

Leading in the Age of Imagination – Assessing Change and Partnership and the Art & Design Institution

Dr. Sara Diamond, President and Vice-Chancellor OCAD University

This talk will provide a case study of a six year path of change and adaptation on the part of Ontario College of Art & Design (OCAD) University – a 135 year old institution. OCAD University is located in Toronto, the largest city in Canada in the downtown core, adjacent to the Art Gallery of Ontario. It is the largest and most comprehensive art, design and media institution or set of programs in Canada and one of the largest in North America and Europe. We currently have 4300 undergraduate students in attendance and approximately 200 graduate students. That is one big load of talent! The visual art program has historically included Drawing and Painting, Photography, Printmaking, Sculpture and Installation, Integrated Media, and Curatorial and Critical Studies. There is also a cross over program in Material Art and Design with our Design faculty.

In 2006 we undertook a rigorous strategic planning process that refocused the institution and set a framework for its transformation. The school sustained its historic strengths in traditional art and design – with a great attention to formal values and professional training – but it redirected its philosophy. Its’ strategic plan framed a vision and mission that emphasized research, interdisciplinarity and partnership rather than one narrowly constrained by formal training in art and design. The vision states that, “OCAD U makes vital contributions to the fields of art, design and media, through local and global cultural initiatives, while providing knowledge and invention across a wide range of disciplines”. The notion that art, design, and science can and should have a deeper dialogue than in the recent past is embedded in our

strategic plan. The call is for a significant and fundamental dialogue, not one that simplifies art, design, science, or social science. It does not erase the value of practice outside of the art and science dialogue, although these practices can then be interpreted through a wider range of lenses. The turn to an activist engagement with the sciences (including medicine, earth sciences, physics, and material science) is driven by the desire and need to provide relevancy, cogency, and power to art and design practices. An engagement with the social sciences provides a set of parallel methods and tools for analysis of human factors in creative fields. This in turn places art and design at the centre of contemporary discourses, practices, and concerns—looking out at other disciplines and providing fresh approaches and methods to these. This in turn offers the potential for new forms of knowledge and of practices such as “ArtSci” or “SciArt” (depending on where one lives) as well as new media.

The plan draws on a growing history of successful cross-disciplinary research and pedagogy that engages knowledge in art, design, and many other disciplines.¹ Aspects of the mission emphasized partnerships, “OCAD U’s fearless and future facing learning environment draws from its high-quality, diverse research practice, undertaken with extensive outreach and partnerships”, and, “OCAD U offers vibrant disciplinary and cross-disciplinary opportunities for cultural and lifelong learning in concert with local, national, Aboriginal and international communities.” Its code of practice further emphasizes collaboration, “OCAD U values, respects and advances ethical practice, flexibility, advocacy, diversity, accessibility, Aboriginal cultures, wellness, global citizenship, as well as the manifestations of creativity in entrepreneurship, innovation, and sustainability”.

¹ The power that these crossover practices can have was indicated time and again during many years of leading the Banff New Media Institute—an experiment in new media research and intellectual exploration that depended on dialogues and experiments between the arts and sciences.

After I provide an overview of the ways that the university adopted and then enacted this challenging mission I will provide two case studies –the first the Aboriginal Visual Culture Program: Art, Design and Media, and the second case the Inclusive Design Research. These two initiatives focus on serving communities with rich histories of knowledge that have a history of marginalization from the university – Aboriginal people and the disabled.

OCAD University created a working group that drew upon its own expertise in art, design, cultural theory, and history, and solicited the views of outside consultants from many different disciplines. With their help we grappled with two significant questions:

- ♦ What is the future of art and design?
- ♦ What is the future of post-secondary education?

