

**Doing, Being and Becoming more
Active through Taking Part in
Community-based Museum Scenarios**

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The idea that museums need to be more responsive to their communities has been raised from various angles including regulation of corporate social responsibility (Janes & Conatus, 2005), and the upheaval in the politics of knowledge which has resulted in greater stakeholder participation through online technology (Knell, 2007). Many people are more able to access information, express their opinions, and organise community-cultural activities online. If we accept the view that, “Culture involves the myriad ways in which people relate to their world” (Sutter & Worts, 2005, 130-131), then there seem to be increasing modalities through which people may spontaneously engage with their local, regional, national and even international current affairs. Educational programs facilitate people’s acquisition of technology and build their capacity to use technology to their own ends. At the community level, there has been a growth in organisations that participate in “culture” and Glenn Sutter and Douglas Worts have suggested that museums could be “active facilitators of social change at the local and regional level,” and argue that, “society needs therapy.” The concept of museums taking an active role in mediating social action was raised as early as 1996, in UNESCO’s *Our Creative Diversity: Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development*:

Museums need to broaden their roles. Particularly in cities, they need to represent the knowledge, experiences and practice of all those who contribute to the human dimension of the city, to promote the involvement of the entire community in policy and operations, recognizing that their working assets are not just

their collections but the total patrimony, whether tangible or intangible of the territory concerned. Few are equipped to deal with the socio-political aspects of culture and development. To do so would require involving disciplines of the human sciences as well as building a new institutional base.

Incremental shifts in the role of museums have occurred through broadening practice to incorporate more participatory social action through the use of creative media, interactive play and games, both online and within museum facilities. This new direction in policy and practice raises new ethical dilemmas through inviting critical reflection and a range of interpretations people of diverse backgrounds. This requires new conceptual foundations, suggesting the need for involvement of therapists, counsellors, multimedia designers, educators, cultural advisors and creative arts practitioners to facilitate the encounters. This chapter explores the contentious shift in paradigms which increasingly implicates museums in taking on social responsibility for promoting the health and well-being of society.

Background: literature review

At first glance, the link between museum practice, occupational therapy, and community cultural development may be difficult to grasp – but the common factor in employing active creative play in various situations is the use of the hands. In 1962, Mary Reilly stated that, “Man through the use of his hands, as they are energized by mind and will,

can influence the state of his own health.” This represented foundational thinking in Occupational Therapy practice in the USA and UK immediately following World War I. Adolf Meyer, a psychiatrist and pioneer of occupational therapy philosophy, described how therapists could assist people to balance the time they spent in daily living tasks, work, rest and play, and using creative activities to assist in mental health adjustment (Meyer 1922 reprint, 1977). There have been many others who have influenced the development of theoretical foundations for hands-on, participatory approaches. Action learning philosophies were espoused by Friedrich Fröbel, founder of the kindergarten movement in Germany in 1840, followed by the progressive education precepts of John Dewey, Rudolf Steiner, and Maria Montessori. Eric Erickson (1982) described development stages that guided people’s involvement in various occupations throughout their lifespan. Psychiatrist, Mihály Csíkszentmihályi (1996) wrote about how play occurs in a state of “flow” with an optimal balance between challenge and opportunity. These theories inform discussions about why people’s involvement in play and hands-on learning is important for facilitating public participation and community engagement. Going one step further, I would argue that people’s active use of their hands is critical to achieving social agency which benefits communities (Kirkwood, 2010).

There has been a gradual transition from therapists and teachers facilitating the creative activity of individuals in hospitals, community health centres and schools, to broader health promotion and community-based rehabilitation led by

local community groups (Kronenberg et al., 2005). Therapists are increasingly being asked to advocate for social inclusion of people from target equity groups (Dhillon et al., 2010) and to assist in community recovery after disasters (Kendall et al., 2009). This revolution in the way that human services are delivered at the societal rather than individual level has an economic rationale, related to the increasing proportion of people who are aged, and the lack of capacity for human service workers to sustain individualised home visits. Florence Baum describes how *The New Public Health* (2008) can implicate and involve every sector in developing policy and taking social action to promote the health and well-being of particular population groups and society at large.

