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Development of Best Practices for Intergenerational Arts-Based Programs Addressing Ageism, Social Isolation, and Depression

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Abstract

Ageism, social isolation, and depression are key societal issues that negatively influence mental health as people age. Public health interventions have been developed to reduce these issues and their negative consequences. Intergenerational arts-based programming is an approach that can not only lower rates of loneliness and depression by presenting creative opportunities for participants to socially engage, but one that also offers an experience where participants can better understand individuals of various age cohorts, reducing ageist beliefs and stereotypes. In this qualitative study, the researchers gathered data from art educators regarding their experiences with and suggestions for intergenerational arts-based programs. Participants suggested learning experiences that intergenerational arts-based programs should feature to reduce the incidence and prevalence of ageism, social isolation, and depression among art program participants. An intergenerational

arts-based best practice guide was then developed and vetted by art educators and may prove useful for addressing these important public health challenges.

Background

Ageism

Ageism is "a process of systematic stereotyping and discrimination against people because they are old" (Butler, 1975, p. 35). A more recent and expanded definition describes ageism as the "negative or positive stereotypes, prejudice and/or discrimination against (or to advantage of) aging people because of their chronological age" (Iversen et al., 2009, p. 4). Ageist beliefs can be directed towards oneself (internalized or self-oriented) or towards others (other-oriented ageism) (Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2017). While ageism can "cut both ways" (Applewhite, 2020), we focus here on ageism directed toward older adults. Such ageism derives from a defensive strategy pertaining to death anxiety (Butler, 2009) and fear of physical and mental deterioration (Kite & Wagner, 2002). Experiencing ageism can lead to social isolation and loneliness (Meehan et al., 2023; Shiovitz-Ezra et al., 2018), poor health outcomes (Chang et al., 2020), lower quality of healthcare and social exclusion (Kite & Wagner, 2002), and a 7.5-year reduction in life expectancy (Officer et al., 2020). Older adults show high rates of intra-generational ageism, which suggests negative bias regarding people of their own age (Kite & Wagner, 2002).

Social Identity Theory (SIT) suggests that age groups evaluate their own self-worth at a higher standard than those of other ages (Butler, 2009). SIT proposes that the in-group seeks ways to identify negative aspects of an out-group, which in turn enhances the self-image of the in-group's members (Stets & Burke, 2000). Proponents of SIT suggest that younger people do not identify with older adults, and thus older adults are negatively deemed to be lesser (Butler, 2009). Efforts to help younger people identify with and connect to older adults show promise for reducing ageism against older adults (Fassi & Rickenbach, 2023).

Age Segregation, Social Isolation, and Health Outcomes

Age segregation leaves members of different generations disconnected from one another (Thomée et al., 2011) and enables ageism on a societal level (Palmore et al., 2005). Social isolation, a lack of social engagement with others (Banerjee & Rai, 2020), leads to an increased risk of experiencing distressing feelings (Coyle & Dugan, 2012). Furthermore, older adulthood often includes a retirement phase, reduction in mobility, increased risk for experiencing illness and disability, and a potential loss of spouse (Coyle & Dugan, 2012). An estimated one-fourth of adults aged 65 and older are socially isolated (National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, 2020).

Negative health impacts associated with social isolation are particularly severe for older adults (Coyle & Dugan, 2012). Loneliness caused from social isolation can have serious physical and mental health implications (Hawkley, et al., 2010). Socially isolated older adults are also at higher risk of elevated blood pressure and depression (Hawkley, et al., 2010).

Younger adults, who rely strongly on peer relationships (Padmanabhanunni & Pretorius, 2021), can experience social isolation as well. Social isolation can also be caused by high computer use (Thomée et al., 2012). Younger adults reported higher rates of depression when screen time compromised other daily life activities and sleep hygiene (Thomée et al., 2012). Mobile phone usage also led to sleep disturbances and symptoms of depression among younger adults (Thomée et al., 2011). Further, urbanization plays a role in socially isolating younger adults, as many people relocate from their families to pursue careers (Padmanabhanunni & Pretorius, 2021).

Social isolation is closely associated with depression. Depression is the most prevalent mental disorder — 3.8% of the global population experiences depression (Global Health Data Exchange, 2019). The most common outcomes of depression include disability and reduced life-satisfaction (Sjöberg, et al., 2017). Major depression is a disease that severely impedes both psychosocial functionality and quality of life (World Health Organization, 2008). Depression can affect individuals of all ages.