Through this process the group created scenarios in order to understand the key uncertainties affecting art and design.² The major drivers that the research acknowledged and then analyzed were technological change, globalization, societal values, sustainability, and cultural diversity. These powerful forces would shape the broad context of art and design.³ This analysis led to the identification of two key forces that would impact art and design education. These were a) the extent to which art and design would be valued in future societies and b) diversity and sustainability and the extent to which the resolution of world conflicts would be

² The development of “Leading in the Age of Imagination” was itself a dynamic process. The core working group included students, faculty, administrators, alumni, staff, and the Board of Governors. It used all manner of participatory design and brainstorming tools. It held extended brainstorming sessions at OCAD beyond its own membership. It met with faculties (Art, Design and Liberal Studies). The plan was passed by Academic Council. The Student Union held a series of fora that resulted in additions to the plan. It was then unanimously adopted by the Board of Governors in 2006.

³ The discussion also included a discussion of more focused forces and factors directly shaping art and design practice and education, such as education funding and delivery, the nature of learners and evolving practices of art and design. These factors are reflected throughout the core strategies that OCAD has embraced.

able to effectively address these.

From these forces came four scenarios. The first scenario was entitled the “Globe Lab,”

an optimistic, but not impossible scenario in which global creative diversity, art and design imagination and leadership are valued and harnessed to help solve major global problems, from poverty and security to disease and sustainability.

The second scenario was dubbed “Island Living,” in which,

increasing global political instability, inequity and insecurity lead to a growing rejection of globalization, and “local” problem solving that includes non-geographic issues through networked collaboration. A combination of idealism and pragmatism influences and is influenced by art and design. For artists, society is rich in paradox, evolving in its thinking and open to exposure and direction in reshaping society’s view of itself. Art is recognized and valued.

The third scenario was named “Legacy Inc.,” a time of terrorist activity, pandemics, and economic upheaval, a conservative time of fear in which,

people search for their roots and cherish the original, the archival and traditional. Art and design are used in the service of the culture, the community and the clan, on preserving and securing the past.... The criterion for success in design is not whether it is attractive, unique or groundbreaking, but whether it works.

Finally, there is a scenario entitled “Commercial World” where,

commercialization and technology drive art and design as well as education. Strong global economic growth, relative political stability and the rapid deployment of technology—notably broadband and wireless—renew globalization in trade, travel and consciousness. Large-scale universal aesthetics are constantly asserted and then re-invented. This is a world of user generated content and “prosumers” as well as constant demand for skilled artists and designers.

In taking into account each of these scenarios, OCAD saw the impact of holistic knowledge, albeit from an art and design perspective. It saw the tremendous impact of technology in the last century and, with this, the often hidden role of science in shaping our lives, the planet, and beyond. The institution defined its culture as “a learning environment that integrates studio-based education with historical, critical, and scientific inquiry.” We applied our values (stated earlier) to our curriculum focus.

What did this understanding mean for pedagogy and research? OCAD identified five themes that would consolidate and build on existing cross-disciplinary curriculum and research interests within the school that were identified within the analysis of key trends in knowledge that needed art and design engagement. These would shape practices within the institution and in its relationship with others. The themes are:⁴

Sustainability: An overarching challenge for the twenty-first century, reflected in the use of materials, energy, economic autonomy, and other key concerns.

⁴ This is a highly abbreviated version of the themes. An executive summary of the plan is available at the OCAD Web site.

Diversity: A vibrant, productive arts community, animating and reflecting rich cultural diversity, is a core quality of twenty-first century practice and a requirement for problem solving. Attention to place and Aboriginal values.

Wellness: Medical discovery, health-care policy, health technologies, service delivery health communication, lifestyle education, art therapy, addiction, and care for the elderly are among the areas of potential collaboration and discovery between art, design, health, wellness, and lifestyle researchers and promise significant innovation potential in the current century.

Technological innovation: Rapid growth and persistent change in technological platforms are a constant. Digital culture and tools are transforming everyday life, creative practices, business models, and cultural industries. The international trend is towards increasing engagement of art and design with science and engineering. Artists and designers have begun to move beyond using current technologies to imagine and invent new technologies and applications.

