How do arts-based communities conceptualise their contribution to social justice for people living with intellectual disabilities? A scoping review

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Abstract

This study reports key concepts of arts-based communities (ABCs) regarding their contribution to social justice for people living with intellectual disabilities and provides a foundation for future research. A scoping review was carried out, following the systematic search-strategy approach proposed by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. To extract data, a data-charting form for characteristics and topics of included publications was developed. Thirty-three publications were included in the review. Concepts and terminology were synthesised into key concepts.

The identified key concepts are: empowerment and self-advocacy; social interaction, belonging and inclusion; awareness and challenging stigma; advocacy for rights and social change; and skills and employment. These concepts can be related to aims of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and to claims in art therapy literature.

Keywords

Social justice, intellectual disabilities, arts-based community, scoping review, key concepts

Introduction

Disability has historically been viewed through a medical model focused on the incapacity and impairment of individuals. Persons living with intellectual disabilities (ID) have largely been provided daily support through structures that segregate them from public life, such as residential institutions. Since the 1980s, the growing tendency to see disability as a human and social rights issue has seen policy shift towards inclusion (Schippers, 2021). There has been a reduction in segregation-focused structures as approaches using a social model of disability have increased, recognising that persons are disabled not only because of their body, but also because of environmental factors (Danermark & Gellerstedt, 2004; World Health Organization, 2011). In a radical political/social model, centred on a feminist framework of disability, disability is acknowledged as multifaceted and contextual. It recognises the need for radical social change (Kafer, 2013; Yi, 2019).

To improve the social position of people with disabilities, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD), which was adopted in 2006 at the United Nations

Headquarters, outlines aspects such as respect for independence, full participation in society, and accessibility to public life (United Nations, 2006). The aim of the convention is the creation of an inclusive and socially just society where all persons deserve equal economic, political, and social rights and opportunities, and can participate without experiencing obstacles (United Nations, 2006; World Health Organization, 2011).

Despite the convention, persons with ID continue to experience barriers in accessing services, including health, education and employment, as well as information (Schippers, 2021). Reporting on a worldwide survey, Scior et al. (2020) indicate that in countries where advocacy and self-advocacy are well advanced and equality of opportunity is reflected in policy, law and service provision, there is widespread support for the CRPD aims. However, there are double standards: alongside the message that persons with ID are valued as equals and welcome in all parts of life, frequent concerns can be noted that their inclusion in normal activities such as education and work negatively affects the opportunities and advancement of those without ID. Such attitudes reduce social rights of persons with ID and bode badly for efforts to improve attitudes among the public, as contact appears key to their success (Scior et al., 2020).

To change mechanisms that maintain social injustice, human rights organisations advise ongoing action (College voor de Rechten van de Mens, 2019). The World Health Organization (2011) reports that community-based development programmes can challenge negative attitudes towards others, leading to greater visibility of, and participation by, persons with disabilities. However, there is insufficient clarity about successful approaches. There is a need for research, focusing on interventions that increase social justice for persons with ID in society (Clifford Simplican et al., 2015; Scior et al., 2020).

Arts-based communities

Arts-based communities (ABCs) refer in this study to a broad and diverse concept of groups of people who come together to engage in various artistic activities such as painting, sculpting, dancing, making music, theatrical performance or writing poetry. These groups or communities provide space to connect, learn, share creative interests and explore new ideas. Literature in the domain of art therapy describes variations of ABCs as, for example, open studios (Moon, 2002; 2016; Vick 2016), community-based art studios (Allen, 2008; Vick, 2016), or community art studios (Howells & Zelnik, 2009). Their designs differ between homogeneous groups of, for example, psychiatric patients, or heterogeneous groups of people with different backgrounds and characteristics. In their approach, participants are often facilitated to make authentic art, rather than being directed by someone's suggestions or interpretations (Moon, 2016).

Art therapy literature describes the history and performance of ABCs:

ABCs emerged in the late 1930s, when the first art studios were created within psychiatric asylums in the USA and UK (Moon, 2016; Finkel & Bat Or, 2020). Making art was believed to promote mental health and became part of empowerment projects for patients (Moon,

2016). In addition to this perspective, art therapists started to appreciate the community-based art approach to help patients engage in communities (Moon, 2016; Vick, 2016).

In the 1960s and 70s, when problems of mental health patients were increasingly contextualised in larger social contexts, the ABC approach became more accessible to address the needs of deinstitutionalised adults with developmental, physical, or mental disabilities in the community (Moon, 2016). ABCs such as open studios were established outside the walls of institutions. This was also the beginning of the 'studio outsider art movement', where artwork by persons with ID was validated as a genre and an art movement (Vick, 2016; Yi, 2019).

