SJDR Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research
Established by the Nordic Network on Disability Research

Art Work as an Inclusive Space: Caring Relationships at a Day Activity Centre with an Artistic Profile

RESEARCH

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STOCKHOLM UNIVERSITY PRESS

ABSTRACT

Drawing on an interdisciplinary research arts project in collaboration with a day activity centre (DAC) with an artistic profile, we explore the dynamic of caring relationships, that is, the interaction between the staff and the participants, within welfare settings aimed at people with disabilities. Our research takes its point of departure in critical disability studies (CDS). The power dynamic of caring relationships is often imbued with paternalistic notions positioning the service user as the 'vulnerable disabled Other' and the carer as the 'invulnerable expert practitioner'. Together with this DAC, we set up a research arts project about dreams and carried out ethnographic fieldwork. The analysis reveals how the art work offers an inclusive space where the predefined roles of staff/'expert' and participant/'care recipient' somewhat cease to control the interaction between them. These caring relationships are characterised by reciprocity, collaboration and a respect for differences, enabling agency and voice for the participants.

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KEYWORDS:
critical disability studies; arts; caregiving; relationships; daily activity services

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:
Stjerna, Marie-Louise, Helen Knutes Nyqvist, and Stephan Hau. 2026. "Art Work as an Inclusive Space: Caring Relationships at a Day Activity Centre with an Artistic Profile." *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research* 28(1): 117–129. DOI: https://doi.org/10.16993/sjdr.1269

DOI: 10.16993/sjdr.1269

INTRODUCTION

Care is a necessity in life. It takes many forms and is enacted both in formal and informal settings. In disability politics, with its emphasis on the right to live an independent life, there is a longstanding critique of care. However, whilst the advocacy of independence is found in connection with rhetorics of self-sufficiency, some scholars are revisiting the concept of care to see how its values might be beneficial (see e.g., McLaughlin 2020). Here, we aim to reimagine care by exploring the potential of art work within welfare settings where formal care is enacted. In doing so, we take our point of departure in the feminist ethics of care, since this tradition recognises the importance of relationships and interdependencies (Sevenhuijsen 2003; Feder Kittay 2011). There are tensions between the feminist ethics of care, which positions the individual as relational and interdependent, and disability studies, which emphasises the empowerment of people with disabilities and their human rights to live an independent life. Disability scholars have rejected the concept of care, which they argue positions people with disabilities as dependent and passive receivers of care (Kröger 2009; Kelly 2013). Bearing in mind the dark side of care history—the oppression of people with disabilities—care could be seen as a barrier to living an independent life (Fine 2007). Also, power imbalances certainly still exist in welfare settings (Kelly 2013). Influenced by critical disability studies (CDS), we argue that there is a need to critically scrutinise care and disability services. We agree with Davy (2019, 111), who states that if the point of departure is the understanding of the subject as a relational self, autonomy and care need not necessarily be 'the conflicting ethical impulses they are often understood as'. Thus, with its focus on the relational self, feminist ethics of care has the potential to go beyond traditional understandings of caring relationships being merely unidirectional, flowing from the carer/expert to the cared for. Within CDS, a central issue is how to attend to dis/ability. Ability is a reference point in relation to which disability appears as a malfunction. To expand these understandings of disability, there is therefore the need to develop social theories about ability (Goodley et al. 2019). Furthermore, CDS identifies positive associations related to the disability experience. It 'cherishes notions of interdependence' and distributed competence (Goodley et al. 2019, 985). Both CDS and the ethics of care challenge traditional notions of the autonomous independent self and share a relational ontology, which is why we find that they work well together in this study.

The relationship between art and disability within the welfare system has varied across different settings and over time. In the broad field of art and health, medical and rehabilitative approaches dominate. Disability art stems from the disability experience. Art work is regarded as having the power to produce positive connotations regarding disability as well as to challenge prejudice and fight oppression (Solvang 2018). Thus, art work has many different potentials within social care practices, although it is not a straightforward way to inclusion for people with disabilities (Hall 2013). Welfare services that make use of disability arts have what Ineland (2016; 2020) refers to as hybrid structures. They are governed by two institutional logics. The logic of art is associated with cultural and artistic dimensions of disability art, while the therapeutic logic is based on disability ideology, and forms the basis of how disability services are run (Ineland 2020). Balancing these two institutional logics may entail challenges for professionals.

