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The Experiential Art and Crafts Preferences of Senior Adults:

A Preparatory Assessment for the Implementation of

the Project Senior Art Model

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A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Division of Cross-Disciplinary Studies

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Masters of Arts in Liberal Studies

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by

Charlynn Watson Campbell

May 2005

_____

Mr. Ralph Slatton, Chair

Dr. Judith Hammond

Dr. Rick Osborn

Keywords: Senior Adults, Community-based Learning, Intergenerational,

Experiential Art, DBAE

ABSTRACT

The Experiential Art and Crafts Preferences of Senior Adults:

A Preparatory Assessment for the Implementation of

the Project Senior Art Model

by

Charlynn Watson Campbell

Project Senior Art was conceived in answer to the growing need for worthwhile directed activities in our community senior centers and to provide valuable community-based learning experiences for university art students. This intergenerational program recognizes the unique intellectual abilities of older adults and meets the educational needs of senior participants and college art students, providing both creative opportunities for personal growth. Fundamental to the successful development and implementation of the program, and the focus of this study, is ascertaining the experiential art and crafts preferences of the targeted senior adult population. Personal interviews, focus group discussions, and a survey instrument were used to secure the information necessary to plan experiential art activities, recruit student facilitators, and provide the core course content. A high interest in traditional and nontraditional art activities was expressed, with senior adults citing photography, painting, and memory book making as the most preferred media.

This thesis is dedicated to Dr. James C. Mills, friend, and masterful "teacher as trickster," who invites us to show up and dance so that we might learn the secret of teaching and who's love for humanity transcends even his love for art and for teaching.

"Where is gentleness? My friend, I wish for you a quieter, gentler world…to know that even one life has breathed easier because you have lived---that is success!"

J.C. Mills

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview

From the moment ancient man placed colored clay handprints on cave walls art has been recognized and appreciated as an intrinsic and valuable means of self-expression and communication (see Figure1). Gratifying at any age, engaging in art and crafts provides a tremendous means for physical, mental, and social stimulation. Today the number of senior adults is increasing at a phenomenal rate. The demand for meaningful activities for this exploding population is only now being realized. It is for these reasons and the inherent nature of art that Project Senior Art was proposed in an effort, at least in part, to meet the needs of the growing senior ranks.

Figure 1. **Ancient Anasazi Rock Art, photo courtesy J.Q. Jacobs**

Project Senior Art is a community-based cooperative initiative involving East Tennessee State University's College of Art and Design, the Kellogg Community Partnership Program, and the Johnson County Senior Center and serves as a successful model for intergenerational experiential art programs (see Figure 2 for project logo).

Figure 2. Project Senior Art Logo

The level to which a program such as this succeeds and is sustainable is directly dependent upon the active participation of the senior adults in the art and crafts classes and the university students who act as instructors/facilitators. Consequently, determining the various art media the target senior adults prefer, the method of instruction they are most receptive to, and the successful recruitment of capable and committed students are the very core for designing and experiential art program that achieves the desired outcomes and ensures a quality experience for all participants.

<p style="text-align:center">Rationale</p>

Senior adults are the fastest growing population in the nation (Smart, 2001). The quality of life for older Americans has improved significantly in recent years. Today's seniors are living longer, healthier, and more active lives (see Figure 3, p. 10). They have more discretionary time and money than

Figure 3. Bike Riding at Penney Farms, photo courtesy of Penney Retirement Community

ever before and seek to use it engaged in worthwhile activities. As such, the need for more community senior centers has risen and along with the demand has come the need for experiential programs; programs that not only attract seniors but also provide stimulus for the participants and produce positive outcomes whereby the seniors are satisfied with the experience and enthusiastic for continued participation.

<u>The Model</u>

Project Senior Art was developed with two principal outcomes in mind; the first, to develop a course of study that prepared art students to teach the visual arts within a community of senior adults, and the second, to provide art activities to the seniors during the research , development and implementation of the course of study (Mills, 2001). The project was a "win-win" proposition. The

designated senior center for the initial project was in Johnson County, Tennessee. In addition to the local elderly residents, retirees from outside the region had discovered the community and had moved into the area on a permanent or seasonal basis. Combined, they brought a rich variety of perspectives and experiences.

The Principal Outcomes

Johnson County is an economically depressed, rural county and funding for community outreach programs is limited. Project Senior Art provided not only a directed activity for the senior center to promote and offer, but it provided the instructors/facilitators for the class sessions. On the other hand, art students from East Tennessee State University (ETSU) had the opportunity to work with and gain valuable insight and feedback from the senior participants. Research has shown that students involved in community-based learning such as this exhibit equal or possibly better academic outcomes in traditional courses, they have the opportunity to use their learned skills and course content in a practical, real-life setting (Behringer, 2000; Corbett & Kendall, 1999), and they develop practical interpersonal skills that would not be afforded them otherwise (Eyler, Giles, Gray, & Lynch, 1997; Soukup, 1999).

The Purpose of the Study

As with any learning experience, the way it is conceptualized, organized, and coordinated directly affects the outcomes (Lobertini, MacRae, Hicks, & Behringer, 2001). Before any planning for a program such as Project Senior Art can begin it is imperative to first determine the types of art and crafts the senior adults prefer. This is key to the credibility of the endeavor and essential to its successful implementation. The focus of this particular study is the determination of the art and crafts preferences of senior adults for the purpose of planning a

program, modeled after Project Senior Art, with directed activities whereby university art students lead senior adults through creative hands on art experiences. To that end, personal interviews and focus group sessions were organized and conducted with a target group of seniors. In addition, an instrument that surveys the art and crafts preferences was developed and presented to the participating seniors. The target group was comprised of the members of the Clay County Senior Centers and residents of Penney Farms retirement community. The results of the personal interaction acted as a litmus test for the interest in such a project being implemented in Clay County, Florida, and the survey results served to determine the specific activities to be incorporated into the senior art project. The data collected will also provide crucial information for the recruitment of enthusiastic art students whose art concentration is related to the art media the seniors have exhibited an interest in.

Research Methods

Traditional research methods, in conjunction with on-line searches and personal contacts with senior organizations such as the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), Elderhostel, and the First Tennessee Area Agency on Aging have netted a formidable foundation of information related to the attitude of seniors towards art and crafts and the value placed on engaging in art experiences. Preliminary readings reflect there are numerous benefits to a senior art education program and that there is a decisive interest in art activities among senior adults.

The analysis of the survey results demonstrates the art activities seniors in the target area would most likely participate in if given the opportunity. In addition, the study compares the art preferences of senior men to women and

local to transplant seniors. Previous involvement in art is also reflected among these various subgroups.

Conclusion

Project Senior Art was conceived in answer to the growing need for worthwhile directed activities in our community senior centers and to provide valuable community-based learning opportunities for university art students. It acts as a model for subsequent programs to be fostered throughout the country. The first step in the development and implementation of a successful program modeled after Project Senior Art, that produces the desired outcomes, is to determine the preferences for art and crafts activities among the specific population of senior adults who will be the focus of the program. The information gleaned through the use of personal interviews, focus group discussions, and a survey instrument will then be used to plan and organize experiential art activities, recruit student facilitators and provide the course core content .

