3 April 2025], p.8.

³ Aiden, Hardeep Singh and McCarthy, Andrea, 'Current Attitudes towards Disabled People', p.14.

⁴ Colin Barnes, Disabled People in Britain and Discrimination: A Case for Anti-Discrimination Legislation (C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 1992) <<https://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/library/Barnes-disabled-people-and-discrim-ch2.pdf>> [accessed 3 March 2025], p.11.

Dialogical Art

To plan this workshop, I referred to dialogical art, which values continuous sustainability and dialogue⁵ between people who differ from one another. I invited my sister, a person with a disability whom most participants considered unfamiliar, to the workshop.

There are three key points to consider my workshop⁶ as a dialogical art. Firstly, about “Interdisciplinarity,” I researched disability from multiple aspects, including historical background, medical science, social welfare, and sociology, to avoid making the workshop too subjective. Accepting multiple interpretations and establishing the project as a result of an interaction between people, “Multiple registers of meaning vs. formal immanence,”⁷ is also necessary. I invited my sister and peers from various backgrounds and encouraged them to communicate.

Finally, I gave importance to “Dialogical indeterminance vs. formal indeterminance”⁸. The participants were allowed to speak freely. Also, I tried to break out the typical relationship between the host and guests and provided different parts which different people led: eating part, which my sister served mashed potatoes (in the workshop, I served in place of her), and creating part which students from GSA led to make and share their works. I facilitated the situation mainly, but it was not a simple, one-sided relationship.

5 Ueda Yoshiyuki, ‘ソーシャリー・エンゲイジド・アートにおける「参加」概念とその内実’, 2020 <https://tsukuba.repo.nii.ac.jp/record/55332/files/BKK_15-21.pdf>, p. 28.

6 Grant Kester, ‘Dialogical Aesthetics: A Critical Framework For Littoral Art’, Variant, 2000 1999.

7 Kester, ‘Dialogical Aesthetics: A Critical Framework For Littoral Art’.

8 Kester, ‘Dialogical Aesthetics: A Critical Framework For Littoral Art’.

As mentioned, the workshop had two parts: eating and creating. There were specific projects as references for this workshop: Conflict Kitchen, Enemy Kitchen, and Creative:Connection. Conflict Kitchen and Enemy Kitchen are both Socially engaged practices that are food-themed. Foods are sometimes used in an educational situation as an art and social engagement because they can work through multiple senses: taste, touch, and smell. Such physical and impressive experience enables us to both build and break emotions, thoughts, and knowledge.⁹

Conflict Kitchen is a restaurant that serves local cuisines of the countries with which the United States is in conflict, and they also provide narratives through various mediums, such as packages to give an opportunity to discuss these countries, cultures, and people.¹⁰ (Fig.2) Enemy Kitchen invites participants to cook and eat traditional Iraqi food, and the artists open up the project for free conversation.¹¹ (Fig.3) Creative:Connection is a project that aims to encourage understanding and communication between young people with and without disability. They provide the opportunity to engage in various creative activities together to explore their creativity and establish a trusted relationship between them.¹² (Fig.4)

9 RYAN SHIN and JAEHAN BAE, 'Conflict Kitchen and Enemy Kitchen: Socially Engaged Food Pedagogy', National Art Education Association, Studies in Art Education, Vol. 60.Special Issue: What Does Social Engagement Mean and What Should Art Education Do About It? (2019), p. 220.

10 About', Conflict Kitchen <<https://www.conflict-kitchen.org/about/>> [accessed 3 March 2025].

11 Brian Boucher, "It's a Strange Communion": Artist Michael Rakowitz on Why He Set Up an Iraqi Food Truck Outside the MCA Chicago', Artnet, 14 January 2018 <<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/iraq-cooking-michael-rakowitz-enemy-kitchen-1198394>> [accessed 3 March 2025].

12 CREATIVE:CONNECTION', Create <<https://createarts.org.uk/our-projects/with-disabled-children-and-adults/creativeconnection/>> [accessed 20 March 2025].



