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Building Bridges, Opening Doors: Arts in Multi-lingual Senior Housing

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ABSTRACT

The author was requested to provide classes in exercise, crafts and Asian Brush-painting to multi-ethnic residents of three low-income senior buildings in Los Angeles. Creative expression processes were included in the exploration of how the Arts can connect people who lack a common language and so address the serious issue of social isolation. It was important that participants enjoyed themselves and felt empowered through the new skill-acquisition while building bridges towards each other. The focus of each class was on creative process versus research goals. The assembled teams included bi-lingual teaching-artists to engage monolingual participants; we distributed lists of cultural values to inspire reflection and to guide individual themes. Information gained in earlier groups was incorporated into later groups. A total of 56 older adult residents attended one or more sessions, with 30 consistently participating weekly. Observations by team members, as well as photographs and videos, documented an increase in non-verbal communication between participants. On-site staff also reported increased interactions outside of the projects and first-time attendance at other classes grew. The arts possess potent properties for dissolving boundaries, revealing interconnectedness in non-verbal ways while also providing opportunities for mastery and expression. Initial connections, however, must be built upon in order to increase both individual relationships as well as a greater sense of community. While this project involved older adults, these methods can also be used with other, younger groups who need to co-exist yet lack a common language.

KEYWORDS

Isolation; social context; creative expression; arts; non-verbal communicating; low-income seniors; multi-cultural; language barriers

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INTRODUCTION

For the Cultural Legacy Project, a team was assembled by the author, who acted as lead-artist, and consisted of professional artists from different disciplines and graduate gerontology students needing hands-on experience to act as assistants. The Cultural Legacy Project explored how participating in the arts might build bridges between older adults who lack a common language. Believing that they are not artistic, residents of low-income senior housing requested exercise, crafts and Asian brush-painting classes to be provided by the Cultural Legacy Project. The team adapted arts processes to the residents' requests and used what we learned in earlier sessions to augment later ones using an action-reflection process.

The author's long experience in arts and aging and the benefits of participatory arts, was useful when the issue of social isolation was raised by on-site staff during planning. Consequently, we decided to explore how these arts processes could build bridges between participants, affect feelings of isolation, as well as providing enjoyable stimuli so important in senior programs.

BACKGROUND

Although it seems that residents of the same building would become socially involved, it is often not so. The numerous languages spoken in any one building in multicultural, metropolitan areas like Los Angeles, present a major challenge in communication and providing engagement programs in senior housing. Possessing the same qualifications for low-income housing, such as income and age, is rarely enough to offset culture and language differences, as well as differences in the two generations frequently living in the same building. The problems associated with social isolation are increasing in most industrialized countries. For example, in the UK, the Campaign to End Loneliness estimates that there are over a million older adults who are chronically lonely (https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org), while in the US, one in three adults over 45 are thought to be lonely (Anderson et al., 2018).

In Los Angeles, official communications in senior housing are in English, by law, and even with bilingual on-site staff, there are always individuals without peers from their language group. As a result, non-English speakers can feel increasingly left-out and isolated. In addition to limited social interactions, their increased dependence on family members for translation of English-language messages, mail and announcements, erodes individual sense of autonomy, and results in decreased self-confidence. People raised in cultures, where ageism is not as rife as in the US, are deeply affected by the current divisive and racist political climate and frightening actions against immigrants (Center for Public integrity, 2018). Thus older immigrants become even further isolated from people of other language groups. The lack of social interactions contributes to a larger and growing epidemic of social isolation in older adults linked to "a wide array of major health problems" (Lubben in AARP Foundation 2016, p. 136; Holt-Lunstad, 2017). The harmful impacts of these factors on health and wellbeing emphasize the importance of meeting their challenges and ameliorating their effects.