Definitions of Terms

The following terms and definitions were used for the purposes of this study:

- Community-based Learning – The integration of community involvement and hands-on research into traditional classroom curriculum. This service type learning provides students the opportunity to apply knowledge and skills gained in the classroom to develop research projects, gather and analyze data, and communicate their findings with the community organizations and agencies that would benefit from the information.
- DBAE – Disciplined Based Art Education is a comprehensive approach to art education that draws upon four foundational art disciplines for its

instructional content: art production, art history, art criticism, and

aesthetics (Dobbs, 1992, p. v).

- Experiential Art – The process of engaging in the act of creating art.

- Intergenerational – The cooperative exchange between any two

  generations. Typically involving "the interaction between the young and

  the old in which there is a sharing of skills, knowledge and experience"

  (Newman, 1986, p. 6).

- Senior Adults – refers to individuals who are 55 years of age or older.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The fastest growing segment of our population is that of senior adults. Though there is no set age that defines a senior adult, demographic studies and educational gerontology typically use the ages of 55 and older as descriptors for older adults. The group of people between the ages of 55 and 75 are generally referred to as the young-old, the old-old signify those over the age of 75. (Kauppinen, 1990) The elderly population in the U.S. increased 100% between the years of 1960 and 1994; this occurring while the entire population grew only 45%. The number of older Americans continues to increase dramatically and it is projected that by the year 2050, one in five will be over the age of 65, as many as 80 million. This almost exponential growth is anticipated to occur through 2030 as the baby-boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964) join the ranks of older adults. (Hillier & Barrow, 1999) It is this generation that demographers predict will redefine just what it means to be an older adult (Smart, 2001). To put these figures into perspective, consider that by the middle of this century, there will be more people over the age of 65 than there will be children who are 14 years of age or younger. "This shift will profoundly affect national and regional policies on education, health, recreation, economics, role of government—indeed the national self-concept will experience a shift from being a youth-oriented nation to one of mature citizenry." (Hillier & Barrow)

The shift is already beginning to occur and with it a change in the manner in which older adults are viewed. "An expanding database, improved research methods, matured longitudinal studies, and inquiry in humanistic fields have debunked the myth that aging is synonymous with decrepitude and senility"

(Kauppinen, 1990, p.99). The results gathered from empirical data and humanistic inquiry, suggest that normal older adults can experience continued growth and can develop special mental abilities. Michelangelo painted the Sistine Chapel at age 84; Tolstoy learned to ride a bicycle at 69; Lina Prokofiev, at 80 narrated the 50th Anniversary Performance of Peter and the Wolf at Lincoln Center (Ringold & Rugh, 1989). Through life's experiences older adults tend to acquire an understanding that the nature of reality and knowledge is relative and non-absolute, they acknowledge that reality is in part paradoxical, and use an integrative method of thinking (Kauppinen). It is the life time of personal experiences that sets older adults apart form all other age groups (Lowy & O'Connor, 1986; Merriam, 1985, Moody 1985). The wisdom gained from these life experiences affords the older adults unparalleled strengths, two of which are insight attained from life review and the achievement of integrative understanding; life review being a natural stage whereby the elder reflects upon, evaluates ,and redefines past experiences (Butler, 1982; Erikson & Erikson, 1978; Merriam & Cross, 1981) and integrative understanding being the ability to appreciate the value of opposites and reconcile the tensions between them (Clayton & Birren, 1980; Erikson, 1963; Lewinson, 1978; Schaie, 1975).

Dobbs (1992) stated, "…art is an important tool for nurturing the mind, for developing intellectual and sensory functioning upon which almost all behavior and skills are based" (p. 11). Conversely the unique mental abilities of older adults may be quite helpful in art studies (See Figure 4, p. 17). Kauppinen (1990) suggests they may help the older individual grasp various representations of a theme in art, find and agree on varying interpretations of an art work, and evaluate several formal and expressive aspects in an art work. In addition, these qualities may assist them in translating conflicting meanings in a work of art into

a unified theme as well as direct them in identifying meanings quintessential in life and significant for the unearthing of human thought and objectives in a work.

Figure 4. Art at Everett Senior Center, photo courtesy of Joe Huff

When considering the educational needs of older adults McClusky's Education for Aging: The scope of the field and perspectives for the future (1974), the educational needs of older adults are classified into five distinguishable categories: coping needs, contributory needs, influence needs, expressive needs, and transcendental needs.

- Coping needs – involve the acquisition of the basic skills of reading, writing, and computation; information on health, financial, and family matter; and new vocational training.

- Contributory needs – call for education to encourage and equip older adults for participating in community projects and activities.

- Influence needs – involve learning about political processes and decision making, social action and advocacy, and work in associations and organizations.

- Expressive needs – involve engaging in learning activities that are enjoyable and meaningful.

- Transcendence needs – involve overcoming one's previous roles and definition of self to accept the past and let it go.

(Kauppinen, 1990)

The unique abilities of older adults combined with their educational needs may have significant implications when considered in reference to Art Education. Currently there is a trend toward Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE). DBAE is a comprehensive method of instruction and learning in art that pulls content from four fundamental disciplines. The disciplines are art production, art history, art criticism, and aesthetics.

These disciplines of art provide knowledge, skills, and understandings that enable students to have a broad and rich experience with works of art in four ways: by making art (art production); by responding to and making judgments about the properties and qualities that exist in visual forms (art criticism); by acquiring knowledge about the contributions artists and art make to culture and society (art history); and by understanding how people justify judgments about art objects (aesthetics) (Dobbs, 1992, p. 9).

Participation in an art experience that incorporates the four basic disciplines may provide for the expressive needs of older adults in that the creation, understanding, and appreciation of art allows for self-enrichment and the joy of learning. It is also plausible that the information and skills gained

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through involvement in art education contributes to meeting the coping needs. The opportunity to use the acquired skills in community art-related projects and/or exhibit their works, lecture or lead discussions on art, corresponds to the contributory needs. Learning about the history of the built environment and its preservation, along with related social and political action, respond to the influence needs as does participation in various art clubs and guilds. "Older adults' art studies may increasingly be an expression of the search for the meaning of one's life, a comprehension of one's place in culture, and transcendence…the insight of life review and integrative understanding may be invaluable in discovering human meanings and universal themes in art. These discoveries can be recycled back to the evolving understanding and transcendence." (Kauppinen, 1990, p. 101)

In addition to educational needs, older individuals face challenges as they age that create other needs as well. They must adapt as their bodies and appearance change as a result of the natural aging process. They may experience changes in health, chronic medical conditions such as hypertension, and arthritis, losses in hearing and vision, and reduction in mobility, strength, and stamina. Often the elderly are without an opportunity to exercise choice, particularly those with disabilities. They may feel a lack of control for their environment and their self-direction (Kemp, 1985). Later life also brings emotional losses such as those experienced through the deaths of aging family members or friends or through transitions such as retirement or disruptive residential moves (Foster, 1992).