The first author (MLS) and the second author (HKN) have explored, in a previous study, how participants at a day activity centre (DAC) with an artistic profile, 'Studio X', characterise the centre as a place for creating art, and what the affordances provided at this setting are (Knutes Nyqvist and Stjerna 2017). Individuals covered by the Swedish Act concerning Support and Service for Persons with Certain Functional Impairments (LSS)[1] and not employed in the open labour market are offered support at DACs such as Studio X. Studio X is one of the disability services in Sweden that uses different forms of creative arts in its activities and projects. The results from this earlier study demonstrate that being categorised as a member of a collective of artists rather than as a 'social client' at a DAC provides opportunities both to develop as an artist within this 'safe space' and to contribute to mainstream society (Knutes Nyqvist and Stjerna 2017). This insight generated an interest in exploring the character of caring relationships, as we saw the importance of the relationships between participants and staff for providing meaningful activities. Here, we aim to explore this topic further by drawing on

1 'Support and Service for People with Certain Disabilities' (Lag om Stöd och Service till vissa funktionshindrade, LSS, 1993:387) covers individuals with intellectual disabilities, autism or autism-like conditions, and those who have sustained severe brain damage as adults.

an interdisciplinary research arts project run by the Department of Special Education and the Department of Psychology at Stockholm University in a continued collaboration with 'Studio X'.[2] The overall aim of this paper is to explore what characterises the dynamic of caring relationships, that is, the interaction between staff/supervisors and artists—adults with neuropsychiatric disabilities and adults with mild/moderate learning disabilities—at a DAC with an artistic profile. More specifically, the research questions are:

- What characterises the support provided to the artists within the caring relationships?
- What characterises the interaction between staff/supervisors and the artists in their ongoing artistic work?
- What characterises the artists' agency within the scope of the caring relationships?

FEMINIST ETHICS OF CARE

In societal contexts that favour autonomy, disability is generally associated with dependence and loss of control. However, feminist philosophy challenges the view of the subject as atomistic and independent and recognises vulnerability and dependence as underlying existential human conditions (Davy 2019). Within welfare settings though, a medical gaze will serve to reinforce the dichotomy between the 'invulnerable expert practitioner' and the 'vulnerable disabled Other' (see e.g., Viscardis et al. 2019). Also, care practices that position the carer as an agent and those who need support as (more or less) passive recipients of care constrain what can take place within human encounters. Yet, there is also the potential for care relationships to be more reciprocal (Levy and Young 2020). Noddings (1984) defines care as an ongoing and reciprocal relationship between the carer and the cared-for. This implies that instead of relying on universal principles of justice, local ethical decisions are seen as more valid. The clues in the actual situation and the needs of the cared-for should be what guides the carer. Thus, an ethics of care is based on responsibility in concrete situations, in contrast to dominant models of justice based on impersonalised rights. Also, early ethics of care works have been developed further to include political and social dimensions. This expands the areas of applicability of this framework to wider societal contexts (see e.g., Williams 2001). Prioritising self-sufficiency embedded within an individual consumerist logic overlooks the societal factors producing disability and obscures the fact that care is an important aspect of autonomy (McLaughlin 2020). Further, a too narrow focus on procedures and resources in assessment can impede the voice of the service users (Ward 2011). Care can, when respecting the views of the cared-for, support self-determination. All people move in and out of different relationships of dependency and different conditions of health throughout life (Sevenhuijsen 2003; Feder Kittay 2011). Further, 'everyone is in principle capable of giving care' (Sevenhuijsen 2003, 184), which adds to the complexities of how to define care, blurring the boundaries between the carer and the cared-for. In the feminist ethics of care, the focus is directed towards the quality of the caring relationship in terms of issues of relationality, reciprocity, situatedness and the local norms that govern these relationships.

DISABILITY AND THE DYNAMIC OF CARING RELATIONSHIPS

Studies adopting an ethics of care perspective have engaged in debates about how to understand care and support. By using the concept of 'accessible care', Kelly (2013) strives to further the understanding of care. Equally important, though, is that accessibility can easily 'fall away from critical reflection' and be reduced to checklists addressing 'complaints and barriers to physical and social inclusion' (Kelly 2013, 789). Therefore, an approach is needed which examines how the more underlying assumptions about disability inform care. A multilayered definition of care is required that recognises that care can be a form of oppression but also a way to apply a critical perspective as to what constitutes accessibility (Kelly 2013). McLaughlin (2020) draws on a study involving young people with disabilities to explore their views on care, support and independence. The results demonstrate that these young people were most comfortable with the support they received from their family. This support was connected to 'ties of care and intimacy' (McLaughlin 2020, 405) and normalised as something everybody is subject to. At the same time, the participants were actively aiming at reducing the amount of support they received from others, including from family. In line with calls made by the disability rights movement, these

2 The psychological aspects and the processes of portraying inner worlds through artwork about dreams will be developed in a coming paper.