The benefits of involving older adults in arts programs with professional artists have been demonstrated to include decreased feelings of depression, loneliness and increased opportunities for mastery of new skills. These arts programs help create supportive environments for participants with increases in morale and social interactions (Cohen, 2005; Greer N., Fleuriet K. J., Cantu A. G., 2013). Research

also shows that involvement in arts processes provides an intercultural experience (Frame, 2012). We hypothesized that the groundwork for intercultural communication would be laid when participants learn together and share their cultural values. Our past experience as artists and arts-therapists (Kellen-Taylor 2015) encouraged us to use the arts to "expand communication beyond words" (McNiff, 1998, p. 122) and to communicate "the truth of experience" (McNiff, ibid). The term "arts" here includes visual, performing, music, literary, video and photographic arts. Each can provide, in their own way, "a setting in which every sense can be stimulated—sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell, and the kinetic sense of the entire musculature" (Erikson, Erikson, Kivnick, 1994, p. 317) and different ways of knowing (Heron, 1992), which can also be useful in relating to other people.

OBJECTIVES

1. To provide creative involvement in the arts, opportunities for mastery and new ways to express and communicate using art forms.

2. To explore how the arts can bridge language differences and help initiate connections through sharing creative arts experiences.

3. To model acknowledgement of and respect for different cultural origins and values.

4. To provide economical resources for easy continuation and replication of arts programs.

ASSUMPTIONS

Learning new art-forms and consequent increased feelings of mastery and greater self-efficacy would help to counteract introjected ageism. Ageism is the persistent prejudice and devaluing of aging, which over time comes to be believed, that is introjected, by old people themselves.

These feelings of mastery would add to a positive outlook and feelings of well-being (Cohen 2005) and thus encourage participants to take the risks involved in non-verbally connecting with others and, later, to enter new social groups.

Multi-cultural artist-teams who demonstrate respect and interest in stories from different cultures, can model both appreciation of cultural values and encouragement to express them.

Different ways of knowing, engendered by the arts, will facilitate connections between participants. These ways of knowing – experiential, practical and presentational (Heron, 1992) – will open pathways to information contained in propositional knowing, i.e. the languaged information and ideas commonly exchanged when speakers of the same language relate.

CONTEXT AND DESIGN

After meeting with the housing company president where we both described our plans and received approval, the team proceeded with the project. Shortly after, we began to meet regularly with on-site service coordinators who publicized the programs, collected photo releases from participants and shared useful information.

Our intention was to anonymize the data in our documentation: individual participants received random initials, and references to where they live as well as the name of the housing organization were omitted. The safety of the residents was a top priority. With the help of on-site staff members, we planned to use a pre- and post-survey for evaluation, as required by one of the funding sources. The programs were delivered to groups of residents living independently in low-income older adult housing in three different areas of Los Angeles. We initially asked about the particular classes requested by the residents. Typically, most of the potential participants did not see themselves as artists, consequently in order to include as many people as possible, we initiated the classes as requested and gradually introduced creative arts processes. A series of eight weekly sessions was offered at each site in turn and new series started at a different site few weeks afterwards. Each building had its own unique and different mix of cultures and languages, about which we were generally informed at planning meetings with the on-site staff.

However, we knew that we had to accommodate absences due to medical appointments and illness. Using an action-reflection model, as in Cooperative Inquiry (Heron, 1988), each team observed the methods (our actions), reflected on their effects on participants and applied the information to the next sessions. We also utilized what we had learned at one site in the planning and implementation at subsequent sites.

The group at Site 1 requested exercise: the warm-ups and exercise routines were to be transitioned into expressive movement and meditation; the second group wanted crafts and, while it was planned for participants to embellish functional objects, they would also express important values; the third group requested formal Asian brush painting and this would be segued into writing poetry.

We prepared translations (Russian, Korean and Spanish) of lists of values in English that were derived from several cultures (Appendix A). Because of the many cultures and languages present in the buildings, we chose to use values from the cultures that were most represented in the sessions. These were African-American, Latino, Korean and Russian (Troutman et al., 2011; Waites, 2012) as well as Eurocentric (Barret Values Model, n.d.). We timed the introduction of these lists to each group according to advice from on-site staff.