Olbrich (1985) observed that those individuals with the most efficient coping style were those who possessed a strong belief in internal control. He stressed the need for not only plans for action but actions themselves as an

effective means of coping. Art work, as an expressive channel, provides a "safe" outlet for communicating feelings and is not limited by physical or mental barriers (Harlan, 1992). The process of bereavement is essential to coping with loss. A particularly effective part of the grieving process may be creative art experiences (Harlan & Hawkins, 1992). Whereas art programs following the DBAE model may best serve to meet educational needs of older adults, the creative art approach may be better suited in attending to their emotional needs. The objective of art education is typically to gain knowledge, skills, and techniques. The resulting art work is evaluated using certain external standards. The creative art approach differs in that the art work is not judged. The focus is on imagination and experimentation and the process of art making, not necessarily the end product. (Harlan)

"Neither age nor disability should prevent individuals from enjoying the benefits of creative problem solving" (Foster, 1992, p. 31), and the benefits of creative art experiences are numerous. "Creative experiences can function as a powerful catalyst. They facilitate stress-reduction, coping and adaptation by means of perceptual and attitudinal change during the course of long enduring and irreversible medical conditions" (Baer, 1985, p. 202). Feelings that cannot be expressed verbally can be communicated through drawing, painting, or sculpting. The process of art making involved judgment and organization, and engages memory and perception resulting in cognitive stimulation. Manual skills such as coordination and fine motor dexterity are also encouraged. Every step in the process of creating art involved decision-making and can help to support a sense of autonomy. Any opportunity to make decisions and act on those decisions is important to strengthen the self-concept and improve self-image. (Foster, 1992)

Creating an opportunity for a social exchange is also a benefit of a creative art approach as seen in Figure 5. Constructive social interaction occurs naturally in a group setting or can be arranged by cooperative efforts such as mural making.

Figure 5. Studio at Penney Farms, photo courtesy of Penney Retirement Community

Finally, in addition to stimulating emotional, intellectual, physical, and social responses, the creative art experience also provides a sensation that has been described as "joy" (Schachtel, 1959). Shonbrum (1986) refers to this "joy" as the "Creative High:"

> But call it joy, or wonder, or creative high…it is
> certainly the same craving that caused certain
> cavemen to coat their fingers and whole hands with
> colored clays and leave their bright message on the
> walls of the cave. These are probably not the same

men and women who, incising the walls with flint

tools, or drawing with soot from prehistoric campfires,

left the sort of art that true artists wonder at. But,

maybe they were. Maybe the experience of art in life,

and life in art, are not so different – are in fact,

connected by a kind of cord or thread…The filament a

spider spins to let itself swing out and away to carry

on, carry on with, Life: That fragile, that fiercely strong

filament or thread…

Lifelong Learning and the Visual Arts (Hoffman, Greenberg, & Fitzner, 1980), represents a turning point in art education to many professionals in the field, as it not only documents art programs for older adults it challenges professional art educators to become involved and enter the field (Barret, 1993). The research presented in this pivotal collection suggests that art programs for older adults are widely available, but that in general, they are developed and carried out by caregivers, leisure specialists, and art therapists (Hoffman et al.). Jones (1980) classified several research needs and encouraged art educators to consider moving into the field of art education for older adults. Among a few of the categories sited were: 1) the need for comprehensive planning and documentation of art programs for older adults; 2) the importance of recognizing the diversity within the older population and the resultant issues; and 3) incorporating an interdisciplinary approach which draws information from the field of gerontology, recreation, and adult education. In 1985 Greenberg documented the "craft-kit" tendency in older adult visual art programming and challenged art educators to take notice and effect positive change. It was her stance that art education must be broadened to include all ages and not be limited to K-12. She

recommended creating programs to certify art educators for older adult programs, providing in-service opportunities, incorporating the DBAE model into art classes for older adults, and educating professionals in the areas of gerontology and recreational therapy in the value of quality art programming.

Course offerings and visual art programs through such entities as Elderhostel, American Association for Retired Persons, Elder Craftsmen Shops, and the trend toward second careers in crafts were presented by Taylor in the July 1987 issue of Art Education, as means by which the needs of older adults were beginning to be addressed. A look at national, state, and local trends reveals that the majority of arts programming occurs in community centers, assisted living centers, adult day care centers, and local nursing homes. McCutcheon (1986) found that on the local level, artists from small arts organizations, community colleges, and parks and recreation departments are becoming involved in arts programming for older adults. On the state and national level funding sources are becoming increasingly available. Many state art councils provide support for arts and cultural enrichment programs for older adults. Organizations such as the National Council on Aging (NCOA), 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 are funding sources as well. The National Center on Arts and the Aging was formed in 1973 as part of the NCOA. The purpose was to promote the inclusion of cultural and creative activities as part of its support service programs. (Barret, 1993)

There is no question as to the need for quality art programming for older adults nor of the value it imparts on lifelong learning. Respected art educators have documented the importance of researching the basic needs and trends in

this field, developing programs that offer intellectual stimulation and creativity, the inclusion of the entire spectrum of life in art education, and formal certification programs for art educators who work with older adults. The field of arts programming for older adults is expanding and broadening dramatically. The challenge for art educators to take advantage of their unique position to contribute their knowledge and skills has been given. Barret (1993) encourages art educators to not wait for older "students" to come to them, but instead, accept the challenge and risk leaving the comfortableness of their classrooms and seek out means by which to connect with older persons. She invites them to create their own outreach programs, write grants to subsidize creative art programs, and work with experts in other fields relating to aging. Art educators can offer older adults a variety of art experiences and serve them well by promoting aesthetic awareness, critical thinking, historical knowledge, and artistic creation. And by so doing provide a "safe" opportunity 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" (Barret, p. 139).

