RETHINKING ART EDUCATION FOR OLDER ADULTS:
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE

A Dissertation in
Art Education
By
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ABSTRACT

Our older population is growing, and by the year 2030, one in every five Americans will be over the age of 65. Included in this growing number of older adults are those who are interested in learning about art and craft. This study is an investigation of art education for older adults. In this writing, I examine the types of programming that are currently available and I explore new possibilities through the British University of the Third Age (U3A). The U3A is a learning organization where older adult members (50 and older) share their knowledge, expertise, experiences, and interests by learning from each other. Based on the notion that, by older adulthood, people have a vast repertoire of experiences and knowledge worth sharing, in the U3A, there are no teachers and no students. There are only members who share what they know.

Taking an ethnographic approach, I spent five months in Britain with one local U3A group studying its entire art and craft program, engaging in participant-observation and conducting interviews. The purpose of this study was to examine art in the U3A and to explore the U3A as a means of introducing new ways to conceptualize older adult art education. Aiming to provide alternatives to current thinking, this study examines the American literature on art education for older adults through the lens of the British U3A. This literature was treated as data to facilitate comparisons between the literature and the U3A. Disconnects between these two data sources were investigated, leading to an examination of the previously unquestioned foundations and assumptions in the literature.

An in-depth background of the U3A is provided, and this study explores a number of key areas in older adult art education including teaching and learning, benefits and
motivations, and the language of the literature. Themes from the U3A, including shared learning, the agency of older adults, and the social aspects of education, are discussed and used to inform art education. Through the data and discussions, numerous implications for further exploration and future research in art education are presented.
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PREFACE

This is a study about art education for older adults. Since this is a qualitative study in which I have been the researcher, data collector, and data analyst, the study was shaped by me—through my eyes and by my interests and understandings. Gaining a glimpse into my background may provide some insight. So how did I, a student in my twenties, become interested in lifelong art learning?

My earliest art experiences took place mostly at home—outside of school with my family. You see, as a child, I attended a very small school in Southern New Jersey: Pomona Elementary. The little red brick schoolhouse with around thirty students in each grade had no permanent art teacher. Our traveling art teachers came around once a week, sometimes less (but never more), and when they did come, class time was very short. I had very few art experiences in school, but this doesn’t mean that I was missing out on art. Actually, I had an extensive amount of art experiences outside of school. My mother provided me with a wealth of art materials: crayons, colored pencils, and paints. She also involved me in various craft projects: tee-shirt painting, decorative wood painting, simple weaving projects, and needlecrafts. I grew up surrounded by art and craft. Our home was filled with blankets that my mother had crocheted and ceramics that she had made. Scattered around the house were ceramics that Grandma Scott had made and hanging on the walls were still lifes that Grandma Licwinko had painted. My father had a small collection of wildlife magazines and books that I used to borrow. I would scan them for photographs and drawing of animals, and then attempt to copy them realistically in pencil. Art and craft have always been positive forces in my life and the vast majority of my early experiences took place beyond classroom walls. This might provide clues to
why I became interested in lifelong learning and art in the community—but how did I make the leap to older adults?

Throughout my life, no matter where I was or what I was doing, it was almost a given that I was to be the youngest person. I started school early, so from elementary through to high school, I was always the youngest in my grade. This continued into college and graduate school, and because I’ve always been the youngest, all of my friends have been older. In my family, I am the younger of two children, and I have few extended family members who are younger. As a result, the most meaningful relationships in my family life, my social life, and my academic life have been with people significantly older than myself. This may be a key reason why I’ve developed interests in working with older people. Another key reason is family, specifically my grandparents.

Although few would consider themselves “artists,” my family tree is filled with artists, craftsmen, and craftswomen. Grandma Licwinko has told me many stories of artists in our family—most of whom I’ve never met. There was the New York City fireman, Peter Rizzo, who painted as a hobby. “And he painted walls in his mother’s living room. It had a ship and water, and they used to put certain lights on it that looked like the water was moving. He was very clever!” There were many others on this side of the family. Some painted as a hobby; others sold their paintings. Some won awards for their paintings, some had exhibitions of their work, one designed clothing, and another opened up a ceramics shop. Grandma explains, “So I say, it’s something that’s in the family genes.” What Grandma Licwinko has to say about art in the family is monumental to me, as she has always been a strong influence on my artistic development.
Visiting their home in Northern Jersey on many weekends when I was young, I was surrounded by her creations. The interior walls are covered with her still life and landscape paintings and her pressed flower arrangements. The outside of the house was bordered by beautiful plants and flowers and the inside revealed evidence of Grandpa Licwinko’s handiwork, as he was interested in gardening, photography, and woodworking. When I was around ten years old, Grandma saw that I enjoyed drawing and she gave me an invaluable gift: her sketchbooks. I was intrigued by her drawings and spent countless hours trying to copy them. I wanted to render the human figure as gracefully as she had. During visits, she proudly showed me her craft projects. Serving as an officer in her local garden club for nearly twenty years, she was involved in craft projects that were donated to the Meals-on-Wheels program. For each holiday, the garden club members made homemade gifts to be delivered to homebound older adults along with their meals. Grandma explained that this was her way of cheering up people who were ill or lonely. Through her painting, drawing, and charity projects, she had always set an example for me by living her life through the arts and for sharing her gifts with others. Grandma and Grandpa Licwinko, however, were not my only mentors.

Between the ages of five and fourteen, I spent every summer with Grandma and Grandpa Scott in a small community in South Carolina. Grandma Scott was enrolled in two classes at the community center—classes which she attended each week religiously. One was an arts and crafts class which entailed various projects from painting to jewelry making to sewing. The other was ceramics, where poured molds were cleaned, fired, and painted. So during the summers, twice a week, I accompanied Grandma to these classes and participated in the projects alongside of the other older women in the class. Grandma
Scott would also take ceramics home and we would sit on the sun porch together and paint them for hours. The home is filled with her creations, as are the homes of her family and friends, since she often gave them as gifts to loved ones. Many summers, she involved me in helping her redecorate—choosing colors and fabrics and pictures to hang on the walls. Once, she even had me design and paint a mural for the dressing room in the pool area! But she was not the only one in the home being creative. During the day, Grandpa Scott was often found in the basement, in a woodworking shop that he built himself. He was always building something, and although I was young, he would show me projects that he was working on and how the different machines and tools worked. As we got to talking, I learned about his art experiences—from illustrating his high school yearbook to his painting attempts in later life through a community class that he jokingly called “Dab n’ Smear.” His devotion and love for creation was instilled in me and my most treasured possession reminds me of him daily: a cedar chest that he designed and built for me. So between Grandma and Grandpa’s creations, I was immersed in art, craft, and creation every summer.

So this is a glimpse into *my* art history. Some of it was experienced firsthand and some I only know through stories. When I entered graduate school at the University of Arizona, I knew that I wanted to learn about community art education. Just as the majority of my early art experiences took place outside of school, I was looking to gain the knowledge and background to create community art programming. One day, when I was in the library scanning art education books, I stumbled across one about art education for older adults. Although I hadn’t considered this before or even known that it was an option, something clicked. I brought the book home and read it immediately. It opened
up a whole new world to me. What I was reading spoke to me, and from that day on, I’ve immersed myself in studying and learning about older adult art education. Hopefully, this provides some insight into how I became devoted to art education for older adults. Because I have shaped the course of this study, my observations and conclusions are rooted in my background and my understandings. As you read on, you’re likely to see connections between this study and my early experiences and influences. I hope that what I have to share will connect and speak to some of your experiences as well.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation to my doctoral committee for guiding me throughout my studies. Each member has contributed to and has helped to shape the study in a unique way. I thank Dr. Patricia Amburgy for offering encouragement and for raising thoughtful questions, Dr. David Ebitz for providing countless theoretical avenues to explore and for his genuine enthusiasm, and Dr. Gregory Kelly for offering continual support and guidance in the development of my research methods. Finally, I offer my sincere gratitude and highest regards to Dr. Mary Ann Stankiewicz, the chair of my doctoral committee, my dissertation adviser, and my mentor. She has worked closely with me during all of my time at Penn State—providing the space and resources to explore my interests and continually offering her guidance and insights. Her unwavering support, coupled with the example that she sets, has not only shaped my study, but has also deeply influenced my scholarly and professional growth.

I would also like to thank my parents, Paul and Jean Scott, for teaching me the importance of education, for stressing the importance of always “doing my best,” and for instilling in me a love of learning. I thank my brother, Paul Edward Scott, for devoting numerous hours reading over and offering editing advice on my early drafts. Thank you to everyone else in my family for freely offering encouragement, for providing reassurance, and for taking an interest in my studies. Finally, I express my deepest gratitude to my husband and best friend, Michael James, for remaining steadily by my side—showering me with support in countless ways. I am forever grateful for his steadfast and unwavering confidence in me, for adapting to my quirky writing schedules, for moving to England with me for my fieldwork, and for reading and listening to drafts.
in all of their stages. Above all, I am grateful for his understanding, his interest in my ideas, and his efforts towards making everything possible. I can’t thank him enough!

Finally, I am indebted to Stamford U3A, whose members have taught me the significance of a fulfilling and meaningful third age. Many thanks are extended to all of Stamford U3A’s members, and to those who went out of their way to assist me and to make me feel welcome during my time in England. I thank “Emily,” “Holly,” and “Melody” for opening their homes to me and for providing rides to meetings. I thank “Gayle” for literally opening up her home to my family by providing our living arrangements. Nothing else could have felt more like home! Finally, I thank “Penny,” the Stamford U3A Chairman, who made everything possible. She opened the doors of Stamford U3A to me and provided many more opportunities for me to gain deeper understandings (not to mention my first home-cooked meal in England!). I thank her for making my time there not only an invaluable learning experience, but also a truly pleasurable experience.

This writing is dedicated to “Penny,” the art and craft group members, and all of Stamford U3A. I have learned so much from them and am honored to have the opportunity to share what I have learned with others.
Those who teach shall also learn
and
Those who learn shall also teach

Peter Laslett
CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION TO OLDER ADULT ART EDUCATION
The Older Population, Education, and Art

Our population is changing. America is aging. As the Baby Boomers enter retirement, our older population is entering a new stage of development. Those belonging to this cohort are becoming the largest and most educated older population in American history. Presently, adults over the age of 65 comprise 12.4% of the total population (approximately one in eight). This is projected to increase to 20% by the year 2030 (one in five), and over this time period, the number of those in the older population is expected to double (U.S. Administration on Aging, 2006a). In addition, our lifespans are increasing, and as a result, our present and future populations are expected to spend a longer time in retirement than experienced by retirees of any previous generation. After reaching the “retirement age” of 65 years, on average, men live an additional 16.8 years and women live an additional 19.8 years (U.S. Administration on Aging, 2006b). These changes are having effects that reach far beyond the amount of time spent in retirement. The experience and nature of retirement is also changing.

First, when people retire is changing, reflected by the increasing variability of the “retirement age.” Although the U.S. has no mandatory retirement age, 1 65 has traditionally been accepted as the customary age, since this was the age at which one could begin receiving full Social Security benefits. But this benchmark is on the rise, depending on one’s year of birth. As an example, while my grandparents began receiving full benefits at the age of 65, my parents will become eligible at 66 and I will have to wait until I’m 67 (Social Security Administration, n.d.). Although these ages are standardized

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1 The Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 prohibits mandatory retirement ages except in a few select occupations where public safety may be affected (e.g., airline pilots). These exceptions are called bona fide occupational qualifications. See U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (1997) for more information.
through Social Security, there is nothing standard about when people actually retire. In fact, the majority of Americans are retiring well before the age of 65. In 2005, 68% of retirees left fulltime employment before their 65th birthdays, with 33% retiring before the age of 60 (Carroll, 2005). So we see that the “retirement age” of 65 is no longer an accurate predictor of when people actually retire. This recent trend towards “early” retirement is also met with a qualitative change in how people experience retirement.

Rather than a definitive and final break from paid employment, many “retirees” are returning to employment (e.g., Hayward, Hardy, & Liu, 1994). “The abrupt transition from paid work to retirement has begun to lengthen into a process of anticipation, bridge jobs, intermittent part-time work, and eventual withdrawal” (Hardy, 2002, p. 15). This necessarily changes how we think about and talk about retirement. It raises new questions: If you retire and then return to work, are you retired or not? New terms are being introduced to describe these changes, and sociologists, by necessity, have begun to distinguish between “working retirees, multiple retirees (those who retire from more than one job), and partial retirees” (p. 15). In the traditional sense of retirement, “working retirees” is contradictory, and as more people begin to refer to themselves as “semi-retired,” we begin to see that earlier notions of retirement are being challenged.

Retirement is changing.2

With so much variation in retirement and older adulthood, what are current and future retirees to make of this new phase in life? If retirement is a time that marks the end (or at least a reduction) of paid work, then there should be an accompanying increase

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2 An interesting signal that retirement is changing is that the former American Association for Retired Persons shortened its name in 1994 to AARP. Due to the recent “messiness” in defining retirement, the trend for “retirees” to return to work, and the fact that an increasing number of retirees in America are not American, the AARP is no longer just an association for American retirees! (AARP, n.d.)
in the amount of free time available. With their increased leisure time, many retirees return to interests that were put on hold during their working lives. Consider for a moment the things that you’ve been meaning to do and the avenues you’ve been wanting to explore. Perhaps it’s an interest in gardening, in collecting antiques, or in model railroading. Random blocks of time are devoted to these interests, but with more time at your disposal, you could do so much more. Retirement affords more opportunities to follow these paths. Some retirees pursue these interests through learning and education; perhaps by joining a gardening group, by attending lectures on antiques, or by reading railroading books. So who is engaging in these activities? Currently, the most reliable factor leading to educational participation in older adulthood is previous education, and in recent years, these levels of previous education have skyrocketed. In 1970, only 28% of those over 65 had completed high school, but by 2005, this had increased to 74% (U.S. Administration on Aging, 2006a). Previous education is positively correlated with educational participation in later life, so as the older population continues to enter older adulthood with higher levels of education, the demand for educational programming should expand accordingly. In fact, in a study titled “If you had your life to live over again: What would you do differently?,” DeGenova (1995) found that older adults wished that they had spent more time learning and in education. “If life could be lived over again, more time would be spent pursuing education and developing the mind and intellect for men and women, respectively, than in any other area” (p. 105). Rather than seeing this as regret, we can begin to see it as opportunity—as possibility. Considering the recent changes to retirement, we recognize that it’s not too late. It’s never too late to
continue learning. The lengthening of life as well as the increase of time spent in retirement work to make this even more possible.

Education during adulthood tends to be work-related, but in older adulthood, the focus tends to change. “The desire to learn something new tends to take a broader form as people get older and to be less narrowly confined to short-term vocational concerns” (Sargant, 1991, p. 20). Retirees are pursuing studies in the humanities, learning languages, studying history, and focusing on environmental concerns amongst many other activities. These new paths following lifelong interests undoubtedly include interests in art and in craft.