Ageism, social isolation, and depression not only negatively impact the health and well-being of individuals but adversely affect culture and economics on a societal scale (Ng & Lim-Soh, 2020). Intergenerational programs, which may help address these issues, are social routes to harnessing engagement through gathering participants of various generations to interact in activities that offer opportunities to share their knowledge, experiences, and skills (Cohen-Mansfield & Jensen, 2015).

Intergenerational Program Benefits

Intergenerational programs provide an increased feeling of meaningfulness among older adults (Murayama et al., 2015). Through intergenerational interactions, ageist stigmas can be reduced (Caspar et al., 2019). Benefits accrue to all participants — when younger adults collaborate with older adults, an inclination to consider career choices involving older populations grows (Caspar et al., 2019). Further, increased age-integration decreases ageist beliefs and increases productivity among all generations (Uhlenberg & De Jong Gierveld, 2004).

Programs intentionally designed to engage intergenerational audiences with learning objectives to reduce aging stereotypes have increasingly been implemented in recent years

(Leedahl & Serrano, 2019). Through engaging different generations in positive relations, communication skills are practiced, which can lead to reductions in ageism and other factors that diminish mental health (Leedahl & Serrano, 2019).

Remaining engaged in activities is essential for reducing social isolation later in life (Caspar et al., 2019). The social activities that intergenerational programs provide offer a direct route to engagement through participation with different generations that people may not be accustomed to interacting with as regularly (Caspar et al., 2019). Intergenerational programs that provide a collaborative experience result in reductions in isolated feelings, making such programs successful interventions for addressing social isolation (Rubin et al., 2015).

While the loss of a loved one or of one's mental and physical abilities can lead to negative health consequences and depression among older adults, engaging in activities across generations can reduce depressive symptoms (Sjöberg et al., 2017). Given that increased social isolation can be a primary cause of depression, it is important for differing age cohorts to share experiences with one another. Authentic engagement between people of all ages can lead to "enhanced well-being for all generations" (Leedahl & Serrano, 2019, p. 153).

Intergenerational Arts-Based Program Benefits

Art programs are key resources for providing learning opportunities among participants of all ages (Heydon, 2011). When an art curriculum stimulates creative influences, participants' curiosity is activated, which inspires motivation to learn more (Heydon, 2011). Some arts-based programs have been developed for implementation within intergenerational contexts. Pairing college students with people with dementia (PWD) as the PWD created visual arts projects improved college students' attitudes toward PWD and comfort with working with PWD (Lokon, et al., 2017). Similarly, medical students who participated in a storytelling project with residents of a senior living community reported greater comfort in working with older adults, while the older participants enjoyed learning new skills and a greater sense of community (Manohar et al., 2024). Intergenerational performing arts activities also hold promise for improving empathy and support for older adults (Anderson et al., 2017). Specifically, younger and older adults partnered to create and perform plays, drawing on skills of openness, flexibility, and adaptability, resulting in both older and younger participants feeling "profoundly listened to and heard by the other generation" (Anderson et al., 2017, p. 22). Offering an opportunity to practice newly adopted modern technology usage skills (e.g., use of computers and tablets) enables an exceptional learning experience during intergenerational interactions (Caspar et al., 2019). One intergenerational art program utilizing this approach revealed that an individual's age impacts how they perceive various artworks (Heydon, 2011).

When age stereotypes are addressed in art programming, ageist attitudes are discouraged through learning others' perspectives. This then reduces the activation of age stereotypes that younger adults may experience when thinking about older adults (Leedahl et al., 2020). Intergenerational programs that expose participants to positive images of aging can create a personal connection and build a sense of belonging, where younger adults see themselves through the lens of their older adult counterparts (Fruhauf et al., 2020). Feelings of social isolation are modifiable – creative art programs foster social connections for and with older adults (Coyle & Dugan, 2012). Collaborative, intergenerational art programs offer expressive activities that inspire social engagement among participants (Rubin et al., 2015).