In answer to the challenge set forth, James C. Mills, Ph.D., of East Tennessee State University, proposed the development of a new course offering within the Department of Art and Design whereby art education students would be trained to teach older adults. He recognized that the development of an intellectually stimulating curriculum coupled with a practical real-world application was a pivotal factor in determining the program's success and appeal. To that end, Project Senior Art was put forth in two phases. The first phase was to determine which of the many possible art experiences the older adults would be interested in. The second phase was an experimental course based on the research conducted in the first phase and offered to art education students. A

vital dynamic of that course being a student practicum, where in the venue of a rural senior center, the students facilitate creative art experiences and interact directly with the older adult participants. The long term goals of the proposal are the permanent offering of such a course, and on-going association with valuable seniors' activities, and a sustained provision of students who are adept at teaching older adults. (Mills, 2001)

The primary players in an endeavor such as Project Senior Art are the senior participants and the student facilitators. The value and numerous benefits of art experiences for older adults are presented above. It stands that the pedagogical value and the nature and extent of the benefits afforded the art students through community-based educational opportunities should also be addressed. Lobertini, MacRae, Hicks, & Behringer (2001) noted in their report on student outcomes for the expanding community partnerships program that there are two schools of thought regarding the value and sustainability of community-based learning. The report documents that some in higher education maintain experiential activities must exhibit distinct links "to traditional academic learning (comprehension and mastery of traditional course content and skill) and to specific disciplinary practices" (Lobertini et al., p. 6). In this viewpoint requisite students outcomes are the mastery of subject learning, the enhancement of intellectual and academic skills (i.e. critical thinking, writing, etc.), and/or successful entry or advancement in a career. The other perspective places a higher value on the personal development and growth achieved by the student; focusing on such aspects as self-esteem, social responsibility, civic-mindedness, and a greater acceptance of cultural diversity. However, it must be noted that there are numerous possible student outcomes that cannot be so easily compartmentalized as they legitimately correspond to both categories. (Lobertini

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et al., 2001) An example being the increased understanding of the barriers faced by older adults may be considered an affective outcome, benefiting the personal growth of the student, but it also has unquestionable cognitive application associated with multiple disciplines and necessary for professions that pertain to the elderly.

To date there are no set categories either for the types of activities or for the types of student outcomes in the research studies conducted in student outcomes from community-based experiential activities. However, the following five categories of learning/development have been considered: 1) cognitive complexity, 2) knowledge acquisition and application, 3) humanitarianism, interpersonal and intrapersonal competence, and practical competence. (Lobertini et al., 2001) In the area of traditional course content and academic skills, research confirms that students involved in community-based activities achieve academic outcomes that are at least equal to or possibly higher than the academic outcomes for traditional courses (Astin & Sax, 1998; Hesser, 1995; Soukup, 1999). Many educators agree that community-based learning experiences offer students an excellent venue in which to gain a more thorough knowledge of the course content and skills than they learn through traditional college courses. By applying the learned content and skills in a realistic setting, with real clients, practitioners, and problems, the students gain a higher level analytic skills, better comprehend the nature of the work environment, and exhibit improved outcomes in career decision-making and continued education (Behringer, 2000; Corbett & Kendall, 1999; Hesser, 1995). Practical interpersonal skills such as leadership skills, the ability to relate to others, and conflict resolution are cited as being enhanced by real-world learning experiences. Skills such as these are invaluable for success in human relationships and in the

workplace. (Eyler, Giles, Gray, & Lynch, 1997; Soukup, 1999) The unquestionable benefit for students participating in experiential learning is in the area of personal growth. Conrad and Hedin (1995) even suggest that community-based activities boost self-confidence and interest in learning and as a result counterbalance the often inferred negative effects of traditional education on students. "Community-based or service learning activities have been found to develop students' sense of self-empowerment, self-esteem, or sense of self-efficacy" (Lobertini et al.).

The prospect of an intergenerational program that recognized the unique intellectual abilities of older adults and meets the educational needs of both the senior participants and the college art students while providing creative opportunities for personal growth is exceptional. Project Senior Art steps away from the conventional programming of both older adult directed art activities and college art education course framework. The potential merits of such a venture are supported by research, yet the program itself may very well set a precedent for future development of course offerings and inclusion of full life spectrum in art education teacher certification.

CHAPTER 3

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

Careful research and thorough planning are crucial to the successful development and implementation of any program. For Project Senior Art two preliminary steps were taken to design the appropriate means of gathering critical data; defining the function of the research and determining the approach to be used. The primary objective of this study was to determine the art and crafts preferences of senior adults for the purpose of implementing an experiential art program based on the Project Senior Art model, developing the course curriculum, and recruiting students for the project. The information needed for the program required descriptive research. This type of study involves observation and the description of variables as they are distributed throughout a population (Crowl, 1993). Quality observation (i.e., measurement) is central to descriptive research (Heppner, Kivlinghan, & Wampold, 1992). Typically descriptive research designs are classified as either qualitative or quantitative.

Bloland (1992) states qualitative research designs are dependent upon the written or spoken words and/or observable behaviors as data sources. "Essentially, qualitative research focuses on understanding and illuminating meaning with an emphasis on discovery and description through open, reflexive, and interpretive methods" (Rafuls, 1998, p. 1). Phenomenological research is a form of qualitative research that focuses on "gaining participants' understandings of their environments, involvements, and experiences" (Cashwell, 2000, p. 2). Pursuant to this, characteristic methods of research involve: interviewing, observation, document analysis, and visual methods. The most common methodology associated with qualitative research is interviewing. Although face-

to-face interviewing is the most frequently used approach, group interviews and self-administered questions are also useful (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Interviewing within each format can be structured to unstructured, conducted over days, weeks, or months (Rafuls). In this type of research "bracketing" and "horizontalization" are necessary in order to eliminate researcher bias as much as possible. Bracketing is the deferment of the researcher's personal prejudices and biases so as not to impose structure in the interview. Horizontalization involves treating all data as if they were equally important, thus avoiding the tendency to overemphasize data consistent with the researcher's preconceived notions (Heppner et al.).

The results of quantitative descriptive designs are numerical or statistical descriptive data of how variables are distributed throughout members of a population (Crowl, 1993). Survey designs are a form of quantitative research that are especially useful tools when collecting descriptive data. The fundamental purpose of survey research is the gleaning of information about variables or phenomena within a population through the use of interviews or questionnaires (Heppner et al., 1992). It is quite possible the most predominant methodology in education research (Wiersma, 1995). "Survey research may be longitudinal (i.e., data collection over time at specified intervals) or cross-sectional (i.e., data collection at one point in time from samples representing a population)" (Cashwell, 2000, p. 2). Of pivotal importance to survey research is the validity. Heppner et al. proposed four key tasks in the conduct of survey research:

1) matching the survey design to the researcher's questions;
2) defining the sample;
3) selecting and developing data collection methods; and
4) analyzing data.

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"Surveys can be highly structured (specific questions with a set group of responses) to unstructured (general questions with the respondent providing whatever responses s/he feels appropriate; surveys can be sent through the mail, completed in-person, or used as an interview" (Wilde & Sockey, 1995, p. 9). The reliability and usefulness of the data gathered is directly dependent upon the quality of the questions presented on the survey instrument. If the questions are vague and open to interpretation or if the possible responses do not allow the respondent a full range of options, then it can be difficult to analyze the results. Additional limitation of survey research include failure to allot sufficient time and resources, improper sampling, inadequate measurements, nonrespondent bias (i.e., how nonrespondents differ from respondents), and failure to consider nonresponse that may lead to overgeneralization of results (Wiersma, 1995).

