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Exploring Aging Attitudes Through a Puppet Making Research Study

Susan R. Whiteland
Arkansas State University, USA

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Abstract

Intergenerational programs often reduce ageism and stereotypical thinking. This author uses a mixed methods case study to investigate how attitudes may change when older adults and children participate in an intergenerational art project. The research question, “Is there a positive correlation in children’s attitudes toward older adults and aging after interacting together in an engaging intergenerational art activity?” is explored. Context for the study is in an elementary classroom. Gifted and talented students partner with volunteering older adults from the community to create hand puppets, write scripts and dramatize personal stories dealing with the big idea of communication. Statistical analysis using t-tests did not show significant change in students’ attitudes, yet there was evidence that students constructed new meaning toward their understanding of aging and older adults.

Introduction

Recently the song, “Happy Birthday to You” was recognized in court as being part of the public domain ending decades of copyright infringement battles (Mai-Duc, 2015). The popular song’s anthem to celebrate another year of aging, however, may not readily invoke gaiety and a congratulatory response. Instead, the idea of growing older often spurs on ageism, prejudicial thinking based on age, and the rationale for social inadequacies (Cuddy, Norton & Fiske, 2005). The common practice in industrialized nations for segregating generations based on age further distances generations and breeds a fear of aging, stereotypical thinking by both young and old, hostility between the generations, myths associated with aging and a deterioration of the mind and spirit of the elderly as well as mistrust among those on opposite ends of the life span (Newman, 1997). Intergenerational programming, an approach to integrating older and younger generations in a variety of settings, has the potential of producing a positive influence on the attitudes of one generation toward another Alcock (2011). Allport’s (1954) social contact theory posits that when contact between groups takes place under optimal conditions prejudice is reduced. In other words, as different groups interact together with a common purpose, with equal status, no competition and authority sanctioning, they will recognize commonalities and develop positive relationships.

Using social contact theory as my theoretical framework, I chose to investigate the question, “Is there a positive correlation in children’s attitudes toward older adults and aging after interacting together in an engaging intergenerational art activity.” The outcome goal of the research project was to better understand aging attitudes of children who have interacted with older adults in an engaging art activity. It was anticipated that results from the project would be meaningful to art educators and others interested in aging as they could better understand how intergenerational art activities may promote positive attitudes of young people toward aging and older adults. Transference for similar contexts was expected. I used a mixed methods approach for the case study planning to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. As primary investigator and participant observer I investigated the aging attitudes of a classroom of students toward aging and older adults who were working together to produce scripts and create hand puppets related to communication. This article tells what was learned.

Literature Review

Intergenerational programming in the United States was introduced in 1963 through the Foster Grandparent Program (Friedman, 1999). Low income senior adults and special needs children were paired in an effort to develop relationships, bring generations together and inspire civic responsibility. Numerous articles document the role that visual art activities play in building relationships between the generations. A review of the literature for this present decade

suggests that intergenerational visual art programs promote a sense of community between the generations, which reduces stereotypical attitudes. For example, Rubin (2015) reports that art creates a natural topic of conversation and acts as a bonding agent between students and older adults. Lokon (2012) says that art builds bridges across age and cognitive barriers. Heyden (2007, 2012) says that she discovered in two case studies that an intergenerational art class can aid in the communication between preschool children and older adults at a retirement facility. Heyden, R. and Dailey (2008) say they saw the elimination of fear toward older adults as the result of an intergenerational art class. Lawton and LaPorte (2013) write that the value of intergenerational art programs in community based arenas provide reciprocal benefits in lifelong learning for both older adults and young people. Moody and Phinney (2012) report that community engaged arts promote connections for older adults and neighborhood youth. Larson (2006) says seniors and young people create bonds as they began to know each other through the visual arts. Chapline (2006) tells how a center for elders and youth brought together youth-serving community organizations, schools, community artists and senior sites. Through the arts collaboration in Chapline's (2006) experience the youth and elders established lasting relationships that encouraged compassion, caring for others and sharing. Wilde (2008) reports of an intergenerational art collaboration that exercises collective energy and builds bridges between participants. Wilde's project involved intergenerational participants producing a story quilt and accompanying children's picture book. In a previous study Author (2013) I found that art programs in facilities where both older adults and children are serviced can produce a sense of community. In another project Author (2012) I saw that senior adults at an adult day care, university students, and preschool children can develop empathy and care for one another through a shared art project. In a third study Author (2013) I discovered that university students, a preschool and residents at an assisted living facility can create connections and understanding through an art exchange program. Each of the articles that I reviewed suggested that intergenerational art programs are appropriate for engaging older and younger participants in meaningful activity and that doing so prompts positive relationships among those who take part.