Contemporary ethics: Art and design grapple with ethics and social justice, at times embracing divergent strategies such as critique, revelation, intervention, or problem-solving. Community and international engagement surface and require attention to ethics, as do art and design research methodologies.

These new directions emphasized the development of new methodologies that were cross-disciplinary and emergent and moved towards a hybrid culture, one that prized problem solving, requiring nurturing collaboration skills as well as fostering individual talent. A rigorous period of academic planning has led to shifts in our traditional Visual Arts program, consolidating 2D and 3D studies and creating sub-categories and interdisciplinary minors with Design. New programs include Digital Painting & Experimental Animation; Publications; Contemporary Figuration; and Cross-Disciplinary Thesis Stream as well as Art and Design i& Social Change.

The most significant new program emerging out of this process is the Digital Futures Initiative – a comprehensive transformation of learning to bring the physical, material together with the virtual as well as launching a series of degree programs. As we built our graduate school we architected programs that exemplified this interdisciplinary approach. For example the Interdisciplinary Masters in Art, Media & Design provides a home for critical thinking and interdisciplinary studio. The Strategic Foresight and Innovation Masters brings design thinking into business and government problem solving. Our Digital Futures Masters stresses, “Graduates of the Program will contribute to the development and application of new knowledge in creative digital technology practices, content, and experiences, providing insights into human needs and desires in a technologically dependent world”. And our Masters of Inclusive Design assumes, “Accessibility and inclusion are not only rights to be protected, but catalysts for new ideas, design principles that lead to better design, business strategies that make good business sense, and economic drivers with ubiquitous social benefits.” New undergraduate programs are equally interdisciplinary. The Digital Futures: Technology, Innovation Design & Art BFA and BDesign was drafted with participation from industry and digital NGOs. It combines such diverse fields as

computation, physical computing, data visualization, screen-based media, gaming, and business and innovation studies to create a rich forward-thinking program which will position students well to work across the burgeoning and varied fields of digital media.

OCAD U has developed partnerships with science and technology, engineering, medical research, and innovation faculties of other institutions, research institutes, or companies. An implication of these directions has been an intensification of research interests and support. Art and design research is understood as intrinsically valuable in its own right and of value in relation to the thematic fields above. Beyond its historical strength in art practice, social sciences and humanities research, OCAD U has undertaken intensive research development in 4 areas in the last three years: 1) digital media: data visualization; mobile technology and experiences; computer games studies and design; bioinformatics; design and art; 2) strategic foresight, 3) design and medical research (in areas such as universal design, accessibility, and human factors); and 4) sustainability, in particular, in relation to the built environment. We have created a multimillion dollar network of laboratories: The Digital Futures Research and Innovation Institute with our partners.

As an art and design university, we define ourselves as a public institution:

We can occupy the public terrain as a culturally diverse, creative and intellectual centre that links initiatives in culture, public education and discovery to its mandate as a university of art and design. OCAD can function as a hybrid—first as a university, second as a cultural institution, and third as a partner institution able to intervene effectively to meet the needs of diverse communities.

This means intensified support for faculty and students to engage in situated learning and research with the larger community and to present their practice and their research beyond OCAD's walls. It means bringing the community into the university.

In the process of developing the strategic plan, OCAD's working group undertook intensive sketching as well as brainstorming. It created metaphors for the new OCAD, often working in subgroups and teams. It described the institution's intellectual environment as "The New Ecology of Learning." This nomenclature reflected images of an OCAD that was organic, whether biological, plant-like, or cellular: penetrable yet able to absorb and adapt to new growth. Brian Goodwin, in *How the Leopard Got His Spots: the Evolution of Complexity*, captures this image when he states, "organisms...must be understood as dynamical systems with distinctive properties that characterise their living state."⁵ The institution was depicted with intertwined yet semi-autonomous systems that were able to evolve in systematic yet complex ways. It is a strong image.

The Aboriginal Visual Culture Program: Art, Media and Design

My people will sleep for one hundred years. When they awake, it will be the artists who give them their spirit back.