As the Baby Boomers begin to retire, the number of older adults will rise until one of every five Americans will be over the age of 65. Among the ranks of this population, there must be those who are looking to resume old art and craft interests: women who knitted and crocheted with their mothers and grandmothers when they were children and men who learned basic woodworking and woodcarving techniques when they were younger. Perhaps some had been involved in macramé, clothes making, and tie-dyeing, while others have tried their hands at painting or printmaking. The Boomer generation includes people who have doodled while at work and wondered if they could be talented in drawing. It includes those who at the office, at home, and with friends, have always been the designated photographers. They love taking pictures, always have the latest equipment, and have been itching for more time to learn more about their cameras and how to create even better pictures. There are those who were employed in construction. As they built, renovated, and beautified hundreds of homes and buildings, they noticed stylistic differences in structures from different time periods, sparking an interest in
architecture. The examples that I could offer are endless. With art and craft so embedded in our lives, it is inevitable that many will look to pursue, further, and expand these interests with their newfound free time.

In light of this, an overarching purpose of this writing is to investigate art and craft education for older adults: what is currently available, what is possible, and how the field of art education has addressed older populations. While the bulk of this writing is discussed in terms of art education, it has implications that can be extended to interests well beyond art and craft, so I encourage you to consider what I have to share in terms of your own interests. Similarly, even though this writing is an investigation into art education for older adults, I have convictions that what I have to say is important to everyone. Everyone ages and everyone has a stake in what opportunities are available to older adults. What is available now has implications for current retirees, and what we envision now has implications for future retirees. Put simply, thinking about opportunities in older adulthood has implications for everyone who plans on living!

So with the rise in the number of older adults and the increase in their levels of education, there should be a corresponding boom in participation in education and learning in retirement—including art education and learning. What types of programming are currently available to older adults who wish to continue learning and are looking for avenues to pursue new or lifelong interests? Looking at what is available now can help us to consider possibilities for the future.
Older Adult Education in the United States

Elderhostel

There are two main providers of education for older adults in the U.S.: Elderhostel and Institutes for Learning in Retirement. Elderhostel is a short-term, travel-oriented educational organization for adults who are 55 or older. It was introduced in 1975 and since this time the number of Elderhostel participants has grown from 220 to 160,000 a year and the number of programs has grown from six to 8,000 per year (Elderhostel, n.d.). Elderhostelers have a wide range of subjects available to them, including history (e.g., *Lincoln's road to the Civil War: Laying the foundation* and *St. Augustine: 450 years of history*), language learning (e.g., *The Spanish language: Learn it and use it*), science (e.g., *Paleontology at the St. George Dinosaur Discovery Site* and *Crime scene forensics*), and religion (e.g., *Building bridges of understanding among Jewish, Christian, and Muslim American families* and *Amish and Mennonites: From yesterday to today*) among many other subject areas including art.

Older adults who pursue art education through Elderhostel first locate a program of interest and then travel to the site where it is offered. Elderhostel offers both art history and studio art programs and both types of classes are location-based. In terms of art history, a broad range of topics are covered in various locations, including the history of architecture, traditional art, crafts, and museums. Several museums offer programs in which students receive guided in-depth tours of the collections and some offer intergenerational courses for grandparents and grandchildren, such as *The Art Institute of Chicago: Share your interests with a child*. Studio courses, which are highly popular in Elderhostel, tend to follow two separate approaches. The first of these is that students
travel to art schools or art centers in which a wide range of highly specialized studio courses are offered. These courses offer instruction in both art and craft, from watercolor painting to digital photography to weaving on a four-harness loom. Several of these programs are intergenerational. The second approach to studio art is tied closely with location since scenery is used for inspiration and for subject matter in art making. Some examples of this type of program include Arizona highways landscape photography workshop, Oil painting: Rocky Mountain landscapes, Transparent watercolor by the sea, and In pursuit of the hidden image: Photography on the Oregon coast.

While these courses provide a wonderful opportunity to travel and learn about the arts of a particular region or how to paint in a beautiful setting, there are several factors that make Elderhostel inaccessible to many older adults. First, traveling is not feasible for many older persons, especially those who have health problems and those who have caregiving responsibilities for grandchildren or an ill spouse. Another main accessibility factor relates to cost. As these programs are costly, averaging approximately $1,000 for a five-day program, this excludes the many older adults who are on a fixed income. Finally, since programs typically last for five to 15 days, any type of long-term study through Elderhostel may become difficult to schedule, not to mention costly. So while Elderhostel offers a wide variety of art programs, these programs are not accessible to many older adults.

**Institutes for Learning in Retirement**

Institutes for Learning in Retirement (ILRs) are self-created groups in which interested older adults (50 or older) form a local organization and design their own learning activities. Introduced in 1962 with one local organization, there are currently
over 250 groups throughout the U.S. and Canada. These groups are affiliated with colleges and universities, and classes are typically held on campus. What makes ILRs unique is that they are usually taught by the members of the group themselves. “The curricula are chosen, designed, and often led by organization members and encourage peer learning and active member participation” (Kim & Merriam, 2004, p. 442). ILR members decide what studies are to be undertaken, and as a result, there is great diversity from one group to the next. While there is diversity in the courses offered, there tends to be a concentration on subjects relating to history (e.g., Origins of the Cold War: 1970-1960 and World War II broadcasting: Journalists and dramatists), the sciences (e.g., Energy alternatives for the future and Genetic systems, emerging technologies, and genomics), political science (e.g., From interrogation to national security), and the humanities (e.g., A classic of Scottish literature and Beethoven and Mahler: The cornerstone and the capstone of Romanticism in music). Just like in Elderhostel, many ILRs include art courses.

Those older adults who are interested in pursuing art study through an ILR can join the organization and attend a course in the arts if it is offered. Similarly, if no art classes are offered and a member in the group has a sufficient background, he or she can propose to start up a course. Art, art history, and craft subjects are offered; however, the range of what is offered varies greatly from group to group, with some groups offering no art classes and others offering over ten options. Since the classes are held on campus and they are generally in the form of “college-level courses on a non-credit basis” (p. 442), the art history courses tend to be specialized and specific with names sounding more like university courses than community education classes, such as Insular and Germanic art
of the early middle ages and The Pre-Raphaelites: Romance and realism. Like art
history in Elderhostel, some ILR groups have courses that are centered around museum
collections, but rather than traveling, local resources are utilized, so an Arizonan can
attend the class Mesa Arts Center and Art Collection. Similarly, while Elderhostelers
travel to different locations to learn about that region’s art and craft making traditions,
ILR members learn about local and regional arts in classes such as Adirondack crafts in
New York, Architecture of Newport churches in Rhode Island, and The Art Students
League of New York: Relationship to the art of Cape Cod in Massachusetts. In addition
to the more specialized courses, there are also more general introductory art and craft
courses that can range from Creative stitchery to Basic art and watercolor to Beginning
drawing.

Like in Elderhostel, ILRs also have characteristics that can make them
inaccessible to older adults. Although the element of travel has been eliminated, there are
still barriers related to location. Nearly all ILRs are affiliated with other institutions of
higher education, so these groups are typically found in urban areas or those regions
geo-graphically close to a college or university. They are seldom located in rural areas.
In addition, since they are “college-level” courses delivered on campus, this can deter
those without high levels of education as well as those who are returning to education
after many years.

Locally-Based Programming

Beyond these two main providers, there are other programming options that are
frequented by older adults, though they may not be exclusive to those in the older
population. Some county and local libraries offer craft workshops and talks by local
artists. Parks and Recreation departments sometimes offer leisure or recreation classes in addition to the parks and environmental services. When these classes are offered, arts and crafts are usually included. While most classes for adults are held in the evenings, deterring older adults, those held during daylight hours tend to be comprised mostly of older students. Other education and leisure providers such as the YMCA/YWCA, JCC, community colleges, community centers, public school adult education programs, and senior citizen centers can also have arts classes on offer, but this varies greatly from location to location. In this context, like with the Institutes for Learning in Retirement, access is determined by location. Typically, it is only in urban areas where all of these options, providers, and opportunities are available.

While this discussion provides only a glimpse into the diversity of options available to older populations, it does provide an overview of the major structures and offers insight into the current limitations and barriers that hold serious implications if the ultimate goal is to provide programming to more older adults in more locations. Are there structures beyond U.S. contexts that are more accessible to older adults and that can provide hints and suggestions for more inclusive programming? Looking to the University of the Third Age in Britain may provide some of these much needed clues.

**Older Adult Education in the United Kingdom**

**The University of the Third Age**

The University of the Third Age (U3A) is a worldwide movement that began in France in 1972. When the U3A was introduced to Britain ten years later in 1982, it

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3 This writing will focus on the U3A as it has developed in Britain. For information on the U3A as an international movement, see Formosa (2000), International Association of Universities of the Third Age (n.d.), Radcliffe (1984, 1985), Swindell & Thompson (1995), and Yenerall (2003).
assumed a unique form.⁴ As the main provider of education for older adults in Britain, the U3A is not a university in the technical sense, but is best described as a learning organization to which older learners become members. The British U3A is comprised of a network of voluntary, self-help groups. Within this network, members share their knowledge, expertise, experiences, and interests by teaching and learning from each other. There are no “teachers” or “students,” since the British U3A is simply composed of members who share what they know. This movement, which started with one group and 75 members in Cambridge in 1982, has continually grown to its present size of 668 local groups with 188,507 members⁵ (Third Age Trust, 2008).

The U3A was designed for maximal accessibility to older adults and alleviates the major barriers to participation present in programming in the U.S. In terms of cost, annual membership dues in the U3A range from £5 to £50. This is approximately $10 to $100 per year, making it very reasonable in relation to Elderhostel’s cost of around $1,000 for one five-day course. The U3A erases the traveling barrier present in Elderhostel by the nature of its organization: local groups and local meetings. This characteristic also makes it more accessible than ILRs which are bound to college and university campuses. As U3A groups have no higher education affiliations, this allows groups to form in areas which are geographically far from campus. Due to this, U3A groups can be found well beyond urban areas and college towns. This allows for the creation of many more groups, leading to over 650 U3A groups in Britain, while there are only approximately 250 ILRs in the U.S. and Canada. This becomes even more impressive when we compare these countries, since the current population count of the

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⁴ A thorough background of the British U3A is discussed in Chapter 3.
⁵ These numbers change on an almost daily basis as the U3A continues its growth. Their membership counts are updated regularly, so visit their website (Third Age Trust, 2008) for the most current figures.
U.K. is over 60.5 million, while the populations of the U.S. and Canada are approximately 301 million and 33 million respectively (Central Intelligence Agency, 2008). In terms of land area, there are 668 U3As in a country that is slightly smaller than the state of Oregon. The far reaches of the U3A aid in providing programming in areas where there are few other options, because “peer learning programs need not be limited necessarily to urban areas. Even in a small community a group of seniors can get together to form a study group” (Clark et al., 1997, p. 761). Finally, classes, meetings, and groups are offered on a university schedule with Fall and Spring sessions, and in some places, Summer courses, which facilitates long-term study of subjects, unlike Elderhostel’s five- to 15-day courses. All of these characteristics (cost, location, and scheduling) allow for participation to be accessible to a wider range of older adults over a longer period of time than the major educational structures present in the U.S.

As the British U3A represents an educational structure that is more widespread and accessible to older adults than American programming structures, the U3A can help inform the field of art education for older adults. The following section will discuss the current state of the field.

**Older Adult Art Education: The State of the Field**

**Older Adult Issues in the Literature**

While older adults participating in art and crafts is not a new phenomenon, and although adults have been included in art education from the very beginning, interest in

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6 The total land area of the U.K. is 244,820 sq. km, while the combined total land area of the U.S. and Canada is nearly 20,000,000 sq. km. (Central Intelligence Agency, 2008). Since the majority of Canada is sparsely populated, this statistic is a bit misleading, but I think that it still paints a picture of the U3A being much more accessible in terms of location.

7 Provisions for adults were included in the Massachusetts Drawing Act of 1870 (Massachusetts Board of Education, 1871), which is typically seen as the birth of formal art education in the U.S.
older populations is a fairly recent trend in art education. The first major body of art education literature pertaining to older adults came in the form of a special issue of the journal *Art Education* (Mahlman, 1977), which was entirely devoted to topics of lifelong learning. This issue appeared just one year after the U.S. passed the Lifelong Learning Act in 1976. Since this first special issue, others have followed and can be found in the journals *Educational Gerontology* (Lumsden, 1982), *Art Education* (Lewis, 1987a), *Studies in Art Education* (Hamblen, 1993), and *Journal of Gender Issues in Art and Education* (Hicks, 2001). In addition to these publications, there have also been two edited books published by the National Art Education Association about lifelong learning: *Lifelong Learning and the Visual Arts: A Book of Readings* (Hoffman, Greenberg, & Fitzner, 1980) and *Crossroads: The Challenge of Lifelong Learning* (Fitzner & Rugh, 1998). While older adults have featured prominently in discussions of lifelong learning in art education, overall they remain a marginal population within the art education literature. As of 2004, *Studies in Art Education*, since its first issue in 1959, has only contained eight articles (0.79%) pertaining to issues regarding older persons (James, 2004). This is striking given that the older population currently occupies 12.4% of the population, soon to be 20%. Although the literature is sparse and emerges only sporadically, a number of themes have been explored. But while many topics have been touched upon, from the rural elderly (Clements, 1980) to learning needs (Taylor, 1987) to surveys of programming (Barret, 1993), there is little concentrated focus on any given area.

In addition to the scattered nature of the literature, there is little variety in the sites for older adult art learning since most writings pertain to art in senior citizen centers and
community art centers (e.g., Barret, 1998; Denney, 1987). Few other contexts have been studied, illustrating the need for research which explores other models. Looking to other more informal structures, such as the U3A, can help in increasing our understanding of the diversity of sites and contexts where art learning occurs. Rather than devaluing and delegitimizing what has already been explored, looking down other avenues can add to and expand the current picture of older adult art education. Informal educational structures are often ignored and this is a problem that is not exclusive to art education:

> Participation studies in adult education often fail to provide a complete picture of learning activities in later life. Instead, these studies often present a narrow snapshot in time bounded by traditional schooling concepts of courses, classrooms, and teachers. Consequently, the richness and variety of later life learning activities are often ignored. (Clough, 1991, p. 146)

The diversity and richness of older adult learning should be exemplified in the literature, not hidden. Rather than continuing to focus on the same types of sites and contexts, we need to expand our notions of what older adult art learning is, where it takes place, and what else is possible.

**Older Adult Issues in the National Art Education Association**

The National Art Education Association (NAEA) presently includes 15 issues groups for “NAEA members with special interests not covered by divisional concerns” (National Art Education Association, n.d., para. 3). These groups allow for educators with similar interests to meet, share ideas, and advance knowledge in their particular areas of practice and research. Among these 15 groups is the Committee on Lifelong Learning. This committee was created in 1989 and its mission is to address and advocate for all ages to be included in art education. Particular emphasis is placed on populations
beyond school age who are typically absent from art education discourses. The committee’s purposes are outlined in its constitution:

1. To promote the study, research, and teaching of concepts and issues pertinent to the development of lifelong learning in the visual arts.
2. To widen the practice of art education to include development of quality visual art programs for adults of all ages, but with the mature population over 50 years in age of priority concern.
3. To examine cultural policy and services as they are presently provided by government and the public sector.
4. To offer resources, guidance, and alternatives to those wishing assistance in developing or expanding adult art education.
5. To develop alternate employment opportunities for art educators wishing to become involved within the community as teachers and administrators of adult visual arts programs.
6. To seek certification or licensing of visual arts instructors working with mature students based on the highest standards of the field.
7. To act as liaison among local, state, and national art agencies, assuring that related artistic disciplines will be coordinated in their involvement with the adult population.
8. To develop a core of retired and semi-retired individuals who will lobby for the development of well supported school arts and for community visual arts programs. (NAEA Lifelong Learning Committee, 2000a, p. 4)

The group also sees fostering awareness as a major part of its mission so that teachers and those preparing to teach are aware of opportunities within their communities and beyond K-12 settings (NAEA Lifelong Learning Committee, 2000b). Although the committee has established a space for itself within NAEA, its position is unsteady and its future uncertain as the number of involved members is on the decline.

