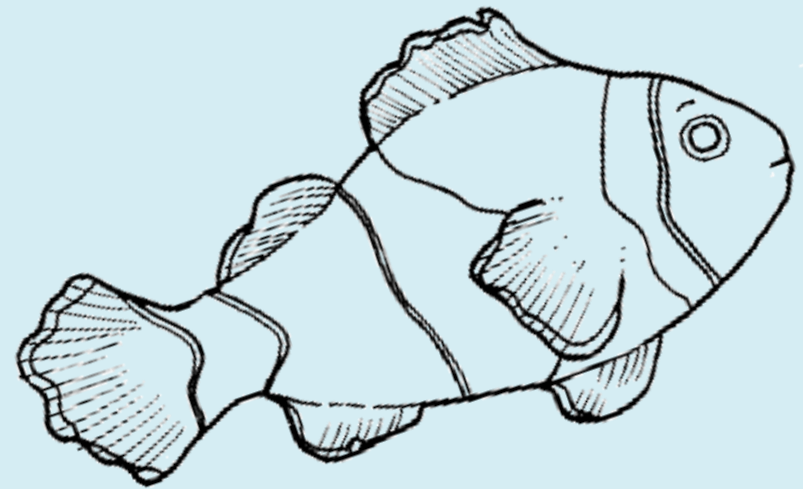
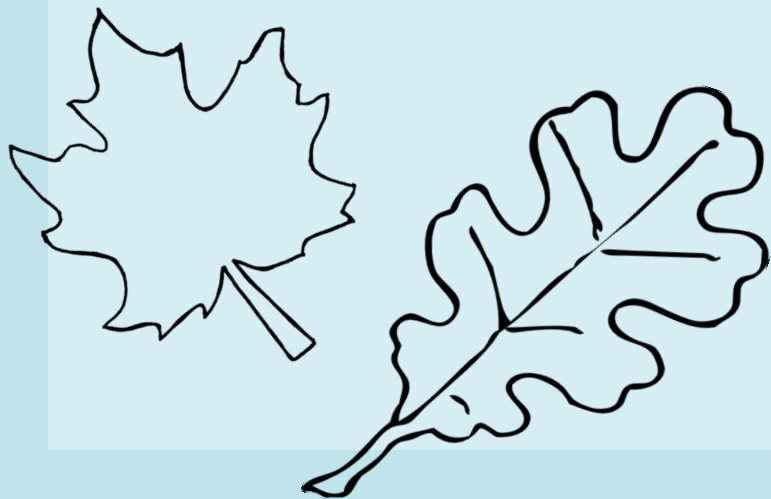


The Body Matters Project

Creative Workshops





Introduction

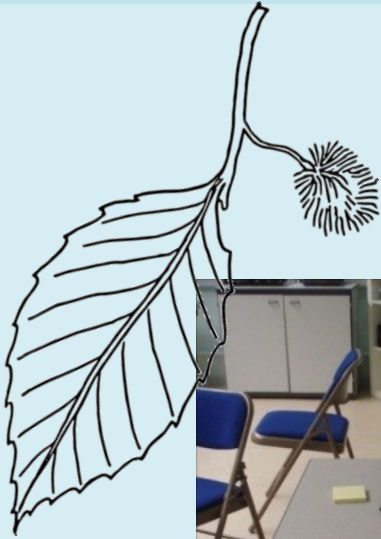
On the 19th of November we held a workshop as part of the Research Project, 'Embodied Selves in Transition: Disabled Young Bodies'. This was a follow up to an initial workshop we had held in October.

Present were Janice McLaughlin, Ed Coleman-Fountain and Jayne Wallace and two participants from the project. Together across the day we made jewellery to explore themes of the project.

