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## *Journeys*

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# JOURNEYS

Susan R. Whiteland  
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*“We asked authors  
to consider what  
type of life journey  
experiences they  
encountered when  
they engaged in  
collaborative  
art-based activities.”*

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The theme for the third volume of IJLLAE is journeys. We asked authors to consider what sort of life journey experiences they encountered when they engaged in collaborative art-based activities. We wanted to know about the transformations that occurred along the way and how art educators ensured that the journeys were meaningful for all participants. The first article in this issue is by Rebecca Bourgault. She writes about her journey to a place of appreciation for simply being present and participating in a socially engaged art practice. Her article describes serving in an urban shelter for homeless and low-income adult women where she was involved in a weekly workshop that offered artmaking and conversation practice. Her reflections indicate a personal transformation that took place as a result of her community-based art education (CBAE).

The second article in the issue by Liz Langdon continues to explore CBAE and its impact for creating memorable life journey experiences. In her review of the book, *Community Based Art Education Across the Lifespan: Finding Common Ground* (Lawton, Walker & Green, 2019). Langdon shares how the authors create a roadmap of information detailing how they planned, partnered, implemented and assessed community-based art experiences. Langdon suggests that the lessons learned are valuable for researchers, k-16 art educators, community artists and non-profit organizations.

In the issue's third article by Thomas Keefe the idea of journey is specifically related to reminiscing about places and events that older adults have encountered through their lifetime. Keefe tells what he experienced as he presented a lecture at a senior living center. He says that through a variety of photographic images of iconic events and conversation participants walked through memories that created a common bond, and enhanced a collective understanding toward others that benefited both residents, staff and himself.

Elise Kieffer's *Prosthetic Ontology into Pedagogy: Applying Garoian's Theory to the Performing Arts*, is the issue's fourth article. It provides the reader with a journey into the life of the author as she recounts the effect of the performing arts on her own well-being. Kieffer shares how she gained from her growing up experiences using art as a medium to express herself and then empowered others to use the performing arts to find their own voice.

Courtney Weida and Carlee Bradbury suggest the unicorn can be a lifelong companion in art education, because it is a timely cultural and artistic phenomenon, worthy of aesthetic discussions that encourage intergenerational exchange through dialogue and creating together. They cite arts education histories of Froebel's kindergarten and Steiner's Waldorf schools centering the unicorn as a standard of children's imaginary play. The authors explain multiple roles unicorns serve, including as complex symbols of the shifting individual human psyche and bridging gaps between sanctioned spaces of art history and contemporary culture.

We close this issue with an article, *Art Education for Older Adults: Rationale, Issues, and Strategies*, by Melanie Davenport, Pamela Harris Lawton, and Marjorie Manifold. The authors promote quality creative arts programming for older adults and advocate for essential preservice teacher education in andragogical theory and practice. They share benefits their students have gained from intergenerational and older adult art education experiences, and suggest the necessity for further research and practice in lifelong learning.

The articles in this issue considered journey. I have embarked on my own journey as editor for IJLLAE and joined hands with two colleagues who are serving as co-editors, Angela La Porte and Liz Langdon. We have begun the first leg of our journey together and anticipate with eagerness the next milestone for what lies ahead. Thank you for embarking with us on this adventure and I hope that you will consider taking an active part as an article reviewer or manuscript author in our next issue that will consider the theme of reflection.

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# Stories of Community Practice, Artistic Ambivalence, and Emergent Pedagogies

*“The artworks were often created from stories that served as a departing point for discussion.”*

Rebecca Bourgault

*School of Visual Arts, Boston University*

## ABSTRACT

*The reflections and questions discussed in the paper emerged from a teaching artist experience in community-art that led to the examination of the contrasting values between the disciplinary paradigms of social practices, community-based and participatory arts and that of the contemporary artworld aesthetics. As goals of art for social justice often contradict the perception of artistic merit based on aesthetic quality, working at the intersection of artistic creation and community development demands a shift in perspectives. The position demands going beyond one’s artistic ambivalences, to include participants in a reciprocal relationship, attentive to the fact that any goals of empowerment inherently conceal a power structure. Models of interaction borrowed from prefigurative pedagogies, pedagogies of contingencies inspire the elaboration of a pedagogy of presence that allows for the unfolding of a process anchored in integrity, quiet activism, and the heuristic purpose of art.*

## KEYWORDS

*community-art, socially engaged practice, social action, pedagogy of presence, quiet activism, quiet politics*

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The reflections and questions raised in this article emerged during an English Literacy (ESOL)/Visual Arts community-based project intended to support immigrant adult women with emerging or no English literacy. The planned pedagogy included the cross-motivation of diverse creative pursuits that brought together speaking, writing, making and reflecting upon two-dimensional visual art production. Over time, these reflections and questions have led me to examine the contrasting values between the disciplinary paradigms of social practices, community-based and participatory arts, and that of the contemporary artworld aesthetics. As a visual artist trained in one tradition and working in the other, I observed and felt an inner debate with the perceived shortcomings on either side that forced the negotiation of ambivalences. Through the experience of a workshop, my perspective shifted.

### **Context and Place**

As a teaching artist and as an academic engaged in arts-based research, I was trained to aspire to those qualities of creative production that relate to criticality and artistic coherence. Alongside the conceptual art movement that informed my artistic education, theories of socially engaged practices that emphasize human interactions and participatory practices had been emerging since the 1960s, slowly carving a space for a new paradigm. Blending living and art, or “living as form” (Thompson, 2012. p. 16), these social sculptures define their purpose through shared dialogical and relational affects.

As the goals of art for social justice are often seen in contradiction to the values of artistic merit based on aesthetic quality and a validating artworld reception, working at the intersection of artistic creation and community development demands a shift in perspectives. At the onset it becomes process-focused, trans-disciplinary, with roots in critical pedagogy, psychology, anthropology, social theory, and cultural studies. Oppositions will claim that the political, or the social justice potential of art as social action is said to impoverish “versions of the artistic and the political by sterilizing them and reducing them to spheres that cannot exceed the realm of ethics” (Bilbao Yarto, 2017, p. 56).

Nevertheless, the transformative capacities developed through the process of making and “being-with” are important criteria in social practices as they maintain a blend of practical and symbolic significance. The appraisal of such projects is rooted in communal exchange, and often dispenses with the aesthetic function of art, altering its operation, and inserting other possibilities, such as its heuristic or epistemic purpose (Wright, 2014).

As for its importance in community engagement, Maxine Greene (1995) believed that, participatory involvement with the many forms of art does enable us at the very least, to see more in our experience, to hear more on normally unheard frequencies, to become conscious of what daily routines, habits, and conventions have obscured. (p.378)



In order to contextualize what has become for me a long-term research into the numerous epistemological frameworks informing the activities referred to as social practices, I retrace the expansion of my philosophical inquiry through the specific situation of a community engagement project that triggered these reflections.

My early social practice effort took place in a New England urban shelter for homeless and low-income adult women. The shelter, which acts as a community center of sorts, is a locally prized organization operating with the mandate to support women experiencing financial, legal, emotional and physical emergencies, as well as demonstrating other linguistic and/or socio-cultural needs for assistance. Alongside numerous other services that range from food pantry, to employment support, and counselling, volunteer teachers offer training in computer basics and multiple levels of literacy for spoken and written English language. Visual arts and crafts workshops were recently added as an expressive and reflective pursuit. All of this work is done in the spirit of equity and social justice. Many guests, as the staff refers to them, are immigrants and refugees. Most if not all are low-income persons, and many have experienced recent traumas. In working with the women, volunteers and staff are reminded that being friendly does not mean to be friends. From the onset, I remarked that in making all efforts to protect everyone's privacy, we also have to reinvent what it means to communicate with authentic presence with each other.

The visual art and English learning project in which I took part – marking the beginning of a long-term, continuing relationship with the organization – consisted in a weekly workshop with participants who were enrolled in a daily English language course. The visual art workshop was offered at the end of the week, as a culminating activity that offered the opportunity of a casual English conversation practice. As a team-taught workshop led by one visual artist and one English language coach, the class included artmaking and conversation practice. The artworks were often created from stories that served as a departing point for discussion. As they struggled to explain a thought or a choice of motif, the participants were supported by the group who suggested vocabulary. The art supplies were simple, limited to two-dimensional materials, for drawing, painting and collage. Every few weeks the participants explored a theme of interest, introduced with reproductions of artwork selected for their cultural inclusivity and relevance. While this preparation served as thematic guidance, the participants usually carried on as they saw fit.

### **Pedagogy**

In his elaboration of transpedagogy, Pablo Helguera (2011) suggested that in the context of community-informed artistic practices, dialogical modes of exchange bear more creative meaning than the art object. Due to language barriers, our limited spoken conversations tended to emphasize the silence of the art making activity. Often, our non-verbal, intuitive and sensorial ways of knowing predominated. Autoethnographic storytelling took place in images. One woman's drawing showed a rendition of a major volcano eruption that took place in Cabo Verde, where the participant and her family came from after losing their farm to the catastrophe. She drew feverishly, not looking up, focused and seemingly driven by an inner

desire to recall, to show and to tell. As a Portuguese speaker, she could only narrate the story by pointing to her drawing and with hand gestures. On other occasions, a person in the group would help translate, teaching everyone new words at the same time.

One learned to practice teaching artistic skills without the usual community building approach that arises from verbal connection and dialogical exchange. The usual explanations of skills, techniques and discussion about conceptual approaches to one's artwork were replaced with what I can only call an embodied practice. It responded to the silent relational attunements between participants, their creative processes made visible, and a fleeting sense of presence. The irony for me and a cause for questioning was that the project included an English-for-speakers-of-other-languages (ESOL) learning mandate, and conversation about the artwork and the process was to be at the core of our workshop. However, we never spoke only English. Rather, inspired by the urge to communicate, we invented ways by use of the body, and through a creative mixed-language idiom of our own spontaneous invention.

Askins (2014) describes the possibilities of relationships as emerging from a "quiet politics", "an unassuming praxis of engaging with others...performing a citizenry embedded in emotional belongings, previous experiences and [one's] own sense of agency" (p. 354). My observations confirm that in the environment of the shelter and the studio, participants tended to be guarded, cautious, keeping a relational distance until they felt safe with each other and with the volunteers. Most were not eager to tell their stories. As with any relationship, familiarity and trust develop with time, patience and repeated encounters.

In defining a pedagogy that would be best adapted to the circumstances, I borrowed from my knowledge of adult education, and the need to recognize the richness of the participants' life experiences, aware that their hesitation and/or appreciation of art making and art forms might be connected back to their school years, or circumscribed and defined by contemporary expressions of commercially disseminated visual culture. However, art making at the shelter did not pretend to be presented as a school subject. The visual language skills that were developed alongside the spoken and written English were the work of self-taught artists, some of whom had learned to enjoy the process of making and of "being-with" while others remained more goal-oriented.

In his work as an educator, Miner (2013) defined an activist teaching practice using "prefigurative pedagogies". The term is borrowed from prefigurative politics, "an anti-institutional tactic designed to dismantle oppression and social stratification... with the goal to create and sustain within the live practice of the movement, relationships and political forms that 'prefigured' and embodied the desired society" (p. 3). Therefore, "prefigurative pedagogies are anti-hierarchical and predicated on participatory learning" (p. 3). At the shelter, this activism is quiet and embodied. "As such, it is characterized by qualities of gentleness, slowness, subtlety and subversion. Quiet activism extends the realm of the political beyond the cognitive and verbalized, into practices of doing, making and flow" (Pottinger, 2017, p. 216).

If for Miner (2013), the subject matter of the work his students complete addresses directly the issues of politics and infringement on civil liberties to name a few, I noted that at the shelter, the subject matter, unless it is to tell a story of personal importance, was not as salient as was the simple experience of making something that, in small ways perhaps, gave its maker a sense of achievement, of having created something beyond one's initial sense of artistic inadequacy. Sometimes, the success was simply to slow down, to be quiet and to feel safe. Subject matter and techniques for selecting it ranged from being copied, borrowed, traced, collaged, remembered or invented. In such a simple creative project, everyone has their private imaginary precipice to straddle, and to reconcile.

I take comfort in Thomas Hirschhorn's slogan Energy, yes, quality, no! (Art21, 2014), and I know that the value of the work at the women's shelter cannot be assessed by its conventionally understood artistic quality. I also attend to Claire Bishop's (2012) insights as she declares that this type of art tends to value the invisible, and that these projects, "thread a fine line of a dual horizon – faced towards the social field but also towards itself" (p. 274), toward artistic integrity.

As I was slowly discovering the pedagogy that would best suit the context of the art workshop, I reconceptualized what it meant to teach. Rather than struggle between the necessity of producing artistic value, or to focus on sociality and empowerment as pedagogical goals, to a certain measure, I had to learn to let go of what I knew, of what I thought I knew (Kight-Witham, 2020). "Our impulse is to fix and to rescue and to control, but to truly know what will serve in that moment, we must let go of all that and be present with what's there" (p. 7).

### **Aesthetic Attributes**

Suggestions of applicable criteria for socially engaged practices were indeed what I longed for when I found a collection of Aesthetic Attributes, a document published in 2017 by Americans for the Arts. Led by Laramee-Kidd, the goal of the Lab Group that created the document was to "promote evaluation that embodies values and practices congruent with arts and social justice work" (p.2). In the document, the use of the concept aesthetic is reclaimed to indicate that, "aesthetics is about how creative expression stimulates our senses, moves us and makes meaning in the world" (p.5). The criteria enunciated in the publication include "commitment; communal meaning; disruption; cultural integrity; emotional experience; sensory experience; risk-taking; openness; resourcefulness; coherence, and stickiness" (p. 4). Their reference to artistic and cultural processes, products and practices puts in place fundamental values for community, social, and civic work as it is achieved through artistic engagement.