Overall within the NAEA, beyond the creation of the Lifelong Learning Committee, there seems to be little acknowledgement of lifelong learning and older adult issues. The most current research agenda, adopted in 1994, contains 49 questions relating to areas of research that are needed in art education (NAEA, 1994). Of these 49 requested research areas, there are only two that could be generalized and extended to older populations. These questions are: “Who teaches art in non-school settings; how are
these teachers prepared and/or certified?” and “What strategies are most effective for teaching preschool to lifelong learners from different social, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds?” (NAEA, 1994). So while the Lifelong Learning Committee advocates for the acceptance and recognition of all ages in art education discourses, there has been little done to adopt these ideals.

The Continual Need for Advocacy

While lifelong learning issues and older adults have been visible to some extent and to varying degrees in the art education literature for over 30 years, these areas still occupy a marginal and tenuous position. As a result, virtually all lifelong learning articles contain sections advocating for lifelong learning issues and for art education to begin recognizing the importance of art and art learning for all populations. These advocacy statements urge a rethinking of who art education is for. They call for expansion beyond school age populations to become more inclusive. The ultimate goal is for art education to begin to include and integrate all ages into its discourses and practices: Art education should not be a privilege only for school children. Advocate Pearl Greenberg (1985a) states, “First, we must start to take a cradle-to-coffin approach to the content of art methodology courses. To continue with a K-12 orientation is outmoded; art teachers must be prepared to work with people of all ages” (p. 38). Nearly all older adult art education articles contain calls for inclusion and advocacy for older populations, and this is likely to continue until older adults and all populations receive the attention and recognition that they warrant.
Current State of the Field: Unquestioned Foundations

Overall, in the art education literature, little attention has been paid to older populations, and what is present provides a “narrow snapshot” of what is currently available and what is possible. In addition to these problems, it is important to address the time period of these publications. The bulk of writings surfaced in the late 1970s to the mid-1980s. As these provided the groundwork for later studies and for our understandings of older adult art education, nearly all subsequent literature has been based on this foundation. As a result, the writings and the field are rooted in modernism.

Modernism, although defined in many conflicting ways, can be viewed as a search for truth and perfection. “Modernism is grounded in the optimistic Enlightenment belief that people and society are ultimately perfectable” (Brookfield, 2000, p. 45). A modernist mindset leads to searching for universal and overarching truths and principles. In art education, this could translate into creating a perfect art curriculum for older learners—one that will be successful in all situations. Modernism in contemporary writings, however, is most often framed in terms of postmodernism, which rejects universality and the notion that there is a single truth waiting to be discovered. “From a postmodern perspective, truth is local, provisional, and changing” (p. 45). Postmodern thinking questions the “truths” of modernism. Rather than seeking the truth, it seeks out multiple viewpoints and multiple perspectives. In art education, this would mean not looking to create universal standards for programming, but to ask what works in each situation and context. Adopting a postmodern perspective also means asking who has been discounted and ignored in modernism’s paradigms. Although this is perhaps an overly simplistic view of oft-debated and messy concepts, postmodernism can be conceived of as a questioning and challenging of modernist foundations. “A basic tenet
of all postmodern theory is a suspicion of totalizing discourses and grand narratives—the belief that there is one right way to organize and understand things” (Gude, 2004, p. 13). “Postmodern theory seeks to reveal what is hidden in modernism; it is to challenge underlying assumptions and that which has been taken for granted” (Freedman, 2003, p. 13). Art education on a whole has begun to address postmodern issues and examine its assumptions. These discourses, however, have yet to be extended to older adults. As a result, older adult art education retains its modernist foundations—foundations that may actually work to make art education less accessible to older adults. Among all of the modernist discourses that have yet to be examined in relation to older art learners, there are three central issues that are deeply embedded in the literature—elitism, individualism, and lack of context.8

Within modernism, clear boundaries are maintained between the “high” or “fine arts” (e.g., painting, sculpture) and the “low arts” (e.g., ceramics, crafts). This hierarchy leads to a narrow and limited view of art which elevates the fine arts and either devalues or ignores all other art and craft forms. This “disdain for popular tastes” (Clark, 1998) disregards crafts and popular art—the art forms that the public are most familiar with. In this sense, what the artist is involved in is art—what everyone else is involved in is of trivial importance. Postmodern thinking questions this hierarchy and asks why popular art forms have been so underrecognized. A postmodern perspective has been adopted in art education, leading to an opening up of what is valid for art study.

Today, art educators are no longer bound by the canon …. Today, experts study the aesthetic qualities of objects formerly categorized as non-art, as popular or

8 This discussion focuses only on three elements of modernism that are directly relevant to older adult art education. For more in-depth reading on modernism and postmodernism in art education, see Efland, Freedman, & Stuhr (1996), Fehr (1994, 1997), Gude (2004), and Stankiewicz (1998).
folk arts; and works of “high art” are re-examined in new contexts and from new perspectives. (Stankiewicz, 1996, p. 5)

This, however, has not occurred in relation to older adults, where art education still translates to fine art education, and crafts are seen as less important and less “serious” than the fine arts. Questioning this foundation seems to be especially important in terms of older adults; many of whom have experience and lifelong interests in art that go well beyond narrow definitions of “high art.” Elitism in what is considered art and what is valid for study can exclude many older adults with art and arts-related interests.

Another modernist foundation that is deeply embedded in older adult art education is individualism. In modernism, the artist is conceived of as an individual, working alone to freely express him or herself. In modernism, “artists are thought to be innate ‘geniuses,’ who are untouched by social, political, and economic interests and who are thus able to represent that which is true, universal, and eternal, while showing what is personal” (Efland, Freedman, & Stuhr, 1996, p. 19). In modernist conceptions of art education, the “art curriculum has maintained this notion of individualism through the promotion of autonomous expression in the production of art…” (p. 19). This has been recognized in art education and called into question. It is now understood that “the value placed on originality and personal self-expression may need to be reconsidered to reflect differences in artistic philosophies” (p. 3). Again, this has not extended to older adults. By focusing on the “solitary artist” (Fehr, 1997) and “the artist as solitary maverick or hero” (Milbrandt, 1998), older adult art education presents a limited view of who can be an artist. This view ignores the potential for collaborative art learning and it ignores art and craft forms that do not focus on expression. It devalues art forms, ways of learning, and ways of creating that may be appealing to older learners. Finally, a focus on the
individual and his or her self-expression is maintained at the expense of the social elements of art and art education. This leads us to the third major modernist foundation.

The focus on the individual leads to a disregard of culture, context, and social aspects of art and art education. In modernism, art in everyday life is devalued and art is detached from life. Postmodern conceptions of art education acknowledge these previously disregarded facets of art. In this mindset, “art is a form of cultural production that should be studied in its culturally situated context” (Efland, 1996, p. 53). Just as art should be viewed in context, art education should also be seen as situated within particular contexts. Once again, however, this situated notion of art and education is not evident in relation to older adults. So while “postmoderns have connected art to the concerns of daily life” (Milbrandt, 1998, p. 47), older adult art education has not. Contextual factors of art education are largely neglected and art’s social role is mainly ignored. Since older adult art learning occupies such a diverse landscape, context should be seen as primary. Leaving this foundation unquestioned and unexamined leads to limited views of the potential of art learning in later life. It ignores differences related to context, it disregards social motivations and benefits, and it displaces the social importance of art.

Although these three issues have been addressed in art education, they remain unacknowledged in terms of older adult art education. Similarly, although virtually all other areas of art education have become involved in projects of questioning their modernist underpinnings and critically examining their underlying assumptions, this rethinking has not occurred in relation to older adults. Our assumptions about older

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9 These three issues have been briefly discussed here, but will recur periodically and be revisited in Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7.
populations, their educational needs, their motivations, and the purposes of art learning remain largely unquestioned. If we wish to make art education relevant to older learners, we must examine our foundations. Do we uphold ideals that are elitist, that exclude older adults, and that are socially detached? Are our foundations excluding or including older learners? Asking these questions can help to expand our notions of older adult art education. They can lead us to an art education that is not just for older adults, but is also about, with, and by older adults. Presently, however, these questions have yet to be asked.

Why it Matters...

The previous discussions have portrayed older adults as a population largely absent from art education discourses and have portrayed lifelong learning as a field constantly vying to be heard over the heavy emphasis on school age populations, but why does it matter? As previously noted, the older population is increasing at an unprecedented rate, soon to include one of every five Americans. Should art education continue to take this population lightly? As the percentage of older persons is rising, there is also an accompanying decline in the percentage of those in school age populations (Hodgkinson, 2004). Perhaps as those of school age become a smaller part of the population, professionals in art education will begin to reach out to other age groups and non-school populations. This may also become important in terms of older populations’ support for public school arts programs. Although there are worries that an aging population may equate to less public spending for younger generations, current
studies have shown these fears to be mostly unfounded.\textsuperscript{10} This may, however, change with future retirees. Nonetheless, participation in community arts programs may strengthen adults’ and older adults’ levels of support for the arts, for education, and for arts education in their communities and schools. As our population continues to age, the field of art education may be wise to consider older generations as potentially important sources of support and advocacy. Finally, as the numbers of retirees grow, this will include retired art educators as well. When so many begin to retire, will they make their exit from the field and never look back, or will they be looking for ways they can continue involvement in the arts and continue sharing their gifts?\textsuperscript{11} As the population shifts and evolves, the field must begin to address these changes.

Beyond the demographic imperative, there are a number of benefits to working in arts and crafts, and since studies relative to older adults are limited, there may be many more benefits that are yet to be discovered. Studies from art education have shown that art involvement can have positive psychological benefits, such as increased confidence (Bloom, 1982) and improved quality of life (Clements, 1998). At least one writing from art education addresses potential health benefits from engaging in art (Dawson & Baller, 1980), but studies demonstrating these types of benefits typically come from other fields, such as psychology, medicine, and nursing (e.g., Cohen, 2006; Hodges, Keeley, & Grier, 2001; Wikström, 2000). New personal, psychological, and health benefits will likely be identified in the future, yet there also may be social benefits as well.\textsuperscript{12} Older people who

\textsuperscript{10} See Pampel (1998, pp. 136-140) for a review of research on older generations’ support for public spending for education and younger generations. See Binstock (2005) for a general overview of trends and myths about older adults’ political involvements and voting tendencies.

\textsuperscript{11} The roles of retired art teachers will be expanded on in Chapter 7.

\textsuperscript{12} Later, in Chapter 6, the benefits of art involvement will be explored within the contexts of both the U3A and the older adult art education literature.
live alone and are isolated may meet other individuals with similar interests and possibly form new friendships through attending art classes. They may feel more connected to their communities and become supporters of the arts. A recent study by the National Endowment for the Arts (2006) found that “Americans involved in the arts are more likely to partake in a wealth of civic and social activities” (p. 2). These activities range from being active in other art areas to volunteering in the community. In this sense, while a range of benefits may be realized by arts involvement, these benefits may also be extended to the health and vitality of the community. If all of these benefits and more are possible, art education should take responsibility and begin paying attention to all those who could benefit: in the classroom and beyond it into the community. Yet again, while there are so many potential individual and societal benefits, there is currently a lack of attention and research pertaining to older adults in art education.

**Research Background and Purposes**

**Research Background**

As the field of older adult art education is fraught with issues, including lack of interest, few publications, limited research studies, and the maintenance of strong unquestioned modernist ideals, what is most needed is a new way to approach and conceptualize this area. In response to this, I have looked beyond U.S. contexts and turned towards the University of the Third Age in Britain. Initially, my interest in the U3A was piqued due to its potential for informing a new model of art education for older adults in the U.S. Since art programming for older adults in the U.S. is largely undocumented, there are few models for designing programs. Studying alternative providers such as the U3A can serve to illuminate and enhance research and program
planning and implementation. Due to this, my original motive for investigating art in the U3A was to identify elements that could be useful in developing a new model for learner-centered and learner-driven art education for older adults in the U.S. What has been written about older adult art education is mainly teacher-directed, but many studies from adult education and educational gerontology have found that older students tend to prefer more self-directed learning activities. They want to be in control of their own learning.

A significant preference for the self-directed learning style must be acknowledged for this age group. Self-directed learning is defined as the use of resources developed by others, but pursued at the time, place, and pace of the learner. The learner assumes responsibility for both the process itself and the determination of its use. (Cavanah & Williams, 1994, p. 79)

As the U3A is an exemplar of student-centered learning, with members choosing the subjects and topics and teaching each other, learning more about it could inform U.S. practices, offering suggestions for moving away from teacher-directed programming. While initially interested in seeing what occurs when older students take their education into their own hands and teach and learn from each other, I found that the U3A has so much more to offer. Not only does it move away from teacher-centered models, creating more local and accessible opportunities, but it also challenges the very foundations of the older adult art education literature. As the study progressed, I found more and more events and episodes for which the literature could provide no guidance. A possible explanation for this is the teacher-centered nature of the literature which is inappropriate for and disconnected from the teacher-absent U3A. Beyond this, I found many instances of projects in the U3A that the literature continually stresses should never appear in a quality art program. I witnessed other projects that the literature says will turn older adults off to art and to education. But these older learners chose these activities for
themselves—*How could this be?* After the first instance of seeing older learners use “craft kits” in a way that did not “stunt their creativity” as the literature continually promises that it will, I returned home, and after writing my fieldnotes for that meeting, as I did following every meeting, I wrote *more.* ¹³ I wrote about the literature I had read. I wrote about what I had witnessed at that meeting. I wrote about the disconnects between the two and it was at that point that my orientation to the literature shifted. I had many more questions than answers. I began to question the literature in its entirety for the first time, now seeing in full light how deeply entrenched in modernism it is. The project shifted: It grew. I wrote:

> While originally setting out to show the U3A as a more learner-centered, viable model for older adult art education, I now think that there may be other equally important issues to explore through the course of the study. The benefit of the research now seems as though it’s not simply about a good educational model for the U.S., but its potential to transform the way the field handles arts and crafts, education for older adults, and art education in general. The apparent rifts between the literature and my U3A observations need to be addressed and at this point, this seems a bit more important than pointing out what is “useful” in the creation of a new model.

After this incident at the end of my first month with the U3A, I began looking with a more critical eye—looking not only at how art is approached in the U3A, but also looking at what this means for the field. I questioned the projects, purposes, and motivations embedded in older adult art education through the lens of the U3A and maintained this stance throughout the remainder of the fieldwork.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purposes of this study are two-fold. First, in keeping with my initial focus and belief that the U3A in Britain can introduce and inform a new model of art education

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¹³ See Appendix A for selections from this writing.
for older adults in the U.S., the purpose of this study is to examine art in the U3A from members’ perspectives and to identify the structure, format, and organization of art classes. Second, due to my shift in focus, the purpose of this study is to explore the U3A as a means of introducing a new way of looking at art education for older adults, providing alternatives, and questioning previously unquestioned foundations.