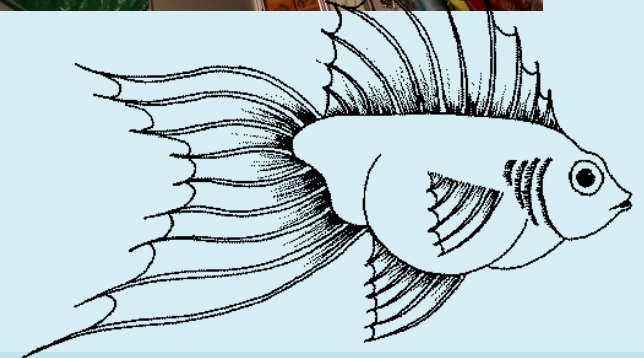
This is a summary of what we did together and achieved.



SETTING UP THE ROOM



The purpose was to explore things that were important to the participants – to say something about themselves and to use jewellery as a form of object that can hold meanings that are placed on the body – connected to the body.



Introduction to Workshop 2

Janice gave an introduction to the session by talking about what had been explored in the first workshop and how it fitted into project.

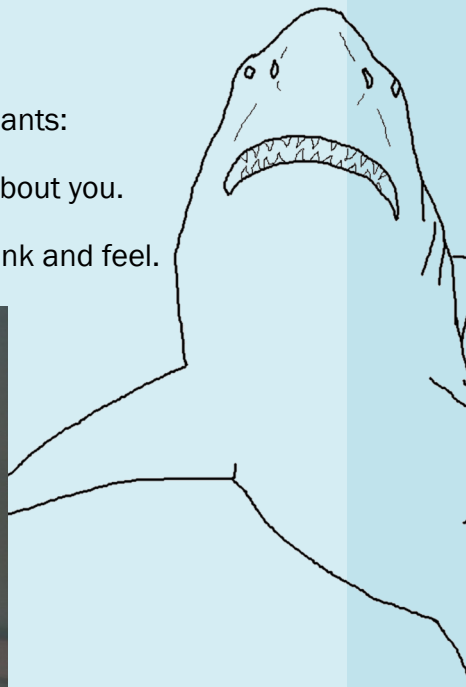
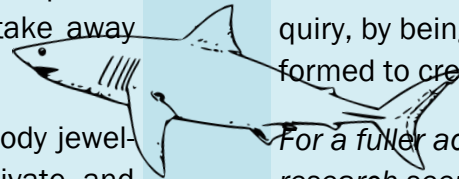
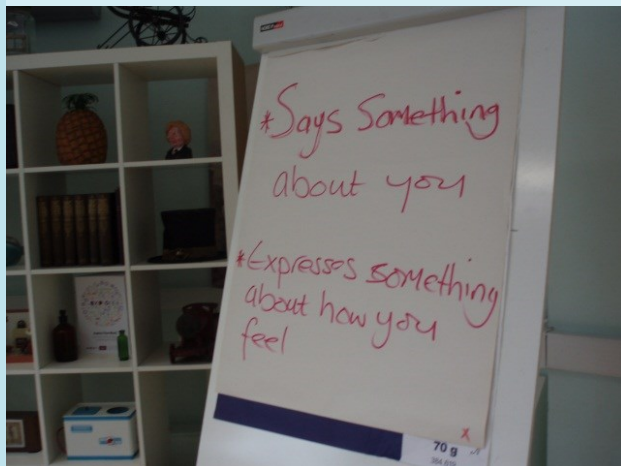
Laser cuts on leather of the drawings each participant had made in the first workshop were given to participants along with shrunk plastic forms of these same images that the participants could take away and use as a key-ring fob or other purpose.

Jayne prompted participants to think about where on the body jewellery is worn, how it both display and also hold something private, and the meaning of jewellery (i.e. how jewellery is worn, is it worn to be exhibited, or as a private reflection on relationships, memories etc.)

Aims

Aims of the day were agreed with the participants:

- I. Make something that says something about you.
- II. Something that represents what you think and feel.



Jayne's Work

Jayne gave an account of previous work she has done, using her work with a couple, one of whom was diagnosed as having early stages of dementia.

