

National Art Education Association

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Source: *Studies in Art Education*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Spring, 1993), pp. 133-140

Published by: [National Art Education Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1320618>

Accessed: 14/09/2011 04:35

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Art Programming for Older Adults: What's Out There?

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In 1980, a pivotal book, *Lifelong Learning and the Visual Arts* (Hoffman, Greenberg, & Fitzner, 1980) documented art programs for older adults and the need for professional art educators to enter the field. This article examines literature to determine what has happened in the intervening decade and describes art programming for older adults which has been implemented at the national, state, and local levels. Emphasis is placed on innovative programs which promote creative thinking and self-expression and on the continuing need for art educators to develop new models of art programming for elderly learners.

Art education for older adults is a field in its infancy. In *Lifelong Learning and the Visual Arts*, a pivotal book of readings by professionals, published in 1980, several researchers alluded to the fact that art programs for older learners were indeed alive and well, but that, for the most part, they were implemented by caregivers, leisure specialists, and art therapists (Hoffman, Greenberg, & Fitzner, 1980). Jones (1980) urged art educators to enter the field and categorized several research needs. Among these were the importance of planning and documenting art programs for the elderly, the need to address issues relating to the diversity of the older adult population, and the value of adopting multiple points of view based on theories from the fields of gerontology, recreation, and adult education. Five years later, Greenberg (1985) noted the craft-kit orientation of many visual arts programs for senior adults and challenged art educators to effect change by "getting into the act" (p. 40). The task, as she saw it, was an enormous one involving a fundamental change of perspective. According to Greenberg, the K-12 approach to art education must be expanded to include the entire spectrum of life. She advocated developing certification programs for art teachers of older adults, educating professionals in the areas of gerontology and recreational therapy to recognize quality art programming, offering in-service opportunities for those currently teaching art classes, bringing the DBAE model into art classes for older adults, and developing courses for experienced art educators who want to work with an older population. In the July, 1987 issue of *Art Education*, Taylor focused on ways in which the visual arts had begun to meet the needs of American elders through Elderhostel programs, art exhibitions sponsored by the American Association for Retired Persons, Elder Craftsmen Shops, and the trend toward second careers in the crafts. These three art educators recognized basic needs and emerging trends still evident today in the area of lifelong learning and the arts.

A dichotomy which must be addressed when looking at senior arts programming is that of the craft versus fine arts approaches. Many excellent programs

for senior adults are crafts oriented; however, there is a tendency noted by Jones (1980) and Greenberg (1987) to use kits which allow for little intellectual stimulation or creativity. "Crafts" in this sense are merely exercises in technique and production rather than art experiences which result in work expressive of the individual. This article will focus on crafts programs which do not have a "kit" orientation and which offer older adults opportunities to be creative.

The majority of documentation of arts programs for older adults can be found in gerontological journals as well as in journals relating to leisure activities. Other rich resources for information are the Ageline Data Base sponsored by the American Association of Retired Persons; the educational data base, ERIC; and program profiles available through the National Council on Aging. In order to describe the large variety of art programs for senior adults, it is necessary to categorize them. McCutcheon (1986) looked at national, state, and local trends. She found that, at the local level, small arts organizations were beginning to merge with senior centers and retirement homes, artists from community colleges were teaching classes at senior centers, and parks and recreations departments were becoming involved in arts programming for elders. On the state level, many state arts councils were funding arts and cultural enrichment programs for older adults, and on the national level, funding for program development was becoming increasingly available through organizations such as the National Council on Aging, the National Endowment for the Arts, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the Very Special Arts program based at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

Programs at the National Level

Among older adults there has been a tremendous interest in crafts evidenced at national, state, and local levels. Glass and Smith (1984) attributed this crafts movement to several factors: more leisure time for older adults, the need for added income in retirement, the increased value placed on handmade goods, and the positive effects of creative productivity for the elderly. A major crafts marketing program in the United States has been that of the Elder Craftsmen Shops (Schreter, 1984). Begun in New York in the 1950s, these are nonprofit, publicly subsidized stores which market, on a consignment basis, handcrafted products of artisans over 55 years of age. Selection committees of artists screen goods, and art classes for older adults are taught by professional craftspersons/artists. Fifteen of these shops existed in 1984, most of them in Florida, California, and the northeast. Today the Elder Craftsmen program in New York not only provides outlets for handcrafted products, it also encourages quality marketing, offering advice and assistance to similar shops across the country, from "The Island Art Center" on St. Simon's Island, Georgia, to "The Elder Craftsman" in Old Sacramento, California. Glass and Smith (1984) noted the need for art educators to become involved in designing more and better crafts training programs.