It is my hope that, through the first purpose, program design and implementation can be enhanced. The field will be at a great advantage if a variety of models are available to inform future programming and practices. While most writings are teacher-centered, the U3A offers a learner-centered alternative. As the older population is growing both in size and diversity, a larger and more diverse repertoire of programs and models should accompany this demographic change, allowing programs to shift and evolve along with the changing needs of the population. Having more options for programming can only enhance our possibilities for creating learner-responsive art experiences—experiences that capitalize upon the strengths of older age.

Through the second purpose, it is my hope that this study can provide a foundation for beginning to question the literature and understand our assumptions. Beginning to embark on projects that critically examine our field, as virtually all other areas of education and art education have, can help us update our practice and inform our research. It can illuminate the ideals that are upheld that limit accessibility and that fail to recognize the agency of older adults. It can help in identifying inadequacies in our literature and provide us with new and previously unexplored areas that may be more timely and appropriate for the older populations of today and tomorrow. The field should strive to be current and up-to-date and ready to face the unforeseen challenges that lie
ahead. Starting to question and understand our assumptions and our foundations is the first step.

Both of these purposes aim to change the field in a way that is more inclusive. Studying structures that are more readily available and approachable to older adults can offer insight into more accessible older adult art education. Similarly, it can help us to see how our foundations need to be rethought to become less exclusive and less elitist. Although this study is directed towards art education, it also speaks to older adult education on a whole since “research-based writing on education and the older adult is virtually non-existent” (Glendenning, 2000, p. 2). While adding to the research base in educational gerontology, this study also provides an example of a truly learner-centered and learner-directed model of education. Since educational gerontology in America tends to focus on American structures, examining the British U3A can extend understandings beyond national boundaries. Finally, this study can add to the literature on the U3A, which typically focuses on the structure and growth of the organization (e.g., Morris, 1984; Swindell & Thompson, 1995), participation rates (e.g., Third Age Trust, 2001; Williamson, 2000), and the use of technology (e.g., Swindell, 2000, 2002). There is virtually no U3A research pertaining to learning, and as of this writing, there are no publications which address art and craft. In short, this study adds to the older adult art education literature base, as well as to understandings of the U3A and educational gerontology. The following section provides an overview of the research methods employed to meet these purposes.
Methodology Overview

To achieve these purposes, the research was conducted in two phases. Relating to the initial purpose, the first phase of the study utilized an ethnographic approach. I spent five months with one local U3A group (Stamford U3A), studying its entire art and craft program. Adopting the role of a member, I was a participant-observer at all of Stamford U3A’s seven arts groups: Art I, Art II, Art Workshop, Art History, Handicrafts I, Handicrafts II, and Quilting and Embroidery. During these five months, I attended all of the group meetings, took fieldnotes, and interviewed members of each group. Coding and analysis were done throughout the fieldwork, guiding decisions along the way, and eventually leading to the second phase of the project.

The second phase took place after my five months with Stamford U3A had ended and I had returned home to the U.S. This phase involved an investigation of the literature pertaining to older adult art education. This literature was treated as data, and I analyzed it using the same coding scheme that I had used for the fieldnotes and interview transcripts. As I previously noted, my time with the U3A led me to see inconsistencies and discrepancies between the U3A and the literature. Treating the literature as data allowed for these disconnects to be highlighted and facilitated making comparisons.14 The following section briefly defines and explains some terms that are found throughout the remainder of this writing.

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14 Chapter 2 provides a detailed explanation of the research methods from site selection through to analysis.
Definitions

The Third Age

The term “third age” stems from a life cycle development theory that conceptualizes “age” in terms of life stage rather than by date of birth and/or calendar age. This theory arose in France in the 1960s and was imported to Britain in the late 1970s by U3A founder Peter Laslett (Midwinter, 2005). In this theory, the first age typically occurs in childhood and is a time when one is dependent on others. The second age is characterized by independence from others for basic needs, but the price for this is work and child-raising responsibilities. The third age is characterized as a freedom from or lessening of employment and child-raising obligations. This freeing up of time allows for more freedom to explore and pursue interests. “This is now a familiar formula: the First Age of socialisation, the Second Age of work and child rearing, and the Third Age of independent post-work” (p. 12). The third age of “personal achievement” holds that self-fulfillment is a major responsibility for those in this stage (Laslett, 1989). It is a time to pursue interests that were put aside during the second age.

Release from Second Age entanglements is essential for Third Age purposes, enabling its members to continue for fifteen, twenty or thirty years or more without doing what is conventionally called productive work. Those in the Third Age properly speaking are decidedly not idle, but working for themselves on those things which they have wanted to do and planned to do since early in life. (p. 194)

The third age, while conceptualizing life stages in a new way, also creates new roles of activity and work for older adults. The difference is that these activities and projects are determined by older individuals themselves, not by those in the second age. For most, the third age is entered into during older adulthood, and entrance into this life stage is typically marked by retirement from paid employment.
Learner

For the purposes of this study, all U3A members will be conceived of as learners. As all members are learners, and membership and participation is learning, the terms learner and member will be used interchangeably. The term “student” will be used only in reference to those specifically in the student role in classes and study groups. “Rather than a teacher/learner dyad, this points to a richly diverse field of essential actors and, with it, other forms of relations of participation” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 56). Defining learners in this all-encompassing way allows the study to explore beyond the standard learner-as-student role to explore other roles present in the U3A, including students, leaders, experts, and volunteers. This definition aids in breaking down the student-teacher dichotomy which is rarely distinguishable or well-defined in the U3A. Accordingly, the terms “leader” and “group leader” will often replace the term “teacher.”

Art vs. Craft, Creativity, and Expertise

The distinctions between art and craft and the definitions of creativity and expertise remained open and were developed as the study progressed. Since an understanding of how members define these concepts is important to the study, preconceived definitions were not imposed on members’ definitions. U3A members design and create their own art and craft learning endeavors, and in the process, define these terms for themselves. It is paramount that definitions created in university contexts do not become the standards to which U3A programs are measured against (Agostinone-Wilson, 2001). It is altogether possible that the ways in which art and creativity are defined in higher education vary substantially from the ways in which they are defined in the U3A. It is equally important that my second age understandings are not imposed on
theirs of the third age. How members define these concepts became evident through the
fieldwork\textsuperscript{15} and there was slight variation between the groups.

\textbf{Summary}

As the older population in the U.S. steadily continues its growth and evolution, looking to educational programming, such as the British U3A, can inform programs here. The U3A represents an educational structure that is more accessible to older adults than the two most prevalent structures in the U.S.: Elderhostel and the Institutes for Learning in Retirement. While the U3A can inform U.S. programming, studying their art programs can also inform the field of older adult art education. As this area still maintains ideals which hinder accessibility, programs in the U3A can help to question and challenge the assumptions embedded within the literature.

This study involved five months in England, studying one local U3A group’s art program in its entirety. An ethnographic approach was taken and the main research methods were participant observation and interviewing. In addition to the fieldwork, the resulting data were compared to the older adult art education literature to locate disparities and discontinuities. The fieldwork was done in order to provide understandings of the U3A that can inform future programming practices, and the literature comparison was undertaken in order to provide new directions for art education for older adults.

Our traditional conceptions of retirement and older adulthood are changing as America continues to experience population aging. Since Britain is further along in population aging than the U.S., their programming can serve as an example. Although

\textsuperscript{15} Members’ definitions of expertise are found in Chapter 4. Their distinctions between art and craft are found in Chapter 5, and their definitions of creativity are located in Chapter 7.
“the U3A is not, cannot be, and never was intended to be the whole response to the challenge to education posed by the emergence of the Third Age” (Laslett, 1989, p. 174), it can provide insight and open up new avenues for exploration. My time with the U3A has changed my outlook and has led me to consider new possibilities. I encourage you to envision new possibilities as well—as what we envision today can have lasting impacts for generations to come.

**Organization of the Chapters**

While this first chapter gave an overview of the field of older adult art education, current educational structures, and the purposes of the study, in Chapter 2, I discuss the methods utilized to meet these purposes, including the research questions and the limitations of the study. In this chapter, I give a thorough background of the project as I situate myself within the research. Chapter 3 provides an in-depth description of the research setting, starting with the beginnings of the British U3A, then focusing on characteristics of the U3A, and finally, describing the site that was selected for the study—Stamford U3A. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 provide a presentation of the data as I share stories from my time with the U3A. It is in these three chapters that the disconnects and rifts between the literature and my experiences with the U3A will be explored. Chapter 7 analyzes these data and disconnects in relation to the field of older adult art education, and finally, Chapter 8 provides closure to the study as I share my final thoughts and reflections on the U3A.
CHAPTER 2:
RESEARCH METHODS
This chapter will provide an in-depth look at the methods employed throughout the course of the study, from the initial selection of the research site to the final phases of analysis upon exiting the site. While “many educational researchers do not provide adequate and clear justifications for their methods, findings, or conclusions” (Howe & Eisenhart, 1990, p. 2), my goal is to present a comprehensive view of the methodological procedures as they arose. In this manner, I will describe the “natural history” of the research project (Corsaro, 1985), as well as situate myself, as the researcher, within this project.

**Introduction to the Research Problem**

The overarching purpose of the study is to investigate and describe the nature of art and craft classes in the University of the Third Age in Britain. This serves two separate, but related purposes. The first is to examine art in the U3A from members’ perspectives and to identify the structure, format, and organization of art and craft classes. The second is to explore the U3A as a means of introducing a new way of looking at art education for older adults, providing alternatives, and questioning previously unquestioned foundations and assumptions of the field.

**Research Questions**

My main interests in the U3A are how the visual arts and crafts are positioned within the organization, how members perceive their involvement in art learning, and how the U3A can assist in rethinking older adult art education. The overarching research questions guiding the study are: (1) How does art and craft manifest itself within the U3A; and (2) How does this challenge the literature? As the second purpose and
question emerged during the course of the study, the following are subquestions that provide a framework for the initial phases of the inquiry:

1. How do older adults plan and conduct their own art and craft learning experiences in the U3A?
2. What are the dynamics of art and craft classes and what are the primary methods used?
3. What is the relationship of U3A objects and principles to actual practice?
4. What do members perceive as the benefits and limitations of learning art in the U3A? Are they satisfied with the available programming?
5. What roles do members assume in their art learning? What are the motivations for assuming these roles?
6. How do members define art and expertise, and how are art experts located?

While these were beginning questions that initially guided my fieldwork, during the study, my focus shifted as I began to recognize the disconnects between what I was participating in and observing in the U3A and the literature pertinent to older adult art education. This led to the formulation of new questions relative to this emergent purpose and direction. These additional research questions are:

7. What are the major disconnects between the U3A and the literature?
8. What is the significance of these disparities?
9. Are concepts, such as art and creativity, defined differently by U3A members and art educators?

Although the first set of questions is mainly descriptive and the second set is more critical, the complexity sought after calls for the use of qualitative research methods.

**An Ethnographic Approach**

While art educators have a wealth of research methods at their disposal, ethnography seems to be the most appropriate for describing and understanding the complexities and the richness of art and craft programming in the U3A. Ethnography relies heavily on participant observation supplemented and informed by interviewing in order to reveal the defining features and intricacies of a given culture. “Guided by their
particular backgrounds, ethnographers seek understandings of the cultural patterns and practices of everyday life of the group under study from an emic or insider’s position” (Green, Dixon, & Zaharlick, 2003, p. 206). Ethnographic studies of education attempt to understand educational settings from the learner’s perspective. In this sense, the “culture” is the classroom, or the context where the teaching and learning occur, and the “insiders” are those involved in that particular context: the students, learners, teachers, and participants. While this orientation may be helpful in art education studies in the public school to better understand students’ experiences in the art classroom, ethnography seems to be particularly suited to settings outside of the public schools. As the vast majority of art education research has been conducted in K-12 settings, research beyond these contexts has been sparse and scattered, with no solid foundation. Ethnographic studies can help to build this foundation in research pertaining to older adults in art education by identifying fundamental questions and issues to further research. Focusing on older learners’ perspectives and meanings can allow research to be more beneficial and valuable in improving teaching and learning and can move us towards a better understanding of what students value in their art education, especially when it is voluntary. In adult education, where the majority of research has been conducted in the areas of adult higher education and workplace education and training, ethnographic methods have been used to explore the little researched areas beyond these realms:

There is room to build upon what has been accomplished and, perhaps more importantly, to create a continuum of educational research in anthropology that reaches beyond the schoolhouse doors and embraces a variety of postcompulsory educational experiences. Our goal for the anthropology of postcompulsory education is to expand our knowledge of how education after schooling is interpreted by its diverse participants. (Jensen, 1999, p. 447)
This rationale can also be applied to the use of ethnography in the area of art education for older adults. So while this study aims to understand art and craft in the U3A, another of its major goals is understanding what this means to learners in the U3A.

The precedent for this type of study in art education beyond traditional settings and populations was set by Angela La Porte (1998) in her ethnographic study of an intergenerational art program involving teenagers and older adults. La Porte employed the ethnographic methods of participant observation and interviewing to explore issues in intergenerational art education. Her study, while focusing on the interactions between the two age groups, illuminated and uncovered various issues in intergenerational programming, posed concerns and suggestions for future programs, and developed a foundation for further inquiry in this area. The major thrust behind these outcomes was the focus on the learner’s perspectives, and in this case, it was a focus on both the views of the older participants and the younger ones. Since my study is focusing on programs for older adults, La Porte’s study sets an example, as it is an exemplar of art education research in nontraditional settings, it raises questions, and it provides suggestions for more responsive programming. So while the setting and the population differ, the purposes and methodological approaches are similar. The remainder of this chapter will discuss how ethnographic methods were employed in the study of the U3A and explain the specific strategies used.

**Site Selection**

Since there are over 650 local U3A groups throughout Britain, I needed to limit my focus, attempting to choose the research site best matched to the purposes of the study, while also taking practical factors, such as time, transportation, location, and
finances, into consideration. As I began this search, I originally had decided that I would base my study around Cambridge U3A, as this is the first and oldest local U3A group, and would study two other local groups, making it a multi-site study, but eventually decided to study just one U3A group. While the study of multiple sites would allow for comparisons between groups and extend the generalizability of the study, closely looking at one group could lead to greater and more in-depth cultural understandings. I opted to study one U3A group in-depth, studying all of its art and craft groups in order to get a more holistic sense of an art program in the U3A rather than comparing isolated segments of various programs.