This was used to reflect on how objects can be used as a mode of enquiry, by being probes of memories, and how they may be transformed to create something that embodies those memories.

For a fuller account of the roles that these objects performed in the research see:

http://www.digitaljewellery.com/jaynewallace/personhood_in_dementia.html.



Making (Part 1)

First off with a demonstration of the shrink plastic.



Objects and Meanings

Participants were asked to show what they had brought with them. One had brought a *skull medallion from an old necklace*, a *broken chain* and a *necklace with blue beads*; the other had brought several items of old jewellery that had roses on them. The reasons for bringing them were because of what the skull, blue beads and roses represented: pain, strength, impairment, support, appearance, beauty.

They both wanted to refashion them, so that they could create something that represented how they saw themselves, and what they think and feel. One wanted to create something that said 'no more pain'.

Working Practices

Participants were asked how they wanted to work, they agreed on working individually, on what they had decided to do. Janice and Jayne become *participant-assistants* working closely with one participant throughout. This one-to-one assistance was necessary as the making was collaborative, with participants requiring a degree of help with cutting, tracing, and shrinking plastic. The dynamic between assistants and participants helped create a dialogue between each pair that created new insight about what lay behind the objects being created.

At times participants apologised for not being able to do certain things. It was stressed this was OK and the assistants' role were to help, however it did raise issues about using materials/techniques which would push their abilities. The role of the assistants in helping do things practically also helped them to develop what the pieces could be – it's difficult for anyone, even a designer, to come up with an idea of something to make. This is especially so when it is something that reflects aspects of identity and complex notions around pain, strength, support etc. It is one thing to identify these as personally important issues and quite another to translate that into a physical form that represents these things.

The assistants talked with the participants about the *meanings behind the objects* that they had brought and how this related to the physical properties of them. In teasing this out they talked about how things like the blue of the eyes, the rebelliousness of the skull, the shape of the rose, the layers of petals, and the sharpness of the thorns represented different things for them. These became starting points to enquire around these a little bit more and to start to think of how these physical properties could be used in a piece of jewellery.



Seeing, Touching, Feeling

One participant reflected on the way things look and feel to her, she spoke of how lines were sometimes invisible to her due to perception difficulties she had (with implications for the making work). She said her glasses (with blue tinted lenses) helped her see more 'normally'.

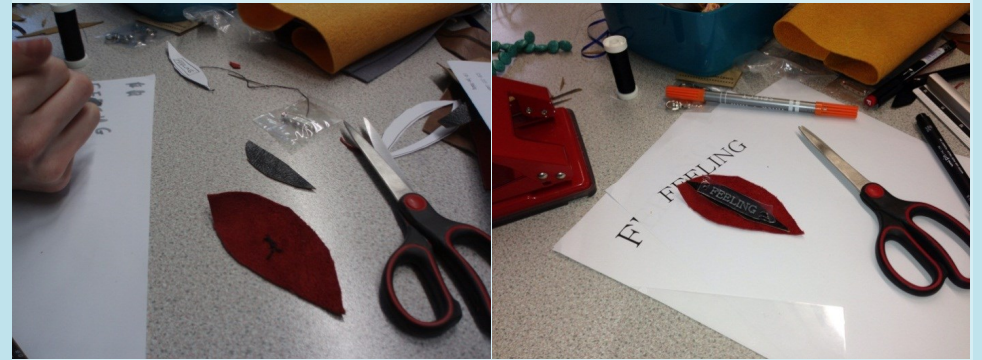
She discussed how the difficulties were inherited. She did not realise how she saw the world differently to other people, until she started to wear the glasses. Now she does not take the glasses off because of the difference they make in seeing the world, more like others. She talked about how pavements and roads appear to be curved, or at a skewed angle to her and was surprised at the difference when she started to wear the glasses – she asked her Dad if the streets had always looked like that when they were in town together and when he said yes she was surprised as it had always appeared differently to her before. Jayne said it could be seen as a special ability she had to see the world differently to other people when not wearing glasses and then she could choose to see it as other people do by wearing the glasses, but she said it didn't feel very special, just a frustrating thing.