There were three teams of artists coordinated by the lead-artist/author, who has 30 years' experience of designing and implementing Creative and Expressive Arts programs with multicultural groups of older adults. The lead-artist acted as project designer, team recruiter, process observer and session facilitator, and also located funding sources, filed reports and acted as liaison with funding sources and the housing staff. Team members were selected because of their particular area of artistic skill and experience, and where possible, were bi-lingual in the languages appropriate to each participant-group.

Team 1. Initially consisted of: two creative movement and meditation artists who were African-American; the lead-artist, who is Anglo West-Indian, acted as observer and photo-documenter; a later important addition was a Russian bi-lingual collage-artist and meditation practitioner.

Team 2. Composed of the Russian bi-lingual collage artist as group session leader and the lead-artist. The latter, used her extensive experience in the arts with differently-abled older adults, to work directly with two group members with great physical and emotional challenges.

Team 3. Consisted of a Korean bi-lingual poet, lead-artist and two graduate gerontology students to assist. One was Chinese-speaking with brush-painting experience and the other East Indian with working experience in senior housing who photo-documented the process.

Each of the sessions took place in a large social–room, found in many senior buildings and furnished with small 4-seater tables. People usually gathered at tables with their own language speakers and tended to return to their original seats each session. The visual products were placed to dry on large tables to one side or were displayed on the walls (including photographs of the movement group). This encouraged people to leave their seats and potentially mix with others while providing new opportunities to interact around the displays.

METHODS AND PROCESSES

SITE 1: THE MOVEMENT SESSIONS

- Requested class: Exercise and stress reduction.
- Techniques used: Stretching, meditative and expressive movement, nonverbal communication techniques.
- Group composition: 6 – 8 mono-lingual Russian-speakers, 1 each bi-lingual Farsi, Tagalog and English-speaking individuals.
- Only 6 weeks of sessions were offered due to the building's calendar of activities.

In a preparatory meeting we were cautioned by the on-site staff, that the written survey and list of values would arouse fear, particularly for immigrants from Soviet Russia, and deter attendance. Consequently, we spent the first few sessions building relationships with participants, and introduced the list of values on a poster only at the final session when we were better known. The survey was not used.

At the beginning of the first session, participants sat behind tables and when invited to come into a circle, most did so reluctantly, with folded arms and suspicious facial expressions.

After general introductions from Russian-speaking on-site staff, we began with familiar exercise routines in the first sessions, and later introduced new expressive techniques, gradually including meditation for stress reduction. Techniques were taught experientially - through demonstration and mirroring. We added a Russian-speaking artist in the third session to conduct the meditation/guided imagery segment in 2 languages and this increased the engagement of the Russian speakers.

We started each session with the same warm-ups to provide a familiar foundation, and then transitioned into expressive movement exercises, for example, group laughing, foot stamping. To encourage experiential knowing, the teaching artists demonstrated non-verbal communication techniques such as "hand-talking" with selected members (Figure 1) then encouraged them to hand-talk with all the other participants. These led into expressing ideas such as "touching the sky" or "hiding in a safe childhood place". In time, with increased confidence and trust, all of the members communicated non-verbally with each other in the break and after the sessions continued to use hand-talking, gestures and so on. The lead-artist photographed the group sessions and displayed the photographs in the social room.

Figure 1: Hand-talking between artist and participant became usual communication between participants