DOI: 10.16993/sjdr.1269

young people were striving to reach independence, although not the 'supported independent life' (McLaughlin 2020, 409) that is advocated by the movement. Instead, they primarily aimed towards a level of self-reliance reflecting prevailing values in society.

Further, there are studies that broaden the analysis regarding which groups are regarded as being engaged in caregiving. People with learning disabilities have for a long time been positioned as vulnerable and in need of care and protection, as 'service users'. Ward (2011) challenges this notion and explores the roles of people with learning disabilities as carers of others within reciprocal care relationships. Acknowledging their role as mutual carers can be a powerful way to strengthen their position as valued and respected citizens. To explore the multiple practices of caregiving, Edwards and Loughnane (2024) draw on empirical work undertaken with people with disabilities. Worth noting is that some of them completely rejected the term 'care', given its association with wider disabling societal structures. The participants were keen on building and sustaining relationships with their personal assistance services and care workers, such as engaging in their carers' personal lives and providing emotional support when needed. Thus, their relationships to their carers were more than just market-based support relationships, but rather involved mutuality and care for each other (Edwards and Loughnane 2024). The above demonstrates that the mutual caring roles that disabled people hold, together with a certain responsibility towards paid carers, are disrupting the sharp divide between the carer and the cared-for.

THE POTENTIAL OF ART WORK WITHIN SOCIAL CARE SETTINGS

Today, empirical studies explore the potential of art work in challenging the dominant idea of a dichotomy between disability and invulnerable embodiments in health and social care settings. Viscardis and colleagues (2019) used arts-based research to conduct a project involving health care providers who identified a problematic dimension of health care practices and narrated their experiences in multimedia stories. They argue that the analysis of these stories reveals the potential of health care providers' art work to counter taken-for-granted medical truths that typically guide health care practices. Levy and Young's (2020) study explores how art as methodology—that is, artists working together with people with profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD) and their paid carers—has an impact on social care practices. The results demonstrate that in situations when art work was part of and intertwined with social care practices, together with valuing the agency of people with PMLD, more reciprocal learning relationships were established. This redefined practice challenges normative care for people with PMLD, which is often associated with monotony and inactivity. Levy and Young (2020) argue that the pedagogical aspects of these relationships were multifaceted, emphasising the importance of all participants being open to do something different to support the agency and learning of people with PMLD.

In addition, there are a growing number of organisations, known as supported studios, which support the artmaking of people with intellectual disabilities. Scott and Watfern (2021) explore the transition of becoming an artist from the perspective of Lisa Scott, an artist with intellectual disabilities at a supported studio in Sydney, Australia. Lisa's story reveals how the support at this studio has enabled her to trust her own ability to make art and to experience a sense of belonging to the wider community. Likewise, Yarmol's (2023) study demonstrates how the art studio environment supports individuals' development as artists and fosters a sense of community. Further, the results show the importance of the staff leaving the artists to 'explore, discover, make mistakes, tell their own stories' (Yarmol 2023, 13), so that their artwork becomes their own personal expression. Atkinson (2020) carried out autoethnographic field work at an art studio aimed at people with intellectual disabilities. She argues that the making of art in this studio is relational, in the sense that it happens in dialogic encounters involving facilitators, studio users and material art practices. Importantly, the studio users are treated as any other artist. The support involves removing disabling barriers and not focusing on individual shortcomings. This enables non-judgementality, creativity and a space to freely explore their art practice. In addition, Stober and García Iriarte (2022) demonstrate that arts organisations for people with disabilities create self-advocacy spaces. This strengthens the participants' resources in building relationships as well as in gaining new knowledge and more self-confidence. In short, the above demonstrates that art work within social care settings has the potential to contribute to new ways of providing care that recognises the competences of those receiving care.

As we have shown, there is considerable potential of working with art in welfare settings worldwide. The Swedish Act LSS is to promote equality in living conditions and full participation in society for persons covered by this legislation. DACs are designed to offer their participants stimulation, development, meaningfulness and community and can be organised in various ways with different foci. Here, we intend to explore how art work is intertwined with and shapes caring relationships at a DAC with an artistic profile.