There is potential for exploring how museums can contribute to social action through community outreach responses. The Queensland Government (2009) Local Government Act provides legislative impetus for facilitating community engagement, based on regional social planning. In reality, however, community organisations express concern about their ability to respond to the needs of communities due to limited availability of infrastructure and resources for community cultural development.

As an occupational therapist and ethnomusicologist who works in museum settings, I am interested to explore cross-disciplinary approaches – especially how people use their hands.

Case study: Piano ethnography

David Sudnow outlined a view of human agency in *Talk's Body* (1978) and *Ways of the Hand* (2001), books which present a phenomenology of jazz piano improvisation, described as “a study of how our bodies gain their grasp of the world.” Sudnow states that his writing follows on from Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of embodiment in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962), and Harold Garfinkel’s (1967) sociological theory of “ethnomethodology.” The central view is that hands are the tools that are most used by people who wish to understand and change the state of their world. I applied this idea to actually enacting a piano ethnography through *Telling my Indigenous Piano Story*, a presentation that I gave at an autoethnography symposium held at Queensland Conservatorium, conducted by Brydie Bartleet with internationally renowned guest speaker, Carolyn Ellis (Bartleet & Ellis, 2009). My piano performance on stage, demonstrates a method of reflection on cross-cultural activities which I have termed “ethnomusicking” (Kirkwood 2009). I told a story about my fieldwork experiences in the Purga Music Museum while I played the piano. The narrative augmented the way that I improvised because I was more able to express emotions in music that closely matched my verbal account. After introducing the story, I played *Bagatelle No 5, Threnody*, composed by Carl Vine (1994), and then my hands easily followed on with improvisations in the same style. I also played quotation of excerpts of music that visitors had played on a historic piano in the music museum, such as *Amazing Grace*, and finished with an improvised solo on the

kazoo that I had performed around a campfire. Sudnow (2001, p. xix) writes: “There is so much in common between ordinary speaking and musical improvisation...” “I would add that the two go hand-in-hand.” My autoethnographical reflection was greatly enhanced by having performed for an audience on the concert stage – an arena that is usually reserved for the most elite concert performers. I felt that it gave me a voice in public, which is another form of social agency in addition to using the hands.

Person-Environment-Occupation model

It is within this context of participatory social action that I introduce the Person-Environment-Occupation (P-E-O) Model which was expounded by Mary Law and colleagues (1996), in relation to occupational therapists supporting people with a disability to make important changes in their lives to enable them to be more self-reliant. The P-E-O model provides a structure for analysing the interplay between people, their transactions with the environment, and their everyday occupation. The therapist acts as a facilitator to help people develop a plan for maximising environmental and social supports to allow them to function better in their chosen occupational role. *Occupation* in this model is understood as the ways that people choose to spend their time in recreation, work and rest, not just earning a living.

Case study: Fish’n’Sing - social oceanography

While the P-E-O model has been applied mostly by therapists

working with individual clients in health or rehabilitation facilities (Strong et al., 1999), it has potential for broader application to museum-facilitated community development outreach. The model can be applied to a range of livelihoods or scenarios that can be played out in a centre or at external venues. In 2009, I piloted a virtual Fish'n'Sing program which was aimed at promoting social inclusion, ethnomusicking, safeguarding traditional musics, and supporting public health agendas, such as environmental protection and healthy lifestyles. The Music Museum can operate in the twilight zone between various disciplines because it has flexible borders that can shift according to the identified needs of communities. I considered the aspirations of community members that had been expressed through focus groups during the development of a Music Action Plan for rural Ipswich (Kirkwood, 2009). This also interfaced with broader social planning (Ipswich City Council, 2007).

The P-E-O model was used as a structure for planning the transactions between people, environment and occupational roles so the activities were meaningful and appropriate to the social and cultural milieu. The notion of occupational performance incorporates “being, doing and becoming” throughout the whole lifespan of a person or community, so cross-generational interaction was also an important consideration when developing participatory social action so it benefits and does not exclude particular community members (Wilcock, 1999). The capacity for occupational performance through singing was played out through supporting people to

become players in an imaginary virtual scenario. I explained to members of our email group on April 18:

...We are planning a Fish'n'sing event for next Sunday on the Gold Coast... If you are not in the area, please feel free to contribute to discussions about music and fishing, or suggestions for antiphonal singing and rounds across the creek. We are debating what sonic environment is best for fishing. Any thoughts? Any suggestions or suitable sea shantys and the like? Maybe fish prefer the sounds of silence...