So the question remains: How did I sort through 650 local groups to select the one that I wanted to study? I began the search by sitting down at my computer, scouring the Internet for as many U3A groups as I could find. This task took countless hours, because at this time, the National U3A website did not have a comprehensive list available online. They now have a searchable database for locating U3A groups by county, town, group name, and/or post code (Third Age Trust, no date-a); however, this was not available to me so I had to compile the list on my own. I started at the Harrow U3A website, which offers an extensive list of older adult education programs worldwide (Harrow U3A, n.d.). From here I followed links to other U3A websites, and some of those led me to even more sites. I continued this process until I was no longer finding new sites, and at this point, I had a list of 132 U3A groups, from Abergavenys to Yately. For each, I listed as much information as I could locate, including the location by county, the year it was established, the number of members, the number of subjects offered, the number of art
and craft groups, and the names of these groups. A typical entry in the list looked like this:

Peterborough U3A
Location: Cambridgeshire
Founded: 1992
Membership: 900
68 total
Patchwork and quilting (2); Greeting cards (3); Painting for pleasure; Knitting;
Calligraphy (2); Scrapbooking; Archaeology/architecture; Art history; Knit and
natter; Roses and castles; Watercolour

From this list, which I had previously tried to make as long as possible, I now had to start
the narrowing process. I first removed groups that I did not have enough information for;
this drastically reduced the size of the list. I then removed those that did not have at least
two or more art and craft groups. Finally, I looked at location and removed those that
were not centrally located. After this, I had narrowed it down to 36. With these, I added
more criteria, looking for a group that was mid range in terms of the date of
establishment and membership size. Groups that were very new or old and those that
were very small or large in membership were discarded. I was now at a manageable size.
I was left with eight groups and I kept six others as “alternates.” The two groups were
separate as priority was given to those groups with art, craft, and art history offerings. I
sent emails to the first eight, telling them about the study and requesting participation
(see Appendix B). From these, I received three replies. Having decided against a multi-
site study in favor of an in-depth study of one entire U3A art program, I now had to
choose one. To make my final decision, I made sure each had art, craft, and art history
offerings, then calculated simple percentages. For an average size group, one stood out
as having the most arts classes in relation to the total number of offerings. In addition,
the names of the classes were extremely vague (e.g., Art I), which heightened my
interest. What kinds of activities take place in Art I? Do these activities relate to how they define art? The decision was made—Stamford U3A!16

Gaining Access and Entry into the Research Site

Gaining Access

Once I had made my selection, the next step was to gain access. What was most helpful in this sense is that I made my decision from three groups that had already expressed their willingness to participate in the study. “Once potential sources of data—sites, groups, or individuals—are located, researchers face the problem of gaining access and entry. They must decide who to contact, how to initiate contact, and how to maintain the contact” (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 111). While access is described here as a problem to face, I found it to be quite a pleasure. The Chairman of Stamford U3A (who, interestingly enough, is a woman) was enthusiastic about the project, and when I asked for permission to base my study there, she seemed to have a sense of pride that I chose Stamford over all of the other possible choices. We exchanged numerous emails back and forth, and after initial interest was expressed, I wrote to her telling her more about my project. She wrote to me telling me about Stamford, what I should expect, and where to begin searching for a place to live. When I informed her that I was considering living in nearby Peterborough, which has more plentiful and flexible housing options, I received the reply, “You couldn’t possibly live in Peterborough! You must live in Stamford.” She tried to ensure that my trip would go smoothly, even forewarning me about the difficulties of bringing my small dog into the country. After our enjoyable exchanges, it was now time for me to leave the U.S. and travel abroad to England.

16 A detailed description of Stamford U3A can be found in Chapter 3.
December 18-19, 2006: Physically Entering the Site

On December 18, 2006, my husband Michael and I, along with our little dog Raphael, boarded our plane at Newark Liberty International Airport, flew through the night, and arrived the following morning at London Gatwick Airport. We picked up our rental car, spent the night in London, then left early the following morning, making our way towards Stamford.

Although Stamford U3A classes were on a break for the holidays and were not to start up again until the second week of January, I wanted time to find a place to live, get settled in, and become familiar with my surroundings before immersing myself in the fieldwork. In his ethnographic study of early childhood education, William Corsaro (1985) entered the research site a month before the school year began. He states, “I decided to use the first month to get to know as much about the setting and participants as possible prior to the start of school” (pp. 12-13). Similarly, beyond the practical tasks of locating housing and moving, I explored Stamford, learning where some of the classes would be held. My husband and I took a walking tour of Stamford led by the town historian, and we learned about Stamford’s long history as well as the architectural styles present throughout the town. This was a time of acquainting myself and becoming familiar with what was to be my new home for the next five months.

December 28, 2006: Coffee with the Chairman: Our First Face-to-Face Meeting

A little more than a week after my arrival, I met with the Chairman face-to-face for the first time. We set up a meeting to have coffee at the George Hotel Coffee Lounge. As I approached the Hotel, an old sign spanning the street welcomed me, and as I entered the courtyard, a magical feeling overtook me. Lush green grass surrounded by charming
old stone structures, Christmas lights strung from small evergreens, and a tiny grapevine bearing fruit all invited me to enter. Once inside, I walked toward the lounge and the Chairman\textsuperscript{17}, Penny,\textsuperscript{18} already seated, somehow knew who I was and called me over. She warmly welcomed me to the country and asked how my trip was. She was dressed in black pants and a rich, red cardigan. Through her chin-length white hair and large glasses shone a warm and friendly smile. As we talked, the enthusiasm in her voice was contagious. Somehow, she was as excited about meeting me and hearing about my project as I was to tell her about it. We discussed my living arrangements, which I still hadn’t found, and she offered many suggestions. We went over the schedule for the art groups and she told me that she was planning a luncheon at her house before the Spring Term began. All of the art and craft group leaders were invited, giving me a chance to meet and get to know them before attending their classes. This unexpected gesture helped immensely with gaining access to the leaders of the groups that I was to be working with.

Access to individuals whom the researcher has designated as the groups to be studied is also facilitated by introductions from third parties known to both researcher and participant … Third parties may ease access, especially if they are valued by people the researcher wishes to study. (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 112)

In this sense, Penny acted as the third party, not only introducing me to those responsible for the art and craft groups, but going an extra mile and providing a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere (and an amazing meal!) as well.

\textsuperscript{17} Although the Chairman is a woman, she prefers the title “Chairman” rather than “Chairwoman” or “Chairperson.”

\textsuperscript{18} Pseudonyms are used throughout this writing.
January 3, 2007: The Art Group Leaders’ Luncheon

I arrived at Penny’s home around noon for the get-together she had graciously organized. She had invited all of the art and craft group leaders and when I entered the house, some were already there chatting in the reception room. Penny greeted me, took my coat, and began introducing me to everyone. Within the next five minutes or so, all of the group leaders were there. This was a wonderful opportunity to get acquainted with the leaders in a social and informal setting. While we talked about my project and they all seemed interested in it, asking many questions, these discussions sparked further group discussions about the U3A. I heard stories about what makes the U3A unique due to having “no teacher” and “no authoritarian” and I heard the leaders comparing the U3A to other adult education structures in Britain, such as the WEA (Workers’ Educational Association), citing how the WEA is “quite hierarchal” in comparison. After discussions of the U3A and the benefits of “learning together as a group” with “no competition,” the topic of conversation shifted to historical sites, towns and villages, and art museums that I must see while in England. This also led to smaller conversations amongst each other. This was nice to see, as I learned that some of the women had not previously met. In this sense, the luncheon was organized for me to meet them all, but it also served as a place and time for them to meet each other.

Some shared stories about themselves, the most striking of these coming from Chelsea, the leader of Art II. She told about how she had taken art in school as a child and recalled an incident where her art teacher ripped up her drawing, telling her it was “rubbish,” but while this would be discouraging for most, Chelsea added, “but I always thought I could do it.” She took it up again in retirement and now leads one of the art

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19 Currently, all of the art and craft group leaders are women.
groups. Perhaps relating to her previous experiences with art teachers, she finished her story by saying, “I tell the members, ‘I’m not a teacher, I’m not an artist. We’ll work together.’”

Beyond these stories, I learned that most of the art and craft groups were in the process of organizing their projects for the next term and would be deciding what to work on for the upcoming months. The luncheon lasted a little more than three hours. As everyone was preparing to leave and saying their goodbyes, Melody, the Handicrafts II leader approached me. She told me that her group would be meeting a few hours after the General Meeting on Monday and invited me to her house for lunch in between the two. We confirmed the details, then she left with the other leaders. I stayed behind to go over some scheduling and practical matters with Penny, but shortly after, it was time for me to leave, as it was getting dark. After all, tomorrow was to be my long awaited moving day!

January 4, 2007: Settling in and Ready to Begin…

January 4th was moving day. Although arriving in England in mid-December, finding short-term, furnished, and pet-friendly accommodations was near impossible. Penny kept tabs on my search and continually asked for updates. Intrigued by how limited availability in the area was, she began her own inquiries. Consequently, it was a chance meeting in a supermarket parking lot that led to us moving in! Gayle, a former Stamford U3A committee member who knew Penny well, was in the process of selling her house and moving to a coastal town in the western part of the country. She was back in town and ran into Penny who explained our circumstances. Gayle then offered to meet

20 During the English winter, days are extremely short, with the sun setting before 4:00 p.m.
us and decided that she would rent to us as long as we would be willing to let the real estate agents show the house. What a perfect arrangement! What is most interesting about this situation is that it was through connections in the U3A that our accommodations became available. It was also quite fitting and a twist of fate that while I was to be taking on the role of a U3A member, I was literally occupying this role by living in a member’s home!

After moving in, unpacking, and getting settled, final preparations were made for formally beginning observations on Monday the 8th. After driving a rental for a month, it was time to get a car. As the house was located in Carby, a small village just outside of Stamford, I needed transportation to and from meetings, and ended up purchasing an interesting little car, a Volkswagen Polo. While very small and odd looking, it fit in with the other cars on the road quite nicely. After this was taken care of, last minute preparations were addressed. I inserted my new local telephone number on IRB informed consent forms and made photocopies to distribute to the U3A members. I organized my materials, set up my research journal, obtained Internet access, and reviewed my schedule for the upcoming week. After gaining access, making contacts, and dealing with practicalities, it was finally time to enter the next phase of the fieldwork: the observations.

Participant Observation

Introduction to Participant Observation

Participant observation was the research method that was most integral to the study and that was the most sustained throughout the project, consuming the remaining time in the research site. The very nature of the term participant observation implies both
participation and observation. “Ethnography takes observation a step further since an essential aspect of the ethnographer’s role is participation in the setting observed” (Pole & Morrison, 2003, p. 20). Participating in the U3A art groups allowed not only seeing what they do and how they go about it, but also positioned me in a stance where I could better understand these happenings through the eyes of a member.

If we are to understand social life, what motivates people, what their interests are, what links them to and distinguishes them from others, what their cherished values and beliefs are, why they act as they do, and how they perceive themselves and others, we need to put ourselves in their position and look out at the world with them. (Woods, 1996, p. 38)

While the goal was attempting to see the U3A through the eyes of a member, involvement in ethnography has been described as falling on a continuum ranging from full participant to full observer, and “within the interactive context of observational research, roles mutate in response to changing circumstances and are never defined with finality” (Angrosino & Mays de Pérez, 2000, p. 684). Where was I located on this continuum?

My Role as a Participant-Observer

As I was studying several groups (three art, three craft, and one art history), my role varied in each one.\textsuperscript{21} I had originally planned to begin as an observer and as a student, participating in more central roles and decisions only if invited. Green, Dixon, and Zaharlick (2003) state that “the position that the ethnographer takes in negotiating entry and in interacting in the setting is one of learner” (p. 207). Due to the orientation of assuming a learner’s role, I decided only to participate in learning activities and not those involving teaching, planning, or organization. As I wanted to see their choices and

\textsuperscript{21} A full description of the art and craft groups can be found in Chapter 3.
activities, I did not want to overtly influence them. While taking this stance, my role was
different from group to group.

Generally, in the three art groups, I was an observer, seeing what the members
were working on and how they went about it. In this sense, I was not participating in the
individual attempts at art making; however, halfway through each art session, there was
always a break for coffee, tea, and refreshments, at which time the members stopped their
work and looked around at what others were doing. I was a full participant in this aspect,
as I looked at what they were doing, engaged in conversations about it, offered
suggestions if requested, made general small talk, and swapped stories, as all the
members did. Referring back to the notion of changing and shifting roles, there were
several instances in the Art Workshop group where I was a full participant, working on
my own drawing and receiving advice from other members. While it was enlightening to
work as they were working, I found it difficult to focus on their interactions while getting
absorbed in the details of my own drawing. It was a trade-off. On one hand, I was able
to experience working in the group and the absorbing and restful atmosphere so
conducive to art making. On the other hand, wrapped up in what I was doing, I was not
as attentive to the group’s activities and interactions.

In the Art History group, where members typically sit and listen to the leader’s
talks, I was a full participant, listening and taking notes alongside the other members, and
even joining in on their “fieldtrip” to an art gallery in London. In this group, my role
remained fairly static throughout.

In the crafts groups, my role was much further towards the full participant end of
the spectrum than in the art groups. While not initially aware of what my role was to be
in these groups, it became apparent on my first day of observations when I attended the Handicrafts II group. The project was beading, and Ivy, the resident beading expert, was leading the group. She set me up with beading needles, waxed thread, a beading mat, and beads (everything that I needed for the project), and she talked me through every step. For each subsequent project, in all of the crafts groups, I worked alongside the other members, engaging in the same projects. While eager to share their knowledge with each other, they were delighted to be able to teach me a thing or two! I learned a patchwork technique, two beading techniques, iris folding, card pricking, and decoupage. While my role in these three craft groups was more interactive than in the others, this is likely due to their tendencies to work on group projects, while the art groups engaged in individual work. In some instances, like my drawing attempts in the Art Workshop, I became completely focused on what I was working on. In a sense, this is one aspect that truly set me apart from the other crafters. Although I had to devote my full attention to what I was doing (in most instances I was trying things for the first time!), the craft group members could chat away while working. I had to work at training my mind to be able to participate in the projects alongside the others while also paying attention to what they were doing and the interactions and conversations that were occurring within the meetings.

Impact on the Research Site

While my role shifted from group to group and I had assumed a learner’s position, careful not to “intervene” or be involved in decision-making processes, my presence there did have an impact, and in some instances, altered the group’s normal activities. Beyond the initial fascination of having a young American researcher interested in their
groups, some organized “special” events for my introduction. In the Art Workshop, all of the members brought in past artworks. Tables were set up around the periphery of the room upon which were exhibited a fabulous display of their work to give me a sense of what types of projects they typically work on. Most brought in items created in the group, but others brought in works they had made at home. Others also brought in some craft items, demonstrating the range of their interests. After they were set up, all of the members were looking at what each other had done, sparking conversations about techniques, subject matter, and other interests. One member noted that even if I hadn’t been coming, it was a wonderful thing to do, suggesting that it should be done again from time to time in the future.

A similar event occurred at my first attendance at the Handicrafts I group. All of the members brought in examples of past projects to show me. While the original intent was to demonstrate what the group has done, they ended up surprising themselves by the amount and breadth of work done throughout the course of the group. As each item was displayed, the members explained it to me, which ultimately led to small conversations amongst themselves. They explained the projects to each other, recalling specific events from those meetings. Going through the projects, they came across one that they had all particularly enjoyed and it was decided that they would revisit the project at the next meeting. So while they originally set out to show me what they had done, the process of looking through past projects gave them ideas for future ones.

Another notable instance of my impact occurred about halfway through my time in the study. In the Art II group, the leader, Chelsea, asked me to bring in some examples of things I had learned in the crafts groups. I brought them in and she had me go table to
table, showing them the projects. At each table, I showed the beading project and the iris folding, which led to many questions. What else do the craft groups do? How many groups are there? Who leads them? They then asked about techniques and eventually started talking about their own interests and attempts at crafts. As I left each table to go to the next, the one I was leaving continued their discussions about crafts, sharing their experiences with each other.

So while I tried to minimize my impact on the research setting, there were obviously changes and events that were unavoidably affected by my presence, although once the novelty of having me there died down, it seemed as though meetings were carried on as usual. As I have described my activities and roles within the groups as a participant observer, the following will describe the data collection and my activities at home after the meetings.