However, these attributes function as measures of success and parameters of evaluation for entire programs. When referring to these aesthetic attributes, what about if we asked: Who is the observer? Is this observer looking at the project from the outside? How long do we have for social change to be made so tangible that "communal meaning" can be measured? How does one bear witness to what happens within? What about the change that

happens incrementally, unmeasurably in the mind and lives of participants? We cannot truly measure, “how the art experience translates into a new way of relating to others, to objects, to the context in which the participants act and live, wanting to transform it...? How does the aesthetic experience relate to everyday reality” (Wildermeersch & von Kotze, 2014, p. 323)?

When I drop the project of finding the aesthetic attributes in my project with the women at the shelter, I am left with the barebones of experience. The methodology is unmethodological and the practice is unpredictable, responsive, contingent, and ever changing. While the aesthetic attributes offer an inventory of outcomes for socially engaged projects that appear better aligned with that mode of address than are the traditional artworld expectations of expertise, I remain suspicious of indicators. The aesthetic attributes can easily frame the way we perceive and expect an experience to be, suggesting a common understanding of development. “Benchmarks intend to shape a consensus about the goals of progress, about what ‘indicates’ the positive development of our society” (Badham, 2010, p. 7).

In analyzing the meaning of a public project that they had designed, Wildemeersch and von Kotze (2014) realized that “the precariousness of everyday life often colors the way people relate to or interact with art” (p. 324). They also recognize the need for a pedagogy attuned to specific contingencies, a pedagogy that maintains “a strong conviction that [participants] can be creative actors if only they believe in themselves” (p. 322).

The resilience and capacities that are necessary in insecure times are highly specific to a particular place and moment. The really useful learning that helps people to survive –not just physically, but also emotionally, creatively, spiritually, and convivially– demands a pedagogy that responds to the particular conditions of location and time. (p. 324)

### **Empowerment and agency**

When I began working at the shelter, I also felt the need to acknowledge my struggle with the feeling that my presence as an academic and artist teacher amidst the community group where I operated, highlighted my condition of privilege, a stance that unavoidably situated the participants in a homogenous and distant otherness within an assumed polarized subject/object relationship. In the class-conscious community and cultures where we orbit, the differences in social contexts brought by economic inequalities cannot be ignored. Seeking to establish a relationship of authentic reciprocal exchange, I was cautious not to default in the denials of class, racial, experiential, or other relational blindness. It is also in our reciprocal effort for authenticity that, as Jared Seide mused in an interview about his social justice work, I was trying to “carry my privilege honestly, maybe use it to build some bridges and create compassion, as someone who was able to walk between those two worlds” (Kight-Witham, 2020, p. 8).

However, “community and individuality need not be understood as antinomies” (Daniel, 2011, p.80), and “relations between particulars are the key to constructing and reconstructing community” (p. 80). Like Daniel, “my goal is to avoid representation –not to speak for others but to provide them with the means to speak for themselves” (p.81). Further, I tried to position

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my association with the participants to clarify our shared relationship to power and “subject”. In defining the use of the word subject, Cruikshank (1999) suggests the following interpretation based on Foucault’s use of the terms. In this context, it serves to illuminate our shared condition as “expressions of the struggle to define ourselves” (p. 21).

Modern forms of power tie the subjectivity (conscience, identity, self-knowledge) of the individual to that individual’s subjection (control by another). The subject is one who is both under the authority of another and the author of her or his own actions. Foucault means to undermine the perspective from which power can be perceived only as the antithesis of freedom. (p. 21)

With time, and as tangible exchanges developed with participants through a pedagogy of presence beyond the Art/ESOL workshop (Bourgault, 2019), it became clear that the distancing role defining our positions was also a social construction that did not take into consideration the multiple and unpredictable changing conditions of our beings. Beneath our unstable state of poverty or wealth, experience of racial inequity and traumatic histories, we can meet in the depths of our interconnected subjectivities. This positionality does not erase or deny differences. It does not embrace a position of doing good, or seeking to empower the other. I am aware that despite its apparent benefit, “the object of empowerment is to act upon another’s interests and desires in order to conduct their actions toward an appropriate end” (Cruikshank, 1999, p. 68-69); thus, empowerment is itself a power relationship.

Much more adequate is the philosophical position that points to a shared method of discovery that facilitates a sense of solidarity and does not assume reciprocity with an “Other”. This perspective points to the recognition that we continually define ourselves relationally, from our own centeredness, through knowledge, and experiences (Bourgault, 2019). It does not mean that we do not recognize social inequity. We acknowledge that, in discussion about poverty and homelessness “what is typically or normatively seen and represented as individualistic and pathological, is instead understood as historically constituted, culturally produced, politically oriented, and socially maintained” (Rimke, 2016, p. 12).

### **Ground, Path, and Fruition**

In Shambhala philosophy, ground, path, and fruition represent a three-folds logic widely applicable to understanding the principle of how we individually and communally change. “Ground is where we find ourselves today, fruition is where we want to go, maybe also where we end up, unaware, and path is what we have to do to get from here to there” (Berkeley Shambhala Center, 2006-07, para 4). I use Ground, Path and Fruition as a theoretical framework for thinking back to my project, where fruition defined its own attributes. The paradigm demands a mind that does not look for things to fix, but that is attentive to qualities that manifest.

I was interested in this philosophy because, in its simplicity, it allowed for individual change and discoveries while also acknowledging a shared community purpose. Contrary to a set of indicators or attributes, the focus was neither on artworld judgement of what counts as good contemporary art—or self-taught art for that matter—nor was the focus on establishing a series of relational outcomes that could be used to evaluate the project and determine its success and validity.

If we agree that at the core of values associated with social justice we find the human attributes of dignity and worthiness, some form of wisdom and human resilience, then we can ask: How much of these qualities were able to manifest through the art/ESOL workshop? How much presence was allowed to come through? Through one's longing for this presence to be visible in the art making, we also feel that one could get there with many other forms of creativity, of inventive living.

The qualities witnessed form the beginning of a quiet activism, “small acts, such as the creation of interpersonal connections that construct social networks” (Pottinger, 2017, p.216) that could also represent the nascent stages of political awareness, leading to further action. In its quietness and lack of obvious deliverables, the workshop (transformed today in an open studio) supplied a kind of resistance to the external pressures of contemporary life that expects optimized productivity with everything we do (Odell, 2019).

At the onset of the art/ESOL workshop, and as this article was first conceptualized, I struggled to find a bridge between the values of social practices and that of the contemporary world aesthetics. Living through the workshop initiated a flow of reflections that continue to evolve to this day, as I enter my third year as a teaching artist at the women's shelter. I have learned that critical artistic reception or the building of community are not within my control. The deepening of a practice of presence transformed the workshop into an open studio, a socially engaged art practice that has no need to be formally recognized as art. Indeed, socially engaged practices seem to value the invisible aspects of their practices. Having set the stage for something to manifest, one needs to get out of the way of its unfolding.

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**BOOK REVIEW:  
COMMUNITY-  
BASED ART  
EDUCATION  
ACROSS THE  
LIFESPAN:  
FINDING  
COMMON  
GROUND**

*“This book explains the theory and practice of CBAE as transformative learning”*

Liz Langdon  
*University of Kansas*

**ABSTRACT**

*This review of Community-based Art Education Across the Lifespan by Pamela Harris Lawton, Margaret A. Walker and Melissa Green gives a detailed description of this valuable resource for community artists, art educators and other stakeholders in community who want to use art to transform communities.*

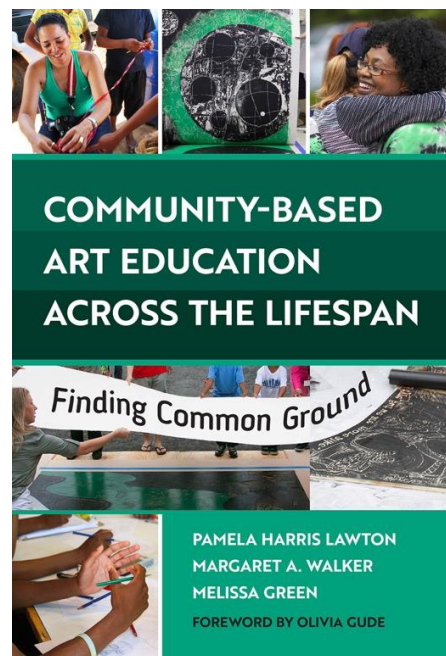
**KEYWORDS**

*Book Review, Community-based art education*

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Book Review: Lawton, P., Walker, M., & Green, M. (2019), *Community-based art education across the lifespan: Finding common ground*. NY: Columbia Press.

When I taught art in an urban high school, I wished I better understood students' neighborhoods, to better meet their needs. To that end I became involved in community art initiatives and through working as a community artist I became acquainted with former students in a whole new light. My tacit knowledge as an urban educator and artist allowed a modicum of success, but there were many things I wish I had known as I navigated working with various stakeholders and community learners.



*Community-based Art Education Across the Lifespan: Finding Common Ground* offers excellent information about how and why community-based art education (CBAE) serves artists and community participants. It broadens the concept of who we can learn from by decentering the artist as genius and welcoming knowledge of the community, both young and old. The text is written by three experienced community artist/educators, Pamela Lawton, Margaret Walker and Melissa Green. Each is associated with either museum or higher education, and show how CBAE is a tool for social justice by giving people across generations an opportunity to contribute and expand their creative capacity. This book explains the theory and practice of CBAE as transformative learning and shows how to collaborate and bring together diverse communities for art learning through partnerships. Each author has developed many successful community art initiatives and these are used to illustrate how to plan, execute and assess CBAE. Through these examples the authors show the challenges and opportunities within this transformative process. The text takes the reader through the steps of the ideation processes: working with groups by asking guiding questions, empowering

participants to use their personal narratives and transforming ideas into visual representations in a community's artwork. For me the most valuable aspect of this text is showing how to set up collaborations for art learning in community through examples that demonstrate theories of why these collaborations work.

The authors introduce the guiding principles of CBAE with the acronym E.R.E.C.T: education, reciprocity, empowerment, collaboration and transformation, to identify what happens in well-planned CBAE. This is followed with a review of pertinent psychosocial, cognitive and artistic developmental theory which grounds the efficacy of art engagement in community settings, noting that the aesthetic value of community-based art may be trumped by learning and social relationships that are developed. A broader understanding of the learner throughout various adult stages of life is informative and may be helpful in appreciating what the adult learner brings to community art.

Educational theories of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) experiential learning and transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991) are discussed in relation to andragogy (self-directed learning) because each plays a key role in understanding how CBAE works. Lawton, whose research focuses on intergenerational learning, expands on these in discussing her theory of age-integrated arts learning curriculum. Based on her personal art practice, *Artstories* participants bring together imagery and text in an artform to preserve, explore and reinterpret stories of different generations within the community. These empowering events emulate the creative power of a family-like environments, foster art learning and build intergenerational community. These positive aspects of CBAE practice, Lawton states, are equivalent to the transformative event Mezirow originally attributed to "disorienting dilemmas" which cause critical self-reflection.

The practical aspects of this book are chapters on planning, partnerships, the challenges and opportunities of implementation, and finally assessment. Each stand-alone chapter offers solid advice. The chapter on locating stakeholders and communities lists eleven great reasons why art educators should work with communities, and includes a helpful section on navigating privilege, finding the right partner(s) to work with and building rapport with the community. The guidelines for planning and implementing successful collaborations with many different stakeholders are outlined, with a caveat that the unexpected will happen. The authors point out that is the nature of CBAE, and openings for community input and flexibility for accommodating new ideas is part of the process. In the chapters on implementation, practical ideas are suggested to build in success, like giving participants small experiences to become familiar with processes and outcomes before tackling a larger project. Vignettes demonstrate how participants' voices are valued as they express the personal, social, moral, cultural and political concerns of the community. Validating people by honoring their contribution is part of the important recognition given them and celebrating their contributions is paramount. The chapter on project and research assessments relates both to the community project and to what can be learned from these projects and processes as research for students. The appendices offer lesson plans of several kinds, the most helpful being an age-integrated learning lesson plan which accommodates the multi-age learning and in-depth planning that grounds strong CBAE, as well as online resources.

The strength of this book is the broad range of information it offers for the researcher, K-16 art educators, community artists and non-profit organizations. It provides a road map for putting together a collaboration which can result in finding a community's core strength and empowering people's collective voice. This well documented research with multi-generational populations supports age-integrated arts learning curriculum and offers ways to making positive contributions by creating community and finding common ground.

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# Using Art to Trigger Memory, Intergenerational Learning, and Community

*“This book  
explains the  
theory and  
practice of CBAE  
as transformative  
learning”*

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## ABSTRACT

*This article explores the use of art to trigger memory as an effective educational tool for discussion. The author is a regular guest speaker at an affluent retirement community. The attendees are highly educated and accomplished professionals with expansive and worldly lived experiences. Formally facilitating lifelong learning, however, is a special vocation and requires a secular shared praxis and other andragogical strategies. (Keywords: photographic history, community-building, shared praxis, memory).*

## KEYWORDS

*historic photographs history, community-building, shared praxis, memory*

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Using art to trigger memory is an effective educational tool for discussion but teaching and lecturing also utilize an intentional mix of pedagogical and andragogical strategies based upon the age and lived experience of the students or participants to promote learning. Recently, I presented a lecture at a senior living center entitled, "Iconic Photographs of History." For the attendees at the Men's Breakfast, including residence staff and me personally, the lecture was an intergenerational learning experience. Leading a discussion regarding history, specifically history in the participants' lived experience, can be a daunting undertaking, the tools of adult education make it an enriching experience. Facilitating lifelong learning with andragogical strategies, such as such as secular shared praxis, created an atmosphere of intergenerational synergy because the gentlemen at Men's Breakfast shared their lived experiences. Collective memory activities can stimulate community-building and elevate knowledge to wisdom and understanding.