To conduct the assessment of art and crafts preferences for the initial Project Senior Art the researcher first determined the population of interest; this being the older adults of Johnson County, Tennessee, who were involved in the Johnson County Senior Center. For the subsequent study the seniors involved in the Clay County Senior Centers and the residents of Penney Farms retirement community were chosen as the target group. The population was selected, as they are the potential participants in the experiential art and crafts activities to be offered in the program. The second course of action was to choose the appropriate means of gathering data pertinent to the aim of the study. Based on the description of the research methods given above, it was determined that a combination of methods would best facilitate triangulation and thus enhance confidence in the validity of the findings. Unstructured and semi-structured interview were settled upon as the most suitable form of qualitative research. An

interview protocol for the older adults, either as individuals or as members of a focus group, was developed. A questionnaire (Appendix) was also developed to provide for the measurements of the quantitative research. The items for the questionnaire and the interview protocol were developed based on the goals and objectives specified by Project Senior Art and the review of literature.

Unstructured interviews were designed to include loosely defined questions in an effort to track and explore what was meaningful to the respondent and what art and crafts activities they would most favor. Establishing a positive rapport and an understanding of the respondents' experiences was foremost in these interviews and as such there were no pre-determined questions or order of questions. The interviews progressed as questions arose through conversation with the respondent.

The second phase of the research was the use of semi-structured interview. These interviews were conducted with the specific topic of experiential art and crafts activities in mind from which the questions were generated. The questions were posed as broadly as possible and the responses were tracked and clarified by the interviewer through reflective comments and follow-up questions.

A questionnaire was developed based on the information obtained through the interview phase of the study. It was formatted to be attractive to the respondent, easily read and understood, with minimal time involved in the completion of the instrument. The first section explained the purpose of the questionnaire and asked the respondents to indicate their age, gender, whether they were permanent residents of the county, and if they were native to the area. The second section listed a number of broad art and crafts activities. The respondents were asked to circle any of the items they would be interested in

participating in. An opportunity to list additional items was also given. The third and final section was an open-ended request for comments to allow the respondent the opportunity to provide any additional information or suggestions they wished to convey.

The data collected for the study were counted and tabulated into the appropriate categories. These descriptive statistics helped to further describe the study population. An analysis of the data from the questionnaire allowed for inferences to be made regarding the significance of the differences and similarities exhibited in the responses. The information attained there provided greater insight into what types of creative experiences the targeted population would most likely engage in. The results were analyzed and shared with the project coordinating team. The information netted from the study will be incorporated into the development of the curriculum for an experimental course that signifies the second phase of the project.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The initial visits to the senior centers and retirement community center were informal allowing the investigators the opportunity to build a positive rapport with the senior adult community. Casual conversation, sharing noontime meals, and even engaging in lighthearted billiard competitions (Figure 6) provided the senior adults and the investigators a chance to become familiar with each other in a positive relaxed atmosphere. It opened the door for further communication

Figure 6. Playing Pool, photo courtesy of Joe Huff

and laid the foundation of familiarity and trust for subsequent interaction. It was important that the senior adults felt comfortable with the investigators, not only so they would share their true thoughts and interests regarding art and crafts activities, but also so that they could be confident they would in no way be exploited. Prior to the first contacts with the senior center participants, the center director revealed there had been instances in the past where individuals came into the senior center under the pretense of helping or providing a service only to use the situation as a opportunity to extract monies from unsuspecting senior

adults. As a result there was as much emphasis placed on establishing a basis of trust as on gaining information for the senior art project.

The project coordinating committee arranged to present a brief multi-media program to introduce the project and the investigators to the center participants. The program was well received. It was apparent from this point that many of the senior adults welcomed the prospect of art and crafts experiences being offered as directed activities at the center.

Originally, it was planned that focus groups would be used to implement the second phase of the study and to facilitate semi-structured interviews. A focus group, comprised of the investigators, the center director, and four center participants was established. However, several scheduled attempts to meet with the focus group did not come to fruition do to various adverse circumstances, largely illness or lack of transportation of the part of the senior representatives. Although the investigators were unsuccessful in meeting with the focus groups, the time scheduled for those meetings was used at the center to continue to build on the relationship that was beginning to develop with those senior adults who were in attendance. From these one-on-one and small group interviews, the investigators discovered that although the senior adults all approved an art and crafts program at the center, they were hesitant to voice an opinion on what types of experiences they would prefer. Almost without exception the seniors responded that any media was acceptable to them and that they would participate in whatever activity the facilitator(s) presented. It was not so much that they were enthusiastic for all art and crafts experiences but more that they were unwilling to make a specific request. Rather, they indicated that whatever the project coordinators chose to present would be acceptable and welcomed.

Many participants commented on their lack of experience with art and crafts. They gave this as the primary reason for their not wanting to specify any particular medium or desired creative art activity. The second most common reason voiced by the seniors was the concern for physical ailments or barriers that could conceivably limit their participation in the art experiences. For example, one of the most enthusiastic supporters of the project, and a member of the focus group, lost her eyesight just one week prior to the first scheduled meeting. Understandably, she was still trying to come to terms with her loss and cope with the inevitable changes to her lifestyle. As a sighted individual her interests were primarily in painting and quilting; she had never given much thought to where her interest would lie should she not have the use of her eyes. The third concern dealt with the scheduling of the activities. Again, the seniors hesitated to share an art preference yet they wanted to be ensured that whatever the planned activity, it would be scheduled at such a time as they would be available to participate. The outcome of the informal interaction and the semi-structured interview confirmed the desire of the senior center participants for directed art and crafts experience, but almost without exception, netted no concrete requests for any specific type of media or activity.

The third and final phase of the data collection portion of the study was the administration and analysis of the questionnaire. It was through this voluntary and anonymous means that the senior adults actually did voice their opinion. Forty-five participants completed the questionnaire indicating any and all of the art media they were interested in. The general preferences are listed in descending order in Table 1, on page 36.

Table1. *The General Art Preferences of Senior Adults*

Experiential art interest		
Media	Response (n=93)	Interest expressed (%)
Photography	17	18
Painting	15	16
Memory Book	10	11
Drawing	9	10
Journaling	8	9
Candle Making	8	9
Jewelry Craft	7	7
Art Appreciation	5	5
Weaving	4	4
Clay	3	3
Folk Toys	2	2
Silkscreen	1	1
Sculpture	1	1
Wood Craft	1	1
Batik	0	0
Puppets	0	0
No Preference	2	2