-- Louis Riel

OCAD University's focus on global citizenship and engagement is balanced by a strong commitment to acknowledging diversity at home and in particular – a commitment to Aboriginal

⁵ Brian Goodwin, *How the Leopard Got His Spots: the Evolution of Complexity* (Princeton: Princeton Science Library, 2001) 3.

people in Canada, their cultures and their rights. We are located on Ojibway and Nishnawbe territory, close to Six Nations. Aboriginal people represent a significant and growing part of Canada's population and are located across Canada, in urban centres and in remote communities and reserves. In the prairie provinces they make up 7% of the total population and some 30% of cities such as Winnipeg and Regina; 5% in British Columbia and 2.5% in Ontario. The territory of Nunavut is administered under Inuit self-government. Canada's Aboriginal people were forced into residential schools where they experienced the violent suppression of their culture and languages as well as intensive physical and sexual abuse. Families, clan and governance structures were destroyed – including matrilineal and matriarchal patterns. Poverty, alcoholism, addiction and suicide characterize life in many remote communities as is educational retention. Prostitution remains one of the few sources of employment for young Aboriginal women. However, despite a nightmarish situation there are over 250 languages grouped into dominant linguistic types. The last thirty years have seen a movement for rights and self-government, truth and reconciliation regarding the residential schools, a new generation of educated Aboriginal leaders, and an unprecedented cultural renaissance.

OCAD University has a history of educating some of Canada's most prestigious Aboriginal artists – names such as Rebecca Belmore, Tom Hill, Terance Houle and Mary Anne Barkhouse. In the last four years we have created a significant new initiative in Aboriginal visual culture, art, media and design with national opportunities, networks, and international links. The initiative embraces undergraduate and graduate programs, as well as research and outreach. While the last twenty-five years have witnessed a dynamic growth of scholarship and practice in the Aboriginal visual arts, design, critical and curatorial studies, Ontario and in fact Canada as a

whole, lack dedicated programs in Aboriginal arts and design at the university, college or Aboriginal Institute level.

“Making a Noise” was a watershed conference at The Banff Centre in Canada (where I used to work). It shared Aboriginal Perspectives on Art, Art History, Critical Writing and Community. Joanne Cardinal Shubert (now deceased) gave the call to arms, “What is our practice? What is our tenet? What is our theory? Who were our heroes? Where is this information? When will we write about it? When will we celebrate it? When will we reference it? When will we write about it? When will we declare it?” She calls for Aboriginal artists, curators and critics to step back and be leery of the wide spread interest and access to Canadian Aboriginal art in a context where there is a failure to protect and institutionalize that art at home, or bring that art to the Aboriginal community. “Let making a noise be truly our own noise, not a bad imitation...this is what we can leave to the next generation – the noise that we have always been here.”⁶

The OCAD U initiative centers on contemporary practice, theory and expression in First Nations, Métis and Inuit art, media and design in Canadian and international contexts. It is based on principles of self government, with a powerful Aboriginal Education Council. In order to strengthen our ability to build the program I brought on board an Aboriginal chancellor, former Lieutenant Governor James K. Bartleman, who chaired the AEC for the first two years and remains a member of Council. The AEC has a membership of 26 highly engaged Aboriginal leaders from many cultural and vocational backgrounds, including Alonis Abomsawin, Lee Ann Martin, Tom Hill, Douglas Cardinal, Zacharias Kunuk. OCAD University’s Board of Governors continues to be engaged in the development of the ABVC Program. Mr. Goyce Kakegamic, a

⁶ Joanne Cardinal, “Flying with Louis”. In Ed. Lee Ann Martin, *Making a Noise: Aboriginal Perspectives on Art, Art History, Critical Writing and Community*. Banff: Banff Centre Press, 2003.

former Deputy Grand Chief of The Nishnawbe Aski Nation, artist and community leader, serves on the BoG and Dr. Tony Belcourt, founding president of the Métis Nation of Ontario is joining the board.