Data Collection: Writing Fieldnotes

The bulk of the data collected from participant observation was recorded in the form of fieldnotes. “Fieldnotes provide a distinctive resource for preserving experience close to the moment of occurrence and, hence, for deepening reflection upon and understanding those experiences” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 13). After each observation, detailed, descriptive fieldnotes were recorded, documenting the observations, activities, and experiences of each class. Since “writing fieldnotes immediately after leaving the setting produces fresher, more detailed recollections that harness the ethnographer’s involvement with and excitement about the day’s events” (p. 40), I wrote my fieldnotes as soon as I returned home from meetings. In some groups, I was able to take brief notes to remind me of incidents and events to write about later.
After the first couple weeks of participant observations, I had developed a style of note taking that served as a personal shorthand that only I could decipher. While this helped me in remembering when I sat down to write up the longer set of notes, it also ensured that my notes would remain private. In some groups, particularly when I was fully participating in a project, it was nearly impossible to jot down notes without disrupting the flow of the group. In these instances, I made mental notes, then jotted down as much as I could as soon as I had left the group and was on my way home.

Initially, my fieldnotes began with basic descriptions of the settings, the participants, the backgrounds of the groups, and the general flow and events of the meetings. Once these were recorded for each group, I was better able to conduct more focused observations, seeking out more nuanced understandings of interactions, roles, and meanings. Descriptions of settings and participants, however, were revisited if and when changes or additions were necessary.

For each group meeting, which lasted approximately one and a half to three hours, I wrote between five and ten single-spaced pages. As observations continued, my notes tended to be longer, as I had become comfortable with my own personal style of observing, taking notes, and writing. The notes also increased in length as I became more focused on nuance as opposed to general description and observation. Occasionally reading through and reviewing notes for a group aided in refreshing my memory and reminding me of specific aspects I wanted to pay closer attention to. Ethnographer Geertz (1973) states:

The ethnographer “inscribes” social discourse; he [sic] writes it down. In so doing, he turns it from a passing event, which exists only in its own moment of occurrence, into an account, which exists in its inscriptions and can be reconsulted. (p. 19)
“Reconsulting” the fieldnotes provided new directions and aided in the writing of memos. As fieldnote writing is mainly descriptive, devoid of analysis, memos allowed for initial analysis, reflection, and further writing. Memos provided a space between description and analysis for writing about incidents that struck me as interesting and called for more sustained comment, for noting similarities and differences across groups, and for commenting on thoughts and next steps. Memos ultimately “help direct the ethnographer’s attention, focusing and guiding future observations and analysis” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 103). I wrote memos whenever it seemed appropriate; however, I also set aside time at the end of each week and month to review observations and fieldnotes, to reflect on the methods and my role in the research, to engage in more sustained writings, and to consider new areas to focus on. Some examples of questions and notes about the course of the research and suggestions for future directions are as follows:

“Trying something new” may be a new element or code to look for in future observations. (February—Week 1)
Keep an eye out for variations from norms and patterns that have been established in the data. (February—Week 3)
I’ve identified a number of roles thus far: founding members, new members, group leaders, experts, dual members, etc., but are there other roles that I may have missed? Thinking about these roles can also help in selecting the remaining members for interviews, and perhaps talking to people who don’t seem to fit into any of these. This may help to see if they fill roles that are harder to detect… (April—Week 1)

These writings also allowed me to critically look for anything that was “missing” and that I had not been devoting enough attention to. While participant observation, fieldnotes, and memos were the most prevalent aspects of the study, interviews were also conducted.
Interviewing

Ethnographic Interviewing

Participant observation and fieldnote writing were the primary methods used, however, interview sessions were utilized to supplement these data. This was done to collect data in various modes, to verify tentative conclusions, and to move closer to the emic perspective by allowing U3A learners to describe their views and experiences in their own words. “Combined with observation, interviews allow the researcher to understand the meanings that people hold for their everyday activities” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 110). Since an essential element of ethnography is understanding cultural phenomena from the participants’ perspectives, interviewing is the best way to learn firsthand how U3A members perceive their roles, involvement, and participation. In addition, interviewing gives participants a voice in the research. “The whole body of elderly people is too often spoken for by others, their juniors that is to say, and very rarely given the opportunity to speak for themselves” (Laslett, 1989, p. 181). Until initiating the interview process, the only data collected were in my voice, and although attempting to view the U3A as a member, my observations and fieldnotes were my actions and my interpretations. It was time to hear from them.

Ethnographic interviews are generally unstructured as “unstructured interviewing can provide a greater breadth of data than other types, given its qualitative nature” (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 652). The main characteristic of this type of interview is that questions are open-ended, allowing informants to approach their answers in a natural way, addressing and revealing what they feel is most important to discuss. Since, as the interviewer, I was an outsider, my view of what was important might have differed from
those being interviewed. Additionally, because ethnography has understanding what is important to participation as one of its main goals, the interviews should allow for these understandings to emerge.

Because the goal of unstructured interviewing is understanding, it is paramount that the researcher establish rapport with respondents; that it, the researcher must be able to take the role of the respondents and attempt to see the situation from their viewpoint, rather than superimpose his or her world of academia and preconceptions upon them. (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 655)

Beyond being unstructured and open-ended, ethnographic interviews typically take the form of a conversation which is constructed by both the informant and the interviewer, and “the management of the interview must be carried out so as to promote the unfolding of emic cultural knowledge in its most heuristic, natural form” (Spindler & Spindler, 1987, p. 19). Although ethnographic interviewing is typically unstructured, the interviews that I conducted were semi-structured. Due to the fact that interviewees came from different art and craft groups, following the format of similar open-ended questions was chosen to facilitate comparison. An interview protocol was created that had questions that I wanted to ask of all those that were interviewed. These questions related to what I had been observing as well as those questions that only U3A members could answer, such as their motivations and what they perceive as benefits. While there were universal questions for all the interviewees, I tailored each set of questions according to the groups they belonged to and the roles they occupied.

**Interview Questions**

The interview questions that were asked of all respondents are:

- How long have you been a member of the U3A?
- How did you come to join?
- Besides (this group) are you a member of any other U3A groups?
- Are there any areas that you’re interested in that aren’t offered?
• Any other arts/crafts areas?
• How long have you been a member of (this group)?
• How did you come to join this group?
• What are your main interests in art/craft?
• What was your background in art/craft before you joined the group?
• Have you taken any classes or workshops in the arts outside of the U3A? If so, how did they compare to the U3A?
• How would you define expertise?
• What attracted you to the U3A and this group?
• What do you see as the benefits of being a U3A member?
• What are the benefits of membership in (this group)?
• Have you ever exhibited your art/craft work outside of the U3A?
• In what ways do you think the group shares ideas and knowledge?
• What are your artistic/craft goals?
• What resources do you use for project ideas, subject matter?
• How would you define creativity?
• Do you see a difference between art and craft? If so, what is the distinction?
• What do you think is the best aspect of this group?
• If you could change anything about the U3A or (this group) what would you change?
• Are you a member of any other groups in the community?
• Do you do any type of volunteering? For the U3A or in the community?
• How does the U3A fit in with these activities?
• How do you think the U3A contributes to your overall experience of retirement?
• What would you tell someone who was thinking about joining the U3A?

The questions relating to specific roles are:

For Group Leaders
• How long have you been the group leader?
• How did you come to lead the group?
• Do you know anything about the background of the group? When it started, who started it...
• Where did you gain the expertise to lead the group?
• What exactly does being the leader entail?
• Do you have any specific goals for the group?
• Is there any specific approach that you take in leading the group?

For Group Members
• Would you lead the group if you were asked? Why or why not?

For Members in More than One Art or Craft Group
• Do you see any difference between the two groups?
• How do they compare or complement each other?
For the Chairman
- How long have you been the Chairman?
- How did you come to take on this position?
- What are the responsibilities of being Chairman?
- How many members are currently in Stamford U3A? How many attend the General Meetings?
- Where do you see Stamford U3A fitting into the larger U3A community?
- What are your goals for Stamford U3A?
- How do you think that Stamford U3A compares to other U3As?

These questions were devised in order to ascertain how the members perceive their involvement and roles, their satisfactions and dissatisfactions, and the perceived benefits of membership. In addition, I asked how they joined both Stamford U3A and the art or craft group in order to hear the stories of how they became members.

Data Collection: The Interview Session and Transcription

Although ethnographic interviews are typically quite lengthy, the length of the interviews that I conducted was shorter, with the longest extending to a little over an hour. This decision was partially based on the health of respondents, as at least two had health issues that kept them from being seated for sustained periods of time. Additionally, as the questions were open-ended, the members could answer them for whatever length of time they wished.

I started interviewing members in the middle of March after already conducting two full months of observations. Waiting this long was beneficial, as it allowed me to use my observations and fieldnotes to guide the questions, and by this point, relationships had already been established, so the interviews were comfortable and fluid. There were drawbacks to this; however, as starting later limited the amount of members I could interview. Eleven interviews were conducted and at least one member from each group was represented. These eleven also represented a variety of roles, including group
leaders, members, volunteers, experts, and those in more than one art or craft group. “An ethnographer cannot rely on a single informant to assess the adequacy of the interpretations of the data. Multiple points of view or perspectives are needed” (Green, Dixon, & Zaharlick, 2003, p. 207).

While a variety of roles and groups were represented, the physical settings where the interviews were carried out varied as well. In each case, interviews were scheduled beforehand and I asked where they would prefer to conduct it. One was carried out during one of the meetings at a table offset from the rest of the group. While I was initially concerned about the potential for background noise on the audio recording, it ended up being fruitful, as the woman being interviewed actually looked over to the group and commented about what was taking place. Answering a question about how the group shares knowledge, she pointed over to the group, “Now, Leo was just going around, and he’s going to chat to everybody, and he’s a very good artist, so he will probably impart some kind of something, you know…” In this case, the physical setting had an impact on the interview. Some of the sessions were conducted during group meetings, and I went with the respondent to an adjacent meeting room for more privacy. Others were held in the respondents’ homes, leading to a very comfortable, informal talk over tea, coffee, and biscuits. One was even held at my kitchen table! It was up to the respondents to choose the time and place that was the most convenient and where they would be the most comfortable.

Interviews began in mid-March and continued until mid-May, with the last one taking place just two days before exiting the research site and leaving the country. For each interview, I wrote up brief fieldnotes (approximately half a page single-spaced)
describing the setting and the atmosphere of the session. The interviews were tape-recorded, and immediately following sessions, I started the transcription process. It was interesting listening to them so soon after, as there were things that I had missed or not noticed during the session itself. Similarly, there were conversations that seemed intriguing at the time, but re-listening, there were others that seemed so much more striking. The data from the interviews are in the form of typed interview transcripts that range from five to 15 single-spaced pages.

**Document Review**

Fieldnotes from participant observation and transcriptions from interviews comprise the majority of the data collected, but in addition to these, I also collected related documents. “The study of material culture is thus of importance for qualitative researchers who wish to explore multiple and conflicting voices, differing and interacting interpretations. Many areas of experience are hidden from language, particularly subordinate experience” (Hodder, 2000, p. 705). The creations and visual artifacts from the art and craft groups were not ignored, and while these were not primary data sources, they were used to accompany and inform the data from fieldnotes and transcripts.

Researchers supplement participant observation, interviewing, and observations with gathering and analyzing documents produced in the course of everyday events or constructed specifically for the research at hand. As such, the review of documents is an unobtrusive method, rich in portraying the values and beliefs of participants in the setting. (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 116)

The documents that were collected were handouts from classes, patterns and templates, announcements and flyers, and the monthly issues of the Stamford U3A Newsletter. In addition to these, pages from the Stamford U3A website (Stamford U3A, n.d.), the National U3A website (Third Age Trust, 2008), and from the Regional U3A website
(Association of East Midlands U3As, n.d.) were included. In the art and craft groups, digital images of the members’ works were taken. These images provide a visual record of the different types of art and craft making valued, pursued, and encouraged within the groups. Although used primarily as examples and illustrations, and not included for analysis, gathering both text-based materials and creating images of the projects was useful in highlighting activities in the groups.

In summary, participant observation was the main research method, followed by interviews to obtain members’ perspectives and viewpoints, and documents and photographs were collected to enhance and illustrate the study.

**Data Analysis in the Research Site**

**Preliminary Analysis**

After the first month of observations and fieldnote writing had come to an end, preliminary analysis began as I shifted for the first time into what Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) describe as a “reading” mode. In this mode, I read all of the fieldnotes I had written in entirety and began to formulate tentative connections, identify items of interest, and engage in more sustained, academic writing. While finding it difficult to shift between the style of writing fieldnotes that I had just become accustomed to and a more academic and analytical style, it was imperative that I began this process early on. This was seen as pressing, as it was hoped that early analysis would guide further methodological choices, lead to more focused observations, and provide cues towards generating interview protocols. “Qualitative researchers analyze data throughout the study rather than relegating analysis to a period following data collection. Because of this, analysis is linked with choices of theoretical frameworks, selection strategies, and
data collection methods” (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 238). Beyond memo writing, which highlighted points of interest and possible avenues to explore, I also, at the end of each month, took a more analytical and sustained look at my progress and considered next steps. At the end of the first month of observations in January, I engaged in the process of open coding. “In open coding, the ethnographer reads fieldnotes line-by-line to identify and formulate any and all ideas, themes, or issues they suggest, no matter how varied and disparate” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 143). In addition to allowing themes to be identified, open coding allows for previously unnoticed elements to become illuminated. The very nature of open coding implies that the researcher should be open to possibilities. The following sections describe the coding procedures used in the study.

Analysis in January: First Attempts at Coding

As I engaged in some form of rereading and coding at the end of each month, I will describe my first month’s endeavors in depth, offering a full sense of the procedures and decisions that were involved. February’s analysis will also be explored, as this was to be the first in a series of focused codings. Beyond these two descriptions, the later phases of analysis will not be explained in depth, as procedures were similar, and only deviations and differences will be explained. The following account describes the specific steps used in January’s open coding:

Step One: I prepared the data for coding including fieldnotes, initial memos, and documents. Photographs were not included, as they will be omitted from all analysis and used only for descriptive and illustrative purposes.

Step Two: Open coding was done to the data set. The notes were read line-by-line and all relevant information was coded. The codes were created entirely from the data and no predetermined codes were used; however, the terminology used for some codes stemmed from my background and from concepts relevant to older adult art education. Beginning on the first page, I began assigning codes to anything that seemed “code-worthy,” that is, anything that could be named.
Using colored markers, I kept a corresponding key that proved to be invaluable as it provided a record of the codes and allowed for easy location and retrieval.

**Step Three:** I continued through, page-by-page, and after going through the entire data set once, the first half was reread to ensure that later-created codes were applied throughout. From the notes 60 codes were created (see Appendix C for the list of codes).

**Step Four:** The codes were then compiled into categories. Simply put, I grouped them together in a way that made the most sense to me. As some pertain directly to the research process and methods themselves, and others are purely descriptive of the research setting, these distinctions aided in sorting them out and grouping them together. A total of eight categories were produced. Two relate to the research process, while the remaining six are rooted in the U3A groups and their activities (see Appendix D for a full list of categories and their descriptions).