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF A DREAM ARTS PROJECT

This study was carried out at a day activity centre, Studio X, which is divided into three ateliers with a total of 70 artists aged 20–60 years. To obtain a place at Studio X, one needs to have an artistic interest. Several of the staff have higher education relevant to the arts as well as training in health and social care. Most of the staff are artists themselves. They act as supervisors, guiding the participants in their development as artists and give support in everyday situations. The artistic work is often arranged under different thematic art projects, of shorter or longer duration, in smaller or larger groups. The artists regularly participate in various exhibitions in public settings to exhibit their artwork. Participation in different shared activities is always voluntary. We have previous experience of conducting research within Studio X (Knutes Nyqvist and Stjerna 2017), which has resulted in ongoing interactions and relationships with staff and participants. This has built trust between ourselves and this DAC, which enabled us to design, together with staff, an art project about dreams.

The dream arts project ran from April to June 2022. When this art project started, its implementation was handed over to Studio X, which ran the entire project. The dream arts project was carried out within the ordinary activities of Studio X. It was divided into two parts. The aim of the first part, *Dreamlabzzz – about Nightdreams*, was to explore the subject of dreams by taking the point of departure in the artists' own dreams. It consisted of four workshop days and ended with one follow-up day, exhibiting the artwork at one of the ateliers of Studio X. During the workshop days, lectures about dreams from an art historical and a psychological perspective were given by the third author (SH). Lectures about artistic techniques were run by Studio X. A group of four artists participated in this first part of the project, selected since they had expressed an interest in exploring dreams. All participants, artists and staff, were encouraged to document their dreams in diaries and to make artwork representing these experiences. To take one's own dreams as a point of departure in making art can stimulate creative processes, but can also evoke negative experiences (i.e., nightmares). However, being part of a particular context, such as being enrolled at a DAC, provides opportunities to receive support and to talk about and process difficult experiences. The second part of the project was called *My Everyday Life – about Daydreams* and was a collaboration run by Studio X together with partners in Nordic countries. It ended with an international exhibition to which the artists sent their artwork. As a part of this dream arts project, we carried out an ethnographic research project to explore the dynamics of caring relationships at this DAC.

The ethnographic research project was approved by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (Dnr 2022-00521-01). We employed an ethnographic approach so we could observe authentic situations in this setting, focusing on the interactions between supervisors and artists and the artists' interactions with one another (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019). Inspired by CDS, we have carefully chosen a design that is beneficial for those concerned (Goodley et al. 2019). This means that the outcome of both the dream arts project and the research project is mutually beneficial for both parties. In accordance with this DAC's focus on dreams—and dreaming being a universal human experience—it contributed opportunities for the artists to engage in a common task and became worthwhile for the participants' artistic development. Importantly, at Studio X, all art projects benefit everyone and thus enrich the creative climate. All three authors took part as participant observers, occasionally also trying out some of the artwork techniques, and observing the artists' and staff's individual and joint work processes. Individual and focus group interviews were also conducted. The participants in this research project were adults with neuropsychiatric disabilities—high-functioning autism and acquired brain injuries—and adults with mild/moderate learning disabilities. They were a heterogeneous group, six women and three men, with ages ranging from 25 to 65. All artists at Studio X, like the ones in this project, can choose what form of artistic expression they prefer, such as painting, sculpture, textile, graphic art and photography. Thus, the participants held different artistic identities. The selection of artists was carried out by

DOI: 10.16993/sjdr.1269

the staff who knew them well and therefore provided security to participants. The artists who took part in the first part of the arts project, *Dreamlabzzz – about Nightdreams*, were invited to take part in the research project. All accepted the invitation. Artists who took part in *My Everyday Life – about Daydreams* were invited to take part in focus group interviews and share their experiences. Five artists accepted the invitation. In addition, two staff members, both women, who ran the dream arts project, were individually interviewed. The participants received written and oral information about the project from the researchers. The artists were informed that their position at Studio X would not be affected by their taking part in the research project or not. All artists who took part signed a consent form that was written in plain Swedish. The forms were handled by us, the researchers. Consent was also obtained on an ongoing basis. The participants were reminded that they could withdraw from the study at any time. It turned out that everyone wanted to be involved during the entire project. The first author (MLS) and the second author (HKN) conducted three focus group interviews with the artists (FG 1–3)—consisting of 2–4 individuals—which lasted for approximately 1 hour 15 minutes each. The artists were asked to reflect on their artistic work, their interactions with the other artists and their supervisors, and how they received support. The researchers also conducted two individual interviews with the two supervisors (INTERVIEW 1–2), which lasted for approximately 1 hour 25 minutes each. The staff were asked to reflect on their role as supervisors. All interviews were digitally recorded with permission from the artists and the staff.