GROUP 1: RESULTS

During the 6 weeks, the group became increasingly convivial and greeted each other by waving and smiling. The teaching artists made the movements fun and expressed their own delight combined with respect for the participants' abilities and reactions. Although the expressive movement was new to participants, as trust in the team grew they laughed, joined in and expressed enjoyment. We noted that the core group of Russians set the tenor of the group interactions for the others. Their increased trust and communication encouraged others to reflect on the process of connecting, and the team gained insights into cultural differences that could enhance or limit connection. For example, a Russian woman had been taught not to trust strangers who smiled. Americans, by contrast, are taught to smile upon being introduced to someone new (as the teachers had done). Another Russian-speaker expressed her fear that the directions in English were more informative than those in Russian and disadvantaged her. After reassurances from bi-lingual Russians, she eventually began to trust us, finally declaring us as "good people" who "must come back!" At the last session, participants chose their most important values from a list written on a chart in Russian and English (Appendix A). By this time, participants freely shared additional important values to be added to the list. When people from different language groups agreed on the same value, they noted the mutuality by looking at each other, nodding and smiling. This was in great contrast to the group of silent, defended individuals we first met. We also noted the consistent attendance and early arrival as positive feedback (as well as disappearing photographs from the display). Both staff and group members requested us to return and hold more sessions in Creative Movement.

SITE 2: COLLAGE, PAINT AND SINGING SESSIONS

• Requested class: Crafts

• Techniques used: paint and collage on functional objects (boxes and frames), singing added to include a depressed individual.

• Group composition: 6 bi-lingual Spanish speakers from 3 countries, 1 mono-lingual Russian-speaker, 2 English-speaking individuals with special needs, one

deaf-mute quadriplegic African-American man and one Jewish depressed (self-described) man. There were also several drop-in residents.

In our ongoing attempts to use pre- and post-surveys, we followed advice from staff to distribute gift-cards. On-site staff announced that at the first session gift-cards would be given in appreciation for completed pre- and post- surveys. These were in English because we were unable to get approval for translation in time. A number of native English-speakers and bi-lingual residents complained about the quantity and intrusiveness of questions and did not return. On-site staff was able to collect some post-surveys from some residents, several of whom had not participated in the arts sessions at all but who wanted the gift cards.

The dominant group participating in the sessions were Spanish bi-lingual and self-described as "not artistic", but were interested in crafts. To address their desire for crafts, we introduced functional objects (medium-sized boxes with lids and picture frames) to be decorated with painting and collages. We distributed lists of values as themes for selecting pictures for collage and suggested that each participant choose 2 or 3 values to express. We encouraged participants to play with color to enhance collages and explore the mediums with suggestions and examples from the collage-artist. The finished pieces were displayed after each session and the creators described the values they had expressed. This stimulated ongoing discussions of values.

The 8 sessions were conducted by the Russian bi-lingual collage-artist with most of the participants. The two men with special needs required more attention than would be feasible in a larger multi-lingual group and they worked with the lead-artist at a different table. One man was challenged by quadriplegia and deaf-mutism and the other confided that he was deeply depressed.

The depressed man, N. explained that he was "too old to cut and glue" but described how he personally used singing to regulate his depressive feelings. However, he was certain that others did not welcome his singing. To include him, the lead-artist scheduled time for him to sing for her to record and downloaded song lyrics he wanted.

The other man J. a deaf-mute quadriplegic who could only use 2 fingers on each hand, was determined to collage and paint his box. He painfully communicated in writing via a whiteboard supplied by the lead-artist. He chose pictures of his favorite basketball team to embody his values (Team, Discipline, Winning, Beauty) and to decorate his box.

Although they were seated at different tables, several of the Spanish speakers visited J. often, and smiled and gestured their appreciation of his work. He welcomed them by smiling and waving.

GROUP 2: RESULTS

The bi-lingual Spanish-speakers, all from different countries, were very sociable in the main group. They enjoyed encouraging each other and assisted the artists in setting a social and inclusive atmosphere. One member was mono-lingual Russian-speaking who depended on the Russian-speaking artist. She gradually accepted and seemed to enjoy the different, extraverted style of her fellow participants. All participants completed several collage projects to express their values, which provided sources of both practical and presentational knowing to their fellow group members. There was much discussion around the show of work as in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Shows the work displayed to promote discussion with fellow residents and garner compliments

Learning from Group 1, we translated the list of values into the relevant languages and distributed copies during the first session for participants to reflect upon and to inspire their art-making process. This time we had written name-signs for participants (although the names were not translated in Russian which put the Russian-speaker at some disadvantage).