The relationship between people, marine environments, and sea creatures has been studied through social oceanography research. Various movies depict people singing songs that relate to human interaction with sea creatures, but there has been little investigation of this phenomenon. I looked online for examples of songs that are associated with fishing in contemporary Australian society, and also sought to understand the connection between song and local traditional Aboriginal fishing practices. The aim was to post useful information on our website as a stimulus to widen participation in the brain-storming exercise.

The ideas suggested by members of the email group were quite remarkable. Jenny Lavett, a Music Therapist from Canberra (e-mail April 19) wrote:

...what comes to mind is What Shall we Do with a Drunken Sailor, on the chords of D minor and C major, or just the bass note of "D" and "C;" with "D" Dorian [mode] improvisation against it - ie. any notes in "D" to "D" octave on the piano or

xylophones, glockenspiels, guitars etc. It can be very energizing and if you make up your own verses spontaneously creative and hilarious....

Alexis Fitzgerald, the Director of the Esk Community Choir, replied in an email (April 19):

*Sorry I can't join you - fishing and singing sounds just great!
This is my offering - TONGUE TWISTERS! ADD YOUR OWN MELODY!!*

Four fat frogs fishing for frightened fish.

Ingenious Iguanas improvising an intricate impromptu on impossibly impractical instruments...

Dr Anne Berry, cellist and music educator, emailed (April 19), memories of a song from an eisteddfod many years ago:

If I was a frog, I'd hop and hop, all over the world, I never would stop

Or I'd sit in a stream and swim about and no one would tell me I had to get out...

Br Bart Seaton SSF, suggested a Celtic sea shanty known as a "health":

Here's a health to the company and one to the past

Let's drink and be merry all out of one glass!

Let's drink and be merry all grief to refrain

For we may, or might never all meet here again!...

All the suggestions for the Fish'n'Sing program were compiled

into an album that was offered to members of the Music Health Australia email group, and a copy made available for Music Museum outreach.

In analysing the Fish'n'Sing occupation in the online context with the P-E-O model, it became evident that place was not the most significant factor; the suggested techniques could have been used anywhere. The choices of repertoire were, however, personal and connected to people's past experiences and their current musical preferences. There was some interchange of ideas and playful interaction between people suggesting innovative tongue twisters, fun songs, and accompaniment methods to improve performance. No one suggested any particular methods for catching fish; and this may relate to the traditional separation between classroom/studio music classes and real-life occupational tasks. Singing while working appears to be diminishing, and radio music is more usual in work environments than new musical creations.

It is conceivable that online creative collaboration may help to reinvigorate interest in traditional Aboriginal or European practices of singing while fishing, but the long-term outcomes are not yet known. We are not aware of how many people actually went on a Fish'n'Sing, because the 84 participants in the email group were spread across Australia. Further research is required to determine if there would be transfer of skills from playful online participation, to responding hands-on, to environmental issues in particular places. There is potential for new songs to be generated by participants to meet particular objectives in land and sea care, but this concern did

not arise in our brief email discussions. The responses appear to reflect the ages, lifestyle, musical and cultural background of participants. It appears from this brief reflection on practice that the P-E-O model has useful application to assessing, planning, designing and evaluating music museum outreach programs.

Conclusions

The findings from participatory action research and literature review support the view that community-based museums have the potential to become more engaged with social action that benefits communities if they are prepared to work across professional borders and invite assistance from community members and non-traditional museum practitioners. New conceptual foundations have been suggested for hands-on improvisation of piano ethnography. The Person-Environment-Occupation model has been usefully applied to reflection on practice for the Fish'n'Sing music museum outreach program. It appears that both centre-based, community outreach, and virtual experiences may be useful for stimulating brainstorming, but it is argued that active hands-on participation is an essential ingredient to real or imagined scenarios in which people learn to understand and manipulate their environment.

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