Fig.2: Conflict Kitchen, Conflict Kitchen, Venezuelan Takeout, Public Art Project



Fig.3: Michael, Rakowitz, Enemy Kitchen, October 2017, Activation



Fig.4: CREATE, CREATIVE:CONNECTION, Performance on the Orient Stage, 2017, Project

The workshop: We are all different potatoes

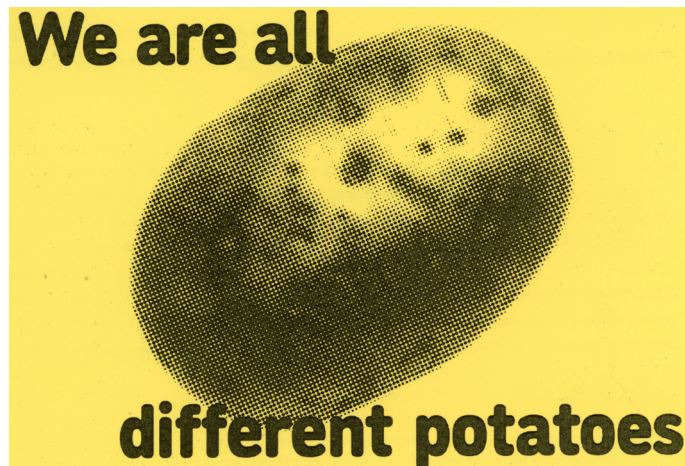


Fig.5: Momo Nomizo, An Invitation Card (Front) of We Are All Different Potatoes, 3 April 2025, Card, 14.8cm x 10.5cm

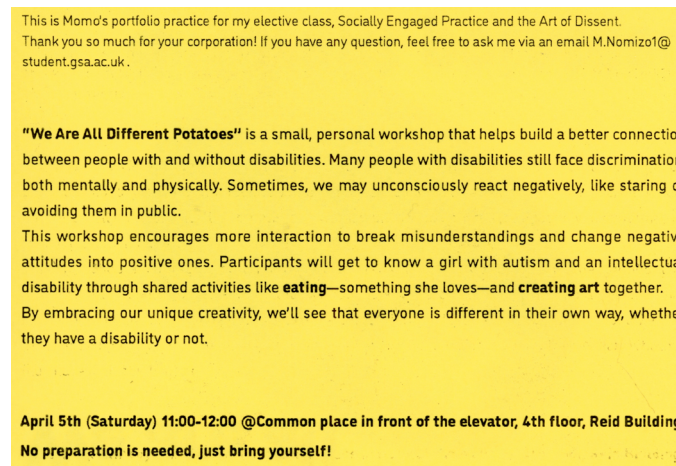


Fig.6: Momo Nomizo, An Invitation Card (Back) of We Are All Different Potatoes, 3 April 2025, Card, 14.8cm x 10.5cm

The theme of the workshop was potatoes. I focused on the significant characteristic of autism: obsession.¹³ Potatoes are one of my sister's obsessions; she has eaten mashed potatoes almost daily. Also, a potato is used as a symbol of human equality in Japan. We often say, "Think of the audience as just potatoes," when people get nervous talking in front of others. This is based on the idea that our nature is just the same,¹⁴ and it might oppose the concept of eugenics. I invited seven GSA students from multiple departments that day, and my sister attended online. Before the workshop, I gave each participant an invitation card to share the workshop's aim and idea. (Fig.5) (Fig.6) In the workshop, We ate potatoes together, shared our unique obsessions, and created our own potatoes to emphasize the diversity and differences between all of us. (Fig.7)(Fig.8)(Fig.9)(Fig.10)

13 'Obsessions and Repetitive Behaviour - a Guide for All Audiences', National Autistic Society, 14 August 2020 <<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/behaviour/obsessions/all-audiences>> [accessed 3 March 2025].

14 uminami-snus, '観客みんなジャガイモ', uminami-snus のブログ, 13 June 2016 <<https://ameblo.jp/uminami-snus/entry-12170485729.html>> [accessed 20 March 2025].