The material from all interviews was analysed thematically based on the theoretical assumptions of the study, by the first author (MLS) and the second author (HKN) (Brinkmann and Kvale 2018). The field notes provided an understanding of the ongoing relationships between participants and staff, participants and participants, and their interaction with the physical environment, which was also of importance in the interpretation of the interview material. The material was transcribed verbatim, and as a first step, was read thoroughly to get an overview. In the second step, the entirety of the material was inductively coded. Thereafter, when constructing the themes, the analysis became more abductive. Starting from critical disability studies and the feminist ethics of care, we explored what characterises the dynamic of caring relationships. This meant that we worked to identify how the participants experienced the way support is organised and provided. This resulted in two major themes: 'supportive encounters' and 'reciprocal relationships'. The analysis process was conducted in a dialogical manner where considerations about how to present the analysis were discussed. To help strengthen the validity of the analysis, the third author (SH), who took part in the entire process of collecting data and therefore knew the context of the study well, acted as a sounding board and a discussion partner in the final stage of the analysis.

RESULTS

In this section, we will present the two major themes identified in the dataset: 'supportive encounters' and 'reciprocal relationships'.

SUPPORTIVE ENCOUNTERS

The staff emphasise that support is shaped within the context of their ongoing relationships to the participants. They put significant effort into becoming familiar with the participants' artistic ambitions and preferences. Support involves mentoring the artists to develop their artistic work. Thus, the artistic work functions as the common space where interaction takes place. The staff have a dual role: they act as supervisors to all artists and as support persons to a small group of artists. For example, staff members make journal entries and set up implementation plans for their group of artists. One artist, Harriet,[3] explains that she knows who she can turn to in different situations:

> The support person is the one who stays in touch with relatives and deals with the more private stuff. Then it is more about what you need help with and who is here (in the atelier) because they work different days. Like today when I needed help with drawing, I asked Adam because he is good at painting. Even though he is not my support person on paper, he still is a supervisor. (Harriet, FG 3)

3 All names are fictitious.

DOI: 10.16993/sjdr.1269

Milton, another artist, emphasises the importance of artists and supervisors working together at the same table:

> At Studio X where I work, we have a big table, where we sit together supervisors and artists, and work on our own projects. And sometimes if you need help, you ask the supervisors. And I think that's good. Because the worst thing would be if artists sat separately and the supervisors sat separately. (Milton, FG 1)

Milton's statement illustrates the close connection between artists and staff in the sense that both groups do art work together. Importantly, this shared commitment to art somewhat breaks with the predefined roles of staff/'expert' and participant/'care recipient'. For example, in the dream arts project, both artists and supervisors share their dream experiences and do art work together. A permissive climate permeates throughout Studio X:

> Almost everyone is sharing their experiences. The supervisors listen carefully when an artist says something and address the topic at hand. After a while, several participants chose to leave the room and continue their work in another room, because they felt that there was too much talking in this room. (Field notes, first part)

This illustrates that the staff are attentive to the needs of the artists. As a supervisor, it is essential to be able to be excited by the uncertainty of the creative process, and together with the artist examine the path forward:

> It's not possible to guide someone according to some kind of manual, my experience is that if I am really interested and curious, the artists feel it, and they want to talk about their work and show me what they are doing. (Supervisor Alice)

Supervisor Alice stresses that there is a need to be sensitive to what works for the artist. Sometimes it is all about having patience and just waiting until the artist is ready to take the next step. The supervisors make use of their own experience as artists when supporting the participants, but they also need to hold back their own ways of doing things. Here, artist Molly describes an experience when the supervisor was not responsive to her artistic expression:

> I wanted to do felting, because I had never done that before. And then I made a flower. I made it oval because I wanted to make an oval flower and then the supervisor said: Oh, you haven't cut here, you have to cut more and then I couldn't bring myself to say that I wanted it oval, not circular (...) The supervisor should not be a teacher or an instructor, but if you want some response, you should of course get that, but it is not the supervisor's job to tell me how to do my art work. (Molly, FG 2)

What we see is that the caring relationship is not equal: the supervisors may use their position to give advice not asked for. This diminishes the agency of the artists and their possibilities to take their own creative process forward. As Molly expresses, it may be helpful to have a dialogue with supervisors, but in the end, the artist themselves must decide how to go forward. Another aspect of support can involve taking immediate action in a situation to help the artist manage a challenging task. Molly describes what she felt when she could not fulfil a task:

> Before the conference I was involved in making the programme, and then I was going to do something more and just felt I don't have the energy or time. I told Lucy (a supervisor), and she told me we'll fix it. I felt that it's okay to fail or just say no. You don't need to explain anything. And then I have the courage to take on things because I know I can fail. (Molly, FG 2)

Given that artistic growth emanates from individual motivation and involves a process of trial and error, there is a need for challenges. Thus, a permissive climate is a prerequisite to leave one's comfort zone and to explore new areas and develop new skills. The artists describe how they are encouraged to change their way of working and to explore new routes in their creative work:

> **Milton:** When I started embroidering, I embroidered a lot of these ready-made patterns and then this supervisor said, I don't think you should keep on embroidering patterns like this. Embroider something freely, then I started embroidering very freely.