The participant also linked this to feelings of pain and recalled the ice image from the first workshop and how it resonated with her experience of pain, as something that comes, and then slowly goes away.



The Feeling Badge

The badge was constructed from red felt, black leather and shrink plastic with the word 'feeling' copied on in silver ink. Janice found a font that the participant was happy with and printed this out – the participant copied it onto the plastic by hand.



The use of black and red reflected her favourite *colours*

The word 'feeling' indicated the significance of *feeling* and *touch*.

The red felt black leather were selected as materials and *textures* that she liked the feel of.

The fabric was cut in the shape of a tear to symbolise experiences of *pain* and *sadness*.



Strength, Support, Selfhood

Working with the other participant, Jayne made use of the various rose materials that were brought along.

The roses were seen as symbolic of strength (due to its thorns and hardness); support (the stem and the leaves nurture the plant); and the complexity of the self (a rose flower has layers, suggesting all the different things that come to make somebody).

The participant had the idea of using lots of little pieces to represent something about herself.



The result was two pieces of jewellery that capture themes of:

Pain and feeling; family and support; memory; self and identity; and the body in tribute.



Memory Rose

One such piece was intended as a tribute to her father, which was done through the repairing of an old bracelet which he had bought her from Sea-World (it was a bracelet with a collection of starfish, turtles and seahorses).

The work involved taking of bits of the bracelet to make it fit, and adding in a rose made from shrink plastic, and copied from a photograph of a ring she had taken along with her.

Making (Part 2)

The Rose and the Skull

Following the first round of making, Jayne, Janice and the two participants moved on to the production of much larger items.

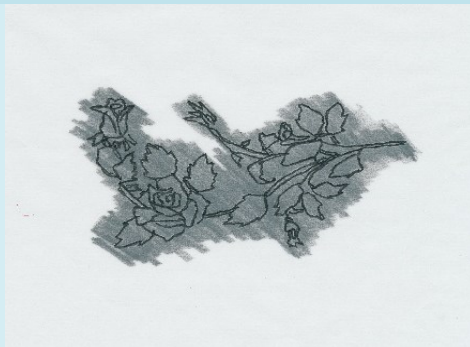
This time, two bracelets built around the two symbols the participants had focused on in the first workshops, *the skull* and *the rose*.

These were used as powerful representations of their own perceptions of disabled young people:

The rose as a symbol of strength

The skull as a symbol of morbidity and defiance

THE ROSE



The idea for the rose bracelet was well defined. The participant had the idea that the fabric rose, which was cut from an old badge would be at the top of the bracelet and would represent her, it would be supported by a variety of leaves, printed from the internet and selected to represent a member of her family.

This involved a long period of texting back and forward to her mother to find out which flowers would best represent who. It was interesting that the participant chose to create a traditional representation of beauty – the rose – flowers albeit using this alongside the notion of thorns - and

THE SKULL



Participant two made two pieces that were more spiky – sharpened tear shape, sharks and piranhas with teeth exposed and dripping with blood – her emphasis was on strength in a different way to the first participant. The skulls related to forms that jewellery takes and she was aware they represented rebellion and defiance and wanted to work with these.

She made something that she said wouldn't be for wearing, but for hanging in her room – which itself is an interesting comment – it was something she felt was fit to be displayed in her own space – it represented something about her enough for her to give it this role.

Making the Rose Bracelet

The leaves included the leaves of lilies, sweet peas, acorn, thistles, oak, orchid, wisteria, sunflowers, hops, holly, and other plants alongside two four leaf clovers to represent the children of her grandparents.



These images were printed, and drawn by hand onto tracing paper by Jayne but in consultation with the participant, the participant then copied the tracings on to shrink plastic in black OHP pen.