After going through these steps and ending up with the resulting categories and codes, I was honestly at a bit of a loss as to what to do with them. I counted and tallied the codes to get a general sense of which codes and categories appeared most often. Then I went back through and completed the same process, this time tallying by individual art and craft groups, noticing how some codes/categories were prevalent in some groups and virtually nonexistent or even absent in others. While I “did” all of these things to the codes, it wasn’t until I put these activities aside that I discovered that, in a sense, the codes spoke for themselves. They showed me what I was seeing and what I was paying attention to, demonstrated what I was not attending to, and provided clues for what to look at next. An example of this is that from my very first days of observations, I had hunches that social interaction was an important element in U3A art programming. After the first round of open coding, I felt as though this hunch was justified, as it was a frequently occurring code. There were episodes that I had written about that did not initially strike me as inherently social while physically witnessing them, but upon
rereading and assigning codes, it became evident. It was at this point that I decided to
focus on this aspect more in observations.

In addition to pointing out elements I had previously been unaware of, the
creation of categories was also found to be beneficial in terms of future observations and
interviews, because the categories themselves aided in developing questions. I took each
relevant category and asked myself what elements in this category could be looked for in
observations and what questions arose that could only be answered by U3A members
(see Appendix E for the resulting questions). After writing about all of these new
insights, I set the active analysis aside until the end of the following month, but was
careful to remember what I had learned and to use these new insights to guide future
decisions.

Focused Coding

At the end of February, rather than reengage in open coding, I subjected the
fieldnotes to focused coding. “In focused coding, the fieldworker subjects fieldnotes to
fine-grained, line-by-line analysis on the basis of topics that have been identified as of
particular interest” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 143). While I had used open
coding the previous month, throughout February, some of the codes were jumping out at
me, and focused coding seemed like an appropriate strategy to try to make sense of them.

Through the process of focused coding, the ethnographer begins to recognize a
pattern in what initially looks like a mass of confusing data. With focused coding, the
ethnographer may also begin to envision possible ways of making an
argument or telling a story. (p. 161)

To choose what to focus on, the codes and categories from open coding were consulted.
Rather than using the same codes, I coded the categories. In addition to these, I selected
several codes that were particularly interesting and used those as well. The resulting
codes from the categories were: Context; Members and roles; Group practices; Motivations; Issues and realities; Community involvement within the U3A; and Community involvement beyond the U3A. The codes that I selected to investigate further were: Sharing knowledge, ideas, and expertise; and Decision making. Similar to open coding, these focused codes were assigned to the data from February. The most beneficial aspect of this ended up relating to the two codes that I had chosen, as after coding was complete, I was able to go back through and identify how decision making and sharing occurred differently from group to group. It also allowed for making connections, as I noticed similarities within the craft groups and within the art groups. This caused me to continue to look for these items through focused observations and also to begin looking at the differences between the art and craft groups, hypothesizing why these might exist.

In March, similar procedures were followed as focused coding was employed again, but after reaping the benefits of using the codes as opposed to the categories, I devised the coding scheme almost entirely from the initial set of open codes. In addition to those previously used, these codes were also added: Resources; and New members. Two new codes were created in response to observations. The first of these is “Art vs. craft” and was intended to help identify the distinction and interplay between these two areas. The second was “Agency” and was selected to highlight the ways in which members and groups are self-reliant. During this month, I had conducted several interviews, and when coding the transcripts, I found that new codes needed to be created for this new data source. Due to this, open coding was applied to the transcripts, and while there were a number of codes that appeared in both data sets, new ones were
created that were exclusive to the interviews: Age related issues; Relaxed atmosphere; and Lack of time and busyness.

In April, the codes from March’s analysis were reused for both the fieldnotes and the transcripts with only one alteration. March’s “Social aspects” was split into two distinct codes: Social importance; and Social interaction. This split allowed for the distinction between members’ social actions and their resulting meanings.

In summary, open coding was initially used, followed by a series of focused coding sessions. The codes and processes evolved in response to the study, and in a likewise fashion, the study evolved in response to the analyses. This approach was beneficial in refining observations, creating interview questions, and identifying connections. While these were the main data analysis processes, there were also other strategies that were employed, as I reviewed my initial research questions halfway through the fieldwork and again towards the end in order to ascertain what I had learned and what I was still lacking an understanding of. In addition, I periodically wrote brief memos that involved commenting on the field of older adult art education in relation to my fieldwork. As I left the research site in mid-May, with my final observation just one day before my departure from England, no analysis occurred this month and was suspended until my return home.

Data Analysis upon Exiting the Research Site

Final Coding of the Fieldnotes and Transcripts

While coding was utilized throughout the course of the fieldwork, open coding was done to the entire data set of fieldnotes and transcripts one final time. This was done in order to locate possible differences between in-site and off-site analyses and to see if
there were items that were more visible once I was no longer immersed in the research setting. This analysis was conducted in August, three months after my exit. While no distinct differences were found, there were a number of new codes that were added that emerged from my focused observations towards the end of the fieldwork. New codes also related to particular events that were occurring around the time of my departure. Thirty-four new codes were added that were not represented in the in-site open coding, leading to a total of 87 codes (see Appendix F). While this analysis was conducted to reveal potential differences between in- and off-site understandings, the following analyses were conducted to reveal differences between these understandings and those from the art education literature.

**Open Coding of the Literature**

During my time with the U3A, I witnessed and participated in numerous activities, projects, and events for which the art education literature pertaining to older adults could offer no guidance or explanation. In some instances, my observations stood in direct opposition to recommendations for “quality” programming, and in others, the art and craft groups chose to engage in the very activities that the literature promises will turn older adults away from art. It was these repeated events that prompted me to investigate these disconnects in a more analytical way. To accomplish this, I decided to treat the older adult art education literature as data, and to begin this process, I first had to think about how to create parameters for choosing this literature.

I began with an ERIC database (Educational Resources Information Center, n.d.) search using the terms “art education” AND “older adults” OR “older adult” OR “aging OR elderly.” This search yielded 55 documents, which were then filtered based on
inclusion and exclusion criteria. The criteria for inclusion were that the writings come from either art education journals or those that were written by art educators. Most importantly, the writings had to specifically concern art education for older adults. Criteria for exclusion included writings from the fields of adult education or art therapy, items that pertained to adults rather than older adults, and writings about intergenerational arts (unless found in an art education journal). In addition, book reviews were not included for analysis. The rationale for developing these criteria was to obtain the literature by and for art educators that best shapes, defines, and provides a foundation for the field. This process yielded 34 writings, and to these I added writings from the “special journal issues” on lifelong learning and the arts (Hamblen, 1993; Hicks, 2001; Lewis, 1987a; Lumsden, 1982; Mahlman, 1977) and from the two NAEA anthologies (Fitzner & Rugh, 1998; Hoffman, Greenberg, & Fitzner, 1980) that did not appear in the initial ERIC search. During the coding process and upon closer reading, it was found that some writings did not meet the criteria, and these were also removed from analysis. A total of 58 writings were included for analysis (see Appendix G).

I employed “semi-open” coding, which falls in between open and focused coding. The codes that had already been created from the fieldnotes and transcripts served as a starting point, and new codes were added as they arose. The fieldnote codes were chosen to facilitate comparisons between both data sets, and adding new codes allowed for disconnects to become more visible, as codes appearing in one data set and not the other could signal important shifts, discontinuities, and differing emphases. Additionally, using the same set of initial codes could aid in further analysis of how the same concepts are interpreted differently in theory and practice. Semi-open coding was conducted on 58
readings spanning from 1975 to 2004. This process resulted in 111 codes: 54 codes were repeated from the fieldnotes and 57 new codes were generated (see Appendix H).

It is these codes that provided the organization for the results of the study, as they highlight the relationships between the theory of the literature and the practice of the U3A. The codes were grouped into categories according to main characteristics and then further into two main themes (see Appendix I). The first main theme relates to generalities about older adult art education and includes the categories: Older adult population, Experiences of older adults, Motivations and benefits, Methods and approaches, What to avoid in a quality program, Practical issues, and Programming. The second theme relates to the field itself and includes: Art education’s place, The language of the literature, and Underlying theories. The first theme involves what the literature says and the second relates to how it is said. While each category contains a wealth of codes, concepts for further discussion were chosen according to the magnitude of disconnects that could be explored. As a main purpose of this study is to highlight these schisms, items were selected that have the most potential for questioning the literature and highlighting its modernist foundations, as these have the most promise for prompting a “rethinking” of the field. The following section discusses the limitations and issues that arose during the course of the study and how they were addressed.

Limitations of the Study

The Issue of Time

The most salient limitation of this study refers to the amount of time spent in the research site.

Another attribute of an ethnographic approach is that ethnographers usually work at their sites for long periods of time. Validity in anthropological fieldwork is
largely dependent on the time spent in study. A year is considered a short period for a whole community study, or the study of a band or a group, and most anthropologists spend more time than that. (Spindler & Hammond, 2000, p. 41)

This time-based criterion posed a problem for studying the U3A. As each term runs the length of a university semester, there are long breaks in between sessions. As a result, each individual session can only be studied for around five months, which does not seem to be lengthy enough for a “true” ethnography. While at least a year is recommended, this suggested minimum has been questioned by Jeffrey and Troman (2004) who note that “an ideal length of time to be spent in the field is difficult to establish” (p. 536).

These researchers note that spending years at a research site is not typically feasible for a variety of reasons such as funding time lines, financial concerns, and the reality that most ethnographic researchers come from higher education and have teaching obligations. Due to these realities and practicalities, they offer alternative ways of conceptualizing time. Nonetheless, spending only five months\(^{22}\) in the site and realizing the nature of the time issue, I tried to make the most of my time there, studying the art program in depth and accepting every feasible opportunity that presented itself. In addition, I have kept contact with several of the members and the Chairman who were willing to provide additional information and resources after my exit of the site if I found it to be necessary.

**Identity**

Another issue that was considered in relation to the fieldwork relates to identity. I had initially questioned whether my identity as an American student in my twenties studying a British organization, whose members are almost all of or beyond retirement age, would present issues in regards to gaining access, trust, and the emic perspective.

\(^{22}\) Legally, I was granted six month entry into the country, making it impossible (and illegal!) for me to stay longer without requesting further permissions.
Thinking about how to approach this issue, I turned to other ethnographers who had faced similar circumstances. I looked to Angela La Porte (1998) and her study of an intergenerational art program in Harlem, New York City. In relation to identity, she states:

Within this inner-city community, I was an outsider, a white graduate student of Italian descent, from a rural Southwestern Pennsylvania village, nestled in a river valley with surrounding hills and mountains, a loving family, and membership in a caring community also of European heritage. Outwardly, I would almost have passed for a Latina, but from within, I was different. (p. 17)

To account for these differences, she entered the setting by taking a peripheral role, assuming a more central role as time elapsed. Another example of overcoming identity differences is ethnographer William Corsaro (1985), who assumed the identity of “Big Bill” in order to gain access to study the culture of young children. Like La Porte, Big Bill also assumed a peripheral role at the outset, gradually moving towards the center as time passed and as the children became more comfortable with his presence. He forfeited his authority as an adult in order to be viewed as different from other adults, thus allowing him to become more accepted by the children. Big Bill provided me with a wonderful example of the necessity of shedding the university researcher identity if the setting dictates it. In the U3A study, as previously mentioned, I found early on that the literature was inadequate in informing what I was observing in the U3A, requiring me to put aside everything I had read pertaining to older adult art education. This greatly aided in putting my academic identity aside to focus on my new role as a “U3A member.”

In terms of my identity affecting access and trust, this issue did not arise. As both the spread of the U3A throughout Britain (and beyond) and the emphasis on advocating for increasing the availability of educational opportunities for older adults are embedded
in the aims and goals of the U3A, I was warmly welcomed. My study helps to further these aims and is aligned with their overall mission, and these characteristics facilitated access and trust. So while identity was initially identified as a possible limitation, the fact that the study furthers U3A interests and goals prevented potential problems from arising.

Is it Ethnography?

Due to various features in the research design, such as the length of time in the study and the semi-structured rather than unstructured interviews, the study may not be considered to be a “true” ethnography.

… anthropology is also a set of ideas and practices that educators and other professionals experience and sometimes adopt and/or adapt. It is natural that when educators co-opt ideas from anthropology they transform the field in ways that may not seem rigorous to anthropologists … Education, as an applied field, has different goals than anthropology, and many of its goals involve action as well as understanding. (Spindler & Hammond, 2000, p. 47)

Since this study goes beyond understanding and description and moves toward practical questions and issues, modifications and adaptations have been made to traditional notions of ethnography. These changes were made in order to best approach the research questions and purposes and to be best suited to the topic, participants, and practicalities. González (2004) makes the distinction between using the anthropological construct of ethnography as a field and a tool:

… I differentiate between anthropology as a field, as a repository of disciplinary knowledge (anthropology in education), and anthropology as a tool, a theoretical and heuristic device that allows us to study students, schooling, learning, and teaching (the anthropology of education). (p. 18)

Viewed in these terms, I employed ethnography as a tool that allowed for the strengths of anthropological methods to be benefited from, while the facets not feasible or applicable
to the research problem were altered and modified. Due to these modifications, this study is not a “true” ethnography, but is best described as a research study that adopts an ethnographic approach.

**Summary**

In order to research the nature of art and craft learning in the U3A, an ethnographic approach was adopted to gain an understanding of how members go about designing and engaging in their own learning projects and what this means to them. One local U3A group’s art program was investigated for a period of five months through participant observation and interviews and data were collected in the form of fieldnotes and interview transcripts. In-site analyses were conducted periodically throughout the course of the fieldwork, which led to more focused observations and aided in the development of interview questions. During the fieldwork, a second purpose emerged: highlighting the discontinuities between my observations in the U3A and the older adult art education literature. This led to the second phase of the study, where the literature was coded and analyzed in order to study these emergent discontinuities further. The next chapter presents an in-depth look at the research site, starting with the beginnings of the British U3A and ending with a rich description of the local group that was studied.
CHAPTER 3:
INTRODUCING THE UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE
This chapter will provide a comprehensive discussion of the research site, starting with the history of the U3A in Britain. The underlying principles of the U3A and its organizational structure will then be explained, followed by a thorough description of Stamford U3A and its art program: the setting for the fieldwork. The purpose of the following sections is to situate the research in historical, situational, and physical contexts.

**The British U3A**

The U3A in Britain is an educational organization for older adults which is comprised of a network of voluntary, self-help groups. Within this network, members share their knowledge, expertise, experiences, and interests by teaching and learning from each other. This movement, which officially started with one group in Cambridge in 1982, presently boasts 668 local groups and 188,507 members throughout the country (Third Age Trust, 2008) and continues to expand by approximately twenty percent each year (Beckett, 2003). How did this continually expanding movement begin?

**The Beginnings of the U3A**

**Cambridge U3A**

Finding the true beginning of the University of the Third Age in Britain is rather like searching for the source of a great river. You locate a spring here, a puddle there … they form a trickle which becomes a stream and then a river. (Norton, 1984a, p. 16)

The U3A is composed of hundreds of local groups and each has its own history, but the first of these groups to develop was Cambridge U3A. The British U3A was conceived on July 20, 1981 in Cambridge. On this date, a meeting was held to bring together those who were interested in starting a pilot educational program for older
adults. This program, launched in March of 1982, originally called the experimental Easter School, marks the formal beginning of the U3A. The Easter School, lasting for six days, was designed to test the interest in and feasibility of implementing a self-help educational organization for older adults on a larger scale. The seventy-five participants of this trial program were organized into smaller study groups to discuss and share their interests regarding designated topics and subjects. In addition to the study groups, select participants volunteered to share their interests further by delivering presentations to the entire group. The activities of these initial seventy-five participants of the Easter School provided the framework for future U3A activities to be extended to other older adults in Cambridge. Several months later, in September of 1982, the U3A in Cambridge was born. This new organization followed the formula of weekly lectures, entitled the “Foundation Lectures,” open to all U3A members, and weekly classes and study group meetings covering a range of subjects including art history, political science, music, English literature, and the fine arts (Futerman, 1984).