According to a scoping review by Finkel and Bat Or (2020), in recent years there has been an increasing prevalence of studio art approaches in art therapy, venturing beyond the traditional definition of the profession in today's institutions and into the realm of social action. This suggests that ABCs have been rediscovered as practices in supporting social justice experiences for marginalised persons.

Art therapy literature indicates that within the relationship between ABCs and social justice, there is the potential to instil agency, promote empowerment and self-advocacy (Frostig, 2011; Kaplan, 2016; Moon, 2002; Talwar, 2016; Vick, 2016), promote healthy interactions by the transformative power of the arts (Moon, 2002), raise awareness and give voice to underprivileged or marginalised persons (Frostig, 2011; Golub, 2015; Talwar, 2016), and contribute to broader social change (Frostig, 2011). Literature about ABCs for fostering social justice for persons living with ID has been written by Miller (2020). Miller describes disability art-studio practice as "a counter-cultural endeavour rooted in a political movement, [which] offers a distinct and potentially fruitful framework in which art therapists in studio practice with artists labelled/with IDs can advance social justice" (p.93).

The potential for ABCs to improve social justice for people with ID is worthy of consideration. Although existing literature states that the increasing number of ABCs has the potential to foster social justice, the theoretical assumptions this is based on are not supported by rigorous research. Art therapists seem to draw on their implicit practical knowledge. Besides that, research concerning ABCs and people with ID on this issue is scarce.

To address this knowledge gap, research is required that explores existing ABCs and expands the understanding of how they can foster social justice for people with ID. The object of this study is to contribute to knowledge about the ABCs' potential to increase social justice for people with ID. This article focuses on the research question: How do arts-based communities conceptualise their contribution to social justice for people living with ID?

Method

Design

A scoping review was carried out to get an overview of existing literature on the topic, to identify key concepts in a field that we found characterised by a lack of consensus on terminology and key concepts, and to provide a foundation for future research by identifying gaps in the existing literature.

The method used for extraction of relevant information followed the systematic approach proposed by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Moher et al., 2009).

Search strategy

The search was carried out in a systematic, replicable and comprehensive manner from October 2020 to July 2023. The database search was conducted on 11 December 2020 and updated on 13 March 2023. The search strings led back to the start of the databases.

The search strategy consisted of steps following the PRISMA Flow Diagram (Moher et al., 2009). The first step consisted of a broad search in seven leading electronic databases, which were expected to contain academic, peer-reviewed publications on the topic. Search terms, search strings and databases were chosen with the assistance of an information specialist. The chosen databases were PsycInfo (Ebsco), CINAHL Plus with Full Text (Ebsco), Medline (Ebsco), SocINDEX (Ebsco), Web of Science Core Collection, ERIC (Ebsco) and Embase (OVID).

Within each database, papers were searched for containing at least one term or synonym from the block 'intellectual disability', 'social justice' and 'arts-based'. These terms (including synonyms and closely related words such as 'learning disabilities', 'cognitive impairment', 'fairness', 'human rights', 'social equality', 'art therapy', and 'creative arts') were used as index terms or free-text words to represent the concepts mentioned above. For each database a customised search was constructed, taking into account the unique properties of each database, such as syntax and thesauri. For search terms and search strings used for all professional domains in the databases, see Appendix, Table 4.

After duplicates were removed (Bramer et al., 2016), the second step entailed screening titles, keywords and abstracts of the remaining 3592 articles, with the help of Rayyan QCRI (Ouzzani et al., 2016). This first selection process was performed by three authors (first, fourth and fifth authors). To increase consistency among reviewers, they worked in pairs, sequentially evaluating the titles, abstracts and keywords. The first author screened all articles, while the fourth and fifth each screened half. Discrepancies between them were discussed weekly to find consensus and, if necessary, resolved with the other authors. If the title, abstract and keywords did not provide enough clarity on whether a study conformed to

the screening criteria, the article was included. This ensured it could be subject to a detailed assessment in the next stage.

In the second selection process, full texts of all potentially relevant studies were assessed by the three (first, fourth and fifth) authors. Disagreement between these authors, regarding article eligibility or key criteria, were resolved through discussion with the remaining authors. During the second selection process, the selection was sharpened by excluding all studies that did not match the inclusion criteria.

Study selection

A priori inclusion and exclusion criteria were established and implemented.

