An Aesthetic of Knowledge Translation: Using Dance to Disseminate Research on Youth with First Episode Psychosis

Katherine M. Boydell, PhD
Senior Scientist, Child Health Evaluative Sciences
Associate Professor, Departments of Psychiatry & Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto
CANADA
Creative Team:

Choreographer: Siona Jackson  
Musician: Tim Isherwood  
Dancers: Courtnae Bowman  
Shavar Blackwood  
Jeff Dimitrou  
Mariano Abarca  
Lisa Collins  
Nicola Pantin  
Photographer: Ashley Hutchison

Research Team:

Katherine Boydell  
Brenda Gladstone  
Elaine Stasiulis  
Tiziana Volpe
Objectives

To contravene conventional boundaries and forms of social scientific writing and include a visual embodied representation

To use an arts-informed method (dance) to communicate empirical research about first episode psychosis

To explore the potential of sharing research findings via the arts
Arts-based Research I

Traditional dissemination methods often restrict audiences to fellow academics & pose a barrier to research use

Interest in arts-based research methods has grown, as one consequence of an extended epistemology that recognizes different forms of knowledge

Evocative power of the arts in enhancing representation, generating new insights and increasing understanding of phenomena
Performances deconstruct, or at least challenge the scholarly article as the preferred form of presentation (and representation). A performance authorizes itself, not through the citation of scholarly texts, but through its ability to evoke and invoke shared emotional experience and understanding between performer and audience.

(Denzin, 2003,p.192)
Arts-based Research II

Photography, music, poetry, video installations, drama and theatre presentations added to qualitative researcher’s toolbox

Performative a ‘working title’ for dissemination efforts of researchers wanting to enhance/move beyond traditional presentations & journals

Dance is an under represented area of arts-informed inquiry
DANCE

A *universal language*
Something that people can see, feel and understand using their senses
Expresses meaning through body language, emotions and movement

Theoretical Underpinnings - Les Todres (2007) embodied inquiry
With respect to our research with young people experiencing psychosis, dance was selected as the form of communication. The power of dance to communicate a story – parallels with the aims of qualitative research. Was it possible to develop visual ways to communicate research findings about complex subjects like psychosis? In what ways could expressive bodies/performance be used to represent qualitative research? Could it challenge us to engage differently with the data and to see differently?
First Episode Psychosis

Young adults suffer more from mental disorders than any other age group - least likely to use resources
At least 2 of every 100 Cdn adolescents experience psychosis

First episode psychosis is ‘critical period’
1-2 years between the onset of psychotic symptoms and the start of treatment

Secondary analysis of earlier work revealed: (1) young people deny, hide, ignore & explain away early signs & symptoms; (2) pervasive influence of others in social world
THE STUDY

Youth Experiencing First Episode Psychosis: A Comprehensive Examination of Pathways to Care

K. Boydell, B. Gladstone, E. Stasiulis, T. Volpe, Sick Kids
J. Addington, P. Goering, CAMH; T. Krupa, Queen’s; E. McCay, Ryerson

Study Objectives

1. To identify the factors contributing to the lengthy treatment delay of psychosis by obtaining in-depth accounts of pathways to mental health care: from the perspective of youth experiencing psychosis; from the perspective of others in the pathway

2. To elaborate and refine the Network Episode Model of mental health care specifically for first episode psychosis
Richness, depth of information, complexity
Each pathway unique, yet, share many common elements
Much help-seeking activity vis-à-vis subtle/not so subtle changes
A number of persons & multiple systems involved in help-seeking activity
  – rarely communicate
Many failed attempts or ‘missed opportunities’
Participant observation, audiotaped meetings, field notes used to analyze collective interchange & document ways in which the research & creative teams define (and redefine) their situation through interaction with others.

Narrative or dramatic coding of the transcripts – text identified to be used for particular narratives or informing character or scene development.

normal – abnormal
accepting - resisting/rejecting
reaching out - withdrawing/holding back
losing control - gaining control
active – passive
hope – despair
coping – collapse
darkness – light
heavy – light
denial – claiming of
crisis – transformation
weak – strong
layered stories/fractured stories
changed identity/new identity
interruption/disruption/interference
A 3 Minute Clip of the Performance
Measuring the Potential of Arts-Informed Methods

Consistently high mean scores from the evaluation questionnaires and from the open-ended ‘graffiti wall’
Dance has the potential to be a highly efficacious and engaging method of knowledge transfer, particularly regarding complex material (human emotion and interpersonal relationships)
Participants also identified its potential to educate and sensitize people about psychosis
So powerful – I could identify an array of emotions – isolation, fear, despair, question and comfort.

Pain-Trying-CyclesAlone/Not-(dis)connect-Break/broken/flee

So much pain that as a professional I CAN’T feel w/every person b/c I’ll drown but this reminds me why I do my job. Reminds me HOW I should – That words aren’t enough to understand.

Whoa – very powerful
-the sound worked so well really evoked the pain, isolation, the desire to connect it even produced anxiety in me beautifully uncomfortable

Touching
mind to heart
connection
inspiration
transformation
transcendence
Participants included research scientists, service providers, ‘at risk’ secondary school students, decision-makers and artists.
Knowledge Translation

International Film Festival (IEPA Australia)
Book Chapter (in press)
*Canadian Medical Association Journal* article
Toronto Star article
*Journal of Early Intervention in Psychiatry*
Child & Youth Mental Health Conference
Arts in Healthcare Conference
Symbolic Interaction & Ethnographic Research Research Conference
CBC News
Taking the “show on the road”

End of Grant KT Funding

CIHR
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Effective means of capturing particularity and universality of a person’s experience?

Potential to serve as a catalyst for dialogue and collaboration?

Contribute to empathic participation in the lives of others?

Effective knowledge translation strategy?

Is science enriched? Dumbed down? De-theorized?
Thank You