We noted how, after the second class, participants began to circulate and admire the work of others. We reflected that this may be partly due to cultural backgrounds where strolling and exchanging news is a daily ritual (*el paseo*). The Spanish speakers hailed from three different countries and, because the dominant culture tends to lump them all into one category of "Latino" or "Hispanic", they were glad to express the differences as well as similarities in cultural values.

Notably the Russian-speaker stayed apart for the earlier classes. She gradually responded to the warm friendliness of the other participants, who communicated their appreciation of her images of places she had visited in the past and wanted to visit in the future. She shared through the Russian-speaking artist.

There was increasing interaction between members of the main group and J., the deaf-mute quadriplegic man, at first through gestures, encouraged by his smiling and cheerful disposition (experiential knowing). Later we used a white-board for them to further converse and connect.

J applied himself to cut and glue pictures of his favorite basketball team with great thoughtfulness and determination. He also began to make small paintings (in Figure 4) which he proudly displayed with broad smiles. His work is shown in Figures 3 and 4.

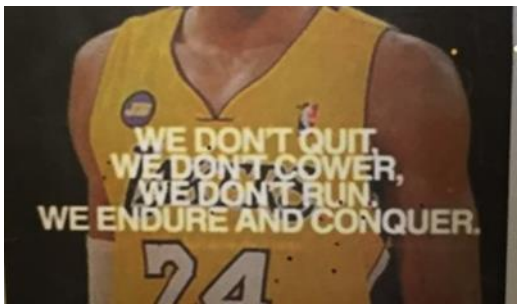

Figure 3: J's Lakers Box

Figure 4: J working on his collage

For inside the box (Figure 3), J. chose a powerful quote about never giving up, which seemed emblematic of both the man and his team (presentational knowing). When the lead artist pointed this out (on the white board), he wrote “Yes”.

Working with the N., the man who sang, the lead-artist downloaded from the Internet lyrics that he requested, and recorded him singing. Interestingly, when he could not remember the words, he made very creative substitutions. His process was reflected in the songs he chose over the weeks, starting with “Smile Though your Heart is Breaking” and later the more optimistic songs such as “Singing in the Rain”. When he realized that we enjoyed his singing, he began to express his sense of humor (singing “I’ve got a crutch on you” to someone on crutches.) The lead-artist told him that he inspired her to arrange for singing at another building. He seemed surprised and pleased at this validation of his process.

We noted increased interaction and conversation around the displayed art products. Typical of the social nature of this group, participants transformed the final session into a pot-luck with much camaraderie. There N. had his 90th birthday celebrated by all and was asked to sing. He chose the song “Cigarettes, and whiskey, and wild, wild women…” which seemed to function as a sort of life-review which he delivered with great gusto. He finally and poignantly sang his goodbye to the lead-artist “We’ll meet again, don’t know where, don’t know when….”

The participants requested a continuation of the sessions. However, when we could not assure them of our return, two of the participants decided to hold similar classes for their neighbors, the other participants and their families. We left boxes, collage and paint materials.

SITE 3: THE BRUSH PAINTING AND POETRY SESSIONS

- Requested class: Korean Brush painting.
- Techniques used: exercises in brush-painting, poetry writing.
- Core group composition: 6 mono- and bi-lingual Korean speakers from 2 countries, 1 mono-lingual Spanish-speaker, 1 tri-lingual Armenian, 4 English-speakers, 6 drop-in participants.

Although the requests for Brush Painting came from Korean residents, the sessions also drew a number of non-Korean speaking residents who also became core participants. The survey was distributed at the first and second sessions and again several people were deterred from participating. However, when the Korean-speaking staff and the Korean bi-lingual poet translated the questions for small groups of Korean speakers, each question was discussed and the group decided on the answers for each individual. The remaining English speakers completed the survey on their own. Lists of values in Spanish, Korean and English were distributed at the first session (Appendix A).