Inclusion

The following were included:

- studies with primary evidence of English-language peer-reviewed journals focusing on relevant information about ABCs that show a relationship to social justice for people living with ID in terms of, for example, inclusion, social change, human rights and empowerment (see Appendix, Table 4, S1);

- a variety of art expressions, in order to detect all arts-based approaches in communities, such as visual art, theatre, dance, music and poetry (see Appendix, Table 4, S3-S7);

- publications reporting qualitative studies, quantitative studies, mixed-methods studies, case studies and action-research studies; and

- publications with a method section.

There were no restrictions in relation to the design of or approach in the ABC.

Exclusion

The following were excluded:

- studies of ABCs limited exclusively to educational settings, and studies of ABCs limited to producing vocational or for-art-marketing emphases only;

- publications that did not describe empirical data, providing an understanding of the practice of arts-based communities;

- papers identified as discussion or opinion papers; and

- studies available merely in the form of an abstract or presentation, or duplicate.

Quality assessment

The quality of each of the included studies was assessed and discussed in pairs by the first, fourth and fifth authors using the Standard Quality Assessment Criteria for Evaluating Primary Research Papers from a Variety of Fields guide (Kmet et al., 2004). (See Appendix). The checklist for assessing the quality of qualitative studies (and the qualitative part in mixed-methods studies) consisted of ten criteria with a maximum summary score of 20 points (Table 2). The checklist for assessing the quality of quantitative studies (and the quantitative part in mixed-methods studies) consisted of 14 criteria with a maximum of 28 points (Table 3). The items were scored depending on the degree to which the publication met the criteria ('yes' = 2, 'partial' = 1, 'no' = 0). Items in quantitative studies not applicable to a particular study design were marked 'n/a' and were excluded from the calculation of the summary score. By summing up the points, a summary score was calculated for each publication. For the purpose of this article, all papers selected during the search have been included and treated equally regardless of quality scores. It was expected that the inclusion and exclusion criteria guaranteed a quality-standard minimum, such as an underlying research project, peer review and a method section. The aim was not to source evidence of the effects of the ABCs in relationship to social justice, but to identify terminology, ideas and thoughts that could teach us about underlying concepts.

Charting the data

For data extraction, a data-charting form (Supplementary Material 3) was jointly developed by four authors (first, second, sixth and seventh authors). This tool, based on the research question, included classification of findings according to (a) reference, date and country of publication; (b) focus of study; (c) study design, description of sample and quality score; (d) described concepts in findings and conclusion of the study with regard to fostering social justice for people living with ID; (e) ABC design; (f) ABC approach; and (g) artform and its use in relationship to social justice.

Four reviewers (first, second, fourth and fifth authors) independently extracted the data from the selected papers and entered them into the data-charting form, discussed the results, and continuously updated the data-charting form. Any missing data were requested from the study authors and a time limit of four weeks given for their response.

The first and second authors synthesised similar terminology and concepts into key concepts.

Overview of the findings

In this section, an overview of the extraction of the findings is presented alongside what the authors judged to be the most important concepts. Firstly, the number of included articles after the screening process is presented. Secondly, the data extraction process is outlined. Thirdly, characteristics of the included studies/publications, including the identified key concepts for answering the research question of the scoping review, are presented.