Methodology

Research Participants

Ms. S. who teaches gifted and talented (GT) students at a local elementary school responded to a letter of inquiry that I sent to several local middle school principals outlining my research agenda of surveying children's attitudes toward aging and older adults before and after they had worked together with older adults in an art project. Gifted and talented students are defined as individuals who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude or competence in one or more structured areas of activity such as mathematics, music, language, painting, dance or sports (National Association of Gifted Children, 2010). I met with Ms. S. and explained that

the research project would not only provide data regarding attitudes on aging it would also address several English language arts and visual arts curriculum standards. I planned to use contact theory (Allport, 1954) as my theoretical framework for the study. The theory supports face-to-face interactions with diverse groups to reduce prejudice. Ms. S. enthusiastically agreed to take part and suggested that I work with her first period sixth grade class of 15 students ages 11 and 12 years old. Ms. S. also assisted me with recruiting older adults from the community for the project. I contacted those she recommended. Through word of mouth and personal acquaintance ten older adults 55 years of age and older committed to the script writing and puppet making workshop. Ten University students enrolled in two of my art education classes assisted in the facilitation of the puppet making and helped document the proceedings through photography and video recording. I took on the role of Primary Investigator and Participant Observer as I taught the workshop's art component that included graphic novels, papier mâché puppet building and painting. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at my university approved the research project.

Puppet Making and Script Writing Workshop

The Puppet Making and Script Writing workshop took place from 8:15–9:00 on Tuesday mornings for five weeks from January 20, 2014–February 27, 2014. On the final day of the workshop a field trip was scheduled to visit the Heritage Site of Hemingway Pfeiffer Museum where Hemingway wrote a short story, *A Day's Wait*. This was also the location of where the older adults and young people performed their puppet shows. Prior to the first combined meeting of older adults and young people, both groups had an opportunity to read Hemingway's short story to help them understand the ramifications of misunderstandings and set the stage for them to recognize the value of effective communication with someone of another generation. They were also briefed on what to expect when the two populations came together for the workshop. In my introductory meeting with the students I administered a background questionnaire and surveys on aging perceptions to set a baseline for attitudinal change. (See appendices.) During the workshop the older adults and elementary students played ice breaker games to get better acquainted, collaboratively wrote scripts, created hand puppets, illustrated graphic novels depicting their scripts, performed their puppet shows and reflected on each day's accomplishments.

Day One

On the first day of the project six older adults from the community met with the GT students in Ms. S.'s class. To help them get acquainted they played an icebreaker, speed-dating-type game. The participants sat in a line of chairs facing each other. When instructed to do so each person took about 2 minutes and shared with the person facing them an event when they were misunderstood or misunderstood something such as directions, or instructions and what

happened as a result. Five rounds of the game were played with one of the conversation partners moving down the row to another partner on cue.



Figure 1. Intergenerational Ice-Breaker Game

Following the game students and older adults divided themselves into five groups of three students and at least one older adult. Each table group elected a member to serve as taskmaster, graphic novel illustrator, and scriptwriter. All of the participants were responsible for creating a puppet character and helping with idea generation of the story line that their puppets would dramatize. Teams brain stormed ideas and began creating the armature for their puppets from toilet paper tubes, wadded up newspaper and masking tape. A ball of newspaper taped on top of the toilet paper tube served as the puppet's head and the cardboard tube served as the neck. Next, a half sheet of newspaper was placed over the foundation and secured with tape. Pieces of stiff poster board were cut, fashioned and taped to the armature for facial features, ears or hats. At the conclusion of the class period each team's taskmaster was in charge of collecting and storing the puppet heads in a team box. During the remaining minutes before dismissal teams took turns sharing their progress and intended story line for their puppet show.

Day Two

Day two of the research project began with an early arriver activity. The older adults were briefed on the Backseat Driver game, another icebreaker game, intended to spur conversation between the older and younger generations. The objective of the Backseat Driver game was to help players realize how communication can often be misunderstood. Using art cards, familiar art works on postcards, the students and older adults took turns describing the pictures without using naming words. The artists drew from the description given to see how accurately s/he could make their drawing resemble the art card. After the introductory activity the teams began working on their puppet armatures and discussing their scripts.

Some of the groups completed the foundation for the hand puppets and began applying a first layer of papier mâché. Ms. S. suggested propping the puppet head on a laboratory beaker while applying the paste. This idea provided stability and aided in drying. Story lines were beginning to take shape each having miscommunication as part of the plot. One story involved the longhaired princess, Rapunzel who was asked by the handsome prince to throw down her hair but she mistakenly understood him to say throw down your bear. Another miscommunication dealt with mistaken identity and a lost dog. Another team wrote about a farmer who invited a chicken and a pig to dinner but coming to dinner and becoming dinner were points of miscommunication. Each of the five groups cooperatively engaged in problem solving with a common goal in mind.

One of the university students helping with the project reflected on the day's activities. The student noted conversation between the older adults and the students' enjoyment of the icebreaker game and their reluctance to stop the day's art activities.