Gaps in Research

Ageism is particularly harmful to older adults, and social isolation and depression can negatively impact people of all ages. Intergenerational programs, particularly those relating to or directly involving art, can address these issues, primarily through fostering connection to community (LaPorte, 2002; Manohar et al., 2024). A systematic review of intergenerational programs revealed that a small portion (12.5%) were arts-based (creating puppets, script writing of personal stories, music and computer-based project), and no suggestions regarding best practices specifically for arts-based intergenerational programming were provided (Martins et al., 2018). The authors did indicate that the quality of the contact between generations is the most important factor influencing success of programming. While gerontologists (e.g., Leedahl et al., 2020) intentionally engaged a planning process for intergenerational arts-based programs, to the best of our knowledge, there is no guide detailing best practices that stems directly from feedback derived from the art educators who directly implement these programs. In addition to limited information regarding best-practices for intergenerational arts-based programming, there is limited research on what arts programs' facilitators are interested in and willing to offer to gather intergenerational audiences to address ageism, social isolation, and depression. Therefore, the authors' purpose in this study was to identify key elements of intergenerational arts programs designed to reduce ageism, social isolation, and depression among participants and to delineate those elements in a best practices guide.

Methods

Participants

Participants were initially recruited through email invitations to arts practitioners in North and South Carolina. Snowball sampling, which included asking early participants to share information about the study with their contacts (Chaim, 2008), was then used to expand the sample. The expansion led to the recruitment of additional participants from sites outside of North and South Carolina. People were eligible to participate if they worked in a museum or

other setting where art programs are offered and if they spoke English. Six art educators were recruited.

Measures

Two interview guides were created: one focused on soliciting initial, formative input on best practices for intergenerational arts-based programs and the other on gathering summative feedback on the best practices guide that was developed. The interview guides were purposely created to provide flexibility to encourage a more organic discussion.

Procedures

Interviews began with the gathering of verbal consent and permission to record the discussion. After the initial, formative interviews were completed, transcribed word-for-word, and analyzed, a guide for the best intergenerational arts-based practices incorporating ideas from those interviews was developed. A subset of participants was then invited to review the guide and offer summative feedback. Only three of the original six interviewees were available to participate in the summative feedback interviews. Responses were again transcribed word-for-word and analyzed.

Analysis

Qualitative data was synthesized from both formative input and summative feedback interviews. The transcriptions were reviewed line-by-line and key ideas and suggestions were identified and categorized into a codebook, arranged logically and hierarchically. The codebook featured each code, its definition, supplementary notes, and direct quotes from interviewees.

Findings

All six interviewees were women, with five of the six identifying as White and one identifying as Black. Participants ranged from 36 to 57 years of age. All participants had degrees in art, with five of the six having master's degrees and one a bachelor's degree. The interviewees' programming experience included museum education and community outreach art programming. Four of the six were actively employed in museums, while the other two were art educators outside of museums. Avery, Debra, Elle, Emma, Olivia, and Sarah (all pseudonyms assigned to protect participant confidentiality) answered all initial interview questions. Key themes emerged regarding the need for and value of art programs and suggestions for how to implement such programs in intergenerational environments.

A key topic of discussion was the growing need for intergenerational programming. Avery

said, “I do think that the trend for doing more intergenerational programs is inclining, especially from community organizations.” Likewise, Elle shared the following: “I can’t speak for all museums, but I feel like there’s more interest locally.” Sarah answered similarly, stating “there’s definitely interest in intergenerational art programming from both educators and participants, it’s something we’ve wanted to host exclusively advertised as just that [intergenerational].”

Program participants’ ability to socialize was described as a key benefit. Elle said that “socializing is so important for older adults, especially those who live alone,” while Avery mentioned that “art is a great way of communicating and breaking down barriers.” Sarah agreed, noting that “…there’s a social aspect. Maybe you’re new in town. This is a great way to meet people and talk to people.” Communication in general emerged as an important idea as well, expanding the term socializing outside of just the participants and into the sense of how art itself communicates. “I think that art has the ability to communicate in a way that makes sense,” said Olivia.

The value of art programs was talked about from an intergenerational perspective as well, with participants delving deeper into what the guide should comprise, detailing how both art creation and appreciation are equally important. “In terms of a guide for intergenerational programming, I think a focus on artmaking is essential, but with art appreciation being included too, through the art that the participants create,” said Avery. Other interviewees agreed with this sentiment. A guide that features both art creation and appreciation was the consensus, summarized well by Debra, who said, “both [are vital]! We push for active engagement because that’s really beneficial cognitively and physically.”