Brush-painting is typically learned by copying traditional landscapes and other natural elements using guides. The initial sessions were primarily tutorials during which everyone also learned to paint their names and their chosen values in Korean and their native language. The poet translated the names and values into English for the Korean participants and vice versa for the English speakers. Spanish speaking staff translated for the lone Colombian participant. The students and lead-artist assisted and encouraged.

Gradually the teaching artist-poet encouraged the participants to write poetry in their home language, and she shared her system of putting words and phrases together to express ideas and feelings.

Building on what we learned from previous experience, we videoed group interaction in order to study any changes in frequency and type of interaction between group members. The final session included a show of the visual work and a poetry-reading to the group and a few visitors.

Figure 5: Brush paintings

GROUP 3: RESULTS

We observed that participants habitually sat in their language groups. Late-comers of all language groups shared remaining tables. Early cross-cultural interactions came from helping each other (e.g. opening an ink bottle, a Korean woman encouraging a non-Korean's efforts) (experiential and practical knowing).

We placed the work to dry on large tables to one side of the room, which necessitated people leaving their places and mixing with each other. By the third session, participants walked around to observe others at work, often offering smiles and being acknowledged. Noticing this, we displayed the paintings and saw how this encouraged learning names, reflecting, and interacting particularly around shared values (presentational knowing). One of the African-American participants said that he had spent time between classes learning about Korean Art and culture.

We gradually presented Brush Painting as a door into poetry in each language represented. This transition from brush painting-words to writing verse was prompted by sharing the English translations of the poetical Korean names. That participants wrote about very personal experiences, such as loss, is an indication of the trust that had been built.

A newly-widowed Korean participant shared
"I feel lost without him.
I feel numb.
I didn't know what to do.
I am so thankful that I can come and concentrate on Art."

At the final session some of the more confident residents read their own poetry, (much of which had been composed between classes). The team and staff read translations of the poems so that Korean, English and Spanish speakers were all included.

When the team reflected on the videos we noted the ways people connected with each other. Because of cultural differences we did not interpret the interaction but only the fact that there was or was not interaction. We reviewed the videos for:

• Aesthetic interaction (that is relating to the art-work of another) leading to presentational knowing as in Figure 6;

• Physical communication (wink, touch, smell, salute, gesture, nodding etc.) and other forms of nonverbal communication: (facial expressions, gestures, and eye contact) leading to experiential knowing. Examples in Figure 7.

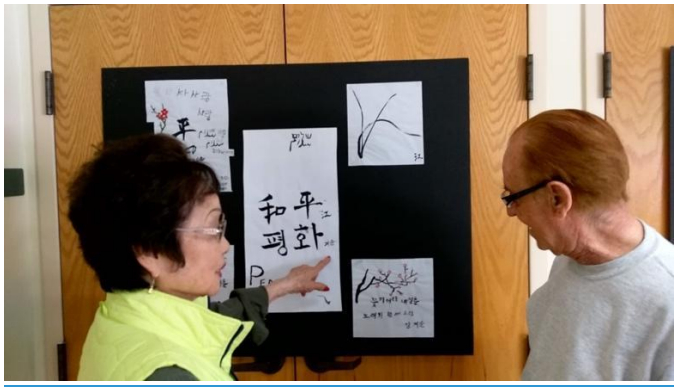

Figure 6: Two residents of different native languages begin to communicate about a painting.

Figure 7: Several residents gather to look at the work and non-verbally welcome each other.

REFLECTION

MOVEMENT AND GROUP 1

Participants' names were not shared. We learned later this was an important omission that could limit interactions outside the group. Videoing all of the classes would have enabled us to quantify the interactions and to review the details and subtleties in each session. Trust was a critical issue in this group more than the other groups and we actively allayed suspicions of some participants. Any initial suspicion of people with different racial features (the African-American teachers) seemed to change over time, perhaps due to the teachers' respectful mirroring of participants and their consistent skilled and pleasant non-verbal communications.