Most of the adults we're on site a few minutes before 8:00 AM. The adults sat at a table together having small talk. They also joked about their ages when signing the roll sheet, which asked for everyone's age.

Most of the students were in the classroom by 8:05 and the class broke up into their groups from last week. Every group seemed to really enjoy the drawing game. Some groups finished in about five minutes while others wanted to keep drawing and took maybe ten. Author had to get the class's attention and direct them towards the next task.

No one seemed very excited about having to stop and slowly came to a stop. Author had to clap her hands again and speak up to remind everyone that it was time to wrap it up. Each group cleaned up quickly and the taskmasters put their groups' stuff into their containers and put them away. Many of the students were

eager to continue on their own, so Author left the supplies for it. (C. P., personal communication 2/3/15)

Day Three

On Day 3 the opening activity, icebreaker, was abandoned in order to have more time to complete the papier mâché process and work on scripts. The puppet groups were a little behind schedule due to the loss of one day to bad weather. A university student recounted the third day's activities in the following narrative including his notice of how the older adults and students collaboratively worked through problems.

Today the students came in around 8:10. We had university students taking photographs again as well as the other class coming in and out to get their supplies, which made the room cramped. Author decided our time was too short for a little game before class and instead encouraged the adults to tell the students how their week had gone and other stories while they worked. We had a few mishaps that were handled well today: One student had to tape the head of his puppet back onto his toilet paper roll, one lady had her puppet stuck to the beaker with paste that had dried, and another lady accidentally dipped her arm into the paint. We also had one group that their storywriter didn't get the paper and instructions to write their graphic novel script.

Once everyone began painting for a bit, they started having a lot more fun. Maybe they were surprised by how much adding color to the puppets brought them to life and made them into recognizable characters. (C. P., personal communication 2/10/15)

Day Four

On Day 4 the puppet groups began working on their puppets soon after arriving in Ms. S.'s class. Only two class days remained for completing the puppets. Most all of the teams were in the process of painting puppet heads. Many students were also decorating and attaching a hand covering onto their puppet as well as working on scripts and graphic novels. Three university students reflected on their experience in the classroom and their interpretation of how the older adults and elementary students were interacting during the project.

I got a really great video of three of the groups interacting with each other and having a blast painting their puppets. Every time we go the children seem more and more at ease and comfortable with their adults. I see the children expressing themselves more freely and telling jokes and laughing with their adults. (R. H., personal communication 2/13/15)

Surprisingly the older people at the HWES are having quite a bit of fun collaborating with the younger students. (L. L., personal communication 2/13/15)

I really enjoy watching the adults interact with the students. I can honestly say I'm sure the students are enjoying getting to know the adult in their group as much as the adults are enjoying them. (S. S., personal communication 2/15/15)

Day Five

Day five was the final class day for the project. Students were at various stages on their puppets. Some students were painting finishing touches, some were decorating with markers and yarn, and some were working on their graphic novels that mirrored the puppet scripts. Several university students attended the class to take pictures and make video recordings.

Day Six

The last day of the workshop involved the field trip. One day had been lost due to bad weather and school's closing. Nevertheless, the students had been able to complete their puppets. Some of the graphic novels were not finished at this point but I intended to come back to the elementary school on another day and give the students suggestions for how to complete the graphic novels. The morning of the field trip the students and older adults gathered in Ms. S.'s room to board the school bus in order to travel to the museum. Despite the bitter cold conditions and snow lingering on the ground at the destination, almost all of the older adults were able to join the group and chose to ride the school bus with the students. We all wore new red T-shirts designed by one of the elementary students. The T-shirts pictured an older adult and young person slapping hi-fives underneath the title "Communication". This seemed a fitting comment on the communication and sense of understanding that had taken place between workshop participants. On the back of the T-shirts each participant's name was listed. Because there was over an hour of driving time to the museum the university students were able to interview the GT students regarding their feelings toward the workshop experience.

At the museum the GT students, university students and older adults, 34 of us in all, toured the facilities and listened to the guide share information about Hemingway, the Pfeiffer family, and historical background stories about the town including the depression years. Reference was also made to Ernest Hemingway's short story, *A Day's Wait*, which the students had read. Seeing the bedroom that was referenced in the story brought to life the narrative that jumpstarted the students' thinking about puppet scripts regarding miscommunication. Each of the puppet groups including older adults and young people performed their puppet show in the education center at the museum. The performances were

given to an audience of peers and museum staff who took photos and made recordings. After the presentations we traveled back to school stopping for lunch at a pizza place en route.



Figure 2. Education Center puppet show venue

Day Following

The next week I returned to Ms. S.'s 6th grade GT class and administered the post surveys and assisted students in completing their graphic novels. Later in the week I emailed Ms. S. YouTube links where the university students had posted iMovie recordings of the puppet shows.