Ambrosias, Hood-Rogers, and Cook (1986) described another important crafts-oriented art program at the national level titled the "Buy Native American" project. Begun in 1986 and supported by private industry and the National Indian Council on Aging, this foundation promoted the sale of artwork of elderly Native Americans through national distribution of catalogues and placement of artwork. All sales and donations went directly to elderly artists.

The National Council on Aging (NCOA) supports many arts programs for

the elderly. In 1973 the National Center on Arts and the Aging was formed, as part of the NCOA, to promote the inclusion of cultural and creative activities as an integral part of its support service programs. In order to create a national awareness and to stimulate partnerships in the area of art and aging, NCOA's center first built a broadly based constituency by co-sponsoring arts and aging workshops and seminars around the country. More than 300 meetings in 46 states indicated a growing interest in this coalition. Funding from the National Endowment for the Arts has supported information gathering and dissemination as well as arts/aging advocacy efforts. A bibliography of literature was developed for the field, and information on programming can be obtained from the NCOA center. An example of a project is the Arts Mentor Program (AMP) which trains older professional artists to teach children and older adults in community arts and residency programs (Lewis-Kane, McCutcheon, & MacDicken, 1986). This program provides income for the professional and supports the value of the elderly artist as one who can teach and inspire.

The Elderhostel movement is the largest and most visible national adult education program for persons over 60 years of age. In 1989 over 190,000 members enrolled in the classes throughout the 50 states, 10 Canadian provinces, and 40 countries overseas. Programs are one week in length and are held on college and university campuses. The purpose of the organization is to provide for older adults stimulating educational programs at modest costs. Based in Boston, the organization publishes seasonal bulletins of course offerings which include many in the area of fine arts. Some courses in the Spring 1991 catalogue include:

Southeast Alaska Native Arts: An intensive look into the art and culture of the Native peoples of southeast Alaska . . . Alaska Marine Highway/Totem Heritage Center.

Painting in America: 18th Century to Present: A survey of American painters which will highlight some of America's best-known artists, from the late 1700s to America's dominance in the 1950s. Slides, museum trip, and opportunity to draw. The Athenian School, Danville, California.

Moon River Music Magic: Explore America's colorful history of popular music, from jazz through the 1950's . . . Armstrong State College, Savannah, Georgia.

Happiness is a Warm Quilt: Study quilts as a folk art that reflects American history and culture . . . Graceland College, Lamoni, Iowa.

Ink, Images, and Imagination: The Art of Printmaking: Explore modern to ancient printmaking techniques . . . Centenary College of Louisiana.

The Chamber Music of Johannes Brahms: From the passage of the piano trios to the pathos of the clarinet quartet, hear and discuss some of Brahms' most beautiful music. Peabody Institute on Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland.

It seems obvious that Elderhostel provides an exciting variety of arts programs for the elderly. Even though the qualifications of instructors are not given in the catalogue, one can deduce from the course descriptions that courses are likely to be taught by people knowledgeable in the arts. One of the drawbacks which may be encountered by a visual arts professional working with Elderhostel is a lack of funding for a studio program. Often money for supplies must come from contributions by class participants, or individuals must furnish their own materials. This budgetary limitation may be a problem for artists/art educa-

tors across the country as they begin programs under the auspices of Elderhostel; however, it reflects the commitment of Elderhostel to keep costs for participants at a minimum. The average charge for 6 nights' accommodations, meals, and 5 days of classes is \$275. The growth of the Elderhostel movement attests to its success in the area of adult education and to the desire of America's healthy, mobile, older adults to find creative arts/learning experiences.

In the area of national programs for elderly who are disabled, one example is the National Institute of Art and Disabilities (NIAD), established in 1984 as a part of the Advancement Programs of the National Endowment for the Arts. Based in Richmond, California, the Institute sponsors a catalogue and traveling exhibition of work of disabled artists and publishes a manual, *Freedom to Create* (Katz, 1991), with art lessons and techniques especially suited for disabled students. It also markets three videos which depict painting experiences with persons who have disabilities. NIAD offers artists, administrators, and other professionals workshops which lead to a "Certificate as Specialist in Art and Disabilities." Twelve art centers for disabled artisans using the NIAD model are now in California, as well as one in Washington state and one in Toronto, Canada. Even though this program does not limit itself to older adults with disabilities, many of its participants are in this category. The centers offer instruction in visual arts for participants who attend 6 hours daily. Master artists teach painting, sculpture, printmaking, ceramics, and crafts, with an emphasis on personal expressiveness and individual choice. Galleries at the centers and in public spaces offer exhibition and sales opportunities for disabled artists. The program also focuses on social skill development, good work habits, independence, and responsibility. Students who are successful in art and socialization then become paid art aides in convalescent hospitals, preschools, and community programs.