When asked about what types of activities might be most useful in the guide, Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) emerged most prominently. “The premise behind VTS levels the playing field for conversation, because all ideas and opinions are welcomed,” said Olivia. “VTS would work well with multiple age groups at once. Everyone interprets something differently, too, so an intergenerational program would involve participants with several decades of life experiences,” stated Emma. Olivia also mentioned the flexibility of how VTS can be facilitated by saying that “just looking at an image in the news cycle could prompt discussion on really difficult topics.”

In terms of how art creation should shape the guide, several ideas were shared, spanning different media and required levels of participation. “One of the important things with performing arts has to do with the neurons in the brain and those neurons will fire in participants as they watch music. Neurons that can mirror those of the performers, as if they [those watching the performance] are playing the instruments themselves. That emphasizes

benefits of passive participation," stated Debra.

Elle made suggestions regarding the order of activities in a program, touching on how art creation and appreciation should intertwine:

> It's beneficial to wrap up with an art appreciation piece as well. In sum, art appreciation from observing artists can introduce the activity, then the art creation stems from that inspiration, then art appreciation of the works made by participants can serve as reflection.

In addition to talking about the perceived value of intergenerational arts-based programs and offering specific suggestions for activities to include, participants provided first-hand accounts of ageism in their programming experiences. Debra mentioned,

> If I don't get a chance to convene with grade school volunteers before a program, I hear language that kind of makes me cringe. For example, things like "she's such a little old lady" or other words involving being "frail."

She then went on to talk about how not only younger participants have shared ageist beliefs but also care staff who attend programs for people with dementia. "I've also heard other staff say – 'oh, it doesn't matter, they're not going to remember anyway'," stated Debra, who later concluded, "I've heard ageism among active older adult groups themselves. When people feel it [ageism] themselves, it can negatively impact their health and sometimes they don't even realize it."

Participants, while indicating the value they perceived of intergenerational programming, also reported concerns about being able to implement such programs. Funding priorities of grant making agencies emerged as a challenge. As Elle noted, "I don't think intergenerational learning is talked about as much, but I've seen more grant proposals regarding creative aging. I guess intergenerational programming falls between the cracks a bit." Sarah also identified obstacles to implementing intergenerational programs. "Sadly, I feel intergenerational programming can be harder to implement, and therefore attendance numbers can be lower due to people of different ages having different schedules and opportunities for free time." Participants confirmed the value of intergenerational arts-based programming, as was evidenced by the reviewed literature, but also touched on why implementing this programming can present obstacles.

Development and Revision of Best Practices

Based on initial input, a guide harnessing study participants' ideas and combining them with

evidence from scholarly sources was created. It was evident that participants wanted the guide to be flexible in nature (in order to be implemented in a variety of settings), while also directly addressing ageism, depression, and social isolation. After integrating participants' initial input into a best practices draft, summative interviews with three of the six original participants then helped shape the guide into a final copy (see Appendix 3).

The revisions were added to the initial draft to reach the final copy stage, which expanded on key themes while adopting other subtopics worth addressing. The overview and purpose sections were expanded to correlate with background research while elaborating on gerontological subject matter. The principles were then revised to identify different types of ageism. A validated tool that facilitators could use to gauge ageism was also added; this tool is known as "The Ambivalent Ageism Scale," which is a measure to assess hostile and benevolent ageism (Cary et al., 2017). Other assessment resources were added as well. For example, the guide suggests that social isolation can be assessed through implementing "De Jong Gierveld's 6-item Loneliness Scale," which includes a 3-item portion that directly gauges factors of social isolation (De Jong Gierveld & Van Tilburg, 2006). Additionally, Radloff's CES-D scale was included for its usefulness for assessing depression, given that it is a short self-report scale that gauges depression among the general population (Radloff, 1977).

Further settings and environments suitable for programming were also suggested, as well as a more in-depth timeline that described the art appreciation and art creation components more explicitly, with outlined time management tips and estimated lengths of time needed to meet all learning objectives. Headings regarding budgeting and facilitation training were also added for art educators to better understand the requirements of implementing the guide. Additional art appreciation programming ideas were also listed, featuring further elaboration on the VTS art appreciation components. The final guide includes website links that provide educational resources for certain terms used throughout the document.

Discussion

This qualitative study was implemented to gather art educators' perspectives on intergenerational, arts-based programming to develop a guide detailing best practices and how ageism, social isolation, and depression can be addressed through such programming. Participants described the value of and need for such programming, useful activities for these programs, and the challenges that can arise to implementing these programs. In follow-up interviews, a subset of participants gave feedback on the guide developed from their initial input.