See <http://youtu.be/JSw4rpw1s00>

By the end of March I had received answers from all of the older adult's interview questions. Some had completed the questionnaires reflecting on their experience and personally given them to me on the last day of the workshop; some older adults mailed me their responses. I collected all of the questionnaires then provided the raw data for statistical analysis.

Data Collection and Analysis

The background questionnaire that I administered to the elementary students provided demographic information according to ethnicity. See Appendix 1. Wilshard (2003) suggests that aging attitudes may relate to a person’s ethnicity. The questionnaire also identified the student’s relationship and time spent with grandparents. See Figures 3 and Table 1.

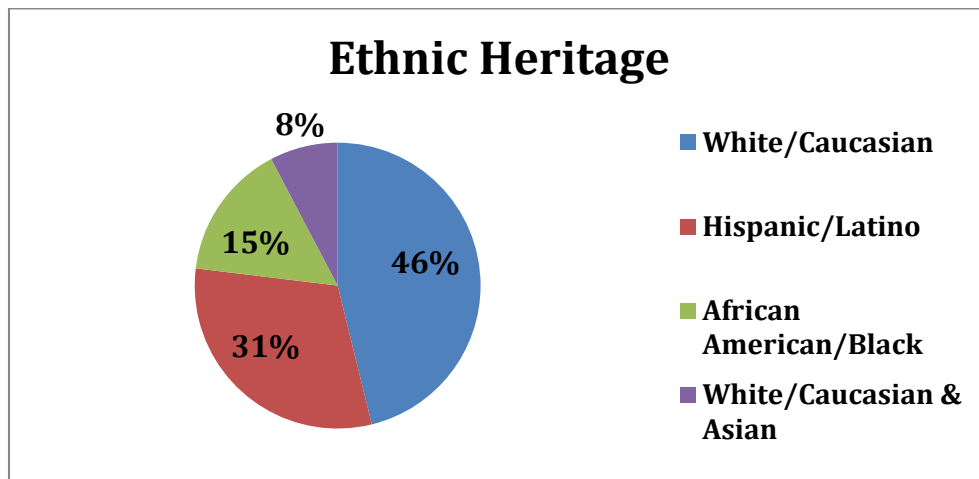


Figure 3. Ethnicity of GT students.

Table 1

Number of times student sees grandparent

(Other Response entries included every day and every week)

Number of Times Seen in Past Year	Grandm a 1	Grandm a 2	Grandm a 3	Grand pa 1	Grand pa 2	Grand pa 3
One	1	0	0	1	0	0
Two	3	0	0	2	1	1
Three	2	2	1	2	1	1
Four	2	2	2	3	1	0
Five	0	2	0	0	1	0
Six	2	1	1	1	2	0
Seven	0	1	0	1	0	0
Other Response	4	3	3	4	3	1

Five of the GT children who completed the questionnaire were female and eight were male. One student did not report gender. Six students chose white/Caucasian as their ethnic heritage. Four chose Hispanic/Latino, two chose African American/Black, one chose white/Caucasian

& Asian. See Figure 3. The background survey asked students to mark the number of grandmothers they have met in their lifetime. Of the 13 who responded one student said s/he had met one grandparent. Six students said they had met two grandmothers. Five students said they had met three grandmothers and one student said six grandmothers. It is interesting to note that almost the same number of students had met three grandmothers, as there were those who had met two grandmothers suggesting the prevalence of blended families.

Students marked how many times they had seen their grandmothers over the past year. Answers varied from every day to not more than once a year. According to the survey half of the students responding saw a grandmother at least once a week. Similarly to the students' responses about their grandmothers, four students were making contact with their grandfathers at least once per week and about half of the students were seeing their grandfathers at least on a monthly basis. See Table 1.

This high number of encounters with grandparents does not support the literature that suggests there is little opportunity for age integration between older and younger generations (Heydon & Daly, 2008).

Also not supported by literature (Heydon & Daly, 2008) but descriptive of the children in this case study was demographic information that suggested the students had grandparents who lived in close proximity. Five of the grandmothers for children in the study lived in their grandchild's same city. Eighteen of the grandmothers represented by the students lived in the same state as their grandchildren often in a nearby town if not in the same town as their grandchild.

Students responded to survey questions about time they spent with their grandmother. The survey asked, "Do you enjoy time spent with each grandmother?" Six students marked "yes, very much"; four students marked "yes". Other comments included "fun", and "awesome" to describe the children's enjoyment with a grandmother. Only two students responded "no" or "not at all" in response to enjoyment. The background questionnaire also asked students how they felt about being age 65 or older. Four of the students said "good", four of the students marked "not sure". Another question asked students if they have been previously involved in a school project where they met and interacted with older people. Seven students said "no", one student marked "yes". The survey concluded with three questions regarding how the students believed their parents felt toward older people, how the students thought their peers felt toward older people and how the students viewed television as portraying older people. Overall, it appeared from the students' responses that they held older people in a positive light or had a neutral opinion about older people. The children's answers appeared to be informed by their relationship with grandparents.