Of the 93 responses the most frequently cited medium was photography with 20%, followed by painting with 16%, then creating a memory book with 11%. Drawing came in with 10%, journaling and candle making both at 9%, and jewelry craft reflecting 8%. Art appreciation, weaving, clay, folk toys, silkscreen, sculpture and woodcraft rounded out the remaining 17%. Although during the second phase all those interviewed stated they had no preference, only 2% of those individuals who completed the questionnaire indicated they had no preference to the types of art and crafts activities offered (see Figure 7).
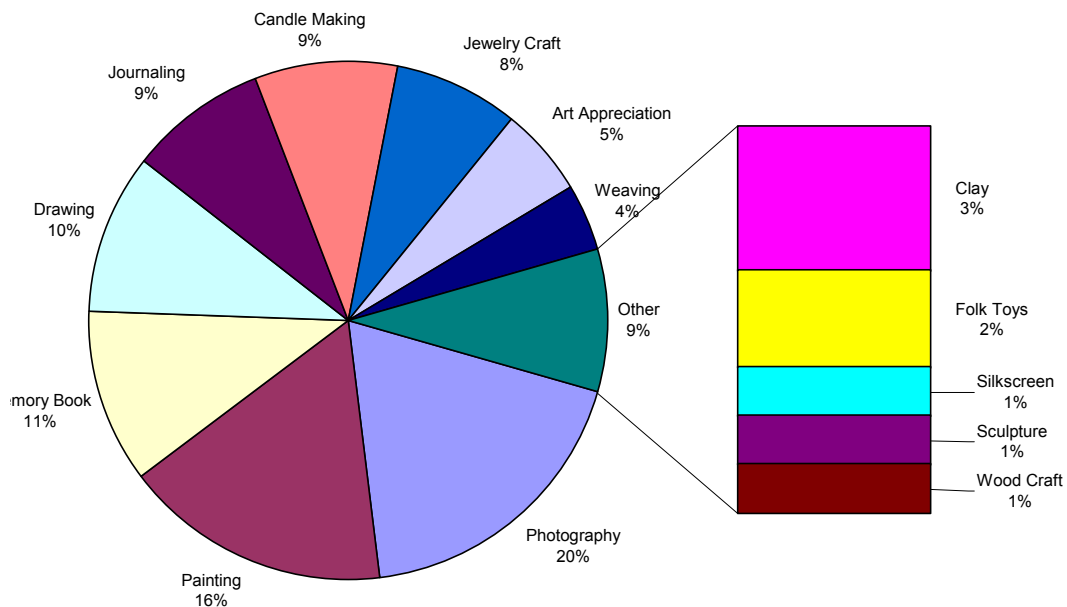

Figure 7. General Art Activity Preferences

As seen in Figure 8 of this page, gender appeared to have little or no bearing on the most popular art and crafts preferences of these senior adults. Of those completing the questionnaire, 82% were female and 18% were male. The top choices expressed by both women and men were photography, painting, and creating a memory book. It should also be pointed out that there was a significant interest expressed in drawing, candle making, journaling, and jewelry craft by the women as well. After photography, painting, and creating a memory book, the men demonstrated a lesser but equal interest in drawing, clay, sculpture, art appreciation, journaling, and woodcraft.
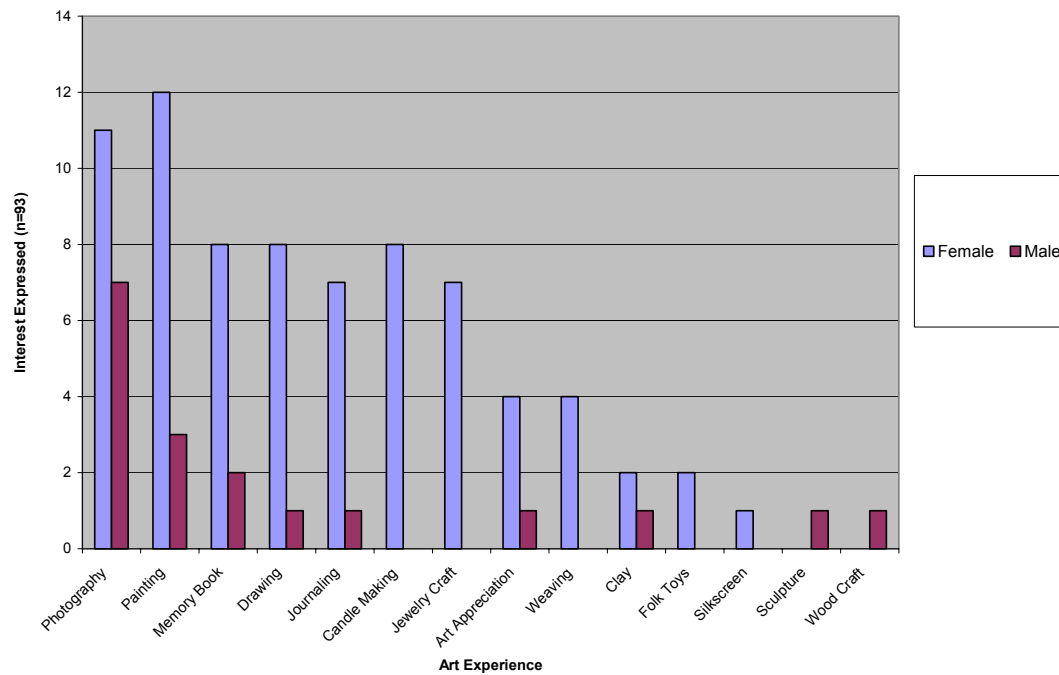

Figure 8. Experiential Art Preferences According to Gender

Preferences were also considered according to the participant's age. Sixty-one percent were young old, between the ages of 55 and 75, and 39% fell into the range of old old, being over the age of 75. It was in this category that the most difference could be found with regard to preferences (see Figure 9 below).
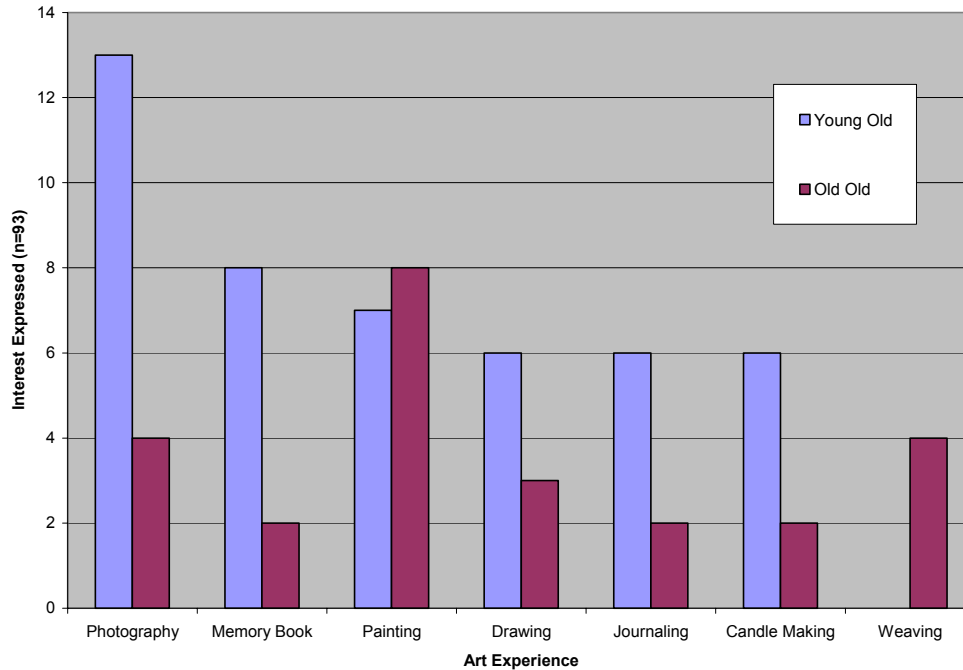