### **Pedagogy and Andragogy: Know thy Audience!**

Earlier in my career, I taught history in middle school and high school. While it is poor pedagogy for a teacher to presume to be the font of knowledge and act like the mage on the stage, it is a safe bet that primary and secondary educators have a longer lived experience than the students. More recently, I have taught history at the post-secondary level and I have had the wonderful experience of teaching a broader age range of students. Kisamore, Aldridge, Alexander, and Whitea (2008) lay out significant ways adult learners are different from younger college students. Formal education, whether post-secondary or earlier, has group dynamics and rules tied to the educational institution. However, non-degree granting and communal educational programming is not tied to external factors, but internal interest and motivation. Each grade level, type of institution, and age of student offers its own joys and challenges, but it is important that all educational activities integrate an activity and visual elements into lectures to touch upon audio, visual, and kinesthetic methods of learning.

### **Learning at Senior Living Centers**

For the past several years, I have offered lectures at an affluent retirement community. The residents are highly educated and accomplished professionals. For example, I presented a lecture on genocide memorials throughout the world, many that I have not visited, but the that many members of the residential community had visited. As an educator or facilitator, how does one discuss topics in which the audience may have more lived experiences? Formally facilitating lifelong learning is a special vocation and requires andragogical strategies. The presentation of materials can be used to elicit participation and shared knowledge, not solely the rather than just a way for the lecturer to transmit information. While artist-in-residence programs are not the same as guest lectures, Richmond-Cullen (2018) explored the benefit of artist-in-residence programs kinesthetically and psychologically and there may also be similar benefits to discussing historical photographs to elicit memory stimulation. However, some kinesthetic activities may be inappropriate due to limited mobility by older adults. As audio

and visual teaching strategies may be affected by declining vision and hearing among senior adults, large visuals and microphones are imperative in facilitating adult learning. The presentation of materials can be used to elicit participation and shared knowledge, not solely the transmission of information by the lecturer. Richmond-Cullen (2018) explored the benefit of artist-in-residence programs kinesthetically and psychologically. However, some kinesthetic activities may be inappropriate due to limited mobility by older adults. As audio and visual teaching strategies may be affected by declining vision and hearing among senior adults, large visuals and microphones are imperative in facilitating adult learning. Again, know thy audience!

### Communal Learning and Community-Building

Prior to the presentation on “Iconic Photographs of History,” the Director for Life Enrichment of the Senior Center shared with me that the community had had a recent influx of new members and, while all were interested in community-building, the stakeholders were not sure how to build that community. Andragogic education is as much about community-building as it is an educational endeavor. Similar to Jean Piaget (1936), education is a communal exercise influenced by the learned and lived experiences of all parties involved in the dialectical undertaking. James Poisson, theology instructor at Archbishop Stepinac High School and Bishop Hendricken High School, has described this as a Piagetian mathematical formula: prior understanding plus new knowledge equals new understanding. This approach facilitates, but also community-building.

Community is both a tool of, and a result of, good pedagogy and andragogy. In 1980, Thomas Groome developed a pedagogy of faith formation known as *shared Christian praxis* (Groome, 1980, 1991). For Groome, a learner is an agent-subject-in-relationship that is “consciously aware, reflective, discerning” and in “authentic being... with others in place and time” (Groome, 1991, pp. 8-9). Though I was unaware of Groome’s shared Christian praxis until a few years ago, it immediately resonated with me as a description of my secular style of teaching. In seeking to adapt shared *Christian praxis* more broadly to all education, I explored similar terminology and discovered similar pedagogical strategies and social descriptions. While the term praxis is common in Del Rocío Guzmán Benavente, de la Luz Ortiz Vázquez, Barragán Ledesma, and Castillo León (2013), Hernández (2014), and Koring, Killian, Owen, and Todd (2004), the usage did not capture the secularization of shared Christian praxis I was seeking to describe.

Secular shared praxis is a pedagogical and andragogical approach that recognizes that learners all have lived experiences that include prior knowledge and prior understanding. That is, understanding is an awareness akin to wisdom distinct from, and transcendent to, knowledge. Citing Blanchard (1967), Groome stated that while wisdom “may be accompanied

by a broad range of knowledge” (Blanchard, 1967, pp. 322-324), wisdom or conation is more accurately described as reflectiveness and judgement that is discerned “from reflection on [personal] experience or from the cumulative experience of the [human] race” (Groome, p. 32). Baruch Spinoza and Martin Heidegger argued that *being* and *knowing* are related (Groome, 1991, p. 29) and, therefore, Groome’s learner as agent-subject-in-relationship is both being [noun and verb] and knower that is “consciously aware, reflective, discerning” and in “authentic being... with others in place and time” (Groome, 1991, pp. 8-9).

Adult learners learn when reflecting in community. Mezirow (2000) wrote that when adults “reflect on and discuss their assumptions about the world, they often experience a shift in their frame of reference or world view” (TEAL, 2011). As secular shared praxis still needs a facilitator organizing the educational activity and asking guiding questions, perhaps the pedagogical and andragogical approach could also be described as a Socratic shared praxis. The underpinning assumption in Socratic or secular shared praxis is that the community collectively has the knowledge and the facilitator can draw out pre-existing knowledge and frame the discussion to form new understanding for all stakeholders. As the educational cliché goes, the facilitator is the guide on the side, not the mage on the stage. This philosophical and pedo/andragogical approach of shared learning is the underpinning for the term communal knowledge or communal understanding.

### **Voluntary Participation**

In 2014, the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills published “Seven Principles of Adult Education.” The first principle is that adults must want to learn. There is no such thing as truancy in lifelong learning. Thus, attendance was, of course, optional for the presentation “Iconic Photographs of History” at the monthly Men’s Breakfast. Referencing Mezirow (1997, 2000), TEAL (2011) argued that adult learners “need to challenge each other’s assumptions and encourage group members to consider various perspectives” which parallels Groome (1980, 1991) and Mezirow (1997, 2000) who stated that reflective discourse is an “environment of acceptance, empathy, and trust” (TEAL, 2011). Trust is built when the teacher or facilitator steps back and empowers other stakeholders in the situational environment. Empowered and engaged adults, attending a lecture by choice, can then learn collectively with the presenter and each other.

### **Choosing and Defining Space**

According to the Canadian Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (2014, Principle Six), adults learn best in informal environments. The choice of presenting a lecture involving memory to an older population during a meal setting was intentional. The senior residence has both independent living and assisted living divisions. As memory is a casualty of age and disease, an antiseptic lecture on memory could be uncomfortable for some residents. Chauvel et al. (2018) point out that procedural knowledge is often left intact by both age and disease even

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when declarative knowledge is lost. Thus, men who attended the breakfast have the procedural knowledge and routine of breakfast to allay anxiety if there are gaps in memory regarding the historical events in the lecture. While Ávila and Hernández (2017) and González-García (2017) explored andragogical strategies for populations with memory gaps, both studies involved excursions to museums and not the use of in-house exhibitions. It is less clear in the literature how historical photography can be used to foster community-building and engagement in senior living residences. It would benefit the field of literature if future research bridged the gap between museum studies, adult education, and issues in gerontology such as memory.

Traditional classrooms and lecture formats can also reflect oppressive, non-inclusive teaching, but the “non-traditional arrangement of furniture destabilizes traditional power structures in unique ways in order to propose imaginative alternatives to more oppressive [didactic] teaching” (Vella, 2015) The residence staff and I, therefore, chose to arrange the tables and chairs so that the attendees were facing each other, forming intentional intimacy by proximity and body position. And, since Yang, Becerik-Gerber, and Mino (2013) explored how acoustics, furniture, and visibility affected the learning environment, we removed the chair at the head of the table, allowing a clear line of sight to the large screen, arranged the podium off-set to the side with controls to the display, and utilized a wireless hand-held microphone system.

### **Teaching Isn't About the Teacher**

The goal of the lecture was two-fold: to present an interesting lecture, but more importantly, it was to facilitate community-building within at the senior living center. Not knowing the specific professional knowledge or personal interests of the attendees, I chose to present on the historical events of their lifetime. I asked the Director of Life Enrichment what the ages were of the men that were expected to attend and learned that the average age was 77 years old. The men are essentially the sons of the Greatest Generation. Thinking about history by generation, I am always intrigued by Maurice Halbwachs' (1980) idea of collective memory. While Guy Beiner (2007) criticized the adjective collective and preferred the phrase “social memory,” I personally use the phrase generational memory. For example, anyone old enough to remember December 7, 1941, knows where they were when they heard that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. Since adults want to be “equal partners” in the learning process (Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, 2014, Principle Seven), I decided to enlist the attendees as co-presenters on “Iconic Photographs in History.” Bennett, Froggett, Kenning, Manley, and Muller (2019) explored the communal method of “aesthetic stimuli” to support shared and distributed memory and I felt confident that secular shared praxis would be effective in creating a learning environment during my presentation at the senior living residence.

### Principles Three and Five of Adult Learning

Adults “learn by doing” (2014, Principle Three) and the only variable I knew those in attendance had in common was their age. Groome (1980, 1991) discusses the concept of *remembrance of being* as an “activity of consciously bringing to mind (engages reason, memory, and imagination) for understanding... that arises from our whole ‘being’ in the world” (Groome, 1991, p. 34). The Men’s Breakfast attendees had a lived “experience of being” in the world and I wanted to draw out their collective remembrance of being, so I turned the presentation into a “This is your life!” and “Where were you when?” interactive lecture. Experience affects adult learning (reference, Principle Five), so I began by explaining to the Men’s Breakfast attendees what I wrote earlier regarding Halbwachs’ (1980) theory of collective memory and how Beiner (2007) preferred to call the phenomena social memory and social forgetting. I then introduced my term generational memory and how I believe each generation has seminal events that act almost as a lodestone that pulls a generation together in a shared memory.



Photograph RG 128 ARC 306553; “The capsized USS Oklahoma lies next to a slightly damaged USS Maryland,” December 1941; Records of Joint Committees of Congress; National Archives.



Photograph 80-G-19930; “Rescuing survivors near the USS West Virginia after the attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941. Records of Joint Committees of Congress; National Archives.

### Iconic Photographs in History

I told the Men’s Breakfast group about my grandfather and how he told me how he learned about the bombing of Pearl Harbor and that he eventually became a Night Warden in New Britain, Connecticut. A tentative hand rose from across the table. I passed the microphone and one of the gentlemen said he was three years old in December 1941 and remembered

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thinking that the Japanese were going to bomb his town. We looked at some of those famous pictures taken on that Day of Infamy and the men nodded their heads in somber silence.<sup>1</sup>

After looking at the pictures from the U.S. National Archives, I asked the group, if Pearl Harbor was the seminal event of their parents' generation, what was the seminal event of their generation? Two men spoke simultaneously and mentioned the Kennedy assassination. I passed the microphone to the closest gentleman and asked him where he was when he heard the news. Another man reached for the microphone and shared his story, and then another hand was raised asking for the microphone. All told, about half of the men shared their memories.



John F. Kennedy Jr. saluting his father's casket. November 25, 1963. Photograph by Dan Farrell.<sup>2</sup>



Lyndon B. Johnson Inauguration. November 22, 1963. Photograph by Cecil Stoughto.

The men were engaging with each other and building community. This process is interrelated to narrative gerontology in which older adults reflect back on "life or any narrative that connected to a specific area of life, can contribute to our understanding of growth later in life" (Bjursell, 2019, p. 66). The gentlemen at the Men's Breakfast indirectly learned more about one another's age, education, professional careers, and the parts of the country that each other resided before their current shared residence.

In a more uplifting iconic historical event, we looked at a series of photographs from the Apollo 11 mission. One man asked, "what year was that again", and another answered "1968." Another said, "'69." The group nodded, "yes, 1969." Community knowledge became community-building

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2011/winter/ph-decklogs.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nydailynews.com/news/back-dan-farrell-greatest-photos-daily-news-gallery-1.2183876>

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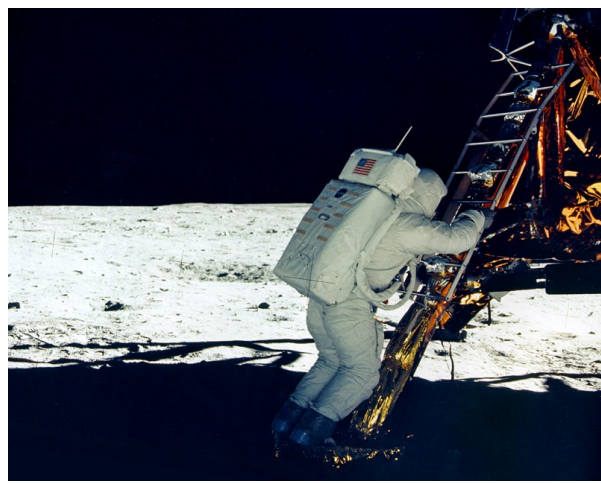


*Photograph S69-39961 (Left); "Apollo 11 liftoff from launch tower camera," July 16, 1969; NASA History Office and the NASA JSC Media Services Center.*

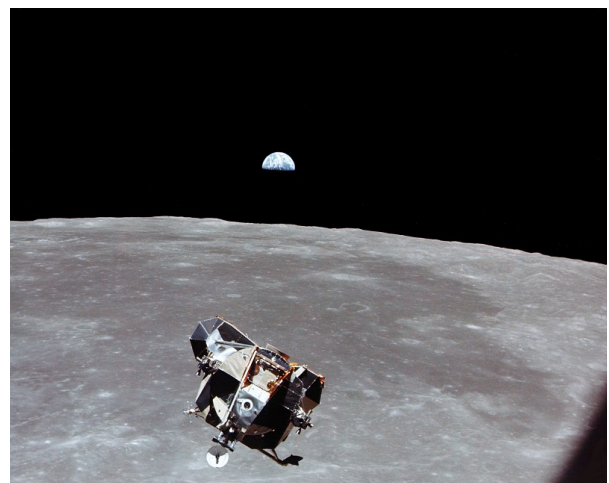


*Photograph AS11-37-5454 (Above); "View from LM window just after landing," July 20, 1969; NASA History Office and the NASA JSC Media Services Center.*

The gentlemen around the breakfast table described stopping whatever they were doing at the time, so many years ago, to hear those immortal words, "Houston, Tranquility Base here. The Eagle has landed" as the landing module touched down on the moon. One gentleman described building his own radio so he could listen to the event while on an engineering project in northern Canada. I realized I never knew what time of day Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin landed in the Sea of Tranquility, so I asked the Breakfast group. The landing was at 3:17 PM Eastern.