“Children’s View of Aging Identification Pairs” was the first pre-test survey that the students were given. See Appendix 2. Characteristics of aging were paired with the scale of “very”, “a little”, “not sure”, “a little” and “very” between the opposing traits. Students selected the box that best identified how they would describe old people. Eleven categories were provided. Good/Bad, Unpleasant/Pleasant, Happy/Sad, Slow/Fast, Pretty/Ugly, Dull/Exciting, Clean/Dirty, Cruel/Kind, Wise/Foolish, Hated/Loved, Honest/Dishonest. A post-test survey was given to the students at the conclusion of the study. A t-test for dependent means to examine any changes in the rating of the words from before to after the study was used to analyze the two surveys using the SPSS software program. A two-tailed test was used to detect for any positive or negative changes. The significance level was set at .05. Results of the t-test did not reveal any significant changes in views between the subjects. See Table 2. The descriptive characteristics ascribed to older adults; however, were informative. The students saw older adults as “very good” (87%), “very clean” (67%), “very wise”(67%), “very kind” (53%) and “very loved” (60%). All of the attributes chosen to identify older adults could be considered positive characteristics.

Table 2

Children’s view of aging ID pairs

Pairs	Paired Differences				t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 GdBd	.21429	.69929	.18689	-.18947	.61805	1.147	13	.272
Pair 2 Pleas	-.21429	1.25137	.33444	-.93681	.50824	-.641	13	.533
Pair 3 Happ	.14286	.94926	.25370	-.40523	.69094	.563	13	.583
Pair 4 Fast	-.07143	.91687	.24505	-.60082	.45796	-.291	13	.775
Pair 5 Pretty	.38462	1.19293	.33086	-.33626	1.10549	1.162	12	.268
Pair 6 Excite	.57143	1.50457	.40211	-.29729	1.44014	1.421	13	.179
Pair 7 Clean	.00000	.87706	.23440	-.50640	.50640	.000	13	1.000
Pair 8 Kind	.42857	1.28388	.34313	-.31272	1.16986	1.249	13	.234
Pair 9 Wise	-.07143	.61573	.16456	-.42694	.28408	-.434	13	.671
Pair 10 Loved	-.07143	.73005	.19511	-.49294	.35009	-.366	13	.720

Pair 11 Hones	.00000	.96077	.25678	-.55473	.55473	.000	13	1.000
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The second survey, Facts on Aging Quiz, was a Likert scale to which students circled whether they “strongly disagreed” with the statement, “disagreed” with it, “agreed” with it or “strongly agreed” with the statement. See Appendix 2. Twenty-two statements were provided. The only significant change after the posttest was given was a disagreement with the statement, “most older people are poor” from before to after, $t(11)=-2.345$, $p=0.039$. Participants more strongly disagreed with this statement after the period between the survey administrations using a two-tailed test with $p \leq .05$ although the power analysis using Cohen’s d was low. See Table 3. It is unclear what may have prompted an attitude change regarding money. Again, it is informative to consider the following descriptive statistics. Generally speaking, students believed that older adults are intelligent, happy, living in institutions, have fewer accidents than those under 65, are learning new things, are free from boredom and are wealthy. The adage healthy, wealthy and wise seems to fit. Elementary aged students also believed that older adults have physical limitations. They cannot see well without glasses, are weak, cannot work as well as younger workers, but are not lonely.

Table 3

Facts aging quiz

Pairs	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Think	-.38462	.86972	.24122	-.91018	.14095	-1.594	12	.137
Pair 2 See	-.30769	.63043	.17485	-.68865	.07327	-1.760	12	.104
Pair 3 Roma	-.07692	.64051	.17765	-.46398	.31013	-.433	12	.673
Pair 4 Breath	-.33333	.77850	.22473	-.82797	.16130	-1.483	11	.166
Pair 5 Happy	.30769	.75107	.20831	-.14617	.76156	1.477	12	.165
Pair 6 Streng	-.23077	.59914	.16617	-.59283	.13129	-1.389	12	.190
Pair 7 Nursin	-.23077	.83205	.23077	-.73357	.27203	-1.000	12	.337
Pair 8 Accid	.23077	.83205	.23077	-.27203	.73357	1.000	12	.337
Pair 9 Work	-.30769	.75107	.20831	-.76156	.14617	-1.477	12	.165