DOI: 10.16993/sjdr.1269

Interviewer: So it was okay that she said that?

Milton: Yes, I didn't get angry or anything, I understand that she wanted me to find my own

Clara: Style

Laura: And you had been practising doing those ready-made ones

Milton: Yes

Laura: So that you knew the technique (FG 1)

This demonstrates how Milton's supervisor provides a suitable challenge, which Milton accepts. Supervisors challenge artists in different ways such as asking relevant questions, presenting art made by other artists and encouraging them to visit art exhibitions. Support can also be given in a group within the framework of an ongoing project, through conversations and lectures when working together. Further, in the process of giving support, the artists' different diagnoses are seen as verbalised knowledge about the challenges that they may face in their artistic work and in their social interactions. Staff make use of their knowledge about different diagnoses, but stress the necessity of ongoing reflection together with participants to be able to identify relevant challenges:

> To see the individual is much more than relying on the diagnosis. That's how we work here. If I had a studio space here, I would not want people to base their judgement on my diagnosis, but on what I create and what challenges I have. (Supervisor Alice)

Thus, knowledge about the individual's diagnosis is not sufficient to be able to give appropriate support. According to the staff, it is therefore essential to get to know each participant on a personal level. All artists have their individual challenges, which are not always visible to others:

> It might look as if we are very functional, but it may be chaos inside, but no one sees that because you've learnt to hide it, I've learnt that you don't say this and that, and that you don't show that you're a bit confused or whatever. (Laura FG 1)

Creative processes include periods and moments of uncertainty and chaos. Therefore, developing one's skills as an artist can be difficult and create frustration. At Studio X, challenging situations are dealt with as soon as possible. This means making general adjustments, such as removing disturbing impressions in the studios, or supporting artists based on their individual needs. At the same time, the staff do not always use their influence to ease situations. Taking on challenges is seen as necessary and fruitful. Thus, the message at Studio X is that it is okay if things go 'wrong'. One of the participants in the dream arts project was worried that she would not be comfortable participating in the group work and would be a nuisance to the other people. The supervisors were aware of her feelings and did not expect everything to just go on without any incident.

Given that Studio X is a DAC, staff are obliged to regularly complete documentation concerning the artists' disabilities and the challenges these might entail. There is a balancing act regarding how much time to spend on documentation versus how much time to spend on artistic guidance:

> It's important to balance between care work and artistic work so it does not turn over in one direction or the other. Our task is to provide care and welfare. We cannot let this task take a back seat in favour of the artistic work, and we can't let the care and welfare work take over. (Supervisor Alice)

Clearly, there is a tension between the care work and the artistic profile of this DAC that needs to be constantly negotiated and reflected on in the day-to-day activities.

RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIPS

The artistic work takes place within reciprocal learning processes. The value of shared experiences is emphasised by both supervisors and artists. The staff and the artists have different roles at Studio X, but there is not a sharp divide between them in the process of doing art work. As supervisor Lucy says, 'The starting point is that we all are very potent. I am fully potent (supervisor) and you are fully potent (artist)'. In a way, this unsettles the traditional

DOI: 10.16993/sjdr.1269

teaching role in which the student is supposed to be the learner and the teacher the master. The supervisors emphasise that the point of departure in projects is always collaborative. To safeguard artistic production of high quality, it is necessary to have relevant competence in initiating and carrying out art work. Often, supervisors have the required knowledge, or one of the artists is skilled and can teach the others:

> One of the artists is outstanding in teaching the technique of tying rya knots. She taught me the knotting technique even though I am an expert in textiles and have a higher education in textile arts (...) If we don't have the expertise ourselves, we bring in outside expertise. In this case one of the artists is the most skilful, and has taught many other artists. (Supervisor Lucy)

Another example where one of the artists taught a supervisor is given by Clara. It demonstrates that the roles taken up by supervisors and artists break with the traditional roles of staff and service users:

> **Clara:** We had a guy called Thomas. He asked me, Clara, could you help me and teach me how to knit a scarf? Yes, I could do that. And then I asked him if he wanted it straight or elastic or what do you want?
>
> **Laura:** And he was the supervisor?
>
> **Clara:** Yes, so it was kind of fun that I started to cast on knitting stitches and do everything for him. It was an artist (participant at Studio X) who taught him. Of course, he is an artist himself, but he is more into graphics and painting (FG 1)

Learning also takes place between supervisors when they are collaborating in projects. The importance of sharing experiences and learning together is emphasised as a crucial aspect of developing knowledge regarding the process of doing art work and how to run projects respectively:

> I think it's important that when you run projects like this dream project, that we as supervisors also get inspired and learn something, you learn side by side, artists and supervisors. I think that's a good way to develop an organisation. (Supervisor Alice)

Thus, reciprocal learning is part of and takes place within different relationships at Studio X. This is in line with Levy and Young (2020), who stress the reciprocity within caring relationships and the pedagogical aspects of these relationships. The artists at Studio X can voice their interests, such as choosing their personal way of exploring materials and creating their own artistic expressions. They are free to choose what projects they would like to participate in. Staff strive to allocate projects between artists so that all will have the opportunity to participate. Moreover, even if one chooses to participate in a given project, there is always the freedom to interpret the task and perform it in one's own way. In the dream arts project, the artists used tea towels to portray their everyday life and daydreams. Melvin explained that he just came up with something that 'fitted with the pattern that was already on the towel' (Melvin, FG 2). Similarly, Audrey (FG 2) explains that she felt she had 'total influence' in the dream arts project. It 'was completely open' and the participants were 'allowed to make mistakes'. The only thing she had to think about was that her art work should not be too fragile to be transported safely to the exhibition. The artists stress the importance of having the right to say 'no thank you' to support and supervision:

> **Nathalie:** I appreciate tutoring when I can say no. I have this problem, what do you think? Yes, I think this and that. And then I can say no. I understand what you're saying but I choose to do it this way instead
>
> **Laura:** You are the one who has the last word
>
> **Nathalie:** I have the last word, and it's my work (FG 1)

It is worth noting that to say no to support does not generate any negative consequences according to the artists. All three ateliers have started cooperatives. They include both artists and staff, and membership is voluntary. The cooperatives administrate the selling of the artists' works, and a certain amount of the income accrues to the cooperative. The members also

arrange different activities such as outings and group trips. Since the cooperatives started, the artists can exert more influence regarding different issues concerning their work at Studio X. They describe that they have absolute artistic freedom, but since Studio X is a DAC, there are certain limitations, such as the opening hours:

> **Harriet:** We have our cooperative as a small artists' association, so to speak. As an artist you are very free. What you can't control is that this is an LSS organisation that closes at three o'clock, for example, so you must work at home if you want to work longer hours. But otherwise I would say that overall you have quite a lot of influence over the art work itself. So I think there is a lot that you can control. What do you say Philip?
>
> **Philip:** Well, yes, I think so. We can come up with ideas and suggestions about what we want to do (FG 3)

The supervisors explain that working hours are not only decided by the managers of the three ateliers, but also by the head manager and the foundation running Studio X. The economic resources given to Studio X by the municipality set the basis of the organisation. The cooperatives are a domain where the artists and staff can meet on more equal terms. Artists express that they have influence, especially when it comes to their artistic work, but that their agency at the same time is exercised within the framework of LSS.

DISCUSSION

The intention of this paper is to reimagine care by exploring the potential and role of art work within welfare settings. We do this by exploring what characterises the dynamic of caring relationships at a DAC with an artistic profile. The results demonstrate how the focus on art work at Studio X creates opportunities to give support within the making of art. As Levy and Young (2020) argue, when art work is part of and intertwined with social care practices, there are possibilities of creating new forms of care practices where more reciprocal relationships can be established. The deployment of disability arts locates Studio X as a welfare service with a hybrid structure, governed by an artistic and a therapeutic logic (Ineland 2016; 2020). In such settings, this dual logic may impose challenges to staff. At Studio X, the staff have a dual role: as supervisors mentoring the artists to develop their artistic work, and as support persons managing issues related to the LSS legislation and the artists' need for support in their daily life. According to the staff, these dimensions, the artistic work and the care work, need to be balanced on a day-to-day basis so that neither of them takes precedence over the other. Further, the results also demonstrate that the artists are aware of this hybrid structure and navigate within the specific norms and rule system of the DAC. As we have found in an earlier study, the aim of the art work in this specific welfare setting 'is not to develop away from or improve certain "deficiencies" or difficulties associated with disabilities, but to do art work' (Knutes Nyqvist and Stjerna 2017, 981). Thus, the identity of the participants at Studio X is mainly centred around the art work they are doing and not around being categorised as someone who is covered by LSS. At Studio X, the art work offers an inclusive space where the predefined roles of staff and participant somewhat cease to control the interaction between them. This is far from the dichotomy between the 'invulnerable expert practitioner' and the 'vulnerable disabled Other' (see e.g., Viscardis et al. 2019) that often exists in welfare settings such as DACs.

