

Doin' it Together: Zine Making and Creative Collaboration with Kids and Youth

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For over 20 years, I have been collaborating and creating with all ages, including kids. Together, we learned and created in community run spaces, public spaces, and in our homes. While I was often in the role of mentor, I too was a mentee in most situations. After all, mentorship (and learning) is always in motion and indeed moves in all directions. Kids can mentor each other as well as mentor an adult and vice versa. I genuinely believe that creating and learning together is the most accessible and joyful way to come together across differences.

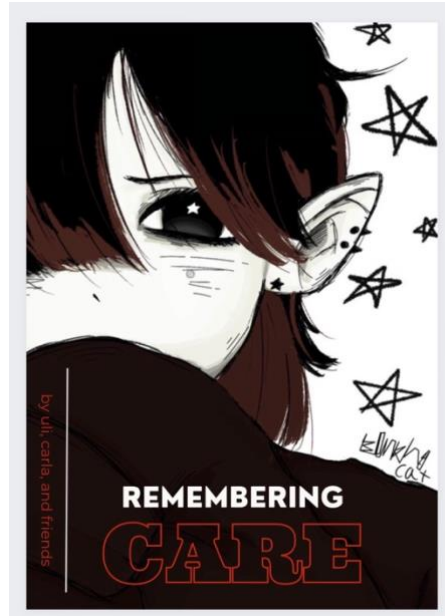
I wasn't trained to be an educator or youth worker, and I don't identify as either. Instead, the impetus of this joyful path was that I wanted our family to be part of a thriving multigenerational community, which is often lacking.

I chose to focus on zine¹ making for this piece because zines are wonderful for collaborating across skill and ages and involve many tasks and skills, including editing, design, and putting them together. The content can take on all kinds of shapes and styles, meeting everyone where their skills and interests are. This includes interviewing folks, writing essays or poetry, taking photos, drawing comics. The ideas are endless!



To keep the work collaborative, it is important to have the meta topics or themes of the zine remain broad. For example, a topic like "Art and Activism" opens it up for all kinds of ideas to emerge from the group. Or you could use a more specific topic like "care" but then continue to be open to how care is framed, etc. Part of my praxis is to have folks read (or view) youth's works, so, depending on where we made it, we would always ensure it had a public launch of some kind. We would print enough to sell or share at events and bookstores or to give to our friends and family at a launch. The larger the project meant a larger audience. In some cases, we had launches that brought in over 100 people each time! Zines really bring folks together,

and I am always amazed how every single youth participates in the process and has a really good time doing it, too. Over the years, the youth I collaborated with reflected that working on the zines gave them the confidence to identify as a writer, graphic designer, photographer, or at the very least (or most!) a zine maker!



It's also important to mention that I don't collaborate with youth within the confines of a typical institution – like school or community centres. We're not bound to work within some of the limiting structures inherent to institutions. This freedom allows us to show up with a profound openness and curiosity for the folks in the room. In doing this, we work to undo social borders and the hierarchy that is baked into our societies. With every all-ages collaboration, we are undoing adult supremacy.

In addition to moving beyond institutions, there are other practices and values that are vital to ensuring that creating across ages and skill levels feels authentic and generative to all involved. Through collaborating, I've named some core values and practices: trust, thriving, listening, and not being attached to outcomes.

Trust: Arrive at these spaces with trust *in* and *with* the folks you're collaborating with. Trust is crucial for these creative engagements to go well. With age differences, power is always at

play, and so for youth and children to feel completely part of the activities, there must be an abundance of trust flowing. Trust supports them to know that their ideas and interests are valid and welcomed. Trusting one another is essential for allowing these encounters to go well.

Thriving: To thrive is to be present with what *is* and what you are doing together. To ensure a thriving space does take some thoughtful planning – especially when you don't have pre-existing relationships. Part of evoking a playful engagement is to embrace and model experimentation and to make mistakes. Also, go outside, have fun, and share food! This all will

support folks to know each other better, ensuring artmaking of any kind becomes accessible and fun for everyone.

Listening: Carving out ample time to brainstorm with the group is where the process begins. This all takes patience. A commitment to hear everyone's ideas will ensure that everyone participates, including deciding *together* what ends up being the project. This might seem counterintuitive, but don't aim to make sense, instead tune into and *sense* the subtleties flowing, especially from the very young and shy folks. Resolve to truly listen.

Not-attached to outcomes: As a mentor, I provide the scaffolding— materials and other resources— but leave the plan and ideas for everyone to come up with together, supporting me to show up with openness to what the group wants to create! Embrace the potential of being surprised by what emerges, letting go of any preconceived notions and hopes of what the zine becomes. Arrive armed with trust, and delight in the process of creating together.



Implementing all of these together will invigorate any kind of creative collaboration. And, we all need to do more things together: to co-learn some skills, to feel good about what we created together, to deepen a sense of belonging, and in the end discover new friendships, ones that will last well beyond the making of a Zine.

Notes

¹ Zines as defined by Wikipedia are “a small-circulation self-published work of original or appropriated texts and images, usually reproduced via a copy machine.”

Author Biography

Carla Joy Bergman is a writer and multidisciplinary artist. She is the co-author of *Joyful Militancy*, and editor of *Radiant Voices* and *Trust Kids!* carla aims to keep the embers burning with and for the youth and the coming generations. She currently lives in Vancouver, British Columbia, on the lands of the xwməθkwəym (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Sel̓ilwítlh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations with her kids and partner. www.joyfulcarla.com

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