Number of included articles after the screening process

The PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1) presents the systematic search and screening process. In total, 4799 publications were found. Out of these, 1207 findings were duplicates, leaving 3592 to be screened. We excluded 3321 findings following application of the protocol's inclusion and exclusion criteria. The remaining 271 articles were screened full-text, applying the inclusion criteria. Finally, 33 of the publications identified through the systematic search were included in the review.
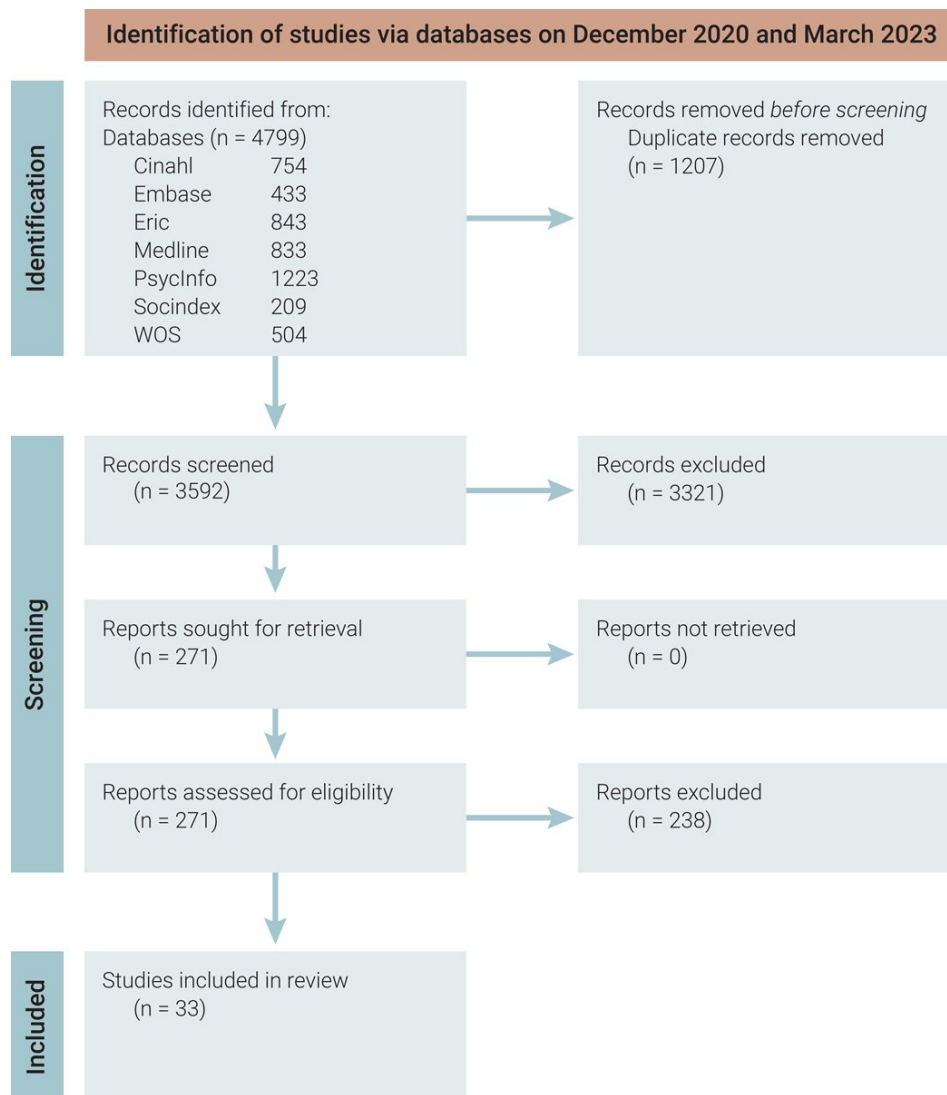
Identification of studies via databases on December 2020 and March 2023

Identification

Records identified from:
Databases (n = 4799)
Cinahl   754
Embase   433
Eric   843
Medline   833
PsycInfo   1223
Socindex   209
WOS   504

→ Records removed *before screening*
Duplicate records removed
(n = 1207)

Screening

Records screened
(n = 3592)

→ Records excluded
(n = 3321)

Reports sought for retrieval
(n = 271)

→ Reports not retrieved
(n = 0)

Reports assessed for eligibility
(n = 271)

→ Reports excluded
(n = 238)

Included

Studies included in review
(n = 33)

Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram (Moher et al., 2009).

Data extraction

The data-charting form (see Appendix, Table 1) presents the data extraction of the included papers. Next to characteristics of the included publications, we identified terminology and concepts that were synthesised into five key concepts answering the research question.

Characteristics of the included publications

Geographical variation and variation in date of publication

Of the 33 studies, 14 were conducted in the UK, five in the US, three each in Canada and Norway, two in Australia, and one each in South Korea (as part of the Australian study), Ireland, Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Portugal and Spain.

Prior to 2000, one article was included. From the period 2001–10, eight articles were included. In five articles, the arts-based community was performed in Europe, and in three articles it was in the US. From the period 2011–20, 19 articles were included. Fifteen articles described arts-based communities in Europe, two articles described arts-based communities in the US, and two described those in Canada. From 2021 until the date of the search in 2023, five articles were included – two from Australia, two from Europe and one from Canada.

Study design

Of the 33 included papers, 24 studies were identified as qualitative studies. Eleven of these were identified as case studies, two as inclusive studies, and one as narrative study. Five were identified as action research, three as mixed-method studies with a quantitative part of data collection and analysis, and one as a quantitative study.

Article quality

The quality of the selected publications based on qualitative research were charted between five out of 20 possible points and 20 out of 20 points (see Appendix, Table 1, column 4). Five articles were assessed with less than half of the points (Almeida et al., 2011; Calvert, 2010; Hourigan, 2009; Macpherson & Bleasdale, 2021; Moore, 2015).