Figure 9. Experiential Art Preferences According to Age

The young old cited photography, creating a memory book, painting, drawing, and journaling as those activities they would be most interested in. The old old indicated painting, the more traditional art experience, as their top choice, followed equally by weaving and photography, and then drawing. Figure 10 and Figure 11 as seen on page 40, show the comparison of the experiential art preferences of the younger senior to those of the older seniors.
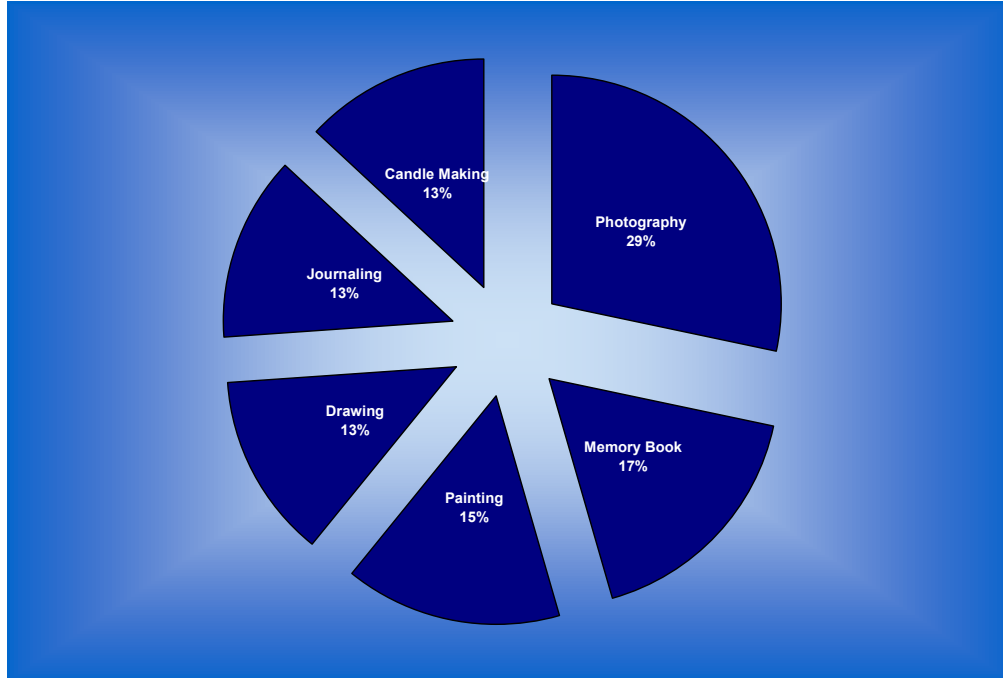
Figure 10. Experiential Art Preferences of the Young Old (n=93)
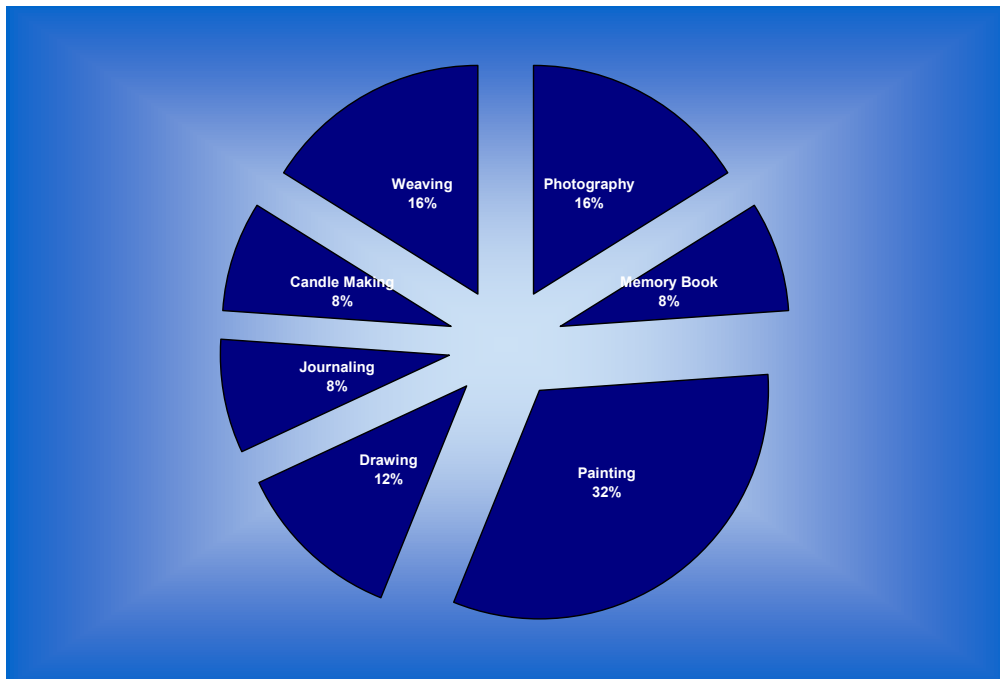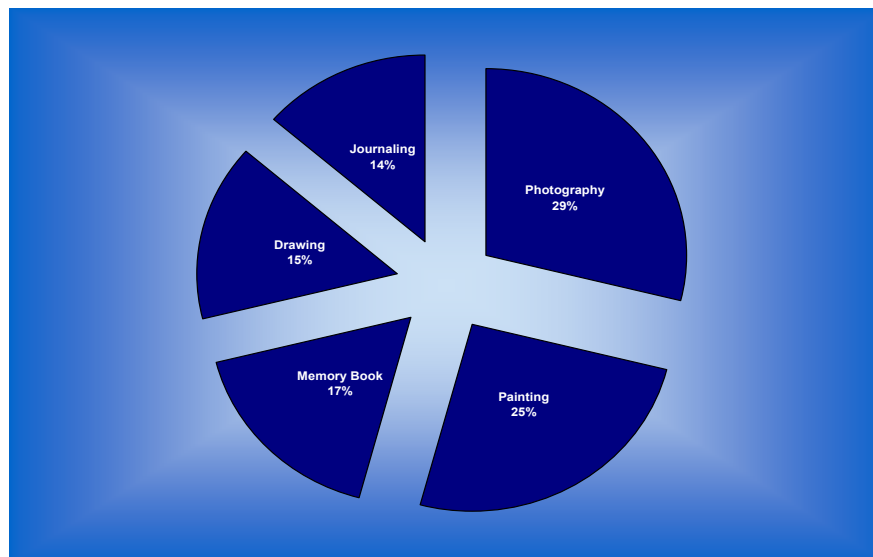

Figure 11. Experiential Art Preferences of the Old Old (n=93)

Other factors addressed in the survey and responded to by the 45 participants, such as whether the senior adults were native to the area, (66%) or had retired to the area (34%), or whether they were full-time residents (93%) or not, seemed to have no impact on the results. A final variable, previous art experience, also proved to have little consequence on the preferences indicated and corresponded to the results of the general preferences. Eleven percent of those polled had previous art experience, yet they too selected photography, painting, creating a memory book, drawing, and journaling, in that order, as their top picks.