Programs at State and Local Levels

During the 1980s, museums at state and local levels had begun to sponsor a variety of outreach programs for older adults (Hubbard, 1983). The Houston Museum of Fine Arts offered older learners classes in which basic skills and concepts of art were taught. The Boston Museum of Fine Arts hired two professionals as arts personnel to direct programs in art and aging. In Los Angeles, free museum tours were geared especially for the older adult. Greenberg (1987) described several museum outreach programs in which staff and/or trained volunteers took educational materials and visuals into nursing homes and senior centers to provide aesthetic/learning experiences for elderly persons who could not come to the museum. Some museums, such as the Robert Fleming Museum at the University of Vermont, sponsored traveling exhibits and constructions by older artists. During the spring of 1991, the Georgia Museum of Art in Athens, Georgia, designed for seniors a special program to coincide with an exhibition of artwork titled, *Remembering the Depression*. Two other programs for seniors were on their 1991-1992 calendar. The July 8, 1991, *Atlanta Journal* featured an article titled "Ageless Art" which described a community-based arts program for the elderly, sponsored by the High Museum of Art. For 3 consecutive years the museum hired a professional artist to provide painting experiences for participants at senior centers around the area. Exhibitions of the work of the elderly artists were an important part of the program. These are only a few examples of museum-outreach to older adults, but they represent a trend in the field of museum education today to address

the artistic and creative needs of a growing population of elderly.

The bulk of arts programming for older adults takes place in community centers, local nursing homes, residences for the elderly, and day care centers. It would be impossible to document them all; however, research reveals that many of them are oriented toward craft-kit production or stereotypical artwork (Greenberg 1987). At a fall 1991 conference on Aging and Developmental Disabilities sponsored by the American Association of Mentally Retarded and the Gerontological Society of America, held in Lexington, Kentucky, five day care programs for adults with developmental disabilities were described in detail. Although the programs based in Texas, New York, Colorado, Ohio, and Indiana were limited in number, they offered insights into what is going on nationwide. Each of the day service centers placed great emphasis on providing a wide variety of activities to allow for individual choices. The majority of arts activities, however, were categorized as "arts and crafts" and included making holiday decorations, latch hook rug kits, and painting greenware. It was encouraging to note that during this conference on aging and disabilities, 4 of the 25 presentations had a creative arts orientation, and 3 of them were held during the plenary session. Two art educators, one drama/leisure specialist, an art therapist, and a music educator were conference presenters. In this arena, arts professionals were in a position to educate caregivers and leisure specialists about the value of a creative arts program for older persons with and without disabilities.

Documentation of arts programs for the elderly which reflect emphasis on creativity and mental stimulation are few and far between. A review of the literature yielded the following descriptions of individual programs and sheds light on innovative developments in the field during the past decade:

1. A mural project in a Jewish home for the aged allowed residents to hire an artist to paint a wall mural depicting their life histories. During the 10 month residency, the artist conducted workshops for residents, brought in other artists to dialogue about their work, and planned a community exhibition of artwork of participants (Keyser, 1984).

2. The Grass Roots Art and Community Efforts (GRACE) program in rural Vermont offers workshops for the elderly in nursing homes and community centers. A professional artist provides a variety of media and encourages each individual to develop a personal style of expression. GRACE exhibits have toured locally and nationally. The program has also resulted in a color film documentary and a 10-year retrospective exhibit of exceptional work (Sunseri, 1986).

3. Artworks, a program sponsored by Mount Zion Hospital and Medical Center in San Francisco, pays professional artists to visit homebound patients each week and to work with them on individual projects such as paintings, collages, and oral histories. Banners and musical dramas are the result of collaborative efforts of inpatients. The artists/teachers also perform at the hospital and exhibit their own artwork (Stavish, 1986).

4. Hillhaven Art and Poetry Competition is a national competition which received, in 1988, more than 2,500 art and poetry entries from residents in over 300 Hillhaven nursing homes. Local artists and poets lead creative workshops in nursing homes and encourage participation in the competition. Awards are given, and a book featuring the year's best entries is published (Ting, 1988).