All papers with a quantitative study, or with a quantitative part within the study, were assessed with 26 or more out of 28 points (Cook, 2020; Kivijärvi & Poutiainen, 2019; MacGlone et al., 2020; Schlosnagle et al., 2014).

Remarkably, in most of the selected papers the number of participants (N/n) in the empirical data is unclear (Almeida et al., 2011; Caldwell et al., 2008; Curtis & Mercado, 2004; Harter et al., 2006; Ineland, 2005; Johansen & Saur, 2018; King et al., 2016; Moore, 2015; Price & Barron, 1999; Richards et al., 2019; Saur & Johansen, 2013; Schlosnagle et al., 2014) or assessed as small (Calvert, 2010, N = 1; French & Jones, 2019, N = 1; Goddard, 2015, n = 3/unclear; Hall, 2010, N = 2; Hourigan, 2009, N = 1; Macpherson & Bleasdale, 2012, N = 1; Macpherson & Fox, 2016, N = 1; Scott & Watfern, 2021, N = 1).

Only three studies were identified explicitly as inclusive studies (French & Jones, 2019; Scott & Watfern, 2021; Whitehurst, 2006). Two of them are (co-)written by authors with experiential expertise in being an ABC participant with ID, providing an insider perspective (French & Jones, 2019; Scott & Watfern, 2021). Those were assessed as high-quality articles (both 18 points out of 20).

Key concepts

By data extraction of the included papers, five key concepts about fostering social justice were identified. They are presented in order from most common to least common.

Synthesised key concept	Number of articles with related terminology
Social interaction, belonging and inclusion	24
Empowerment and self-advocacy	18
Awareness and challenging stigma	14
Social change and advocacy for rights	11
Skills and employment	8

Table 1. Key concepts.

(1) Social interaction, belonging and inclusion

In 24 selected articles, the key concept of contribution of the ABC to social justice for people with ID can be described as more or better human interaction. The data show a variety of concepts and terminology, such as: social inclusion and integration into the wider society (Curtis & Mercado, 2004; Schlosnagle et al., 2014; Stickley et al., 2012; Whitehurst, 2006), inclusion in the art scene (Levy et al., 2017; Macpherson & Bleasdale, 2012), and inclusive experiences for all within ABCs (Hourigan, 2009). Sense of belonging, relationships of belonging, person-directed experiences of belonging, and experiences of attachment as values in and aims of ABCs are of interest in a great number of articles. Hall (2010; 2013), King et al. (2016), and Kivijärvi and Poutiainen (2019) describe sense of belonging as an important experience in the ABCs. Other included articles addressing inclusion and integration, (social) collaboration, relationship and sense of belonging are by Caldwell et al. (2008), Calvert (2010), Dickinson and Hutchinson (2019), Goddard (2015), Harter et al. (2006), Johansen and Saur (2018), Macpherson and Fox (2016), Moore (2015), Nijkamp and Cardol (2020), Price and Barron (1999), Saur and Johansen (2013), Schnellert et al. (2021), and Scott and Watfern (2021).

In relation to the barrier between participants within the ABC, Hourigan (2009) writes that ABCs can create social interactions that help socially challenged persons make lasting relationships and create an inclusive tone of acceptance for all participants. Other examples are joining in with arts activities to feel part of the community (Stickley et al., 2012), and carefully listening to each other (Macpherson & Fox, 2016). Nijkamp and Cardol (2020) write that their study reveals that realising inclusion in a collaboration between actors with and without disabilities is not easy. Nevertheless, they found examples in which actors with and without ID co-created and collaborated on an equal basis.

Several articles addressed the reduction of the barrier between ABC participants and people outside the ABC. The concept of the contribution of ABCs to social justice concerning this barrier is described as fostering social inclusion into the wider society (Curtis & Mercado,

2004; Schlosnagle et al., 2014; Stickley et al., 2012; Whitehurst, 2006), or inclusion in the field of art (Levy et al., 2017; Macpherson & Bleasdale, 2012). Levy et al. wrote in 2017 that the boundaries of who could engage in the arts and experience the freedom to be the person they wanted to be, which for some might be a musician or a dancer, were only beginning to be disrupted.

According to authors, ABCs can transcend barriers in social interaction, such as traditional hierarchies (Harter et al., 2006; Macpherson & Bleasdale, 2012), enabling people to combat social alienation (Calvert, 2010), establishing a communicative space for encounters on equal terms (Calvert, 2010), creating connection on a deeper level (Hall, 2013), fostering understanding (Macpherson & Fox, 2016), and allowing people to be taken seriously (Price & Barron, 1999). According to others, ABCs that address resistance and activism support breaking down barriers of social interaction by transforming exclusion and stigmatisation into community engagement (e.g., Hall, 2010; Johansen & Saur, 2018; Moore, 2015; Saur & Johansen, 2013).