The participant was a little anxious about the quality of her tracing, however, she was really pleased when she saw the resulting shrunk drawing which was a much tighter and well defined line drawing. She expressed pleasure in having made a drawing that looked so good saying that this never usually happened.



Making the Skull Bracelet

The bracelet was to be made from the old chain, skull medallion, and blue beads that the participant had taken along. These were going to be added to with fish made from shrink plastic. The fish were chosen to reflect different themes:

The shark and piranha fish: strength, violence and pain

The rainbow fish and the tropical fish: calmness, absence of pain and beauty

The fish also linked back to scuba diving with her father. What she remembered about this was that in the water she felt at ease, having her body supported by the water and being surrounded by lots of beautiful fish. Alongside the morbidity of the skull, this captured different shades of light and dark.

The different objects (fish, skull, blue beads) captured the different experiences she had of disability:

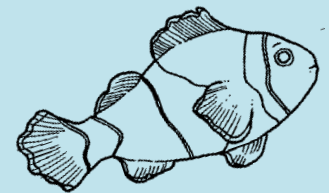
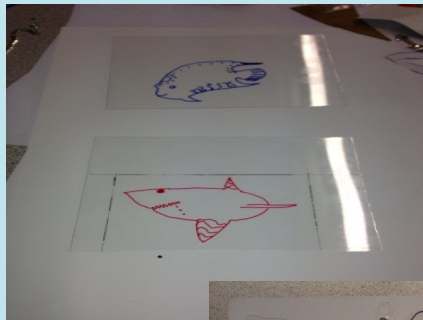
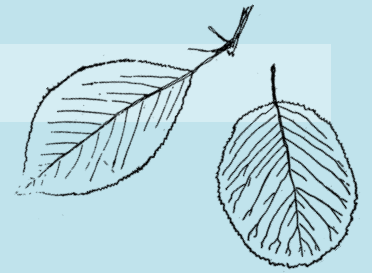
- Of pain and the sudden absence of pain (the skull, fish);
- Her visual impairment and view of the world (the blue beads);
- The dark humour she had developed as a method of coping with pain (represented by the skull and use of sharks and piranhas);
- Memory and relationships (the fish of scuba diving with her father, the skull she received from her boyfriend);
- The challenges she has faced and her resilience (the bracelet was to represent 'no more pain').

As with the other bracelet, the process involved selecting images from the internet, printing, copying, and tracing onto shrink plastic.



Making the Bracelets

Once the images had been copied onto the shrink plastic, these were then cut out and shrunk down to size. Participants and assistants found the heat gun a tricky process, which involved several goes to get right. There was a level of trust between assistant and participant in doing this with the heat gun. Assistants hands were in the line of fire as it were and conversations between both people when going through this process were interesting. The 'one chance only', potential burn hazard and speed in which the shrinking occurred brought a sense of jeopardy to the whole process. And in having to remake drawings that curled up and stuck to themselves in the shrink process there was a further level of 'it must work this time' about the engagements. All of these dynamics bring firstly a sense of true 'making' to the process as there is a material transformation taking place and an amount of effort and investment required – and achievement gained when it did go right. However the pieces that 'went wrong', were also then kept as interesting objects in themselves.



The pieces we were happy with were rolled out to flatten, although some were left with bumps to give the plastic a less smooth appearance.

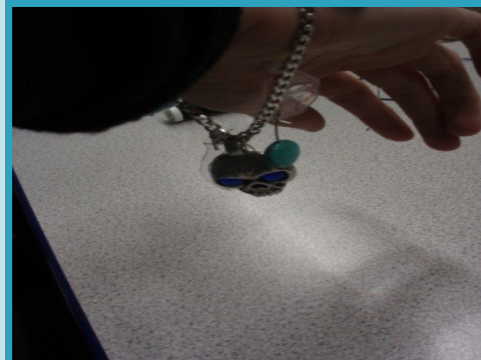
The end result was two bracelets



The Family Tree



The Strength Bracelet



Thank You,
from Ed, Janice and Jayne