Key themes that arose during the interviews support and extend existing research. Participants rightly believed that intergenerational programming presents interventions that reduce social

isolation and depression naturally, which supports previous research (Rubin et al., 2015). Successful intergenerational programming can address the in-group/out-group conflicts identified within Social Identity Theory (Butler, 2009) when such programming fosters a sense of shared community across generations. A key element of successful intergenerational programs is the quality of contact between older and younger people (Martins et al., 2018). Sánchez and colleagues (2020) provide detailed suggestions on elements of programming that enhance intergenerational contact. Programming that promotes cooperation (rather than competition), sharing personal information, and thinking positively about intergenerational relationships enhances relationships and well-being. The opportunity for reciprocal learning and efforts to provide benefit for all participants (not just younger participants) contribute to quality of programming. Including diverse participants while confronting discrimination and stereotypes is vital as is careful planning to ensure the sustainability of an intergenerational program (Sánchez et al., 2020).

Study participants confirmed that there is demand for intergenerational art programs, although participants indicated that there are limited grant opportunities to support such programming. As has been seen in art education programs in higher education, economic downturns are associated with budget constraints and funding cuts, particularly to arts and humanities programs (Honor Society, 2024).

This study expands the existing literature and provides a useful resource for art educators. While this study is among the first to examine the value of, interest in, and suggestions for intergenerational arts programming from art educators, it is not without limitations. The sample size was very small and of limited demographic diversity, although the majority of art educators are White and female (Elpus, 2016). The guide that was designed combines the successes of past intergenerational arts-based programs with newer ideas that were expanded upon, but the practices it lists have not been tested. However, this guide was vetted by active art practitioners with a range of experience in intergenerational programming, although a larger sample size could increase confidence in the outcomes described here.

We believe the guide is a useful tool for developing intergenerational arts programming, but obstacles regarding funding, scheduling, and participant demand could obstruct implementation of this sort of programming. We suggest that gerontology educators and art educators partner together to implement better programming. Gerontology educators have expertise in addressing ageism and other gerontological subject matter, while art educators are more well-versed in guiding art appreciation and art creation efforts. Future researchers should expand this study, gathering data from additional participants and pilot testing intergenerational programs developed based on the guide for feasibility and efficacy. Researchers, educators, and advocates should encourage grant-making organizations to

support intergenerational programming.

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Alex Ramirez is a Program Coordinator at the Department of Public Health in Columbia, South Carolina. He earned a Bachelor of Science (BS) degree in Public Health and a Master of Science (MS) in Applied Gerontology at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. His previous work, a personal narrative, appeared in the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Health Humanities Journal. His more recent research interests explore aging, mental health, and how creative practices fostering collaboration between various age cohorts can encourage life-enhancing connections across generations.

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Katie Crosby is a development professional and advocate for the arts, currently serving as the Director of Development for Major Gifts at the University of North Carolina Wilmington's College of Humanities, Social Sciences, and the Arts. Previously, Ms. Crosby was the Assistant Director of Corporate and Foundation Engagement at UNCW and the Artist Services & Residency Manager for UNCW's Office of the Arts. Prior to UNCW, Ms. Crosby contributed to the arts landscape in Cleveland, OH, as Community Engagement & Education Coordinator for DanceCleveland and Outreach Coordinator & Professional Dancer with Ohio Contemporary Ballet. These roles honed her skills in arts education, grant writing, strategic

partnerships, and fundraising. Passionate about the arts and community, Ms. Crosby remains active in Wilmington's cultural scene, exemplifying her lifelong dedication to creativity and community.

Appendix

Best Practices for an Intergenerational, Learner-Based Art Program

Overview

This document aims to provide the best practices for intergenerational, arts-based programming. The guide's framework is designed to be flexible and feasible for its implementation to be possible in a multitude of different settings. Both art appreciation and art creation will comprise the guide's activities. This guide is instructed by past research (from relevant scholarly articles) and more current research (from recently interviewed art practitioners). These findings were analyzed and synthesized to compile the best methods in intergenerational art programming.