Fig.7: Momo Nomizo, We Are All Different Potatoes, 5 April 2025, Dialogical Art Workshop



Fig.8: Momo Nomizo, A Venue of the Workshop, We Are All Different Potatoes, 5 April 2025, Photography



Fig.9: Momo Nomizo, We Are All Different Potatoes, Creating Part, 5 April 2025, Photography



Fig.10: Momo Nomizo, We Are All Different Potatoes, Creating Part 2, 5 April 2025, Photography

Reflection

The workshop had many successful points, such as “Invite participation,”¹⁵ this workshop had better be private because the topic was sensitive, so I used Instagram and WhatsApp to look for participants. Secondly, “Foster Dialogue,”¹⁶ “Transform Environment and Experience,”¹⁷ “Make a Space,”¹⁸ “Alter Perception,”¹⁹ and “Reveal Reality.”²⁰ During the workshop, I encouraged the participants to expand their conversation by themselves, and they shared opinions with each other. In the survey, some participants answered, “I found that maybe we’re not that different” or “We have many similarities.” after the workshop. Cultivating empathy was also one success. They found many similarities and felt familiar with each other. It was an act of empathetic identification, which Kester argues is a risk for the possibility of negation of the specific identity,²¹ but the “empathy” we might have felt was that we are all “unique.”

However, there was also room for improvement.²² For example, about “Discursive Determinism,” as Kester mentioned, the conversations and opinions could be limited. The workshop was private, so it was not supported financially by any institution except GSA, which provided the place, so no one was controlled regarding their comments or behavior. However, it is possible that there was a power relationship because I joined as a host and might ignore or reject any negative feelings toward disability. I never accepted discrimination toward people with disabilities, but I understand some people experience fear or danger due to disability. To open the workshop as a place for completely free conversation, it was necessary to accept these opposite opinions and invite people who had negative feelings due to proper reasons.

15 Stephen Duncombe, ‘Does It Work? The Effect of Activist Art’, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Social Research, Vol. 83.No. 1, THE FEAR OF ART (2016), p121.

16 Stephen Duncombe, ‘Does It Work? The Effect of Activist Art’, p121.

17 Stephen Duncombe, ‘Does It Work? The Effect of Activist Art’, p121.

18 Stephen Duncombe, ‘Does It Work? The Effect of Activist Art’, p121.

19 Stephen Duncombe, ‘Does It Work? The Effect of Activist Art’, p122.

20 Stephen Duncombe, ‘Does It Work? The Effect of Activist Art’, p122.

21 Kester, ‘Dialogical Aesthetics: A Critical Framework For Littoral Art’.

22 Kester, ‘Dialogical Aesthetics: A Critical Framework For Littoral Art’.

Conclusion



Fig.11: Momo Nomizo, We Are All Different Potatoes, Front Cover, 17 April 2025, ZINE, 12cm x 25cm

Fig.13: Momo Nomizo, We Are All Different Potatoes, Pages from Information Part, 17 April 2025, ZINE, 12cm x 25cm

Fig.12: Momo Nomizo, We Are All Different Potatoes, Pages from an Introduction Part, 17 April 2025, ZINE, 12cm x 25cm

Fig.14: Momo Nomizo, We Are All Different Potatoes, Pages from Eating Part, 17 April 2025, ZINE, 12cm x 25cm

I also need to care about continuing the workshop.²³ The workshop contributed to changing the participants' minds, but it cannot be temporary. To remind them of their experience and change their thoughts, I created a zine as an archive. (Fig.11) (Fig.12)(Fig.13)(Fig.14) I surveyed privacy issues to protect their privacy, and the zine was created based on it and limited in the physical format. Thus, the number of people who can see it is limited, but it also works as a promotion for the next workshop. My workshop succeeded in making the participants feel familiar with people with disabilities and building better relationships between them; however, it was a tiny step toward social change. I hope the workshop will continue dealing with more practical issues in communication, as well as expand healthier and helpful relationships with people with disabilities.

²³ Yoshiyuki, 'ソーシャリー・エンゲイジド・アートにおける「参加」概念とその内実', p. 28.

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Appendices

1. "We are all different potatoes" printed ZINE (Scanned PDF file)

Thank you!