Apollo 11 Image #AS11-40-5869 | July 20, 1969  
Photograph AS11-40-5869; "Aldrin on the LM footpad," July 20, 1969; NASA History Office and the NASA JSC Media Services Center.



Photograph AS11-44-6642; "LM approaches CSM for docking / earthrise in b.g.," July 21, 1969; NASA History Office and the NASA JSC Media Services Center.

I shared what I consider to be seminal events in my own lifetime: the orbital S.S. *Challenger* explosion (1986), the fall of the Berlin Wall (1991), and the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks (2001). We looked at pictures of all these events and shared our recollections, and together built new memories. Going back to Beiner's (2007) critic of Halbwachs' (1980) idea of collective memory, I suggested that while a generation may share the memory of a common event, the perspective of that event can vary depending on race, religion, nationality, ethnicity, gender, and other factors and influences. According to the "Seven Principles of Adult Learning" (2014), "adults are practical in their approach to learning" and prefer meaningful engagement and problem-solving. The problem discussed that day was the idea and limitations to collective memory and how photography has influenced both memory and perspective.

The Men's Breakfast hour was over, but no one moved. We kept talking. "Do you have any more pictures?" someone asked. I did. We looked at a series of pictures I had collected, from the renowned Civil Rights Era photographs of Ruby Bridges (November 14, 1960), Walter Gadsden (May 4, 1963), Malcolm X and MLK meeting on the steps of the U.S. Capitol on March 26, 1964, MLK's death on April 4, 1968, to the Vietnam Era photographs of Quang Duc (June 11, 1963), Nguyễn Ngọc Loan (February 1, 1968), Kim Phúc (June 8, 1972), and the Evaluation of the U.S. Embassy (April 29, 1975). We remembered and learned from each other.

From the optimism regarding the signing of the Camp David Accord (September 17, 1978) to the nationalistic fervor of the Miracle on Ice (February 22, 1980), we reflected on the collective memories of the attendees. We looked at the compassionate meeting of John Paul II and Mehmet Ali Ağca on December 28, 1983, the shy defiance of Sharbat Gula's famed but controversial photograph from June 1985, and the infamous and stark resistance of Tank Man (June 5, 1989). As a group, we remembered the violation of Rodney King (March 3, 1991), the triumph of Boris Yeltsin (August 18, 1991) and the reconciliation between James Earl Ray and Dexter King on March 27, 1997.

We looked at the personal and national tragedy of Chris Fields and Baylee Almon (April 19, 1995). We looked at the photographs of the hideous murder of James Byrd (June 7, 1998) and Matthew Shepherd (October 12, 1998), and then we looked at photographs of murder of nature by Hurricane Katrina and the BP Oil Spill. Finally, we looked at the photos from the Arab Spring and the tragic deaths from the Syrian Civil War. The Men's Breakfast hour had become two hours. We remembered. We talked. We built shared memory and we built community through art, reflection, and discussion.

### **Conclusion**

In lecturing on "Iconic Photographs in History," I learned more from hearing the stories of the attendees than the gentlemen at the Men's Breakfast probably learned from my presentation. My own lived experience is now richer because the Men's Breakfast club shared their lived experiences. For me personally, and the residence staff present, the experience was an example of intergenerational learning. Van den Berg, Dewar Smits, and Jukema (2019) examined the benefits of intergenerational learning experiences resulting from collective activity. The positive experience of the discussion was reinforced by several attendees of the Men's Breakfast told later told the Director of Life Enrichment how enjoyable the lecture had been. These results are consistent with the findings of Redfield, McGuire, Ting-Chun Lin, Orton, Aust, and Erickson (2016) that relational contact-based programs can shift intergenerational attitudes and understandings. On a more personal level, I can say that the use of art to trigger memory and discussion with adults in a senior living residence is a rewarding andragogical strategy that can benefit both residents, staff, and guest lecturers.

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# Prosthetic Ontology into Pedagogy: Applying Garoian's Theory to the Performing Arts

*“By encouraging students to embrace and even exist in significant moments of their past, we empower them to use those moments now as they create new worlds through their art”.*

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## ABSTRACT

*Prosthetic pedagogy, as developed by Charles Garoian, provides a framework for using artificial-real worlds created by the arts to influence and impact teaching practice. The prosthetic space is artificial, separate, from the artist and audience, yet it is felt authentically, as if it were part of their being. Garoian explored prosthetic pedagogy through visual arts and museum experiences. This research further examines prosthetic pedagogy by applying it the Theatre. The art of theatre builds worlds onstage and through performance that allow performers to be and exist apart from their physical selves in the realm of prosthetic reality. The artist and audience are able to transcend the natural and real world to enter a place of internal reality. Through a blend of auto ethnographic reflection and contemporary research, this paper considers theatrical artistic experiences as an application of prosthetic ontology and then explores how that ontology influences pedagogy.*

## KEYWORDS

*Prosthetic Pedagogy, Performance Theory, Art Education, Theatre*

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The concept of prosthetic ontology, as developed by Charles Garoian (2013), provides the framework for using the artificial-real worlds created by the arts to influence and impact teaching practices. The prosthetic space or encounter is artificial or separate from the artist and audience, and yet is felt as authentically and deeply as if it were part of their being. The characters written by an author might become real friends in the heart of their creator. The landscape within a painting might become an authentic mental place of refuge for the viewer. After being developed by Garoian (2013) as an application for visual arts pedagogy, Schulte (2015) applied prosthetic pedagogy to preschool aged children who often live within the imagined worlds of their artistic creations. O'Donoghue (2015) applies the theory to art-based research and Thompson (2015) expands the application into early childhood art education. In this paper I hope to open up a line for future research that applies prosthetic theory, with influence from performance theory, to the performing arts.

This research explores the prosthetic space as a metaphor of embodiment in performance-based education. The prosthetic space or encounter is artificial or separate from the artist and audience, just as a prosthetic limb is artificial from its bearer. Yet, the prosthetic world is felt as authentically and deeply as if it were part of our being, just as that prosthetic limb becomes one with its bearer.

### **Performance Theory**

Before I go further, it is impossible for me to ignore how my application of prosthetic pedagogy in the performing arts overlaps with performativity, as developed by Judith Butler (2010). I must admit that I am still developing these concepts for myself, differentiating and defining the theoretical applications. I hope that I can make the distinctions clear and create opportunities for other researchers to explore the application of prosthetic pedagogy to theatre and other areas of the performing arts. As a child, the make-believe world I fashioned for myself through play was more real to me than the physical world in which I lived. In the world of my creation I was free to be and become all that I imagined I could be, without the restrictions and expectations that my family and society placed upon me. This would eventually lead me to the theatre, to worlds created onstage and through performance that allowed me to be and exist apart from my physical self in the realm of prosthetic reality. The prosthetic ontology of art allows for both the audience and participant to step outside of themselves to learn, grow, and discover. Through artistic experiences in what Garoian (2013) coins "prosthetic spaces," the artist and audience are able to transcend the natural and real world to enter a place of internal reality. In that internal space, the prosthetic device is a real extension of the individual.

For me, the prosthetic space has always been performance. My first experience being shaped prosthetically was at age five and the space was a movie theatre. In that space I began to discover my talents as extensions of myself, and was able to identify them clearly for the first time. As I grew, I experienced evolution and reshaping through performing. I learned who I am as a performer but also as an individual. My time in the theatre's prosthetic space allowed me to discover and discern how my beliefs, faith, talents, and desires shaped who I chose to be and who I learned I could be. Along the way, I learned that I had a voice as well. I could

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write my own words and sing my own songs. This empowered me in a way that performing the works of others never had. This paper attempts to explore the prosthetic ontology, as developed by Garoian (2013) through the lens of performance theory. “This turn understands performance to be a way of knowing, a way of creating and fostering understanding, a method that persons use to create and give meaning to everyday life” (Denzin, 2009, p. 255). In my life, my journey of becoming through performance has been a central part of many critical moments of evolution or revelation.

Performance theory, as a lens, is illustrated by Schechner (1977) as a fan (Fig. 1), with different categories and extremes reaching out from a central common denominator of performance. These categories range from rites and ceremonies on one extreme, to ritualization on the other extreme. The qualities of performance upon which I will focus fall into the more central branches of this fan. My first vignette, centered on the movie musical *Annie*, lies in the performance branch of *play*. The second story, occurring as I performed in the musical, *Gypsy*, falls in the midst of *performance in everyday life* and *art making*. Other observations lie in the *art making process* of the fan while my final exploration, *Growing Up*, moves to another performance road altogether and incorporates *eruption and resolution of crisis*. My hope, through this reflection, is to learn and grow from a prosthetic space of performance and facilitate the creation of prosthetic spaces for others to learn and grow, as well.



Figure 1: The Performance Theory Fan  
Source: Schechner, 1977

## Purpose

This is not a standard research paper wherein the author conducts experiments or applies interventions. This paper's conclusions come directly from the author's experiences reflecting on prosthetic encounters in her own life. This research identifies examples of Garoian's prosthetic spaces in the life of the author. The author draws conclusions and suggests strategies for others to apply in their own performing arts learning spaces. Through the course of this project, the author explores the past and applies those lessons to the present, as an educator. The goal of this paper is to offer strategies to other performing arts educators to learn from their experiences using these methods.

## **Annie – Discovering Prosthetic Spaces**

“The ontology of play constitutes the body's prosthetic augmentation, it is both *not* the body and not-not the body...as of this writing, I'm not-not in the gallery, yet I may always be...” (Garoian, 2013, p. 59).

I spent the earliest days of my childhood playing through performance. My toys, mostly dolls, sang to each other rather than speaking their conversations. I told stories as songs and read my books with melodies. My personal relationship with my art form was yet undefined but it impacted every facet of my life nonetheless. At age five, my older sister took me to the movie theatre to see the musical movie, *Annie*. The experience was profound and life shaping. On one level, I suspended my disbelief and was transported into the world of a poor orphan who struggles to find her place of belonging in the home of a loving adoptive father. On another level, even at age five, I understood that the people on the screen were, in fact, actors. With that realization, I believed they were just like me. They sang when others would talk, communicating through song. What I did not fully comprehend was that, as actors, the people on screen inhabited a world of make-believe. Their roles, their jobs, required singing. The actors were not, in fact, just like me, a real little girl singing through a life of ups and downs, struggles and triumphs. I left the prosthetic space of the cinema, the artificial environment that created such a very real experience for me, feeling a life validation that I had never before experienced. As I began to incorporate this experience into my life, the truth emerged that acting is not the same as real life. The actors were portraying characters. They were not behaving as they would in real situations. This meant I was still an anomaly. I was still the only singer in a world full of talkers. At age five, the answer seemed relatively simple. If actors are allowed to sing their conversations then I needed to be an actor. My future was set and I would not be deterred.

As is evident by my lived-experience in the prosthetic space of the movie theatre, I was confused by the aspects of the characters on the screen. They were real people who were not the characters they portrayed. Yet, they were real, and at the moment I saw them, they were not-not the characters. This is the mental space in which I existed for some time. So immersed was I in my prosthetic movie experience with *Annie* that I began to write my name on worksheets at school as Annie. My teachers told me this was unacceptable so I began to write Aileen instead. Aileen is the first name of the young actor who portrayed Annie in the movie.

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The teachers did not appreciate my name change and did not allow me to continue using Aileen. Nevertheless, I felt, that I had found my true identity. I felt liberated from the constraints my existing reality placed upon my use of singing. Actors perform in their real lives, therefore, I thought that I would perform in my real life. I lived inside *Annie*. Within the world created by that cinematic experience I began to observe and experience my talent in new ways. It was as if the cinema experience created a new quadrant in my mind, exclusively reserved for the exploration of the possibilities created by performance.

### **Gypsy – Expanding Prosthetic Spaces**

Fast-forward ten years from that little girl finding her voice through *Annie*. In high school, now fully fluent in the world of musical theatre, I was cast in my first major, leading role, the title character in the musical *Gypsy*. The plot follows a young girl, Louise, as a child and teen dominated by her controlling and manipulating mother, the quintessential stage mother, Mama Rose. After breaking free from her mother's control, Louise asserts herself and becomes Gypsy Rose Lee, of burlesque fame. Previously trapped in the expectations imposed upon her by her mother and her own insecurities, Louise's ascension to stardom as *Gypsy* is a moment of self-actualization. She makes her own choice for the first time in her life. She asserts her will in opposition to her mother. In this act of rebellion, Louise finds her own identity.

She was me. My delving into the history and character of Louise's transformation into Gypsy Rose Lee released something from within me. Louise found her voice and declared her freedom. I could do the same. Just as the little orphan Annie had been a decade prior, *Gypsy* became a "line of flight" (Thompson, 2015, p. 560). It interrupted my pattern of usual behavior and transformed my perception of the world and my place and power within it. As I, the actor, walked through the process of transforming Louise into *Gypsy*, I myself metamorphosized from a self-restrained and cautious girl into an emboldened, more confident young woman. The transformation was evident to all. As I incarnated Louise and acted out her assertion of independence, so I began to assert my own independence. For the first time in my life, I made choices without asking permission. I advised my parents of my plans rather than inquiring if my plans were acceptable. The beauty of the evolution in my nature was that my parents accepted this emboldened version of me with no question. As I invested myself in the formation of Louise's character, I embraced her power. The voice that I gave Louise to speak became mine as well. I gave her life and she returned it back to me in the form of courage and independence. She became the part of me that was not afraid to take chances. I was not afraid to risk being different or upsetting others' expectations of me.