Working non-verbally in pairs e.g. mirroring, seemed to increase connections between participants. Research has shown that increased empathy is linked to imitation (Iacoboni, 2009; Newcomb, 1960; Ebbeson et al., 1976). The translation of the list of values on a flow chart was seen as equitable (in the light of earlier suspicion about the privileging of English speakers in the sessions, which is certainly true of society at large). However, we wondered if the timing of the introduction of the values could have been earlier, and would then act as sources for creative movement.

CRAFTS AND GROUP 2

Members of this group reported that they had learned more about each other and themselves as they considered how to express their values, and they felt more connected, even when they already knew each other. One woman commented how sharing her culture's values made her feel proud to be Salvadorean. Several said they were inspired by J's determination to complete his project despite his grave physical challenges. We also reflected that J's absorption in the images of young African-American athletes for his collage, might give him the opportunity to identify with them and thus temporarily escape the limitations of his life. They all liked learning to make "works of art that were also useful". We saw how N. finally connected with the group that he initially felt different from. He moved from one to one sessions with the lead artist to being welcomed into the group, encouraged to sing, and sharing his 90th birthday.

ASIAN BRUSH PAINTING AND GROUP 3

Video functioned as a measure of progress in how people connected with each other. We noted the steady increase in interactions between group members. Incorporating the names, in several languages, into their work was important and provided a step toward continued relating. On-site staff saw them greet each other by name in the elevators. Staff also reported changes observed in individual residents. Before the sessions a number of them were non-participants in any program. However, after the art sessions, they began to take part in more programs in the community and were "less complaining" (on-site staff interpretation of resident feedback).

WHAT WE LEARNED

We observed that the creative process in each group served to connect members in different ways by providing presentational and experiential information to increase their sense of "knowing about" the others.

The physical aspects of creative movement in Group 1, such as mirroring, led to potential, if temporary, connection through out-of-the-ordinary proximity. Pictorial expression of values in Group 2 and 3 provided graphic (presentational) information. Additional information of names in several languages (especially where written language incorporates characters that are very different from European-based languages) and values in Group 3 strengthened the connections starting to form between members.

The list of values drawn from intercultural research helped to create an atmosphere of inclusivity in the sessions. When people recognized their own cultural values and were encouraged to express them, they said they felt confident and respected. We tried to add to this by including relevant language speakers to our artist-teams. Sharing the values of each cultural group, discovery of shared values and respectful discussion of differences encouraged connections: "When people are open to sharing, getting individual reports can help create a deeper dialogue and build cohesion." (Barrett Values Centre, n.d.). Listening as participants shared their chosen values also taught the team of artists more about the various cultures represented. We noted that each of the groups took a different amount of time to build trust in the artists, the process and the other participants. This may well have been influenced by their cultures of origin. The team reflected on the contrast between Groups 1 and 2 and that readiness to interact may be due to different cultural practices involving community (e.g. evening social strolls in Latin countries).

Beyond the cultural context, we learned about the important influence of social context at all of the buildings. Social context seemed to be dictated by the culture with the most representatives. Social context while becoming a useful tool for discussion lies beyond this report.

Primary values of the dominant culture (i.e. focus on limiting disease; emphasis on personal autonomy; lack of familial responsibility for the care of older adults; prevalence of aging stereotypes) (Berger, R. (2017) can contribute to social isolation. For example, when an individual who is expected to be independent, feels embarrassed about health conditions, he or she will retreat from contact with others. The prevalence of aging stereotypes, ageism and lack of responsibility towards older family members compound the experience of isolation and lessen feelings of self-efficacy and self-confidence. Although it is beyond the limitations of this project, it is important to note that there is a difference between a "quantitative"

view of social isolation and the felt experience of the individual. There can be no prescription for adequate social interaction without taking cultural backgrounds into consideration. The contrast between an individual's previous and younger experience of social interaction and that of their older years can promote feelings of loneliness and isolation. It is important to also consider the cultural contexts of current social interactions. For example, a member of a cultural group accustomed to frequent interactions with neighbors and family may feel much more isolated in the same circumstances as an urban dweller of a northern culture, where "privacy from "nosy" neighbors might be more highly valued.