Two of the articles describe that it is not easy to break down barriers of social interaction by participation in ABCs (Hall, 2010; Nijkamp & Cardol, 2020). Hall (2010) writes that the belonging that people yearn for is largely that within the ABC. The development of belonging to wider society is much more limited.

(2) Empowerment and self-advocacy

According to 18 articles, ABCs contribute to social justice for people with ID by fostering empowerment and self-advocacy. This concept is underlined by three arguments:

First, being part of the arts-based community can contribute to building confidence, self-esteem, a sense of purpose and growth (Dickinson & Hutchinson, 2019; French & Jones, 2019; MacGlone et al., 2020; Schlosnagle et al., 2014). It is stated that people with ID become braver in relation to what they believe they can achieve, and that they can discover their personal and authentic preferences (King et al., 2016; Schnellert et al., 2021; Scott, 2021).

Second, creating art is considered to promote self-advocacy, empowerment and autonomy (Cook, 2020; Curtis & Mercado, 2004; Price & Barron, 1999). The art-making process, such as creating a theatre play, can be an empowering and rewarding process by promoting people to use their own voice of expression (Almeida et al., 2011; Nijkamp & Cardol, 2020; Richards et al., 2019). Within the creative process people can work according to their own perceived strengths and abilities (Stickley et al., 2012), and are involved in shaping their own personal outcomes (Levy et al., 2017).

Third, having the opportunity to perform the personal in public spheres, such as performances before an audience (Goddard, 2015; Harter et al., 2006), creates opportunities for people with ID to be taken seriously (Parry, 2017; Price & Barron, 1999). Johansen and Saur (2018)

argue that when one is visible and claims space on a stage or with one's artwork, it is not so easy to be oppressed without the oppression itself becoming visible.

(3) Awareness and challenging stigma

Thirteen articles outline concepts that the authors synthesised to the key concept of raising awareness and challenging stigma as a contribution of ABCs to social justice. The data show two perspectives on that concept:

First, that through performance arts it can be possible to understand and celebrate differing abilities, gifts, shared passion for the arts and the realisation that perhaps people are more alike than different (Curtis & Mercado, 2004). In this way, art is seen as having the ability to provoke an awareness transformation, in which persons with ID become more visible and less seen as incapable (Hall, 2010; 2013; Kivijärvi & Poutiainen, 2019; Parry, 2017; Price & Barron, 1999; Yoon et al., 2020).

Second, according to Richards et al. (2019), all persons with ID face direct or indirect stigma because of their label. Through sharing stories and counter-narratives by means of art, the stigma associated with disability stereotyping and the misconceptions of having an ID is challenged and questioned (Caldwell et al., 2008; Harter et al., 2006; Richards et al., 2019). Art is supposed to be an activity that shapes lasting relationships and attachment, which can create an inclusive tone against stigma (Hourigan, 2009; Macpherson & Bleasdale, 2012; Schnellert et al., 2021).

(4) Social change and advocacy for rights

In eleven articles it is mentioned that ABCs can serve as platforms for social change and advocacy for rights. The key concept leans into the perspective that artistic expression can bring attention to issues of social (in)justice, and that honouring the artistic expression of persons with ID is a political gesture (Johansen & Saur, 2018; Price & Barron, 1999).

The synthesis of the variation in the articles related to this key concept describes that artworks, art performances and art-based stories can increase the autonomy of people with ID (Harter et al., 2006), provide new economic and aesthetic opportunities for persons otherwise excluded from the public sphere (Harter et al., 2006; Macpherson & Bleasdale, 2012; Yoon et al., 2020), and transform understanding of persons with ID (Hall, 2010; Yoon et al., 2020).

According to authors, the ABCs can actively work against oppression (Goddard, 2015; Viscardis et al., 2019), transform beliefs and values, at least in some respect (Kivijärvi & Poutiainen, 2019; Viscardis et al., 2019), and disrupt traditional hierarchies and practices (Schnellert et al., 2021; Viscardis et al., 2019). Ineland (2005) writes, for example, that theatre group Olla operates from the viewpoint that they are renegades outside institutional norms and performs above the institutional range. Therefore, this has influenced the institutional environment. According to Saur and Johansen (2013), the traditional view on arts performances can be challenged and the actors will eventually be seen as a natural part of the city's cultural life. The authors write that to succeed in changing old-fashioned ways of

thinking, it requires brave decisions that dare to challenge both audience and actors. In their second article (Johansen & Saur, 2018), they underline that, by making the unexpected visible, one can create turmoil for the cause of a democratic society with shared decision-making on an equal basis.