### **Growing Up – Using Prosthetic Spaces**

The story behind this next vignette is very personal. It involves an incident of extreme gender-based harassment. While broken, insulted, and recovering, I reached back through my inner archives and found my voice in a song. As myself, I was not free to rise up and speak out against my predator. However, through a stage character there were no such restrictions. The character was stronger than I, and so I robed myself in her mantle. I wore her costume and

sang her words. I wrote the words especially for her. My aggressor sat in the audience and I performed. Few knew that the words had any meaning beyond the character's own intention. "The norms that preexist us, shape, to some extent, what is possible to say, do, and how to appear in the world" (O'Donoghue, 2015, p. 522).

### **Ontology into Pedagogy**

Based on my own experiences outlined above, I believe that the practice of prosthetic ontology in art is a deliberate act of seeing things not as they are, but as they could be. The act of removing oneself from the physical and placing oneself in the possible or imaginable is, in itself, a removal away from normalization. By making ourselves vulnerable to the possible changes brought through art, we are allowing for the unexpected. The prosthetic ontology of art allows us to make ourselves vulnerable to the lessons taught through art making and art practice.

My journey as a performer and as a writer has shaped the person I am today. In the prosthetic spaces of the movie theatre, the stage, and the writing studio, I found myself, defined myself, and reshaped who I could be. I have learned that these profound experiences can be shared. I can use my prosthetic space to facilitate the creation of prosthetic spaces of discovery for others. This is the power of prosthetic ontology applied through performance theory. It allows the performer and the audience to shape their spaces, building bridges and associations, creating worlds and shaping paradigms. This is what I accomplished at Burkesville Academy of Fine Arts.

### **BAFA Magic**

Not too long ago I posted an update on Facebook where I communicated the many ways the arts have shaped my life. A parent of some of my students commented, "And if art had not changed YOUR life, think of how different mine would be... and that of my children..." (November 17, 2017, Facebook comment, *emphasis in original*).

Burkesville Academy of Fine Arts (BAFA) operates in a remote community in the Appalachian region of the U.S., in the state of Kentucky. "BAFA Magic" began as a phrase used by students practicing magic tricks instead of "Abra Cadabra," "Hocus Pocus," or "Alakazam". The phrase slowly evolved to describe, define, and eventually embody the spirit of the organization. Through the community created with these young people, BAFA Magic became a constant presence in the atmosphere of our classes, rehearsals, and performances. It lives today as real to those students as their friends with whom they perform. BAFA Magic became a prosthetic space.

In that space, we created an atmosphere where students were free to question generational assumptions, ask any question, explore identities and expectations, all within the practice of their artistic discipline. The following are specific examples of students embracing and embodying BAFA Magic. One student had recently experienced the loss of a loved one. She came to our summer program and took a songwriting class. During her time working with the instructor she wrote a song about rising from the brokenness and challenges to keep

going. She began to sing this song during a public performance and forgot the words mid-song, overcome with emotion. She left the stage crying. I encouraged her to think about the words she was singing. She could go up on that stage right now and rise from the brokenness and embarrassment and overcome, just as she wrote in her song. She accepted my challenge and performed superbly. After the performance she ran off the stage and hugged me and said, “Thank you for giving me BAFA Magic,” as if I had bestowed upon her a tangible strength. These next two quotes are from parents of students on the autism spectrum. BAFA is not an art therapy organization and I hold no specialty in that area, but everyone was welcome and the environment created was real and tangible such that it specifically affected these students.

“BAFA Magic set him free.” (parent).

“BAFA Magic made her feel safe to embrace who she is without apology. Once she learned to do that, she allowed herself to reach out to others for the first time in her life.” (parent)

And finally, from a student, “I believe in #BAFAMagic!” (student)

### **Prosthetic Implications**

Garoian (2013) states that after his first experience in an art museum, “I felt a compulsion to risk everything, to go beyond what I already understood about art and my life” (p. 59). This is the single-minded compulsion that overwhelmed a five-year-old girl into shaping every aspect of her future life so that she could live in a world that allowed her to sing her way through. The prosthetic space of the movie *Annie* intimately became a part of me. It was a core formative experience that would validate my life, passions, and desires. This film would tell me that it was possible to live the life I had always dreamed of. It was not the life depicted by the plot of the movie, struggling through poverty in the midst of the Great Depression, but the life of the actors on screen who could sing on a whim without being silenced or admonished. I could live in the prosthetic world they created, then expand their world to include me.

“The responsibility of art teachers is to foster children’s play, their improvisations, explorations, and expressions through art” (Garoian, 2013, p. 44). I cannot claim that I was forcefully discouraged from my love of singing. In fact, it was almost always complimented and encouraged and my talent was a source of pride for my parents. However, the lesson of maturity was that this could only be one part of me, able to be revealed only on appropriate occasions. It would never be considered socially acceptable for me to sing conversationally with others. I am aware that this very concept might seem absurd to my reader, but as a child, I did not consider that singing was a talent I possessed. It was a way of communicating, my preferred way of communicating. By relegating it to a place of “only for performance” or even “only for personal enjoyment” robbed me of something innately mine. It robbed me of my voice.

With this central part of my being designated as only appropriate for specific times and places, the theatre, my existence as an actor, became my personal prosthetic space. In the walls of the theatre, my voice was returned to me and I was free to use it whenever and however I chose. Thompson (2015) quotes Mary Ann Reilly,

Lines of flight are creative and liberating escapes from the standardization, oppression, and stratification of society. Lines of flight, big or small, are available to us at any time and can lead in any direction. They are instances of thinking “outside of the box,” with a greater understanding of what the box is, how it works, and how we can break it open and perhaps transform it for the better. (p. 560)

The theatre became my line of flight, the interruption in everyday life where newness arrives, ingenuity is possible, and uniqueness embraced. It was the first time in my memory that an experience outside of me so shaped my vision of myself. Even now, as I consider that experience in the cinema, a part of me is there, captivated by the new world growing not on the screen before me, but within my own mind.

Garoian (2015) described a prosthetic device as dissimilar ideas or actions that are encountered in unpredictable ways to create an assemblage of unexpected and unending alliances. Just as *Annie* is always with me, or the child who was me, so is *Gypsy* a part of me. To her and for her part in my formation, I will always be grateful. *Annie* helped me find my voice, and *Gypsy* taught me to use my voice. Schechner (1988) describes the cyclical nature of live theatre for the actor. In the course of performing a role repeatedly, “The actor makes a journey that ends where it began” (p. 172). The strength of this performative experience is that by asserting Louise’s independence over and over again, I became proficient at exerting my own as well. Performance taught me a lesson artificially that became mine in reality. In like manner, every role that I have ever played on stage has become a part of me, as I become the role. There is a mutual sharing, a giving and receiving, between the character which is embracing me, teaching me and welcoming me in as I give myself and all of my own history over to the longings, passions, desires, hopes, dreams, weaknesses and uniqueness of that character’s identity. The act of erasing myself behind the embodiment of the characters I have played has empowered me to envision new possibilities in the world, to see reality differently than it is but rather as it might be. Garoian (2013) believed that prosthetic ontology had the potential to resist, oppose, and overcome society’s normative expectations. Performance provides interruption, intervention and resistance (Denzin, 2009). My assuming of other roles, in this case *Annie* and *Gypsy*, created prosthetic spaces that liberated me to learn, discover, and evolve.

When I assumed a role that gave me courage and confidence to face what I alone could not face, it was the character that stood there in me, with me, beside me, holding me up, speaking to me and through me. The character’s words were my words just as I had written them for her. She was me, as I became her directly. The performance was impacting and affected the space I shared with others, the circumstances around me, and the situations in



which I found myself. As suggested by Schulte (2015), by assuming that role, the agency was mine to affect difference and change in those proximities. Denzin (2009) described performance sometimes as a form of activism, inspiring and empowering the performer to act. This was certainly true for me. I could not do what needed to be done, but by partnering with a prosthetic version of myself, a character of my creation whose words were mine before I first gave them to her, I found my agency. Schechner (1988) called this an “art- life, personal testimony” performance (p. 124). The strength that I had written into her came back to me and provided the strength I needed to confront what I alone could not. In this assumption of that character’s aspect, a prosthetic space was created. In that space I could exist and express myself, even though I was not myself.

O’Donoghue (2015) recognized that the journey toward fluency between art making and our interactions with the world is a process that has to have a genesis somewhere. We are not born able to make sense of our world and represent it through art. This ability comes with training, information, and development. He challenged that current art is often a propagation of normalization, because art is most often representational. In my view, that is the power of prosthetic ontology applied through performance theory. It allows the performer and the audience to shape their spaces, building bridges and associations, creating worlds and shaping paradigms. Schulte (2015) identified pedagogy as the way students draw from experiences and reform them to compose meanings that transform their future experiences. Combining these thoughts, we begin to understand how prosthetic ontology can move into pedagogical practice, through deliberate efforts designed to inspire the creation of prosthetic spaces.

### **Applications in the Performance Classroom**

In the performance classroom, specific and intentional strategies can evoke the prosthetic learning experience that I, as a young performer and then educator, experienced accidentally. Many actors will be familiar with the idea of “Don’t act. BE!” The implication and instruction in this guidance is that the performer does not act like they are a certain character, or a certain type of person. They do not act like they feel happy or sad or whatever else the script might evoke. Rather, the actor is instructed to become. Become the character as only you can. This is important because if I, as I am with all of my own experiences and history become a character, then that character will be unique from any other individual portraying that same character out of the same script. This is where our ontological exploration of prosthetics can move into pedagogy. By encouraging students to embrace and even exist in significant moments of their past, we empower them to use those moments now as they create new worlds through their art.

This can happen by chance, as it sometimes did for me, but it can also happen by design. In the art classroom, Garoian (2013) accomplished this by linking art work to specific and meaningful experiences of his students. He deliberately prompted them with themes that would be personally relevant and emotionally evocative. Performance educators can use these

same methods to help students create their own worlds, informed and inspired by individual memories and experiences, but wholly new with the influence of the author's script.

### Conclusion

Through reflection on personal moments when prosthetic experiences informed my own development I examined when and how the prosthetic device might be useful for educators in the performing arts, specifically theatre. This is just an introduction to the idea. Much more can be learned and discussed about the distinctions between and integrations of the prosthetic space and the performative act.

Shakespeare (trans. 1966), wrote, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players; They have their exits and their entrances, and one man in his time plays many parts," (2.7.139-142). Perhaps my experiences with performance indicate not that we live on a stage reciting the lines of our various roles, but rather, that the stage itself can shape our roles, and help us discover who we can be, and then we, in turn, can build those worlds for others.

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The Unicorn as  
Lifelong  
Companion:  
Remixing Inclusive  
and  
Intergenerational  
Art Education  
Journeys with the  
Freedom of Froebel  
and Wildness of  
Waldorf

*“Concepts of the unicorn speak to the aspiration of art educators to continuously channel joy and cultivate imagination in the classroom.”*

Courtney Lee Weida  
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**ABSTRACT**

In what ways can the symbol of the unicorn represent and inform collaborative, intergenerational visions of art education? This paper outlines some of the roles of the unicorn as a theme and a framework for contemporary applications of art education relating to enduring Froebelian art education, Waldorf-inspired art teaching, and inclusive community art practice as a form of remix. This research seeks to illuminate enduring but oft-neglected areas of inspiring art curriculum for teachers and learners across the lifespan.

**KEYWORDS**

Unicorns, Froebel, Waldorf, art history, intergenerational learning

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How can the symbol of the unicorn both reflect and inform inclusive visions of art education across the lifespan and generations? The unicorn is a legendary, magical creature of both Eastern and Western artistic and literary origins: from mentions in the bible, to ancient philosopher Ctesias' descriptions of a white horned animal in India, and unicorn-like bronze statues in Ethiopia (Hunt, 2003). It occupies a space in a varied visual timeline in art history, as well as fairy tales, film, memes, mythology, and other popular culture. The unicorn is a symbol of myth and impossibility, also linked with the creative imagination in art and literature (Wriglesworth, 2006), and the creative practices of psychoanalysis (Williams, 2010). Conceptually, the word unicorn (Latin: *unicornis*) is also a term for something elusive and sought-after, like art education itself, which can be rare and precious in K-12 schools, universities, and arts centers for learners of all ages.

Throughout my own childhood, unicorns served me as companions to a world of art and symbolism across genres and artistic media, from the seven silken *Unicorn Tapestries* of medieval France, to Tolkienesque unicorn paintings by the brothers Hildebrandt, to the animated film *The Last Unicorn* (Bass & Rankin, 1982) and flying unicorns or “pegacorns” from *My Little Pony* (Hasbro, 1986). In college, I would discover Damien Hurst's *The Child's Dream* from 2008 - a luminous white taxidermy horse with a horn attached, and Betye Saar's supernatural and subversive etching: *To Catch a Unicorn* (1960). With a dual background in Art and in English Literature, I also relished Audre Lorde's poetry anthology, *The Black Unicorn* (1978), which uniquely “portrays the emergence of a coherent, magical Black feminist heritage” (Leonard, 2012, p. 759).

Beyond my own enduring interest, I was surprised to notice that both my adult graduate students and elementary students today share a fascination with unicorns, sometimes overlapping (e.g. shared nostalgia for medieval iconography of unicorns) and at other times distinct from one another (e.g. adults creating diverse unicorn remixes ironically). As a midcareer art education professor with students from their early 20s through retirement age, I have observed graduate students discussing unicorns symbolically, as a metaphor for teaching art. I often hear good-natured quips about my students' love of “unicorn teachers” as a form of kitsch - with the teacher as a stand-in for a rare and often rainbowed classroom character who might even wear unicorn-related fashion and accessories.