The affiliation of the lead-artist with a well-known local university, seemed to affirm the importance of each person's cultural identity, relevant at this time for immigrants. The team was careful to prevent participants feeling primarily as subjects of research. Our emphasis on the benefits of involvement to the participants had to be carefully maintained and raised the question of how to measure the effects in appropriate ways. We had reservations about the survey due to its design for gerontology programs rather than arts programs. The survey would provide information on the results of involvement but not how they occurred, which was key to understanding the exploration of the creative process. Our dilemma is consistent with many art-in-health programs, that is, how to justify the qualitative effects of arts programs quantitatively (White, M. 2008).

According to Sean McNiff (2008), arts-based research is "the systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all of the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies" (pp. 83-92). This is very different from using art products as data for scientific, verbal and quantitative analyses.

Using Reason and Heron's (2008) four ways of knowing (examples noted previously) as a framework, we assumed that a varied cultural mix and lack of a common language lessens the more common propositional knowing or "knowing about" that typically occurs during the information exchange of initial meetings (e.g. Who are you? What do you do? Where do you come from?). This kind of knowing is based on intellectual knowing – language-based ideas and theories.

We asked ourselves if the ways of knowing inherent in the arts – presentational, practical and experiential - could provide new ways for residents to interact with each other despite language differences and thus:

• lessen their experience of social isolation, (e.g. reluctance to enter a room with strangers; not knowing how to connect in the elevators).

• add to a sense of self-efficacy for individual members in the face of introjected ageism (i.e. contradicting the old saw "can't teach old dogs new tricks").

• assist in the safe expression of cultural values (at a time when certain cultural identities are publicly denigrated and their members deported).

Our experience over each series with these three very different groups of older adults leads us to believe that involvement in arts processes can be useful through different ways of knowing. Arts processes can "set the stage" for satisfying intercultural communication, not only between older adults in senior housing but also in other fields where connecting people from different linguistic background is important.

The growing field of arts-based research will provide useful methods for assessing longer-term effects as, over the last several decades, the field has developed into "a major methodological genre" of qualitative research. (Leavy, 2017; McNiff, 2014). Most of all, and commensurate with our emphasis on providing service to a marginalized group, arts-based research facilitates capturing data without the research interfering with the creative processes (McNiff, ibid).

This project described how the arts can open doors in the walls erected by different languages. However, the doors must be kept open by further arts projects that continue on to build bridges across the communication gulf. Further studies can generate information on how the arts expand communication beyond words to strengthen cross-cultural relationships and how sharing cultural values can reinforce interconnections.

AFTERNOTE

The author returned to Site 3 several months later to facilitate a storytelling project in pictures and words. She noted that a number of participants in the brush-painting project joined this new project and that they now greeted each other by name and interacted throughout the eight weeks of new project.

APPENDIX A

Please circle the three values that were most important in your family of origin
Kindness
Creativity
Respect
Collaboration
Responsibility
Truth telling
No to injustice
Family relationships
Loyalty
Learning
Integrity
Belonging/Caring
Helping/Contributing
Inner Harmony,
Peace of Mind
Personal Growth,
Self-Actualization
Achievement
Accomplishment
Financial Stability
Fun
Accountability
Excellence
Winning
Beauty,
Justice,
Fairness,
Interconnectedness,

Nature,
Health
Altruism
Respect for elders
Independence
Self-sufficiency
Activity/Service
Spirituality
Friendship
Pleasurable Activities/Fun
Positive outlook
Living in the Present
Belonging

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Maureen Kellen-Taylor designed and implemented innovative hospital-based outreach programs in San Francisco, in the 1980s, bringing creative projects to isolated home-bound individuals to lessen recidivism. These expanded into in-hospital arts programs. She was awarded California Arts Council funding for 5 years and recognized with a Directors Award in 2002. Later she designed and provided whole-person programs to 32 senior housing buildings for 15 years, including intergenerational arts programs for senior artist colonies in Los Angeles. Dr Kellen-

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