Pair 10 Health	-.53846	1.26592	.35110	-1.30345	.22653	-1.534	12	.151
Pair 11 Set	.07692	.95407	.26461	-.49962	.65346	.291	12	.776
Pair 12 LLear	-.46154	.96742	.26831	-1.04614	.12307	-1.720	12	.111
Pair 13 ImpLe	.07692	.75955	.21066	-.38207	.53592	.365	12	.721
Pair 14 React	00000	.81650	.22646	-.49340	.49340	.000	12	1.000
Pair 15 Alike	-.15385	.80064	.22206	-.63767	.32998	-.693	12	.502
Pair 16 Bored	-.07692	1.18754	.32936	-.79455	.64070	-.234	12	.819
Pair 17 Lonely	.00000	1.00000	.27735	-.60429	.60429	.000	12	1.000
Pair 18 FwAcc	.00000	1.15470	.32026	-.69778	.69778	.000	12	1.000
Pair 19 Poor	-.33333	.49237	.14213	-.64617	-.02050	-2.345	11	.039
Pair 20 LkWrk	.07692	.75955	.21066	-.38207	.53592	.365	12	.721
Pair 21 Relig	-.30769	.75107	.20831	-.76156	.14617	-1.477	12	.165
Pair 22 Irritate	.07692	.64051	.17765	-.31013	.46398	.433	12	.673

The third survey, Children's View of Aging Questionnaire, was composed of eight questions with answer choices from which to choose and three open-ended questions. See Appendix 3. Students answered the pre and post surveys with no significant variation. The first question queried, "Do you think growing old is good, bad or neither good nor bad." The second question asked, "How do you think it feels to be an old person? Most students saw growing old and how it feels to be old as neither good nor bad. Question three asked, "What do you think happens when you get to be an old person? The overwhelming answer for both questions was one of non-committal. On question four students were asked, "Now I would like to know where you learned about old people. Choices included "television", "movies", "books", "your parents", "your grandparents", "your friends", "somewhere else". Most students marked that they learned about old people from their grandparents.

Question five was open ended. It queried, "What do you think you will be like when you are old". Some of the pre-test answers were as follows:

"I think it will be relaxing"

"I will get a discount sometimes and I am treated like I always need help"

"Gray curls, saggy face, wrinkles"

"I will be bored all the time"

“All the time out on the lake”

Some of the post-test responses to the question were as follows:

“I will be the crazy old lady”

“I will be sweet to my grandchildren and buy them everything.”

“I will cook cookies and hope to have a white van.”

“Wise. duh!”

The second part to question five asked students to determine if their previous response to what they think they will be like as an old person is “good”, “bad”, or “neither good nor bad”. Most of the students said their response was “good” or “neither good nor bad”. Only one student rated his response as “bad” on the pre-test.

Question six asked students, “How do you think you will feel when you are old. Some of their responses on the pre-test are as follows:

“Most likely sleepy and irritated”

“Weak and tired, no offense”

“I will [be] more responsible”

On the post-test students said:

“I will feel old and amazing”

“I will feel tired and happy”

“I think I’ll feel good”

The second part of question six asked students to rate their response to their previous answer of, “How do you think you will feel when you are old.” In the pre-test four students marked “good”, three students marked “bad” and four students marked “neither good nor bad”. In the post test eight students marked “good” and three students marked “neither good nor bad”. There was a 36% increase in the number of students who saw their response as good in the post-test.

Question 7 asked students, “What do you think you will do when you are old?” A representative couple of the Pre-test answers are as follows:

“I will garden and cook and watch the news”

“Just stay in a house”

Results from The Child’s View of Aging questionnaire much like the results from questions asked in the Background questionnaire or Facts on Aging quiz suggested that the young people had neither positive nor negative attitudes about aging or older adults. These opinions

appeared to be influenced by the children's grandparents.

Discussion

The research question under investigation during the puppet making and script-writing workshop was, "Is there a positive correlation in children's attitudes toward older adults and aging after interacting together in an engaging intergenerational art activity." Based on analysis of the pre and post surveys using t tests there was none to little statistically significant change.

Literature supports that children's attitudes regarding older adults and their own aging is positively influenced through engaging intergenerational programs. In one study (Aday, Aday, Arnold, and Bendix, 1996) 24 children involved in an 8 month school program showed significance between the sample means conducted before and after the intergenerational program reporting a more favorable perception of the elderly. In Allred and Dobson's (1987) study of 6th grade students after 10 weeks with nursing home residents surveys showed a small positive shift in students' attitudes toward the elderly. According to Wilshard's (2003) study 185 children ages 10-11 years old who reported participation in an intergenerational project had more positive attitudes toward older people than children who reported no participation in a project involving older people.