Purpose

These best practices for intergenerational arts-based programming are purposely designed to facilitate collaboration between participants of various age cohorts. Intergenerational programming enables a learning experience where participants from different stages of the life course interact and discover their unique perceptions of artwork together. The intentionally intergenerational focus fosters harmony among the generations, through the enjoyable process of creating and appreciating art. The objectives and overarching goals are to reduce ageism, depression, and social isolation among participants, through art appreciation and art creation activities. Participating in art programs demonstrating efficacy at reducing depression and social isolation through offering creative outlets in a group setting and the intergenerational approach would actively work to reduce ageism among participants. All in all, this guide is designed for art educators to use as a template for their programming.

Principles

- Providing interactive art activities stimulates social engagement, therefore, reducing social isolation.
- Presenting creative outlets enhances well-being while reducing symptoms of depression.
- Creating an environment where various age cohorts share their life experiences in an open-minded, enlightening way, free of ageist stigmas reduces both other-focused and internalized ageism.

Audience

Art enthusiasts of all ages, with any level of art experience.

Settings/Environments

This design would be best suited for art museums, since an open-studio philosophy would maximize positive outcomes among participants (considering art materials are most abundant in these venues). However, given the guide's flexible nature, an outreach program adopting certain aspects of the guide could possibly be held in other community facilities (e.g., senior centers, libraries, etc.) as well. Partnering with schools (K-12 or universities) could also ensure that younger participants engage in the programming.

Scheduling

Younger and older adults generally have differing schedules, especially during weekdays. While younger, working-age adults would typically gravitate towards participating in free-time activities during the evening, older adult retirees tend to prefer free-time activities earlier in the day. Programs using this guide would see the greatest attendance during the daytime on weekends.

Timeline

One-off workshops could meet all learning objectives. However, consecutively occurring workshops could be possible as well (although attendance may vary week by week). Regardless, the facilitator(s) should start the program by telling participants what they should expect through describing the purpose and principles above. This process could help participants feel more comfortable from the start, as well as facilitate a better experience throughout. After the art appreciation and creation components, time for reflection should be allotted for facilitators to reiterate the program's purpose and principles, as well as signify a clear end to the program. A general feedback survey could also be distributed at the end of the allotted time, so that educators can revise how they implemented this guide (for improving future programs).

Marketing

When advertising for a program following this guide, using other terms synonymous with "intergenerational" could be helpful. For example, advertisements could use verbiage like "an art program for all generations" or "talk about art with different generations," which could hint at the recruitment's aim of reaching an intentionally intergenerational audience.

Materials

While the art appreciation component would only require material such as artworks or surroundings to guide the visual thinking strategies (VTS) discussion, the art creation component could utilize a wide array of materials. These artmaking materials could range

from a simple drawing activity with pencil and paper, to sculpting with clay. Introductory art activities would be advised, in order to gain the most participation. Modifiable grips for materials like pencils, pens, crayons, and markers could be helpful for some participants to use. Not only would this help those who usually have trouble using these materials, but hexagonal grips (in particular) would prevent materials from rolling off tables easily.

Budget

Budgeting for programs following this guide could be as cheap as providing introductory art materials for all participants. Pencils and paper would be the cheapest solution in implementing the art creation component, while the art appreciation component could use free-to-use art. If additional funding is available, allocating it towards other varieties of art materials and paid forms of advertisement and marketing would be beneficial.

Training

The expertise required from educators using this guide is minimal. Facilitating VTS can be learned through the guidelines and educational resources below as well as other helpful, free-to-use websites online. For the art creation component, skills in artmaking may be required (but only introductory ones, since the guide advises basic art creation).

Best Practices

Art Appreciation Components*:

a) ***Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS)*** is a discovery process that uses art to teach thinking skills, communication skills, and visual literacy. The facilitator of a VTS session should listen carefully to participants' answers, acknowledge and paraphrase their responses, and encourage further inquiry throughout. As a result, the facilitator will then synthesize the variety of viewpoints that participants present. This process allows participants to critically think about art, then share and explain their interpretive comments. These discussions are centered around artworks and are guided by the following open-ended questions:
   - *"What's going on in this artwork?"*
   - *"What do you see that makes you say that?"*
   - *"What more can we find?"*

b) ***VTS*** would comprise the bulk of the guide's art appreciation component. Lessons in VTS engage fascinating conversations among participants and facilitators. An intergenerational audience will engage in discussions where participants share a wide range of life experiences. VTS discussion does not require participants to meet any particular prerequisite in art knowledge, meaning this conversational approach does

not present restrictions in who can or should participate based on their knowledge of or interest in art. VTS activities will fulfill the guide's aims of reducing ageism, depression, and social isolation, while also challenging the assumption that art can only be critiqued or appreciated by experts.