(5) Skills and employment

Data show that some ABCs provide skill-development programmes and vocational training for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Eight of the included articles report that by fostering artistic abilities and personal, social or practical skills, participants gain greater independence and enhance their employability (French & Jones, 2019; Goddard, 2015; Harter et al., 2006; MacGlone et al., 2020; Price & Barron, 1999; Schlosnagle et al., 2014; Scott & Watfern, 2021; Yoon et al., 2020). Price and Barron (1999) write that the Lawnmowers Theatre Company operates, beside other purposes, as a vehicle for development of personal skills such as communication, dealing with key agencies, management and basic finance.

The ABCs partly collaborate with local businesses, organisations and galleries to create employment opportunities and promote the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in the creative industries (French & Jones, 2019; Goddard, 2015; Harter et al., 2006; Yoon et al., 2020). French and Jones (2019) report, for example, that the ABC led to a business called Positive You for the first author, who is living with ID. She writes that the business has provided her with many opportunities to meet new people and see new places, has enabled her to be taken seriously, boosted her self-esteem, and given her the experience that it is her right to be included in decisions that affect her.

Discussion

The object of this review is to identify concepts of ABCs that relate to their potential for contribution to social justice for people living with ID, to synthesise key concepts and to provide a foundation for future research.

During this systematic, replicable search, 33 articles were selected, assessed and reviewed, with a broad variety of study focus, samples and quality scores, to scope existing knowledge.

The first article that met the inclusion criteria dates from 1999. The findings show an upward trend in numbers from then on, indicating that there are increasingly more ABCs for persons living with ID and/or that there is increasingly more attention on ABCs in academic literature. This matches the findings of Finkel and Bat Or (2020) that there is, firstly, an increasing prevalence of studio art approaches in general, and that, secondly, the approaches shift into the realm of social action. The ABCs for people living with ID that foster social justice seem to be part of that shift.

The study design of most of the included studies are qualitative (case) studies or action research, with a small or unclear sample size. Future research should therefore focus on a richer, more rigorous body of knowledge, not only about the potential of ABCs as an

intervention to foster social justice for persons with ID but also about the perceived effects of participation on their lives.

Only three articles have been assessed as inclusive research projects and only two articles are (co-)written by authors with experiential expertise on being an ABC participant with ID, providing a firsthand insider perspective. This means that to gain inside understanding, future research is advised to co-operate with, and therefore directly include, the voices of the persons the research is about (de Haas et al., 2022).

In the analysis of the selected papers, the examination of the terminology, ideas and perspectives that shed light on the ABCs' concepts contributing to social justice was prioritised. Consequently, all papers meeting the selection criteria were included, irrespective of their quality scores. In future research investigating perceived effects, the quality of the publications needs to be considered to be able to understand the results, and whether caution is needed when including findings from poorer-quality articles.

The ABCs in the included articles are almost all performed in Western, high-income countries, especially in the UK and the USA. One Australian article wrote about two ABCs in South Korea. The reason for this lack of geographical/cultural variation may be found in the inclusion criteria of our search, especially in the language restriction. Further research including publications in other languages could widen the scope to other regions of the world and provide new perspectives – for example, by exploring concepts that are not related to the CRPD. Between the regions of the included papers, no significant differences were found in relation to concepts or terminology.

We synthesised similar concepts and terminology into five key concepts that can be related to the CRPD and to art therapy literature about ABCs to address the needs of persons with developmental, physical or mental disabilities, as described in our introduction.

There are commonalities between literature on ABCs as a place of social justice for marginalised people in general and for those people with ID. Art therapy literature highlights mutual concepts such as fostering agency, facilitating empowerment and self-advocacy, promoting healthy interactions, increasing awareness, amplifying the voices of underprivileged or marginalised individuals, and fostering broader social change.

Related to the CRPD aims, we identified a variation of terminology of social inclusion that we synthesised with concepts of belonging, and better or richer social interaction inside and outside the ABC into 'social interaction, belonging, and inclusion'. Further, we synthesised concepts and terminology such as self-esteem, autonomy, and working according to one's own perceived strengths and abilities into 'empowerment and self-advocacy', which relates to the aspect of independence of the person living with ID in society. Another key concept, 'skills and employment', can also be related to the CRPD aim of independent living possibilities for persons living with ID.