Being called a unicorn can be a badge of honor for oneself, or often extended affectionately to a quirky mentor or colleague who is rare, like a unicorn. Many common gifts for teachers bear imagery and phraseology that celebrate the unicorn teacher through new and old imagery, fonts, and messages, often remixed from stylized imagery of a horn or unicorn silhouette. So too, a popular coffee mug features a U.S. representative riding a unicorn in front of a rainbow, above the words “I believe in AOC” (LookHuman, 2020).

Maxine Greene's foundational text, *Releasing the Imagination*, reminds us as teachers to look to children and their “images of possibility” (2000, p. 53) that include unicorns and elves, as we encourage the development of both perception and imagination.

Elaborating on mythic metaphors ascribed to art educators more poetically, Smith-Shank (2014) thoughtfully wrote of the contrast between beloved arts teachers and “dragon teachers” that could dramatize and serve as an inverse counterpart to unicorn teachers. I have found such concepts of the unicorn speak to the aspirations of art educators to continuously channel joy and cultivate imagination in the classroom. Unicorns taught in art history cultivate fantasy and escapism, inspiring artistic interests across the lifespan.

During a recent community workshop on fairy tale art, elementary students demonstrated interest in a range of unicorn imagery from medieval art to contemporary television (Figure 1). My co-author, Carlee Bradbury, an art historian, and I were inspired by discussions during the workshop of how children might use the unicorn books they carefully created in an intergenerational exchange, such as reading to a younger sibling, or sharing drawings with a parent. Further, the comments of mothers who joined the workshop reflected a certain legacy of shared love for these magical creatures: a bond of myth, magic, and hopefulness across generations.



*Figure 1.* Image of 2018 community workshop materials at Harvard University's Ed Portal.

Following along with the ideas of our young students, we have continued to investigate how the unicorn can serve as a timely and timeless cultural and artistic phenomenon evoking both nostalgia for past mythologies of unicorns and dragons and visions of futuristic fantasy. Unicorns can also be complex symbols of the shifting individual human psyche. The symbolism of the unicorn as an isolated figure sometimes reflecting depression in the artist has been noted by psychologists observing the work of young creative people (Edwards, 2005). In our teaching, we have found that the unicorn's temporal flexibility makes for a useful and versatile metaphor for the blending of past, present, and future aspirations and longings of art education, including certain experiences of otherness and diversity, for learners of all ages.

My colleague and I also observed that while students were looking at images from art history and rendering their own images of unicorns, they were also talking about the unicorn aesthetically in terms of its rareness, wildness, and magical qualities. We could not help but share our own unicorn stories, which complemented theirs. The dialogue and creation processes that ensued were accompanied by an unabashed love of their beauty or even cuteness. This range of visual meaning shows the unicorn's leaps from medieval art history to fantasy and fan art; bridging gaps between sanctioned spaces of art history and emerging commercial and/or outsider fandoms that speak to the broad appeal of unicorns and of different types of art.

Drawing on art education histories addressing young learners to adults, this article outlines some of the roles of the unicorn as a framework for contemporary applications of Froebel-inspired art education, Waldorf-inspired art teaching, and adult art practice as a form of collaborative and inclusive remix. By analyzing these eclectic influences on our field, we aim to deepen inquiries into intergenerational art education histories and illuminate possibilities of collaborative art curricula.

### **Unicorns: From Art History to Art Education Histories and Aesthetics Education**

Unicorns' histories offer a rich visual and historical references, connecting art history with arts education histories and visions over time. Apart from Christian references widely addressed elsewhere in art history, the iconic *Unicorn Tapestries* evoke mysteries of the very origins of the work and its many potential meanings. Tate Museum director, Martin Clark, described the unicorn comprehensively as “a powerful symbol of good in early pagan mythology

. . . still associated with fairytales” (Kennedy, 2009, para. 3). As part of our analysis, we searched for and collected several medieval and medieval-inspired images of unicorns,

including the *Unicorn Tapestries* in a Pinterest board (Figure 2). We observed throughout this imagery that unicorns in visual culture often evoke and honor the past through antique gold jewelry and medieval scenery. On the other hand, unicorns can also represent an otherworldly, often futuristic quality in the shimmering rainbows noted by Perea (2015) as a 1980s rainbowed unicorn aesthetic of girlhood vis a vis Lisa Frank's colorful Trapper Keeper designs. Indeed, unicorns are interpreted variously throughout fairy tales, children's television, fantasy/science fiction films, and illustrations viewed/consumed by adolescents and adults.

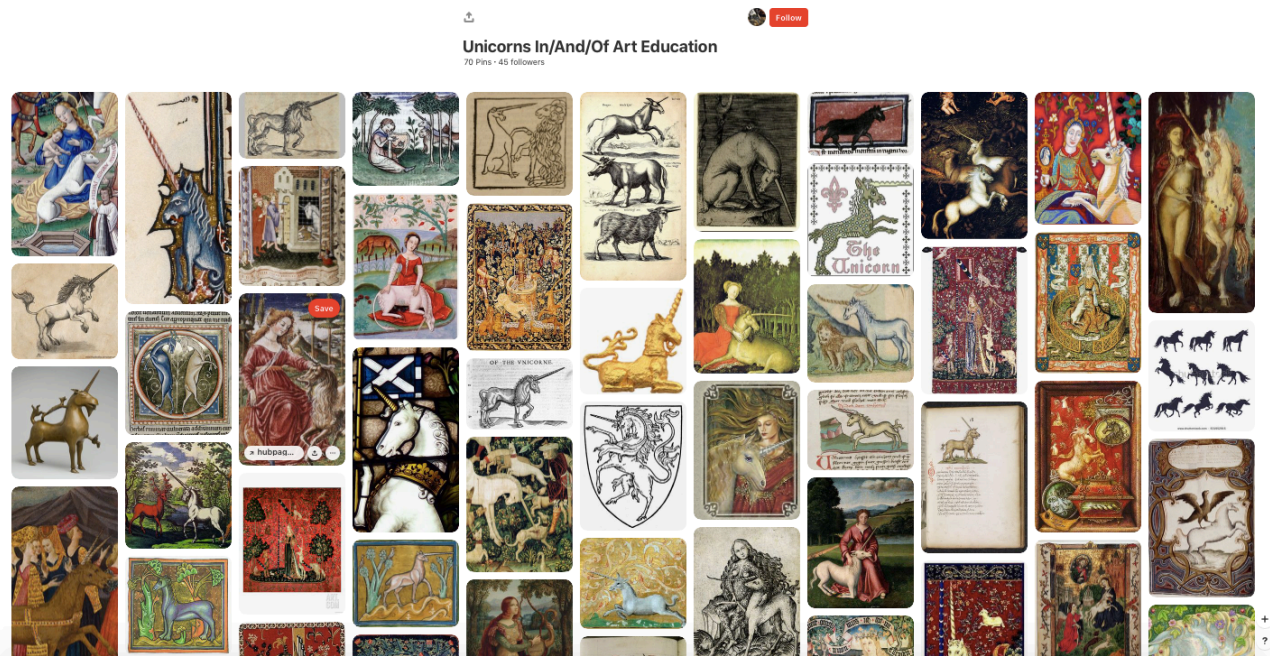


Figure 2. Screenshot of Pinterest board compiled by the authors.

Rather than relegate unicorns purely to youth cultures or fantasy genres, an unofficial unicorn history asserts that these creatures have fascinated several noted historical figures: from Aristotle, to Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, and Julius Caesar (Ang, 2014). This resource makes for an interesting research guide for students investigating the origin of unicorns, with a sampling of related imagery from art history alongside popular culture. Additionally, the symbolism of unicorns is present in media that appeals to readers and filmgoers across all ages. For example, unicorns appear in the *Harry Potter* films and books, which appeal to fans at every stage of life as evidenced by fan letters from children and as well as the elderly (Zalon, 2011). In *Harry Potter*, a plot device relies on the mythology that blood from a unicorn grants eternal life, but results in damned existence because the blood of a magical creature was shed (Stojilkov, 2015).

Unicorns also enjoy a form of immortality across the years of lesson plans, including serious art historical explorations of the *Unicorn Tapestries* in the instructional resource for art educators by Cole, Lambert, Presley, York, and Cappetta's (1989). I have similarly observed recreations of unicorns from heraldry and coins in elementary school art rooms, which reveal the influence of historic unicorn symbols from Scotland (Knox-Shaw, 1997).

Inspired by more contemporary artists, there are also brilliantly colored unicorn fantasy art lessons inspired by designer Lisa Frank, or similar artists like Peter Max (e.g. Hinton, 2012). Further, art education researcher Baxter (2019) celebrates “the rainbows and unicorns” (para. 5) of lesson planning itself, when educators focus on deep creativity over the standardization and tedium that curriculum creation can entail.

Unicorns appear prominently in art education histories as well, as the subject of a model inquiry for the theorizing of children’s sense of aesthetics. Freeman (1996) describes a “unicorn problem” (p. 201) through arts research with eleven and seven-year-old children. Children were asked how someone can know a picture of a unicorn is beautiful if one has never seen an actual unicorn. Many of the students could not articulate how to prove the beauty of the unicorn in absence of other reference points. Only one student noted the way in which the picture was created as a factor in its aesthetic merit.

This brings us to questions of the value of systematizing art teacher experiences around students’ work on fantasy topics like unicorns. The use of mythic imagery in curricula also connects the developing imagination with evolving aesthetic aims of teaching. In addition, for older learners, Galbraith and Grauer (2004) noted in their research of visual art education programs at the undergraduate and graduate level that few college curricula include substantial aesthetic inquiry. However, aesthetic inquiry applied to interest in mythic and playful characters like unicorns connects the enduring interest in fairy tales and mythology with an evolving sense of beauty and symbolism in art and literature.

Unicorn subject matter is quite pervasive among younger artists’ works, and often reflects their experiences of complex aesthetic references from fairy tales, films, and works of art (e.g. Figure 3). Steele (2014) describes and provides photographs of elementary school children’s common preoccupation with unicorns, inspired by unicorn tales. So too, unicorns appear in both the creative writing and verbal storytelling of elementary school students (Fleming, 1995). Unicorn drawings have recently been noted as common subjects in 3-4 year-old children in Turkey as well (Gündoğan, 2019).



*Figure 3.* Image of a unicorn painting by the author's daughter



Ripstein (2018), a Reggio Emilia-inspired teacher, documents preschool student artwork and stories that included a rich exploration of unicorn imagery and fantasy tales. This example is particularly interesting in an intergenerational sense because adult educators and parents serve as co-creators alongside students by documenting the processes of young people. Art educators can extend this enduring interest through creative play in the classroom, inspired by both unicorns and educational philosophers like the aforementioned Reggio Emilia founder, Malaguzzi, or additional theorists addressed with greater depth in the following two sections: Frederick Froebel and Rudolf Steiner.

### **Folding and Framing Froebelian Unicorns in Art Education**

Froebel was an educational theorist who is often credited with the invention of kindergarten. Speaking of matters relating to art education, Froebel and his followers encouraged a rich understanding of form for young people, through play, and careful observation, and often included intricate hands-on paper folding exercises. His beautiful teaching objects and creative exercises, explored by young learners alongside their adult caregivers as co-participants, are documented and preserved in many archives. These projects include wet-folding techniques in origami, as well as other projects centering on fantasy creatures like witches and unicorns.

Although Froebel's frameworks are not acknowledged in contemporary art classrooms; the ways in which his writing spoke directly to mothers and educators offers both a great deal. His hands-on practices of 'learning playfully' with objects from nature and the imagination notably included both horses and unicorns. His follower Susan E. Blow, referred to as the mother of kindergarten, observed:

a toy is only a symbol, whereas it is the spiritual reality which the symbol suggests that allures the imagination . . . What the boy craves of his horse is that it shall waken a presentiment of his own power over nature . . . hence the child turns from objects which by remotely suggesting an ideal heighten the activity of fantasy (Blow, 1899, p. 85).

This quote suggests the power of the unicorn as a symbol of imagination. Elsewhere, Cohen and Uhry (2011) addressed Froebel-inspired block play research groups, and noted children focused on block play to build a unicorn.

Integrating Froebelian principles in contemporary parenting, [familylives.org](http://familylives.org), also outlines how his theories might be applied today more conceptually, with unicorns. This resource also emphasizes adults playing alongside children: "become a fellow unicorn with them trotting around . . . it will contribute to building that dad bond" (para 5). From our perspectives, this quote underscores the depth of young people's affinity for unicorns as objects and symbols of childhood. Given that Froebel wrote with mothers in mind, this contemporary shift acknowledging fatherhood and play also makes for a touching update acknowledging the whole family in art education and art creation around the unicorn theme.

### **Rudolf Steiner, Waldorf Education, and Unicorns**

Like Froebel, Rudolf Steiner was an educational theorist and founder of Waldorf education

with a deep interest in the arts as well as education, who also emphasized unicorns in his philosophies. His focus on fairy tales and mythology is echoed in contemporary Waldorf classroom materials, such as the folk tale collection aptly entitled, *The Coming of the Unicorn* (Williamson, 2012). The imagery-rich tales that are often read aloud by adults inspire the intricate traditions of watercolor painting and handcrafts common in Waldorf schools. Chalk drawings, watercolor paintings, and fiber projects are regularly created by adult arts, crafts, and classroom teachers alongside their PreK-12 students in Waldorf settings. Although Waldorf Education is often associated with private schools, components of its art-rich content are adaptable to other arts education settings. This adaptation is particularly observable in homeschool Facebook groups that connect practices of the family with holistic arts learning.

Waldorf articles and books today specifically approach the unicorn in a useful discursive way that parallels elements of the creative process of artists and young children, exploring for example, mythology alongside zoology in terms of the unicorn as a rich subject. Hundreds of current etsy.com links and related craft sites echo the ongoing connection between Waldorf projects in fiber, Waldorf-inspired wooden toys or puppets used in teaching and seasonal tables or classroom tableaus, and other handcraft projects common to Waldorf education honoring the unicorn in the family home or homey classroom as a fairy tale companion to the very real aspects of the seasons in the natural world.