Other principles of self-government are the integration of Aboriginal perspectives into course syllabi and the placement of Aboriginal faculty in the studios and classrooms to teach both Aboriginal and other curricula. There will be an MFA in Aboriginal Criticism and Curatorial Practice (a new field of the current program) and eventually a PhD in one or both of the Master's program areas. An undergraduate program will launch next year and there is a robust minor. It has begun a research centre dedicated to advancing and collating scholarship in Aboriginal art, design, media, critical and curatorial studies, through collaboration with Aboriginal communities and other post-secondary institutions and researchers.

The program undertakes outreach programming, in collaboration with school boards, Aboriginal associations, tribal/band councils, enterprises, and other post-secondary institutions in Ontario and across Canada, including bridging or transition programs for high school and college students seeking entrance to OCAD U, and internships and work-study programs for OCAD students in northern Ontario communities as well as in Toronto.

Aboriginal youth is a growing sector of the Canadian population and constitutes a critical part of the future Canadian and Ontario labour force. All significant studies of Aboriginal post-secondary education note the importance of developing programs that will engage Aboriginal youth, while building the capacity and knowledge of these communities in their own right and within the larger Canadian context. For Aboriginal people, language, storytelling through a variety of media, identity and well-being are closely tied. Aboriginal art, cinema, new media and exhibition have become a key part of Canada's larger identity and a key part of the growing

cultural economy of Canada. The 3,300 Aboriginal artists represent 2.4% of all artists, which is less than the percentage of Aboriginal people in the overall labour force (2.9%). The average earnings of Aboriginal artists are 30% lower than the average for all artists. But more than this – it brings a new set of skills and capacity to economic development in the Aboriginal community. The development of the Aboriginal Visual Culture Program at OCAD is helps to close this income gap by opening up new opportunities for professional Aboriginal artists. OCAD's design programs are expected to contribute to a growing Aboriginal design economy; and OCAD's emphasis on Curatorial and Critical practices will support the growing community of Aboriginal curators and critics.

Equally important are the questions that these programs grapple with:

- What are relevant distinctions if any between ethnographic and historical categories?
How can an Aboriginal art history be acknowledged?
- How can art practice and exhibition be tied to community – the balance of protocol, definitions of the work as subversive or inclusive (Candice Hopkins) and the sense that Aboriginal art must always have a fundamental community shaping role (Vincent Collison)⁷ Who are primary audiences for Aboriginal art, media and design?
- How can Aboriginal curators intervene into the historical construct of the museum or contemporary gallery with its architectural and philosophical histories predicated on colonialism?
- How are aesthetics to be judged? What are limits of the aesthetics of pain?
- What constitutes authoritative text in the writing of histories (oral, textual)
- How are artifacts to be handled and by whom; collected and by whom? Repatriation.

⁷ Ibid.

In the short span of three years we have created a Dedicated Aboriginal program infrastructure, including:

- An Aboriginal Education Council with national representation to advise on the creation and ongoing development of the program;
- Scholarships and bursaries;
- Tenured and tenure-track Aboriginal faculty including a dual chair structure Bonnie Devine and Arthur Renwick;
- Ancillary support services, in particular a counselor to meet the needs of Aboriginal students on campus;
- A mentorship program with Duke Redbird to augment counseling and support for students, and assist with cultural activities, faculty development, and curriculum development;
- An Aboriginal student meeting place or student centre that holds regular buffalo stews open to the entire campus
- An Aboriginal recruiter who accesses communities throughout Canada
- A curriculum development officer (an OCAD U graduate) who is helping to develop curriculum working with communities and our AEC
- Summer intensives as part of a literacy program that our former chancellor the Honorable James K. Bartleman began bringing our students into remote communities to teach art, design and media arts

In development:

- An Augmented First Year program that supports students from Northern Aboriginal communities to learn at home, using the Internet and studio seminars at a Northern

university, with trips to OCAD U that bank their experience. On-line or hybrid course development – including art/design history and ideas courses (currently being redeveloped at OCAD to include art and design history from a global perspective, but with particular attention to Aboriginal peoples and greater attention to the Canadian context), and also part of some studio courses;