A possible reason that there was not a significant positive change in student's attitudes toward older adults in the present study may have been because of the limited number of times that the older adults and children interacted with one another. The workshop took place over a five-week period and included less than 13 hours of face-to-face contact. The number of participants in the study was also very small. Fifteen sixth grade students and a variety of 10 older adults comprised the case study's participants. A third factor that may have influenced the lack of significant change in children's attitudes may have been due to the high number of students who interacted with a grandparent on a regular basis as a result of living in close proximity. Randler, Vollmer, Wilhelm, Flessner and Hummel (2014) found that distance to grandparents significantly influenced pupils' attitudes. According to the pre-test of the students' attitudes the majority of students characterized older adults in a positive manner prior to the study. This viewpoint may have favorably biased the young people's attitudes toward older adults prior to their involvement in the intergenerational workshop thereby decreasing the likelihood of statistically significant change in young people's attitudes following the intergenerational art involvement.

While there was no statistical significance that can be attributed to improving children's attitudes toward aging based on the present study there is evidence that children constructed new meaning toward their understanding of aging and older adults. One of the children said

on his survey something he learned about older adults was the following: “They are fun to work with and they know stuff we don’t know”. Another student said, “They don’t really take naps all the time”. When one of the young people answered the question if he thought he would be like one of the older adults he said, “Yes, like him, he’s funny and involved”.

Lawton and LaPorte (2013) say intergenerational visual art programs can be transformative and empowering for the participants. One of the older adults concurred when she wrote in her reflections, “The relationship between the students and adults is beneficial to everyone. The students feel valued by the adults and the adults feel acceptance and affection from the students”.

Jenifer Milner (2008) reports that bringing generations together through arts activities allows them to explore differences and find common ground. One of the university student’s comments verifies this to be the case in her involvement with one of the elders. The student wrote the following: “It’s interesting working with her, we both will have different ideas on how to execute a plan, and are able to communicate and merge them together to create something better than either of us expected (H. B. personal communication 2/27/15).”

The narrative entries, student interviews, and reflections collected from the participants in the intergenerational puppet-making workshop suggest that the art engagement provided a mutually beneficial experience. Lawton (2010) says collaborative forms of narrative expression open communication, help build respect and develop understanding and appreciation between the generations.

Future Directions

Research in the field of intergenerational programming is growing. As aging continues to become a topic of discussion more and more interest will be directed to effective strategies that may be employed to foster understanding between generations devoid of stereotypes and ageist prejudices. The visual arts can play an integral role in relationship building by opening opportunities for collaboration, meaningful exchanges and achieving common goals. It is my desire to encourage future art educators to be contributing facilitators in visual arts practice as well as researchers who investigate the process and results of doing so.

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About the Author

Susan Whiteland, PhD., Assistant Professor Art Education, Arkansas State University, sees herself as an educator, researcher, artist and fellow learner. She values service-learning experiences for her university students that provide opportunities for them to engage hands-on in community-based art activities designed for learners of all ages in a variety of contexts. Her research interests include lifelong learning and intergenerational relationships through art.

Appendix 1

Background Questionnaire

Please answer all items carefully. If you have any questions, please raise your hand. Please fill in or mark your answers to the following questions and statements.

1. I am now in the ____ grade.
2. My age is ____.
3. I am a: Male Female
4. My ethnic heritage is (if you are of more than 1 ethnic heritage listed below, choose the one you most consider yourself to be): White/Caucasian African American/Black Hispanic/Latino Asian Native American/American Indian

5. How many of your grandmothers have you met in your lifetime? (These grandmothers should be actually kin to you; for example, the mothers of your parents or step-parents)

6. On the lines below, list each of your grandmothers by her name or her initials. If you have more than 3 grandmothers, choose the 3 you feel closest to.

Name:	How Often:	City/State	Enjoyment
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Grandmother 1

Grandmother 2

Grandmother 3

7. How often have you seen each grandmother in the past year? From the list below, write the number of your answer on the line by each grandmother listed above under "How often".

- 1 more than once a week
- 2 once a week
- 3 not more than once a month
- 4 not more than 4 times this year
- 5 not more than 2 times this year
- 6 not more than once this year
- 7 none this year

8. How far away from you does each grandmother live? Write the city and state where each grandmother listed above lives on the line by her name under "City/state".

9. Do you enjoy time spent with each grandmother? Choosing from the list below, write the number of your answer on the line by the name of each grandmother listed above under "Enjoyment".

- 1 Yes, very much
- 2 Yes
- 3 Not sure
- 4 No
- 5 No, not at all

10. How many of your grandfathers have you met in your lifetime? (These grandfathers should be actually kin to you; for example, the fathers of your parents or step-parents)

11. On the lines below, list each of your grandfathers by his name or his initials. If you have more than 3 grandfathers, choose the 3 you feel closest to.

Name:	How Often:	City/State	Enjoyment
Grandfather 1			
Grandfather 2			
Grandfather 3			

12. How often have you seen each grandfather in the past year? Choosing from the list below, write the number of your answer on the line by each grandfather listed above under "How often"

- 1 more than once a week
- 2 once a week
- 3 not more than once a month
- 4 not more than 4 times this year
- 5 not more than 2 times this year
- 6 not more than once this year
- 7 none this year

13. How far away from you does each grandfather live? Write the city and state where each

grandfather listed above lives on the line by his name under "City/state".