Lowenfeld and Brittain (1987) added the developmental dimension to this discussion of fairy tale unicorns, in that the horse, which appears prominently in so many female children's drawings, can express escape and movement within the creative growth of young girls, as, "a symbol of running, dashing freedom that is part of the joy of growing up" (p. 310). The horse is also widely significant in the feminist aesthetics of adult artists, with many female artists, such as Leonora Carrington (1917-2011), employing the horse symbol as an alter ego, signifying freedom and independence in both her self-portraiture and her surreal landscapes. As a fantastical form of the horse, unicorns stand for wildness and freedom, but also for powerful magic and mysticism within art from women of all ages.

Considering unicorns as extensions of horses in children's artwork illuminates their importance as enduring, enchanted symbols of wildness. Correspondingly, several young people in our workshop included drawings of mythic unicorns alongside real animals such as birds, showing a blurring of real and imagined creatures (e.g. Skophammer, 2008; Stonyk, 1998). Such blending of animal and myth demonstrates children's artistic focus not only on observable reality but also on feelings and stories through creative play. The similar array of real creatures alongside mythic beasts in the Unicorn Tapestries and other works reveals an iconographic link between art history and children's work as well.

Drawing influence from Waldorf art education and Froebelian art education in many media, art teachers can look to unicorns to inspire zoological drawing, painting, block play, origami traditions, craft work, and intricate classroom tableaus. Further, the endangered and imperiled situation of unicorns in mythology can serve as a metaphor for art educators' stewardship of our earth and other endangered creatures through investigation and participation in earthworks and eco-art, particularly for adolescent and adult learners. It is the rareness of unicorns that can serve as a metaphor for such ecological interests that may also be seen as niche, expressed through art education.

### Unicorn Media Performed, Reconsidered, and Remixed

Expanding upon art media focused on unicorns, the My Little Pony media franchises (1986, 2017) inspire a great deal of creativity among young and mature fans, often across generations and genders. They create unicorn costumes/makeup and “cos-play.” These creative activities can relate to interesting questions about the quality of art curriculum in the classroom specific to areas of fashion and design. The art of such remix culture is intergenerational because of the very length of the series’ popularity and its additional incarnations, engaging with “the aesthetics, appreciation, form, and composition dimensions of remix practices . . . centrally concerned with questions about what makes a remix good or of high quality” (Knobel & Lankshear, 2008, p. 26). Notably, the My Little Pony franchise also complexly relates to inclusive gender expression within its sizable fan base of “bronies,” or adolescent and adult males who relish the magical ponies.

On a related note, young people donning unicorn masks in unexpected public spaces have inspired a common internet meme, and even inspired the coining of a recent term, “unicorning” (Moye, 2013). Naidoo (2018) similarly observed the global network of Drag Queen Story Hour is included as a public service in New York public libraries and similar settings, and online during the pandemic. A drag queen performer reads children’s books and shares songs as a creative performance exploring gender creativity. Naidoo also notes that drag queen performer Flo Leeta favored a unicorn costume that appealed to young children and was frequently captured in other news coverage. Meanwhile, elderly relatives have recently made news by donning unicorn costumes to practice social distancing, and also to safely embrace younger relatives (Storyful, 2020).

If approached as creative social acts, all these events and social media posts can be seen as part of intergenerational traditions of performance art, improv, and/or flashmobs. In addition, such actions express solidarity and advocacy for representation of inclusion and diversity. In this way, art teachers might compare unicorn-related performance art with guerrilla art forms pioneered by the Guerrilla Girls, an intergenerational, anonymous group founded in 1985 who advocate for broadening the scope of art history and gallery representation to include women and people of color (Weida, 2013), or Keri Smith (2012), who makes a case for guerrilla art acts in everyday life. Some artists have even taken up the term of “unicorn artist” to underscore their rareness through Facebook groups on this topic. Meanwhile, Unicorn Riot is a volunteer media collective of artists that produces grassroots journalism particularly highlighting the Black Lives Matter movement and news relating to Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) issues (Patterson, 2020). These remixes of the unicorn in public libraries, family reunions, guerilla art, and community journalism playfully and provocatively reframe shared art and action.

### Universal Unicorns and Universes of Art Education

The spirit of the unicorn has metaphors across our communities and lifespans as art educators. Unicorns, with their enduring appeal, are also iconic warriors often pitted against lions, as is observable in the *Unicorn Tapestries*. This predicament can be somewhat familiar to those of us battling for a place for the arts in teacher education over the years, among an ever-crowded landscape of alternative approaches to the K-12 art room, such as programs composed solely of part-time teaching artists, or well-meaning interdisciplinary initiatives that

persist in the absence of both art teachers and teaching artists. In our experiences as parents, professors, and teaching artists, we have often found unicorns to evoke both the timely and timeless elements of hope for art education advocacy as well as the problems and potential within its enduring contradictions and struggles.

Along these lines, there are some modern cult works of film and literature about unicorns that remain relevant and timeless as they possess unique appeal across the lifespan, and represent characters at different stages of life. For example, the 1982 animated film *The Last Unicorn* based upon Beagle's 1968 novel, centers on characters from young adulthood to advanced age. Subject of many remixed memes and blogs, the movie features a middle-aged female character who arguably serves as its heroine. Molly Grue, a middle-aged scullery woman, is infuriated when she meets the last unicorn. She feels bitterly cheated that she did not encounter this magical creature during her youth. The unicorn initially serves as a metaphor for a rude reckoning with her unrealized dreams, but Molly's character gradually develops as a wise woman, and strong counselor to others. Her own enduring unicorn nature, distinct from her lost youth, is realized. In parallel fashion, we might consider other works of art that similarly shift our attention from the unicorn itself to related meanings. Specifically, sculptor Jeanine Oleson's 2009 *Retribution*, is a circular gilded fence recreated from the *Unicorn Tapestries*, which rather than housing the elusive unicorn, serves as a sort of monument to the power of women to tame the unicorn and sustain its magic.

As Babić and Vekić (2018) provocatively proclaim, “the unicorn inherits the meaning of something incomprehensible, unattainable, something that does not exist in the real world, unreal and fantastical” (p. 163). Even if we cannot attain our most fanciful goals, cultivating enduring understanding of aesthetics, art history, and remix is an excellent means to define the legacy and longevity of our work. In addition, Cole et al. (1989) noted that in bestiary allegory, the unicorn is poised as a creature both fierce and noble, with the power of purifying and curing many afflictions. During a time in which some may seek healing balm for our troubled educational landscape in the midst of COVID-19, unicorns symbolize health and healing along with their enduring beauty, creativity, and magical qualities.

Finally, unicorns represent growth in that they are usefully changeable and yet enduringly powerful visual symbols for lifelong study. The chimera in the *Workshop Bestiary* in the Morgan Library is a hybrid animal with a weasel's head, lean blue greyhound's body, cloven hooves of a deer and a horn. The *Aberdeen Bestiary* in the Aberdeen Library, also from the medieval period, illustrates a horned miniature horse. Both represent the unicorn with the central recognizable aspect of its horn. Beyond more simplistic phallic references, this horn serves symbolically as a sort of magic wand for artists and art educators, symbolizing our reassuring ability to wield the richness of creative play, art historical inquiry, visual culture, and remix in our shifting practice as teachers and artists.

There is an enduring sense of nostalgia and of legacies in passing down the mysteries associated with the unicorn through art and education. In a study of parent writing workshops intended to support youth writing, DeFauw (2017) includes a letter from one mother to her daughter about the drawing of unicorns that earnestly captured an adult appreciation of a youthful artistic spirit:

Dear Daughter . . .

You know when you consintrate [sic] on a task, like drawing those spiders and snowmen, I'm thinking about when I drew my unicorns and sunsets. You should take the time to look at the world around you. If there are too many lights on at night, you might not see the stars and moon (p.33).

As we strive to become unicorn teachers and even unicorn artists, may we continue to stop and take the time to perceive unicorns in the artistic development of young people and embrace them within our shared learning landscapes. The unicorn represents valuable dualities that parallel the diverse scope and community of the field of art education itself: from innocence and wisdom, to reverence and irreverence, and high art and popular culture. The question that remains is this: where will the symbol of the unicorn as a lifelong companion lead you?

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# Art Education for Older Adults: Rationale, Issues, and Strategies

*“art educators can  
benefit from  
engaging with  
older adults”*

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The authors assert that not only can older adults benefit from engaging in art education, but that art education can benefit from engaging with older adults. A rationale, and issues and strategies of facilitating art education for older adults is described through several vignettes.*

## **KEYWORDS**

*Older adults  
Intergenerational learning  
Andragogy*

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For most art educators who work with older adults, there is likely a personal story of the circumstances that awakened our interest in this population. Whether caring for an aging parent, researching self-taught artists, engaging our students with older artists, or growing older ourselves, somehow, we found ourselves drawn to a segment of the population many in our field have never worked with, thought about, nor considered as an audience for our professional efforts. Those who have long endeavored to bring attention to art education outside of K-16 settings, into the community, and into the lives of older adults, specifically, have often felt tangential to the field. In this article we add our voices to those who assert that not only can older adults benefit from engaging in art education, but that art educators can benefit from engaging with older adults.

Scholars such as Cohen (2005), Csikszentmihalyi (1996) and Hoffman, et al. (1992), have suggested that there are psychological, physical, and social benefits for older adults who engage in creative pursuits. For many adults it is during the second half of life that creativity is reawakened, when “age can enhance our intuitive powers for self-expression” (Cohen, 2000, p. 70) unleashing the creative potential that is built on life experience. Scholars, art critics, and historians have written about artists who continue producing and sharing exemplary works of art well into old age (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Feldman, 1992; Lindauer, 2003). Others have noted that for many older adults, artmaking helps them maintain social connections, fill empty hours with a pleasurable pastime, or produce objects that may be sold to supplement reduced incomes after retirement (Goulding et al, 2018; LaPorte, 2004; Philip, 2019).

Older adults may want to engage in participatory artmaking for a variety of reasons, but often lack opportunities to do so. Yet, recent research has confirmed that measurable health benefits such as fewer falls, fewer doctor visits, increased morale, and enhanced self-esteem accrue to older adults engaged in participatory arts (Cohen, 2005; Kent & Li, 2013; Rosier, 2010). Cohen (2006) states,

In that they also show stabilization and actual increase in community-based activities in general among those in the cultural programs, they (participatory arts programs) reveal a positive impact on maintaining independence and on reducing dependency. This latter point demonstrates that these community-based cultural programs for older adults appear to be reducing risk factors that drive the need for long-term care. (p. 1)

Encouraged by these and other findings, the *Creative Aging* movement has emerged to promote policies, programs, and best practices for engaging older adults with the arts. A growing number of philanthropies, such as the Aroha Foundation, the Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation, the Eisner Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) offer funding for creative aging programs and research.

In *Toward a New Policy Frame for Lifelong Learning and Creativity*, former National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Chairman Bill Ivey (2012) supported what he termed *the expressive life* as we age, equating it with having voice and noting that it encourages civic participation. He suggested that “the basics of access should be a public good, not a private good . . . this is something that government should be doing for all citizens” (p. 21). He notes that professionals involved in decisions about the well-being of older adults tend to disregard the role of creative expression in maintaining a healthy lifestyle:

How important is it to talk about purposeful high quality of life for older citizens without always defaulting to how healthy they are, how much food they have, what kind of housing they have, and so forth? I personally believe that once you get past absolute material scarcity, expressive life can be critical to a high quality of life. (Ivey, 2012, p. 18)

Unfortunately, despite the known benefits, many older adults lack access to quality arts programming. Nearly 37 percent of older adults reported that it was difficult to participate in the arts, primarily due to transportation issues or social isolation (Rajan & Rajan, 2017). This demonstrates the “importance of promoting accessible ways of experiencing the arts for older adults” (Rajan & Rajan, 2017, p. 16). If lifelong learning in art is a worthwhile and acknowledged mission of art education as a field, then perhaps we should ask how we might help improve access to the arts for this segment of the population. How might art education contribute to more equitable distribution of quality arts programming to older adults who lack access?

Those of us involved in teacher preparation expect our students to understand the learning styles, stages, and needs of school-aged learners. State certification assessment instruments demand this expertise, but none evaluate an art educator's potential ability to work with older members of the community. Expanding the content of our coursework to include andragogical concepts and strategies as well as providing intergenerational field experiences in senior centers or residential facilities might help prepare future art teachers to be leaders in bringing creative aging to their communities either by initiating programming, serving as a resource, or being an advocate.

As teachers, we know that before we attempt to present any lesson, we must try to understand our learners. We might assume that older adults possess basic manipulative skills and cognitive proficiency; we should know how to accommodate the needs of those who face physical or mental challenges as they age, just as we would for younger learners. One basic difference in sharing art with older adults may be the circumstances of their involvement outside a formal school system with regimented curricula. This begs the question: What motivates older adults to engage in making art?

### Why Older Adults Engaged in Artmaking

In a series of descriptive case studies conducted over a period of two decades,<sup>1</sup> older adults living in rural and small-town Midwestern or East Coast communities were interviewed about their artmaking activities. In nearly every case, the subject of study had taken up artmaking after retiring from work in a non-art related field such as farming, factory labor, the service industry, or in one of many skilled professions. The reasons for their involvement in artmaking could be grouped in general categories.

#### Leisure

Freed from the responsibilities of providing for a family, older adults have time to explore creative interests (see Figure 1). Thus, artmaking could be understood as a pleasurable *leisure activity*. He or she might return to an artmaking activity that had been enjoyed or experienced earlier in life, as was the case for Annie Pittman.<sup>2</sup> As a teenager she had enjoyed drawing and painting. Working alongside her husband as a farmer and raising six children had diverted her attention away from artmaking. Once retired, her desire to draw and paint reawakened. She joined the county art association, attended paint sessions twice a month, and received monthly lessons taught by respected local artists (see Lawrence County Art Association).