Although during the discussion and interview phase of the study, the senior adults cited no preferences to the types of art and crafts experiences, they did exhibit an interest in specific preferences through the questionnaire. As reflected in Figure 12, both traditional (painting and drawing) and non-traditional (photography, memory book, and journaling) ranked highest in the seniors' interest.

Figure 12 . Experiential Art Preferred by Senior Adults (n=93)

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The senior adults who come to the Johnson County Senior Center, or the Orange Park Senior Center, or reside in Penney Farms are indicative of seniors across the nation. They are members of a rapidly growing population, whose quality of life and life expectancy has dramatically improved in recent years. They are beginning to recognize and experience the tremendous impact they have on their community as well as the potential for valued and worthwhile contributions. They are drawn to the center by the promise of social interaction and the potential for intellectual stimulation. Eager for the opportunity to participate in quality directed activities, they welcomed the proposal of Project Senior Art. The project presents a means of addressing their specific educational needs while at the same time piloting a program that trains teacher/facilitators to work effectively within the senior adult community. The participants of the senior center have expressed an interest in a variety of traditional and non-traditional art and crafts media that they would like to have presented as experiential activities at the center. With the senior center's enthusiasm and support, and the senior participants' input, the project coordinating committee will be able to use the data collected in this study to develop the program's course curriculum and plan for the recruitment of art students to participate in this intergenerational endeavor.

Educators confirm that learning takes place throughout all stages of life. As the need for senior centers mirrors the increase in the senior adult population, so does the demand for quality educational opportunities that encourage lifelong learning. Creative experiences and the visual arts can provide a powerful mechanism for meeting the specific education needs of the older adult. The

creative art experience stimulates emotional, intellectual, physical, and social responses and has also been attributed with producing a sensation of "joy."

Following the need for creative directed activities in senior centers is the need for qualified instructors/facilitators. In the early 80s, educators recognized the importance of recruiting and formally training and/or certifying professionals to work with senior adults. Project Senior Art proposed a program that provided for each of these needs. It is a program that recognizes the educational needs of the older individual, recruits and trains art students, offers an innovative real-life application of course content, and provides quality directed creative art and crafts experiences. The benefits of such a program are multi-dimensional. Both the senior center participants and the art students gain invaluable insight and knowledge from each other, a necessary service is provided to the community, and a formal means of providing a sustained flow of qualified teacher/facilitators, trained to effectively recognize and encourage the unique abilities of the older adult, is put into practice.

At the core of the Project Senior Art initiative are the types of art and crafts experiences the senior adults wish to participate in. This is the foundation for student recruitment and course content and lays the groundwork for the types of experiential art and crafts activities that will be offered at the senior center. Although in conversation the senior adults were hesitant to voice an opinion or make a request, they did provide an abundance of ideas through a written, anonymous questionnaire. The most frequently cited media was photography. This preference was across the board, and was true despite gender, age, or art experience. Following closely was painting, then creating memory books, drawing, and journaling, all of which step out of the stereotypical craft-kit activities that often exemplify senior center art and craft activities.

It is the hope of this investigator that the information presented here will prove valuable to the further implementation of Project Senior Art and the programming of a similar project based on its model in northeast Florida. The positive implications of such an endeavor go well beyond the boundaries of a college course offering. It recognizes and addresses education needs across the generations in a creative, experiential venue and provides a mechanism for sustainability of future interactions and quality programming where by all who participate benefit.

CHAPTER 6

EPILOGUE

When I first entered into this study, I did so with the intent of ascertaining information on a purely objective basis for the sole purpose of providing quality educational experiences for students, both young and old. Through the process of gathering information and interacting with the senior participants on a personal level, I came to realize something quite profound. Throughout our lives, as we grow and change, our outward appearances change, our skills and abilities may change, and through our experiences, our outlook may change; but who we are and what makes each of us a unique individual, what is at our core, does not change. We still have the same essence, the same desires, and the same hopes. We want to contribute, to be valued, and to have our lives validated. I think in many ways, Mrs. Donna Netherland, at East Tennessee State University's December 2004 commencement ceremony, then 100 years young, stated it best when she said, "I'm still the same young woman I always was, the package has just changed."

To participate in life is not enough. Most, if not all seniors I've had the privilege of interacting with, wish to be actively involved in life. To engage in quality, productive endeavors just as they did before some stereotypical label deemed them "over the hill" or gave them permission, whether they wanted it or not, to just "coast" through their "golden years." This was very apparent during the course of the study. When viewed as a group, as participants of a program, the seniors willingly complied, more to be polite, I believe, than anything else. They voiced support and interest but no real opinions. But when viewed as individuals, the minister, the teacher, the engineer, the homemaker, and they

realized the potential for the center's programming to include true art classes, not just craft-kit activities, that their demeanor changed, even their posture. Many welcomed the possibility of the challenge of exploring and expressing their creativity in an art form. They welcomed the chance to do more than just participate, they welcomed the opportunity to engage, create, grow, and produce.

Judging through the personal interviews and by the top media choices of, photography, painting, memory book making, drawing, and journaling, there was also a very strong desire to record their lifes' reflections, to validate their life and the experiences that made them who they are, and to also have a venue to record the present and the future.

The afore mentioned Mrs. Netherland also told the story of how as a young women at East Tennessee Normal School, she was often chided for hiking up her skirts and jumping barefoot into the creek that bisected the campus. Her thirst for life was apparent then and just as much so when she spoke to the auditorium full of graduates some eight decades later. Many seniors have made it clear that they are "not done yet" and do not wish to be viewed as if they are. They are not satisfied to be mere by-standers in life but rather wish to jump in with both feet and welcome the opportunity to do so.

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Questionnaire

The following survey is designed to assist us in choosing art and crafts activities for the Johnson County Senior Center. Please complete the items below.

Tell us a little about yourself:

Age_____   Sex_____

Are you a native of Johnson County?   Yes / No

Do you live in Johnson County year round?   Yes / No

Have you ever participated in an art making experience?   Yes / No

Please circle the form of art and crafts experience you would be interested in:

DRAWING	**JOURNAL KEEPING**
PAINTING	**MEMORY BOOK**
SILKSCREEN PRINTING	**WEAVING**
BATIK	**JEWELRY CRAFT**
CLAY	**CANDLE MAKING**
SCULPTURE	**FOLK TOYS**
PHOTOGRAPHY	**PUPPETS**
ART APPRECIATION	

Other: _____   _____

          _____   _____

Comments:

_____

_____

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