5. Creative Arts Over 60 is a nonprofit organization which provides arts

opportunities for older adults in Madison, Wisconsin. Visual artists, writers, and performing artists who are committed to working with the elderly hold classes at senior centers, nursing homes, and day service centers. The 13 artist/teachers work in the areas of writing, music, painting, drama, textile art, and photography. Intergenerational programs and an outreach program for older adults with special needs are recent additions to the project (Edie, 1990).

6. Elders Share the Arts (ESTA), a resource center on arts and aging in New York City, utilizes life review as a "creative, therapeutic, and empowering tool for working with elders and intergenerational groups" (Perlstein, 1991, p. 55). Participants are encouraged to express reminiscences through drama, music, writing, dance, and visual art. The program includes living-history workshops; oral history projects with multicultural, intergenerational focus; a storytelling group, and an arts and aging resource center (Perlstein, 1991).

7. Making Your Own Mark, an intergenerational community-based arts program in Oklahoma, provides experiences in poetry writing, storytelling, music, painting, collage, and dancing for older adults, junior high students, and college art majors (Belzer & Rugh, 1991).

8. The Quality of Life Project (QOL) at the University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, is an innovative arts/fitness program designed specifically for older adults with and without developmental disabilities. Funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, QOL employed professionals and students in the areas of fitness, drama, visual arts, dance, and creativity to design and implement an interdisciplinary program in senior centers, nutrition sites, nursing, personal care, group, and family homes in northeast Georgia. Emphasis is on creative expression and physical fitness, as well as an interdisciplinary approach to learning guided curriculum development. Both older adults and caregivers are given opportunities to participate in lessons which relate thematically. The incubation model of teaching (Torrence & Safter, 1990) is utilized to structure lesson formats in each discipline. *The Arts/Fitness Quality of Life Program Manual* (Clements, in press) presents monthly lessons from each of five disciplines, as well as creativity and museum components which offer suggestions for brainstorming, provocative questioning, and designing and implementing museum field trips. Videos are available to serve as guides for leading older adults in "life-enhancing" activities.

These models offer ideas for future program development and indicate at least the beginnings of a move toward art experiences which provide opportunities for creativity and intellectual stimulation.

Conclusion

The field of arts programming for elders is growing dramatically. The reawakened interest in crafts is evidenced by the Elder Craftsmen Movement and the increasing presence of older artisans at crafts fairs. The popularity of the Elderhostel program is indicative of the desire of older adults to continue learning and pursuing areas of interest which include the arts. Museum outreach programs for the elderly, as well as community arts programs, are a part of the boom in arts for elders. At the national level, the Center on Arts and the Aging of the National Council on Aging, the Department of Health and Human Services, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the National Institute for Art and Disabilities are only a few of the many organizations which fund and/or support program planning and development.

Given the increasing interest in art programming for senior adults, it follows

that art educators are in a unique position to contribute their knowledge and skills. The challenge facing the field is both exciting and fearsome because it involves some risk taking. If art professionals accept the idea that education must encompass the entire spectrum of life, as Greenberg (1985) suggests, then they will have to develop their own outreach programs. They will be forced to leave the comfortableness of the classroom and actively seek out places to connect with elders. This means taking an assertive posture in developing Elderhostel programs; writing grants to subsidize creative arts programs at the national, state, and local levels; and finding opportunities to educate other professionals who work with older adults about the definition and benefits of a quality art program. It also means being willing to become learners as well as teachers. Art educators must brainstorm with experts in other fields related to aging in order to find out what works and how they can incorporate successful theories and methods into their individual areas. They must be willing to conduct research and to take the time to write and to publish the results. This is not the time for art professionals to sit back and wait for older "students" to come to them. The next few years are critical ones which call for action. Older adults are a ready audience who, for the most part, have not yet had the opportunity to benefit from the expertise of trained professionals. Until they have been exposed to quality art programming, they simply don't know what they are missing. Art educators can offer them opportunities to experience art in a variety of ways. The DBAE model of teaching which promotes aesthetic awareness, critical thinking, historical knowledge, and artistic creation will serve this population well, opening up avenues for reminiscence, life review, and self-expression. In return, elders offer to the field of art education a tremendous resource of wisdom, humor, life experiences, and spirit. The years ahead have the potential of exciting growth as art educators work to enhance the lives of older adults through creative art experiences.

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