*The art appreciation component is estimated to take 30 minutes to 1 hour in order to meet all learning objectives (depending on which ideas below are implemented).

Art Appreciation Programming Ideas:

c) In museums, the VTS portion will focus on appreciating art available in the facility's galleries. This allows participants to further connect to the museum, the artist(s) behind the artwork(s), other participants, and their stories. This interactive process offers a clean transition to the art creation component as well, since appreciating art can inspire creation. Analogous themes between art appreciation and creation could also ease said transition. For example, a VTS session designed around Impressionist artwork could inspire the creation of watercolor landscape art.
d) Social realism artworks could inspire storytelling during VTS sessions, in a way where older adults could shed light on their perspectives of historical moments that younger participants may be less familiar with (providing a learning experience in itself).
e) Museum environments typically offer art materials, which present the opportunity for the VTS portion to instead be framed around art created by the participants themselves (although this approach could discourage those who enjoy appreciating art but not creating it).
f) In other environments where only certain parts of the guide can be utilized (due to lack of space or art materials), the VTS portion could also alternatively be hosted online, using free-to-use art that could be shown digitally. Platforms like Zoom (or other online conference software) are viable resources for hosting these events virtually.
g) VTS activities could also be hosted outside. For example, touring the city/town and identifying its surroundings, where facilitators could ask questions like "how does this sign fit in the environment?". This would be a fun alternative that does not require an indoor space or particular art materials. However, the downside of an outdoor VTS activity would be limited accessibility, since only those who are able to walk or travel in a group could participate.
h) The VTS portion of the guide could also include a writing activity that follows a similar pattern of facilitated conversation. Not only would this cater to more reserved participants but also would allow participants to think more critically about their answers to VTS questions. The written answers could then be shared among the group.

i) For the VTS portion, more complex art could be viewed over time (as participants become more familiar with art and VTS discussions). However, this would only work in situations where the guide can be implemented in consecutive times over a period of weeks (not applicable to one-off workshop formats).

j) The "Shared Perspective" philosophy can be practiced in the VTS portion. All participants will be sharing their perspectives through appreciating art and participants' perspectives will vary. Participants may bring similar or different perspectives, but either way they would be shared with everyone involved, facilitating an opportunity to engage in meaningful discussion within and across generations. To reiterate, shared perspective does not mean that all participants will agree, but that they understand each other's perspectives well enough to consider and accept them, within a friendly learning environment that invites all participants' opinions and perspectives. This philosophy could be emphasized to reduce ageist beliefs that participants may have.

Art Creation Components:

k) ***Hands-on art creation workshops*** would provide creative outlets that aim to enhance well-being and reduce depression. These workshops would be guided by art creation, with supplementary art appreciation activities to inspire participants to create art. Given that the VTS portion of the guide invites all participants (no matter their knowledge/background in art), the workshops should follow simple art creation guidelines (like introductory drawing and painting activities).

- *A learner-based method of teaching* could shape this portion of the guide fittingly. This term shifts the focus of instruction from facilitator to participant, in a way that establishes learner's independence and also challenges participants to take an active role in learning at their own pace. The upside of this teaching method would allow facilitators to have a range of experience as well, since they can guide activities more passively, in a way that would not demand the facilitator to have particular training as an art instructor.
- *A learner-based method of teaching* also differs from approaches commonly used in other forms of education. Subjects commonly taught in school (like math/science/etc.) are designed for narrowing a student's perspective to find a set few, correct answers. The guide should not include activities where certain participants are right or wrong. Innovation and problem-solving should be encouraged, just not through the lens of subjects that typically urge competition. Art should promote personal opportunity, broaden perspectives, and bring people together. Instead of relying on a "correct" end-product (like math/science/etc.), the guide should invite participants to learn about the art creation process itself.

Additional Resources

- VTS: http://teachers.mam.org/collection/teaching-with-art/visual-thinking-strategies-vts/
- Free to Use Art (for VTS sessions): https://www.nga.gov/open-access-images.html
- Learner-Based Teaching: https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/creating-collaboration-in-global-online-learning/40896
- Ageism Scale: https://academic.oup.com/gerontologist/article/57/2/e27/2632136
- Social Isolation Scale: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0164027506289723
- Depression Scale: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/014662167700100306