

## AHRC funded PhD Studentship in D/disability Studies / Cultural Studies

### Project Summary:

'D/disability and Community: Dis/engagement, dis/enfranchisement, dis/parity and dissent' - aka the 'D4D project'

Connected Communities Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Large Grant (£1.5million).

This project constitutes part of the AHRC Connected Communities Programme (See Connection/Disconnection strand). This programme is innovative in the inclusion of community partners as Co-Investigators with equal status. The programme focuses on the place of people in communities. For information about the Connected Communities programme, see:

<http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/documents/publications/connected-communities-brochure/>

and

<https://connected-communities.org/index.php/about/>

The D4D project will involve the universities of Bath Spa, UCL, Manchester Metropolitan, Bristol Robotics Laboratory based at UWE, and Liverpool Hope. Also involved are community partners, including Accentuate, Screen South, Disability Arts Online, Shape Arts, DadaFest, National Disability Arts Collection and Archive, the New Vic Theatre in Stoke, the Misfits theatre company, and West of England Centre for Inclusive Living, along with campaign organisations, grassroots groups, syndrome specific support groups, charities and other stakeholders such as Action on Disability and Work and Designability.

The project will explore multiple issues around the theme of D/disability and community. It will work across the spectrum of D/disability, involving close collaboration between researchers, participants, research partners and stakeholder organisations. D4D will seek to enhance agency and challenge discriminatory and excluding practices.

Through its work-streams, the project will seek to inform policy and practice, and participant co-researchers and the research team aim to challenge current perceptions of D/disability and to introduce new discourses in the field.

### D4D WORKSTREAMS

**WORKSTREAM 1. *Now You See Us*** – (led by Levinson, Moffat, with input from Burke, Caleb-Solly and Community partner, Action on Disability and Work UK) - This stream will explore issues of integration and marginalization, focusing on two settings: mainstream schools and the work-place. Inquiry will explore lived experience of 'inclusion', looking at issues of participation, visibility / invisibility, resilience and resistance of disabled adults and young people in these contexts. The

research will consider the ambiguous relationships between inclusion and exclusion through ethnographic studies, and investigate ways of promoting agency and integration through creative expression. This will involve the facilitation of a series of Cultural Animation workshops in which participants will explore modes of creative expression (drama, poetry, photography, performance) with practitioners. A further element of this workstream will be run by Burke in youth clubs. Burke's exploration of play and space will form a bridge to workstream 2 in particular. Outputs from workstream 1 will include a co-curated exhibition.

**WORKSTREAM 2. *Catch me if you can – Participating through Play*** – (led by Caleb-Solly, with input from Levinson, Porter, Carr and Adlam, and partners, Designability) - While technological interventions in the lives of disabled children are standard practice in applied fields, there is very little research conducted into the ways in which technology and play might combine to impact on or facilitate experiences of social belonging. By observing playful activities of young disabled children using a 'Wizzybug' (an early powered mobility device designed by Designability to have a toy-like appearance), and their interactions with disabled and non-disabled peers, the degree to which new technologies can support play, social belonging and engagement will be explored. Moreover, methods for capturing and communicating the lived and emotional experiences of young children with disabilities, and their families, in a creative and collaborative manner, will be developed, and the role of new technologies in supporting research with non-conventional participants, will be explored.

**WORKSTREAM 3. *Electric Bodies*** – (led by community leaders Sutherland and Hambrook, with input from Fox, Carr and Levinson and community partner, Disability Arts Online) - In this stream the team will examine the origins, development and future of the Disability Arts community. In common with other 'identity politics' movements within the arts in the 70s and 80s, this community originally formed to resist exclusion and fight discrimination. At present, the evident contributions of this community (in terms of its role in supporting artists with disabilities, via online resources and funding streams, for example) are being increasingly problematized by the sense of limitation or confinement that has come to be associated with issue-led, identity-driven arts practice. These tensions within the D/disability arts community are frequently perceived as generational. They manifest as debates about labels and affiliation, loyalty, professionalism and credibility. This stream will explore these developments, debate the future of this community, and express its narratives through film and poetry. Outputs will include poems, performances and animation.

**WORKSTREAM 4. *Speaking from the body*** – (led by Porter, with input from Fox, Carr, Levinson and Community partners) - This stream contributes to the project's creative and playful exploration of the conceptualisation of community. The research will explore how participants form, experience and express alternative community, and how they manage their (dis)placement and disqualification by mainstream society. Creating new forms of *Connective Ethnographies* we will build understandings of how community is performed and co-constructed; how D/disability is experienced temporally and in relation to place; developing narratives of exclusion

of and within D/disability community. *Speaking from the body* unflinchingly addresses loss and belonging: embodied activities of making/crafting, walking, movement, and clowning are used to support reframing, solidarity, and agency. Misfits Theatre, West of England Centre for Inclusive Living and Arts for Health are partners in this stream.