- Enhanced liaisons with remote and urban communities to maintain and develop mentorship programs for transitioning students within the university context; Collaborations with Weengushk Film Institute and De-ba-jeh-mu-jig Theatre Company on Manitoulin Island to augment program opportunities and develop articulation agreements
- Mid-career completion program for fast tracked Bachelors plus a masters degree
- Coop placements with Aboriginal organizations
- We are currently planning a conference in partnership with the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective that will explore history and future practice in exhibiting Aboriginal contemporary art. A part two to “Making a Noise”

In 2010/11, OCAD University’s MFA program in Criticism and Curatorial Practices included four Aboriginal students – more than a third of the students in this program. By September 2010, 106 students had self-identified as Aboriginal, Métis or Inuit in OCAD’s “Under-Represented Student Survey”. This is more than double the goal of the program’s original vision.

IDRC

The Inclusive Design Institute (IDI) sets the conditions for art practice in the online environment, in a context of accessibility. It is a regional research hub focusing on the inclusive design of emerging information and communication technology funded by the Canada Foundation for Innovation and the Ontario Ministry of Research and Innovation, with 7 core partner academic institutions in the Greater Toronto Area and over 100 other partner organizations in the public and private sector (IBM, MS, Apple, Google, RIM...) to develop tools for everyday interfaces and education as well as providing insights on standards, centered around our university's 25 person Inclusive Design Research Centre. The IDRC engages in participatory design with disabled communities throughout our region and internationally.

A shift from individual experience to hybrid group experiences is precisely the aesthetic challenge that Warren Sack, (a designer of collaborative spaces for large-scale online conversations) makes to artificial intelligence research and cognitive science in his recent article in *Database Aesthetics*.⁸ . He argues that contemporary technology systems require an aesthetic that allows the emergence of new common and collectively constructed shared experiences and identities. New technologies, especially mobile ones, provide the double strengths of malleability and adaptability to individual needs while at the same time joining that individual to a larger collectivity. This duality is of specific value to the field of inclusive design where the emergence of a digital economy has brought challenges for inclusion as evidenced by the notion of the digital divide; conversely it also brings opportunities for far greater accessibility and inclusion.

⁸ Warren Sack, "Network Aesthetics," *Database Aesthetics: Art in the Age of Information Overload*, ed. Victor Vesna (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2007) 183-210.

The Canadian economy will face a number of inevitable complicating factors in the near future. Our population is aging. Seniors will surpass children aged 14 or under for the first time ever sometime between 2015 and 2021. The incidence of disability increases dramatically as we age, 37% of persons age 65 to 74 and 60% of persons age 75 and over experience a disability compared to 15% of the general population.⁹ As this aging trend continues Canada confronts a labour gap in critical positions throughout our economy. Many of the more skilled, knowledgeable and senior employees will retire or cease to be able to work, without younger candidates to replace them, leaving significant gaps in our work force that can be partially addressed by presently excluded persons with disabilities.¹⁰ The Conference Board of Canada has identified persons with disabilities as a potential labour pool to address future labour gaps. It has been estimated that Ontario alone could realize a 4.7 billion dollar increase in annual wages or a 853 dollar increase in GDP by taking the steps required to provide greater accessibility for people with disabilities.¹¹

As these figures suggest exclusion and inequity in a society lead to a vicious cycle of under-education, unemployment, poverty, physical and mental illness that affect not just the excluded and their family but the entire society. According to Wilkinson and Pickett the more inclusive a society the lower the incidence of physical or mental illness and crime, throughout the population.¹²

While mainstream ICT continues to increase in functionality and decrease in cost, assistive technologies are decreasing in functionality and reliability and increasing in cost.

⁹ Participation and Activity Limitation Survey(PALS) 2006, Statistics Canada. Catalogue no. 89-628-X.