Figure 1. Watercolor of Egret, by Roger Papadakos.

<sup>1</sup> The referenced findings are from a longitudinal descriptive study, comprised of over 70 case studies conducted between 1998 and 2019 of elderly artists living in rural, small-town, and suburban communities of the Midwest, East Coast, and Southern United States. The studies, conducted by Marjorie Manifold, were inspired in 1997 by a Getty Education Institute for the Arts grant to study folk artists working in the rural Midwest. The second and third phases of the study, between 2000 and 2009, were conducted in areas of the East Coast and South. The most recent (2019-2020) study collected interviews from older artists working in suburbs and small towns of the Midwestern United States. The subjects, who ranged in age from 66 to 90, were interviewed and their artworks photographed as data of the studies. All inquiries were conducted with IRB approval of Research 1 universities, Indiana University or Virginia Commonwealth University.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, actual names were used with written permission of the artists.  
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Tom Mitchum worried that once retired he would be unable to “sit still” (personal communication, March 7, 2019). During a camping trip to Florida, he met other retirees who were carving canes as a leisure activity. “I sort of took that up,” he said. “It keeps me busy and gives me a lot of pleasure. Then, of course, a lot of folks my age could use a cane!”

### Social Engagement

For Annie and Tom, artmaking also provided opportunities for *social engagement* at a time of life when their grown children had moved from home and many of their friends were being lost to illness or death. Annie’s membership in the art league increased her circle of friends and acquaintances. By creating something others of his age group might find useful, Tom attracted people with whom he could socially interact.



Figure 2. Creating art together provides an opportunity for socialization.

Older adults both gain and give benefit to their communities when they exchange knowledge with younger members of the community. Lacy Randolph,<sup>3</sup> the new art teacher to students of a rural community, volunteered to teach drawing classes for adults at the local library. Only 12 people signed up for the event. Yet, more than twice that many showed up for classes. Each adult brought along a friend or younger relative as driver or companion. Given a choice of the subjects they might draw or paint, participants of the class elected to represent landscapes with quaint buildings that reminded them of their childhood homes or rivers that wound amid tree lined banks, metaphorically referencing distant memories. As they worked together, members of mixed age group chatted amiably, sharing stories of their own experiences, local histories, and family traditions with one another (see Figure 2).

### Staying Productive

Needing or desiring to supplement one’s income or continue being a productive

<sup>3</sup> Pseudonym.

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member of society is another reason why an older adult might seek to create art. When retirement resulted in decreased financial resources, homemaker and seamstress Dorothy Allee turned to making dolls and teddy bears based on classic children's stories and offered them for sale in her local community center (see Figure 3). Even when economics are not a factor, the older adult might choose to seriously apply their career skills and knowledge to a new endeavor (see Figure 4). Arthur Cohee's career as a meteorologist provided a



*Figure 3. Dorothy Allee with some of the bears and dolls she created to be sold in her small-town community center.*



*Figure 4. James W. Butcher's dollhouses and desks (Kane, 2008).*

foundation of knowledge and skills useful to becoming a creator of fine jewelry (see Figure 5). Mastering jewelry-making required intense study of techniques, elements of design, and knowledge of working in fine gems and metals that challenged him intellectually while affirmed his sense of efficacy as a productive member of society.



Figure 5. Arthur L. Cohee's former career in metrology prepared a foundation for learning how to design and create fine jewelry.

### Creative Fulfillment

To those for whom earning a living had been ponderous or joyless, aging might free them to experience *creative fulfillment*. For 45 years, Jim Fox made good wages working in a factory, but it “was time wasted,” he declared. “That was time I spent doing something that I didn’t want to do. Now making the dulcimer, I get satisfaction out of that” (personal communication, May 20, 2007). In teaching himself to build beautiful instruments, he was following a previously unrequited need for meaningful self-expression.

### Therapeutic Effect

Of more than 70 elderly subjects interviewed as data for these descriptive case studies, nearly all described some element of *therapeutic effect* as a result of or as the purpose of their artmaking. Frequently, the art or craft created and the obvious purpose for which it was made masked deeper metaphoric connections to a source of suffering or grief. Hazel Goodpaster sat by her husband’s bed during the long illness that accompanied a surgical amputation of his leg. To pass the time she took up crocheting, a skill taught to her by a teenaged granddaughter. The repetitive motion of the crochet hook had a therapeutic effect, calming her anxieties over her husband’s health. Consequently, she made 30 to 40 pairs of slipper socks as gifts for the nurses and doctors who helped care for her husband.

### Sharing “Histories and Interpretation”

Many rural and small town communities, like those that are home to subjects of

these case studies, have been ravaged by the flight of young adults to urban centers where they find more economically sustainable futures (Carr & Kefalas, 2009). Older generation are left to fend for themselves emotionally, physically, and economically. Community supported art and craft making *guilds* or associations provide opportunities for older adults to learn skills of making from one another and from locally identified experts and teachers. They also provide a space where memories can be shared and celebrated. Memory work has been found to be beneficial to the well-being of older adults. Creating images and objects that stir memories helps establish a positive self-identity, sense-of-continuity with past and present, and self-reflection about that which is meaningful in life (Chapman, 2006). Certainly, many of the voluntarily made drawings and paintings created by the subjects of these studies referenced remembered places or events that were important to the artist and their family and community. Sharing these artifacts with younger members of the community builds continuity between the past and future and supports sense-of-belonging within a common human experience. When asked the meaning of his craft work, for example, Robert Hembree, stated, “If I could give to the young people of this community, I’d like to give histories and interpretations, so life wouldn’t be so hard for them. They’d know what had value, and honor that” (personal communication, July 10, 1998).

### **Teaching to and Learning from Older Artists**

Like any other student of art, older adults learn by observing, asking, and seeking out others who have expertise. They find books or websites with step-by-step instructions and practice, building their skills through trial and error. Also, much like any other student of art, they benefit from access to tools and materials, expert guidance, demonstrations and explanations, and the time and space to practice what they learn. But unlike younger artists, the lifetime experiences and knowledge acquired by older adults privilege them as natural collaborators, teachers, and mentors to those who instruct them. As older students, they may seek information about unfamiliar processes or how to use contemporary materials, tools, and technologies. In turn, they gift their teachers with important knowledge that might otherwise be forgotten. During the recent pandemic, for example, when schools closed to face-to-face teaching and learning, and teachers were forced to teach students online, many teachers were frustrated to find students lacked access to commercially made art supplies, such as paints and drawing papers or clays. Elders who had experienced periods of lack and hardships early in life, were quick to suggest alternative ways of mixing paints from everyday foodstuffs, using paper bags or cardboards for paint surfaces, and making air dry clays from kitchen ingredients. Interactively exchanging older and newer information contributed to an enriched knowledge base for both learner and teacher across generations.

What we already know about teaching young learners can be applied to a group of learners of more advanced age. What we do not know about teaching this population, such as the developmental stages they may be experiencing, diminished cognitive and physical abilities, or best age-appropriate practices for engaging older adults in art activities, can be learned. The challenge is to include this content in our preparation as art educators. As

Lawton and LaPorte (2013) asserted, “Given the growing demographic of adults over the age of 65 (US Census Bureau, 2011) the art education profession needs to consider additional coursework and experience related to the special cognitive and physical needs of the aging population and how this benefits art education” (p. 312).

### **Preparing Our Students to Work with Older Adults**

While some art education programs offer a community-based track or field experiences in informal settings alongside preparation for K-12 certification, many do not. Change is constant and we are frequently tasked with finding space in our curricula for new topics, approaches, or mandates. Finding ways to incorporate art education for older adults into limited class time may be challenging but could be integrated as an intergenerational teaching approach within elementary or secondary methods classes, or developed as a special topics course for those interested in teaching intergenerational populations. If there is a gerontology program, art educators could partner with their gerontology colleagues or adult learner colleagues in education to create a course that would meet the needs of students in each program. Why do we teach art, if not to lay a foundation for lifelong involvement?

When discussing artistic and cognitive development, we can incorporate andragogical (Cohen, 2000 Erikson, 1959; Hoffman, 1992; Knowles, 1975; Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1991) as well as pedagogical theories of learner development. When preparing future teachers to individualize instruction for gifted and talented, English language learners (ELL), and students with disabilities, we can include resources designed to meet the cognitive and physical challenges (dementia, decreased manual dexterity and mobility) some older adult learners face. More importantly, we can include among our field experience assignments opportunities for our students to work with older adults. In our experience, often just a few visits are sufficient to help students overcome their trepidation, build empathy, and begin to appreciate, listen to, and respect these learners as unique individuals—all of which makes them better teachers for any population. Gonzales, Morrow-Howell, and Gilbert (2010) found that “students became more positive in their attitudes toward older adults and felt they had more in common with them ... socializing these groups through art can foster positive attitudes and enhance commonality with older adults. The arts provide a sense of community through sharing an activity, looking past stereotypes, using the mind, and engaging the senses” (National Education Association, 2011, p. 27).

### **Intergenerational Art Education**

When pre-service art teachers experience hands-on interaction with students of any age, we understand that they are not just practicing teaching, but rather, they are also learning from and with those they instruct. There are many ways to provide pre-service art educators with experience working with older adults. Organizing pre-practicum field visits to community arts organizations with programming for older adults, connecting with social events’ coordinators



at assisted-living facilities, and observing and assisting in museum-based art classes for older adults are just a few. In addition, finding ways to integrate older adults into art education experiences with young people creates a more realistic picture of how people engage with the arts in the real world outside of school. Working with elementary and secondary cooperating teachers to bring older adults into the classroom or have students work on collaborative projects with older adults are just a few possibilities.

Through age-integrated arts learning students express and share their personal voice, lived experiences, social, moral, and political concerns while transgressing barriers between school and community, middle age, old age, and youth. Thus, effecting positive, emancipatory social change that allows them to see and make connections between their classroom learning and life after school. (Lawton, Walker, & Green, 2019, p. 37).

The following examples of age-integrated artmaking projects are models for successful intergenerational art education.

### **Carving Out Freedom**

The *Carving Out Freedom* big woodcut project was a collaboration between community participants from Wards 7 and 8 in Washington, DC, aged 10 to 70, which included pre/in-service education students in art, math, and English education, and faculty and staff from the Corcoran College of Art + Design, the University of Maryland, and the ArtReach studio in the Town Hall Education, Arts, and Recreation Campus (THEARC), a community center in the Ward 7. Participants worked in mixed-age groups to create four large (4' x 8') woodcuts on the concept of freedom. Outside of the professors, art education students, and ArtReach staff, few of the participants had any experience with printmaking, and certainly not at this large scale. In addition to creating the woodcuts, participants wrote poems about freedom and produced a short film. There were opportunities for creative engagement that met everyone's interest. Even those not interested in carving woodcuts participated in printing them, including members of the neighborhood, who came out to watch and help on printing day in THEARC parking lot. Through creative collaboration, participants felt a sense of accomplishment and purpose and developed meaningful relationships with people they might not normally encounter. The resulting prints, poems, and film were exhibited in THEARC Gallery, at the Corcoran, and the University of Maryland (see Figure 6).



Figure 6. *Carving Out Freedom Project.*

### **Artstories Quilt**

The Artstories Quilt project, while small, paired eight art education students from Virginia Commonwealth University with two older adults in the Richmond community. The Health Hub, a newly opened wellness center in an underserved section of the city, invited us to create a quilt for display in the center promoting healthy living and provided classroom space. As a group, faculty, students, and community members developed the theme, *Body, Mind, Spirit* as inspiration for their individual quilt squares. The squares were sewn together into a quilt that now hangs in the center (see Figure 7).



Figure 7. Body, Mind, Spirit health and wellness quilt.

The students taught community members how to create fabric cyanotype prints and community members talked about their health concerns for their community, shared stories of life experience, and all shared sewing expertise. This experience was key for pre-service teachers to better understand the community they will one day teach in.

### Artcart

Artcart, an intergenerational arts legacy documentation program developed by Joan Jeffri, brings together aging professional artists with graduate students in the disciplines of art education, arts administration, fine arts, oral history, social work, public health, and occupational therapy. Its primary mission is to involve graduate students in an intergenerational experience that assists aging artists in the documentation of their artistic and cultural legacy, as well as studio organization and preservation of their life's work. The experience provides all participants with opportunities to further develop as skilled practitioners.

### Preservice Art Educator Workshops

Other projects have involved pre-service art educators in developing art-making workshops for older adults in facilities such as the United Way day programs, assisted living facilities, and retirement communities. In our experience, students have expressed appreciation for these opportunities and greater respect and empathy for the individuals with whom they became acquainted.

Intergenerational arts learning offers great promise for leveraging the strengths, skills, and experiences of older adults. Studies should be conducted to identify the unique potential benefits that result from programs engaging older and younger people together in arts learning as individuals, families, and community members. (National Endowment for the Arts, 2011, p.28).

### Considerations

As the older population in the United States increases and the percentage of school aged children declines, art educators need to consider:

- How can art educators contribute to expressive life for older adults?
- How can we involve our students in intergenerational learning opportunities?
- What resources are available to support development and delivery of course content related to:
  - Creative and social-emotional needs of older adults,
  - Age-appropriate teaching and learning strategies,
  - Funds of knowledge/cultural capital of older adults, and
  - Advocacy for participatory art programming for aging populations?

Older adults bring a lifetime of experiences and knowledge, personal purposes, and skills that might be applied to artmaking. Engaging with this population can help art educators learn to identify and plan for learners' individual needs, as well as gain insights into personal and community stories. Artmaking has the potential to enhance quality of life throughout the lifespan. Preparing preservice teachers to engage with older adults in their communities may help alleviate the lack of access to these benefits, particularly in underserved communities. If we truly see art as a lifelong activity, as professional art educators, we need to integrate this content into our teaching and research and find ways to ensure high quality art education experiences for learners across the lifespan.

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