**WORKSTREAM 5: *Institutionalised, Homogenised, Vaporised: The Disability Community Past, Present and Future*** - (led by community CI Fox with input from Carr, Caleb-Solly, Porter and Moffat) - This stream will explore the past, present and future ramifications of the categorisation, segregation and devaluation of disabled people. Arts based research will be combined with theory and play to debate histories of medicalization and institutionalization (see also Workstream 6), including the production of an interactive installation, 'Evolution' - a playful interactive platform based on genetic algorithms that will allow for public explorations of the implications and ethics of genetic screening. Publically exhibited, Evolution (designed by Fox and Caleb-Solly) will ask its players to consider the impact of genetic "interventions" on the disabled community. Workstream 5 is designed to impact on policy and practice in relation to medical ethics, and to support the critical engagement of D/disability communities with research in clinical discourse and public debate.

*Due to the sudden death of Dr Sue Porter, it is highly unlikely that this work-stream will be able to continue in its current form. The D4D team will review the options in the coming months.*

**WORKSTREAM 6: *Playful Bodies, Technology and Community*** - (led by Carr, with Fox, Porter, Levinson, with community partners Accentuate and Disability Arts Online) - Building on the project themes of embodiment, play, performance and agency (and in dialogue with workstream 4 and 5 in particular) this work stream will address historical and contemporary relationships between emerging technologies, associated social practices, and the body. Using audience and player studies approaches, mainstream representations of D/disability and technology will be interrogated and D/disability communities' critical perspectives on mainstream popular culture will be explored. One element of this workstream will focus specifically on social media and online community affiliation (conducted in partnership with Disability Arts Online, and feeding back into workstream 3). Collaborative game design, and public play (in partnership with Accentuate) will be used to explore histories of technology, social practices and disabled communities. This work will draw on games studies literature informed by Boal's work on politicised theatre (e.g. Frasca 2001).

**WORKSTREAM 7. *Ethics, reflection and learning for participation*** (led by Porter, with Levinson, and Brydon-Miller) with participation of all Co-Investigators. This work will inform all the above activities and support the practices and professional development of all those taking part. Drawing upon Brydon-Miller's work on ethical reflection in the context of community-based research (2008; 2009) and recent collaborations with the Centre for Social Justice and Community Action at Durham University, we build upon the notion of covenantal ethics,

**WORKSTREAM 8 *Integration, dialogue and iteration*** (led by Levinson, with whole team involvement). This workstream will run alongside workstreams 1-6 and is expressly aimed at ensuring integration, dialogue and development across all the activities, and facilitating community feedback, critique and ongoing evaluation. The stream will provide a forum for skill sharing and knowledge exchange (within the project and across the Connected Communities community). The work will take the form of regular workshops and meetings that will be documented through the project website.

#### FURTHER INFORMATION

The studentship has been set up with the intention of capacity-building. The student will be uniquely positioned to work across the team, working with academic and non-academic team members in line with the AHRC and Connected Community model of flexible, creative, community-facing research.

The student will be given wider support through access to methodological initiatives and events occurring across the universities involved in this project. For instance, the South West Doctoral Training Centre has recently been awarded ESRC funding for creative research methods workshops drawn from visual, arts-based, performative and narrative forms. The student will be encouraged to attend such events to develop research skills.

The student will be embedded in the project through attendance at the events and at team meetings, etc., so will have the opportunity to gain a full understanding of the wider D4D project, and this process will begin prior to the student committing to a specific topic. The student will also be given the opportunity to meet other community partners involved in the project, and build relationships that will ensure better support from practitioners.

The student's project will stand independently from the project, but it will also provide in-depth insights to at least one of the work-streams. The student will further contribute to the project through the networks that she/he establishes and the consequent deepening of trust with particular agencies/organisations.

The student will have access to all the research approaches that are being utilised across the project, and be encouraged during the early phases of research to engage with at least one of the less conventional approaches. As well as being of huge potential benefit to the future career of a new academic, this process will benefit the project through providing insights into the issues raised for less experienced researchers through the use of particular methods. Of specific interest to the research team, are the considerations that emerge in the blending of methods and the use of unconventional / 'non-academic' approaches.

The context of the project will provide valuable training and career development for the student involved; and, though we are not dependent upon this in the context of our project output, we hope to be able to publish work produced by the student.

The student will also remain in close contact with the ARF (Associate Research Fellow), contributing material derived from her/his work to the database as

appropriate, and benefiting from the ARF's findings. (S)he will also be involved in discussions of methodological and theoretical questions from the start.

In line with support and supervision recommendations in the Institute for Education at Bath Spa University, student and first supervisor will meet fortnightly in the early stages of the project, then at least monthly; training needs assessed at outset and regularly reviewed; additional advice and support provided by a mentor; initial training in research methodology; further training offered through a research skills development programme. Progress is monitored by termly reports agreed by student and supervisors and by the University's Annual Monitoring process.

The student will also have the opportunity to participate in the Graduate Teaching Assistant Scheme. We would also review the student's development of wider employment-related skills, and support him/her in pursuing appropriate training (including, if appropriate, in digital methods). Given the rigorously collaborative nature of this project, we will also explore the possibility, if appropriate, of the student spending an extended period based at a partner organisation.

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The student will be expected to contribute to a series of interactive workshops as part of the D4D project', so will have the opportunity to gain a full understanding of the wider D4D project, and this process will begin prior to the student committing to a specific topic

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Given the rigorously collaborative nature of this project, as suggested above, we will also explore the possibility, if appropriate, of the student spending an extended period (c.3 months) based at a partner university, working closely with a third academic supervisor.