Making the Invisible Visible: Telling Tales of Participatory Arts Engagement

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Participatory arts practice facilitates participation in creative processes amongst people who might otherwise be unlikely to become involved in the arts (Lowe, 2012). Participatory arts organizations increasingly use technology to document how participants experience engagement with the arts. However, when working with sensitive issues such as mental health, this can create emotive, ethical and logistical challenges relating to how creative experiences are documented and shared over time (Clarke, et al., 2014).

We present insights from a project exploring how digital technology might support the documentation of long-term participatory arts engagement (Hook, et al., 2015). In collaboration with a participatory arts organization, we explored how technology might *make visible* people's experiences of participatory arts engagement, and the transformations in attitude and outlook that can result from them. We discuss how the arts organization's initial expectation of technology being able to capture transformational experiences of participation were refocused to the importance of meaning making through situated annotation, curation and storytelling. In doing so, we highlight the crucial role that the project support worker played in making sense of workshop experiences and sharing potential meanings across different stakeholders.

Our findings reveal practical challenges resulting from situating technology-mediated documentation within the practices of participatory arts stakeholders, which relate to scarcity of time and financial resources. We conclude by asking how digital storytelling tools might be leveraged to balance the time required to engage with documentation with levels of curatorial control and, in turn, make technology-mediated documentation a realistic proposition for participatory arts stakeholders.

References

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