14. Do you enjoy time spent with each grandfather? Choosing from the list below, write the number of your answer on the line by the name of each grandfather listed above under "Enjoyment".

- 1 Yes, very much
- 2 Yes
- 3 Not sure
- 4 No
- 5 No, not at all

15. Have you ever lived in the same house with an older person (age 65 or older)?

Yes No

16. How do you feel about someday being age 65 and older?

Good Bad Not sure

17. Have you ever been involved in a school project where you met and interacted with older people (age 65 and older)?

Yes No

If you checked YES above, please describe the project a little.

18. Was this a school or church project?

19. What did you do during the project?

20. How often during the project were you around older people?

21. How do you think your parents feel toward older people (age 65 and older)?

- Positive
- Negative
- Neither

22. How do you think people your age feel toward older people (age 6 and older)?

- Positive
- Negative
- Neither

23. How do you think television portrays older people (age 65 and older)?

Positive
Negative
Neither

Appendix 2

Facts on Aging Quiz

Each statement below is about older people. An older person is someone who is 65 years of age or older. After reading each statement, circle whether you Strongly Disagree with the statement, Disagree with it, Agree with it, or Strongly Agree with it. Circle only one.

1. Most older people cannot think very well.
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly Agree

2. Most older people have trouble seeing things without glasses.
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly Agree

3. Most older people aren't interested in romance.
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly Agree

4. Breathing becomes more difficult in old age.
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly Agree

5. Most older people say they are happy most of the time.
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly Agree

6. As people get older, their strength decreases.
Strongly Disagree

- Disagree
Agree
Strongly Agree
7. Most older people are living in nursing homes, mental hospitals, or homes for the aged.
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly Agree
8. Drivers over age 65 have fewer accidents than drivers under age 65.
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly Agree
9. Most older workers cannot work as well as younger workers.
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly Agree
10. Most older persons are healthy enough to carry out their normal activities, like housekeeping, cooking, and shopping.
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly Agree
11. Most older people are set in their ways and unable to change.
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly Agree
12. Older people tend to take longer to learn something new.
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Agree

Strongly Agree

13. It is almost impossible for most older people to learn new things.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly Agree

14. Older people take longer to react than younger people.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly Agree

15. In general, older people are pretty much alike.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly Agree

16. Most older people say that they are usually bored.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly Agree

17. Most older people say they are lonely.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly Agree

18. Older workers have fewer accidents than younger workers.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly Agree

19. Most older people are poor.

Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly Agree

20. Most older people say they would like to have some kind of work to do (including volunteer work).

Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly Agree

21. Older people tend to become more religious as they age.

Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly Agree

22. Most older people say they are usually irritated or angry.

Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly Agree

Appendix 3

Children's View of Aging Questionnaire

The following questions ask you to think about becoming an old person. For most of these questions you will just need to write a few words. For some others you will need to circle the answer that tells what you think. If you have any questions, raise your hand. There are no right or wrong answers. Don't worry if you cannot spell a word you want to use.

Please check one: Are you a boy ___ a girl ____

For the next eight questions, you need to write a few words or circle the response you want to make. Be sure to answer each question.

1. a) How can you tell people are growing old? b) Do you think growing old is: (circle only one) A good thing to happen? A bad thing to happen? Neither good nor bad?

2. a) How do you think it feels to be an old person? b) Do you think this: (circle only one) Feels good? Feels bad? Feels neither good nor bad?

3. a) What do you think happens when you get to be an old person? b) Do you think this is: (circle only one) A good thing to happen? A bad thing to happen? Neither a good nor bad thing?

4. You have been answering questions about some of the things you know about old people. Now I would like to know where you learned about old people. Circle the one that tells where you think you learned the most. (Circle only one)

- a. television
- b. movies
- c. books
- d. your parents
- e. your grandparents
- f. your friends
- g. somewhere else

5. Now imagine you are an old person.

a) What do you think you will be like when you are old?

b) Do you think this will be: (circle only one) A good thing? A bad thing? Neither good nor bad?

6. a) How do think you will feel when you are old?

b) Do you think you will feel: (circle only one) Feel good? Feel Bad? Feel neither good nor

bad?

7. a) What do you think you will do when you are old?

b) Do you think doing this will be: (circle only one) A good thing to do? A bad thing to do? Neither good nor bad?

8. You have just answered some questions about what you think you will be like and what you think you will do when you are an old person. Now I would like to know where you learned about becoming old. Circle the one that tells where you think you learned the most. (Circle only one)

- a. television
- b. movies
- c. books
- d. your parents
- e. your grandparents
- f. your friends
- g. somewhere else

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