The CRPD scope of social justice, which focuses on respect for independence, social inclusion, participation and accessibility (United Nations, 2006; World Health Organization, 2011), does not, according to Duffy (2023), make clear how to make these rights real. Duffy writes that there is a distinction between rights and entitlement in the concrete and practical form that a right takes in real life. For example, the entitlement to participate in the life of one's own community instead of a day-care centre. Therefore, he pleads for a focus not on quality of life but on citizenship outside the service system – a life that is lived in community, one of meaning, within relationships and interactions in the community as a full citizen.

In many of the included publications there are concepts of inclusion within the ABC and with people outside the ABC, especially with art performances and exhibitions. To our understanding, until now, ABCs have been designed to perform mostly within care systems, with less attention given to addressing social change in the direction of entitlement to life as a full citizen outside the care system. Next to these publications, we found others focusing more on social change with a political focus by, for example, creating turmoil for the cause of a democratic society with shared decision-making on an equal basis (Johansen & Saur, 2018), disrupting traditional hierarchies and practices (Schnellert et al., 2021; Viscardis et al., 2019), and taking positions as renegades outside institutional norms (Ineland, 2005).

To summarise, there seems to be an increasing movement of ABCs towards social justice inside and outside the care system. The perceived effects of both designs, and if or how they challenge this binary, are not clear yet.

Fulfilment of the aim of the convention, to create an inclusive and socially just society, where all persons deserve equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities, and can participate without experiencing obstacles (United Nations, 2006; World Health Organization, 2011), seems to be placed on the shoulders of persons with ID (Treanor, 2020), even in the ABCs, rather than being seen as a responsibility of all of society. The ABCs in our review put much focus on the growth of persons with ID, and their ability to empower themselves, advocate for themselves and develop more skills. For many people with ID this has many practical impossibilities and may be a pitfall, keeping the attention on what people with ID cannot yet achieve instead of what they need from others, including financial facilities, to be able to live a life as a citizen.

Duffy (2023, p.10) also advocates for telling stories about people's lives in order to connect and make sense of each other's perspectives, to move towards social justice. Art therapist, artist and disability rights activist Yi (2019) pleads from a critical, disability culture standpoint for exploration of community art-based practice to foster social justice. She underlines the need for disability culture and activism to move away from the historical medical disability narrative towards a narrative of disability being part of a cultural disability identity, existing next to and interacting with other cultures. In "Res(crip)ting art therapy: Disability culture as a social justice intervention" (2019), Yi describes two self-advocacy projects to bring visibility to the often silenced and hidden performative desire of people

living with disability. Her goal is to rescript the contemporary, suppressive disability-as-impairment narratives.

These approaches in relationship to fostering social justice need more understanding, as they were left out of the scope of this article. For example, exploring how telling stories becomes a two-way street instead of an endless effort that people with ID have to make, and examining how creating better disability narratives can change the perspectives of non-disabled persons. The authors of this article are currently preparing a second article that will delve deeper into the designs and approaches of ABCs, offering a comprehensive understanding of their implications for social justice.

The ABCs, their designs and approaches in relationship to their key concepts, art as a medium for social change and the perceived effects of participation, raise questions for future research. Topics worthy of future research are the potential of ABCs to break down barriers in social interaction between persons living with ID and others outside the ABC, successful designs and approaches that can be applied in future ABCs, and the perspectives of participants on the power of ABCs in relationship to resistance, activism and social change.

Conclusion

ABCs conceptualise their contribution to social justice for people living with ID in a variety of concepts and terminology that has been synthesised into five key concepts in this study. These can be related to the CRPD aims and to claims of ABCs in existing art therapy literature.

As our search led to a rich variation of studies, the understanding of the key concepts and their value for future ABCs as interventions for social justice for persons living with ID needs more research – especially in the direction of successful designs and approaches, and perspectives and perceived effects in the lives of ABC participants.

Limitations of the review

The selection criteria and the search strategy limited the review. First, no 'grey' data were included, such as videos, live performances or presentation papers. 'Grey' data could elaborate knowledge on the subject by adding empirical data, perhaps even from an evaluative perspective of participants with ID. Second, publications focusing on ABCs with no other purpose than including children in mainstream education were excluded. During our study, many of these publications were identified. A review on that subject could increase knowledge about ABCs that aim to foster inclusion in education. Third, some of the articles included were assessed with low-quality scores. After discussion, they were included in the study, because empirical data to answer our question were expected from these publications. Fourth, the language restriction in the inclusion criteria led to a lack of geographical/cultural variation of data.

Acknowledgements

Appendix

The appendix to this article can be accessed at the end of the article:
https://www.jocat-online.org/a-24-zimmermann

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