Carrying out this study, we did not introduce the term 'care' to the participants. Instead, we used the terms 'support/help' and 'supervision', which resonates well with the language use at Studio X. We argue that using these terms, as well as the terms 'atelier' and 'artist', directs the attention towards an understanding that the practices at this DAC involve learning and development, not 'just' care. Against the backdrop of the negative connotations to care—its association with dependence and passive receivers of care—the language use at Studio X can be understood as an aspect of balancing between artistic work and care work. However, using art work in welfare settings is not a straightforward way to inclusion (Hall 2013). As our study demonstrates, it needs to be carefully thought through and done in a way that empowers and gives voice to participants. In line with Atkinson (2020) and Yarmol (2023), our results demonstrate how the staff at Studio X support the artists by, for example, removing

disabling barriers, and at the same time are keen not to take over the artists' artmaking. By adopting a critical disability perspective, it became obvious that the dynamics of the caring relationships are characterised by a way of doing things that could be described as governed by non-paternalistic responses. At Studio X, the artists do have significant influence over how they perform their art work. They also have some influence regarding how the environment is designed. The cooperatives provide a social space for discussing different issues on a more equal level. That said, although it is rare, the participants also voice negative experiences in their relationships to the supervisors and express drawbacks they experience because of the LSS regulations. Further, during fieldwork, we have observed that the staff do not try to silence critique or negative experiences. To sum up, the social climate is characterised by embracing different ways of being and expressing oneself.

According to the feminist ethics of care, ethical considerations are guided by the context and the situation at hand (Feder Kittay 2011). At Studio X, the art work defines this care setting. Art work involves trying out different materials, experimenting and the experience of periods of frustration. Thus, the staff need to be able to allow for uncertainty and stay in the moment. There clearly is no 'manual' to follow. This manner of doing things could be understood as stimulating, but also as challenging. Things can 'go wrong' and staff must rethink how to manage different situations. To be worthwhile, care needs to be acknowledged by the recipient, and in this case, the voice of the artist is significant. At Studio X, the staff and the artists do have different roles and there is a hierarchical structure. However, in the process of doing art work, there is not a sharp divide between them. Both staff and artists give examples about how they learn from each other. Thus, competence does not solely belong to the individual but is distributed across many. This understanding is decisive for how the staff and artists interact. Caring relationships do not just flow from carer to cared-for but are reciprocal and collaborative. This proves that care can entail far more than practical tasks to be 'solved', encompassing issues of relationality, reciprocity and interdependence (Sevenhuijsen 2003; Feder Kittay 2011; Kelly 2013).

CONCLUSION

The notion of the interplay between disability and ability takes disability on an altered route when caring relationships are intertwined with and shaped within art work. Disability is not understood as a separate deficit category that belongs to the participants at Studio X. Instead, as we have shown, doing art work generates opportunities for participants to be recognised as competent persons. Therefore, we argue that there is a need to continuously reflect on and address the understandings of dis/ability within welfare settings. Importantly, how support is defined and organised is decisive for whether the person will be diminished or find opportunities to grow.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Studio X, both the artists and the staff, for their wholehearted participation in the dream arts project and the research project. Your willingness to invite us into your world of creativity and share your experiences has been invaluable. We would also like to thank the three anonymous reviewers for their constructive criticism and valuable comments.

FUNDING INFORMATION

The project received initial funding from the Board of Human Science at Stockholm University.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The first author and the second author have carried out the conceptualisation, methodology, analysis, and writing of the paper; the third author has contributed to the final analysis of the paper. All authors have been part of the entire process of collecting data.

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TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:
Stjerna, Marie-Louise, Helen Knutes Nyqvist, and Stephan Hau. 2026. "Art Work as an Inclusive Space: Caring Relationships at a Day Activity Centre with an Artistic Profile." *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research* 28(1): 117–129. DOI: https://doi.org/10.16993/sjdr.1269

Submitted: 19 February 2025
Accepted: 16 February 2026
Published: 09 March 2026