¹⁰ <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/hcp/default.aspx>

¹¹ <http://martinprosperity.org/research-and-publications/publication/releasing-constraints>

¹² Wilkinson, R., and Pickett, K., (2009). *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*. Allen Lane.

Digitally mediated education, employment, social activities, recreation, culture, commercial interactions and other essential services continue to present significant barriers to people with disabilities.

At the same time, digital mediation has the potential to address many current access barriers and digital tools can be far more accessible than their non-digital counterparts by virtue of the plasticity or mutability of the digital medium. Digital systems can be personally reconfigured or transformed to address each individual's access needs at virtually no additional cost (e.g., increasing size and contrast of text or speaking text using a voice synthesizer). The incidence of disabilities globally is rising, due to the aging trend but also due to advances in medicine that increase the chances of survival with disabilities and population growth.¹³ It follows that there is a growing market for inclusively designed digital products and services globally. Digitally delivered education and digitally mediated employment or employment in the digital industry can be more accessible than traditionally delivered education and traditional employment, presenting an unprecedented opportunity to address this inequity. There is also a potential opportunity for academic institutions that develop education and training in inclusive design of digital tools and media in that the demand globally for ICT professionals with skills and knowledge in inclusive design is growing.

We need to foster the capacity to innovate. One of the most powerful drivers for innovation is diversity. The more a group includes a diversity of perspectives the more successful will be the group's decisions, predictions, problem solving and planning, but more

¹³ <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=18>

importantly, the more innovative and creative the group will be.¹⁴ People with disabilities are a rich source of diverse perspectives. Invention makes creative leaps forward when we address challenges at the margins of any domain. Services, technologies or design changes made for people with disabilities benefit everyone (as recently verified in Toronto when public transit began to consistently call out stops to meet the needs of passengers who are blind).

AccessForAll assumes “one-size-fits-one”, matching the individual needs of each person using ICT. We are working with the US National Public Inclusive Infrastructure and invitation by Obama administration to develop a Global Partnership Initiative and Framework 7, EU. Projects: FLUID – open source software infrastructure that allows specific tools to be built. Flexible Learning for Open Education (FLOE) Hewlett Foundation – for disabled learners. AEGIS - Open source framework and tools to integrate accessibility into standard ICT (desktop, Web and mobile) with EU. We are currently creating a personalized needs and preference server to assist the full diversity of end users to discover, identify, label, store and retrieve personal needs and preferences regarding access to digital systems. The server will act as a repository for research into technologies to address a large variety of needs including needs related to ability, age, literacy, language, culture and other common barriers. As part of this research they are creating a cloud based research platform to find and deliver resources and user experience functionality that matches individual user preferences on a variety of devices, in a variety of contexts. IDRC has partners throughout the developing world including ---- in Colombia. The Ministry of Education. They build in an open source environment that supports the rapid build

¹⁴ Page, Scott E., *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2007.

and dissemination of these tools. The platform will create opportunities for SMEs to build specific applications appropriate to a diverse range of users at reasonable cost and with the potential for commercialization.

Participatory design is a core element of the IDRC and IDI's practice when they are building interfaces that apply directly to end users – engaging disabled people in Participatory design draws from action research, engaging end-users in the imagination and systematic design of technologies that will influence their lives. Hence, the creation process for the IDRC involves brainstorming software, workshops to delineate that phase of the development path, including the production of paper or even electronic prototypes, the software build, often making use of distributed contributors and the documentation of that phase of the software, as well as regular usability testing.

Why is this work relevant to an audience of art practitioners? A core element of the IDRC's practice is to enable creative communities, to create translational tools that allow diverse communities to work in synaesthetic media. But more than this – without access to literacy, education, and online design tools – disabled people will be marginalized from contributing as artists, or as audience members.

Conclusion

These two case studies are but examples of how our institution has taken up the need for transformative interdisciplinary practice that makes a difference on many fronts – from providing tools to creating cultural expressions that build specific communities as well as the larger cultural

framework. We believe that we have provided a highly collaborative “leadership in the Age of Imagination”.