In unison with the beginning of the Fall term of Cambridge U3A, a National Committee was formed, and in the same year published *U3A DIY* (University of the Third Age, 1982), a manual to help new U3A groups to get started and to spread the organization beyond Cambridge and throughout Britain. This Committee, later in 1983 to become the Third Age Trust, is the umbrella organization which unifies and provides direction to existing local groups and aids in guiding interested communities in organizing and creating new groups. This assistance has allowed the U3A to flourish, as the numbers of local groups and members have continually increased from its inception in 1982 to the present. When describing its own history, the U3A relates the
developments of the Easter School, the Cambridge group, and the National Committee, but also looks to the U3A in France (Third Age Trust, no date-b).

L’ Université du Troisième Age: The French U3A

L’ Université du Troisième Age, the French University of the Third Age, was initiated by Pierre Vellas in 1972 and began its programming the following year. Vellas, a sociology professor, created the U3A from the University of Social Sciences at Toulouse. Similar to Elderhostel in the U.S., the French U3A originally began as a summer program, with the intention of making the university and its resources and facilities accessible and available to older adults. Its format was similar to that of the Easter School, with large weekly lectures and smaller classes. The summer session proved insufficient in meeting the demands of the large numbers of prospective students, and in the following year, the U3A began operating on the university’s schedule, with most classes and programs running for eight to nine months (Brasseul, 1984). The concept spread rapidly from the first U3A in Toulouse in 1973, “and while it took eleven centuries to create 70 conventional universities in France, it has taken only eight years to create 60 U3As” (Coni, 1983, p. 201). The stated aims of the rapidly growing French U3A were:

To contribute to raising the standard of elderly people by health-building activities, socio-cultural activities, new responsibilities in the community and by research on the improvement of the lives of elderly people;
To contribute to the improvement of living conditions of elderly people through multi-disciplinary research on law, economics, social welfare, public health etc. by seminars, conferences and training programmes and by the dissemination of information;
To help private and public services and business through co-operative activities in training, information and applied research. (Clennell, 1979, p. 28)
As the French U3A was created as a university department, these objectives are reflective of the functions and uses of the U3A for the university as opposed to the uses of the university by the older participants. The French model of the U3A relies on the resources of the parent university. Courses and weekly lectures are typically proposed and taught by university faculty members and take place within university classrooms. “Although in some cases U3As have been announced without any connection to a ‘normal’ university, this is discouraged and university liaison is generally accepted to be an essential ingredient” (Radcliffe, 1982, p. 7). The defining feature of the French U3A model is its connection to the university and its reliance on university instructors. The Cambridge model of British U3As stands in direct opposition to this.

From the French Model to the Cambridge Model

When the Cambridge model was instituted in Britain, there were deliberate alterations to the ways in which the U3A was functioning in France, abandoning the university link. “U3As in the British tradition have sought neither affiliation with nor sponsorship by universities. They have been established on principles of self-help and self-sufficiency” (Williamson, 2000, p. 51). Since there is no university affiliation, the classes are not proposed and taught by professors, but by the older members themselves, demonstrating a fundamental difference between the two models. In actuality, there is very little resemblance between the two and it seems as though the only aspects of the French model that were borrowed were the name and the idea of offering educational opportunities to older adults. The form that the U3A assumed from its beginning in Cambridge rests on the philosophy of self-help and asserts its autonomy, bearing a
striking resemblance to the strong traditions of English adult education. Beyond its name, there is little that resembles the university-linked, teacher-directed French U3A.

The “Founding Fathers” of the U3A

The founders of the U3A in Cambridge had strong ties to adult education and were no doubt familiar with its current provision and its history. Peter Laslett, known as the founding father of the U3A in Britain, was a historian whose varied interests became focused on the history and sociology of old age during the last twenty years of his life. These interests led to the recognition of the inadequacy of the current educational systems in meeting the needs of older adults (Laslett, 1977, 1980). It was Laslett who called for the initial meeting in 1981 to discuss the possibilities of the U3A in Britain, and he was a key player in the organization and administration of the Easter School and the further developments of Cambridge U3A. In his book, *A Fresh Map of Life: The Emergence of the Third Age*, Laslett (1989) lays out the historical trends and developments of old age in Britain, describes the emergence of the third age as a new life stage, and provides a rationale for the U3A. Laslett, along with another U3A founder, Michael Young, was also involved in the conception, design, and creation of the Open University. From working together on the Open University, to make university education more accessible through no entrance qualifications and an extensive network of distance education, it seems natural that they would again work together to make education more accessible to older populations through the design and development of the U3A.

Michael Young was a sociologist who had been involved in the creation of a wide range of educational institutions both in Britain and internationally before his involvement in the U3A including the Open University, the National Extension College,
and the International Extension College (for an extensive list, see Perraton, 2005). Young’s involvement in these institutions likely influenced the form that the U3A took.

The third key player in the development of the U3A is Eric Midwinter, an educator, whose interests began in the school system, later shifting to adult education, and finally to educational gerontology. Midwinter, whose main concerns relate to older adults’ access to education and the benefits of engaging in educational programming (Midwinter, 1982), was the founder most responsible for disseminating the idea of the U3A, both in the public sphere and in the academic literature. After Laslett called the initial U3A meeting, Midwinter discussed the proposed ideas on a BBC program leading to nearly 400 letters written in response, demonstrating a strong interest among older adults (Norton, 1984a). He also edited the first book documenting the beginnings and growth of the U3A in its early stages (Midwinter, 1984a).

The unique combination of the backgrounds of these three major influences in the creation of the U3A and their previous knowledge of and experience in British educational programs and organizations had a profound effect on the form that the U3A assumed. The influences that they brought with them, from Laslett’s historical perspective to Young’s experience in organizing educational initiatives to Midwinter’s involvement in adult education and education gerontology, led to the overhaul of the university-based French model and to the creation of a uniquely British U3A system. In the next section, the principles and characteristics that make the British U3A unique will be discussed.
The Guiding Principles of the U3A

Teaching Each Other

The objects and principles of the U3A were written by Peter Laslett in 1981 (Laslett, 1989) and have provided the foundation for all subsequent U3A activities. The defining feature of the U3A is found in Laslett’s oft-cited first principle which calls for older adults to teach each other with an accompanying erasure of the student-teacher dichotomy. “The university shall consist of a body of persons who undertake to learn and to help others to learn. Those who teach shall also learn and those who learn shall also teach [italics added]” (p. 179). This concept rests on the idea that people gain experience and expertise in a range of areas throughout their lives and have the potential to share this knowledge with others.

Its philosophy is based on the idea that people who have a lifetime of work behind them can probably teach a thing or two themselves …. Rather than hiring expensive paid teachers, the U3A capitalises on the accumulated knowledge, skills and interests of its own members. (Pile, 2006, pp. 1-2)

Members of the U3A share the knowledge and experiences they have accumulated throughout their lives in order to learn from each other. The emphasis is on sharing knowledge, therefore, the distinction between student and teacher is lessened, leading to a shift in traditional educational roles. Since “the word teacher is not felt to be quite right,” the term is rarely, if ever used, and instead, it is often replaced by “group leader” (Laslett, 1989, p. 164).

This principle is also revolutionary in changing the view of older learners from passive to active. It shifts their roles from recipients of others’ teachings and knowledges to creators of their own learning endeavors and bearers of their own knowledge. While

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23 Select principles will be discussed in this section. For the full document, see Appendix J.
Laslett’s principles were written in 1981, educational gerontology in the U.S. was still strongly maintaining student-teacher distinctions and reinforcing a dependent view of older learners, as evidenced by the emergence of the concept of geragogy:

Andragogy involves self-directed learning, participative decision-making and problem-centered activities, while geragogy stresses instructor-directed learning, supervised decision-making, and person-centered activities. But elders are often undecided about their goals and unfamiliar with learning options so they are more likely to need the supervision of informed instructors. (Schuetz, 1982, p. 342)

This notion of older adults as needing to rely on teachers is upended by Laslett (1989) who cites this as an issue of power and control as he criticizes the “tendency for those in the Second Age to assume that persons in their position should control every aspect of educational activity, even those set up for themselves by those who have retired” (p. 172). The acknowledgement of older adults’ life experience and knowledge, their agency, and their capacity to share with each other, coupled with an emphasis on third age autonomy and freedom from second age constraints, are essential characteristics of the U3A that are built into the first principle. This principle of self-sufficiency leads to another principle which aims to ensure and protect the U3A’s self-reliant status.

Financial Independence

To ensure its independence, the U3A is entirely financially self-supporting, as this is another principle:

Everyone joining the university shall pay for its upkeep and for instruction received. These payments shall be the sustaining revenue of the institution apart from gifts by foundations and other patrons. No support from the funds of local or central government shall be expected or sought [italics added]. (p. 179)

The U3A is owned, managed, and funded by its members to ensure that their interests are not co-opted by outside and/or second age purposes. Funding that might distort the aims
and purposes of the U3A is not accepted, and where grant monies are obtained, they only comprise a marginal percentage of the total budget, with the majority of revenue coming from membership fees. This stipulation not only protects members’ interests, but also allows the groups to remain self-sufficient. Understanding their “special interest” status, U3A members recognize their vulnerability and fragile position in terms of educational budgets, structures, and support. When there are economic downturns and budget cuts, programs perceived to be on the margins or as representing special interests and populations often suffer. Self-funding of the U3A allows it to remain “financially independent of the established educational system” (p. 172) and thus free from its impositions. The U3A, by not relying on outside support, provides a defense against second age interests and the possibility of losing funding, so even during periods of economic instability and budget cuts, the U3A has shown continual and steady growth and expansion (Swindell & Thompson, 1995). While this principle ensures autonomy in their activities, the next principles describe what these activities actually are.

A (Subject) Matter of Choice

As U3A members teach each other, what is it that they are teaching? Who decides? The U3A principles state:

The curriculum of the university shall be as wide as resources permit, ranging from mathematics and the natural sciences, by way of philosophy, literature, and history, to music and to aesthetic, practical and physical training. Nevertheless, the preference of members will be the only criterion of what is done [italics added], and it is recognized that humane subjects are likely to predominate. (Laslett, 1989, p. 178)

Just as members are responsible for teaching and sharing in the U3A, it is they who are responsible for choosing their own subject matter. Members choose the subjects that they are interested in, and consequently, they are afforded the opportunity of learning what
they desire to learn: They are not at the mercy of what others think they want or need to learn. The subjects offered by each group are “determined by the interests and requests of their members” (Pile, 2006, p. 2), so there is tremendous variation among the hundreds of local U3A groups. Although the U3A was created initially as an educational organization, not all interest groups are academically based. Since members choose their activities, what is on offer represents their interests and needs, and as a result, alongside academic subjects, such as English literature and philosophy, one can also opt to join groups such as keep-fit and walking groups, card playing groups, and lunch groups (where members meet at a local pub or restaurant to dine and chat with each other).

Since programming is created according to members’ needs, social, physical, leisure, and academic options are typically present in most local U3As.

How Do They “Teach” Each Other?

In the U3A, members are the teachers, the learners, and the creators of knowledge. They choose what to study and how subjects are approached and studied is also in the hands of members. The principles related to methods are:

The standards of the university shall be set by its individual classes, and ways shall be devised to permit each member to find his or her own level. There shall be no attempts to set a university-wide standard, or any assimilation with university standards elsewhere…

The form taken by each individual pursuit within the University of the Third Age shall be decided on each occasion by members collaborating for the purpose… (Laslett, 1989, p. 179)

While each local U3A decides what is to be offered, each individual interest group decides for itself the course its endeavors will take and the methods used to follow that course. This allows each small group to approach their learning in the style that best suits their needs, goals, and ways of working. Since there is great diversity among local
groups and their offerings, there is an accompanying diversity of approaches within each group. “Some subject groups are led by one person throughout …. Others are multi-contributory, with each member of the group researching a slice of the chosen subject and leading part of the discussion” (Pile, 2006, p. 2). Every decision is up to members, truly making them responsible for their own learning, and the only “standard” that is upheld is that members are expected to organize their activities in ways that best suit their needs.

Who Can Join?

As the U3A was developed to allow educational opportunities to be more accessible to older adults, there are no membership qualifications. “Joining the university shall be a question of personal choice. No qualifications shall be required, and no judgement made by the university between applicants” (Laslett, 1989, p. 178). In addition to open membership, there are also a variety of roles for members to assume, including voluntary roles both within and beyond the U3A. The related principles state:

All members of the university shall be expected to offer voluntary service to it and to its activities in relation to society at large, especially to the elderly.

The undertaking of all members to teach as well as to learn may be fulfilled in the following ways other than instruction: Counselling other members; Taking the university’s offerings into the homes of the housebound, the bed-ridden, those in retirement institutions or in hospitals; Helping the effort to provide intellectual stimulus for the mass of the elderly in Britain; Taking part in any other offer of manpower made by the university to educational or cultural institutions which stand in need of it. (p. 178)

While all U3A members are learners, there are also other roles that members can assume, particularly if they are not interested in or are uncomfortable with teaching or leadership roles. Although the U3A may initially seem to be an organization that is self-serving—as members follow their interests, choose their subjects, and devise their own learning methods—happenings in the U3A are rarely confined to the organization. Activities are
often carried out into the local community. Members are active in volunteering, and these efforts tend to be concentrated on older populations; however, some local groups also maintain relationships with local schools, occasionally engaging in projects with school children or tutoring children who need extra help. Again, as local groups determine their activities, great variation exists in terms of volunteering and community roles from one group to the next as “the U3A movement in Britain defiantly lacks a rigid form” (Midwinter, 1984b, p. 6). The U3A as a movement calls for an expansion of educational opportunities for older adults as well as the roles that are available to them—in their learning, in their communities, and in society at large. Along with this, there is also the goal of expanding the availability and accessibility of the U3A.

**Expanding the U3A and Maximizing Accessibility**

Recognizing the potential of the U3A model for older adults, Laslett (1989) envisioned (and correctly so) its spread throughout Britain when he wrote the objective of “encourag[ing] the establishment of similar institutions in every part of the country where conditions are suitable and collaborat[ing] with them” (p. 178). This objective encourages the growth of the U3A throughout the country, and unlike the French model of the U3A and the American system of Institutes for Learning in Retirement, growth is not limited and restricted to regions geographically situated near universities. This greatly increases access to educational participation in places where there are few other opportunities to engage in other forms of programming. At the same time, the structure of the U3A allows for regional and local interests to be served, since it adapts to the needs of each particular locale.
Spreading the U3A throughout the country also makes it more accessible. Travel and cost are factors affecting adult participation in educational programming and the importance of these factors tends to increase with age (Schuller & Bostyn, 1992). Small, local groups ensure that older participants do not have to travel far to attend classes and meetings, and oftentimes, when members are ill or unable to easily leave their homes, the groups come to them. Additionally, as many older persons are living on fixed or limited pensions and incomes, the cost of a course could be a determining factor of whether to attend or not. Aware of this, the U3A has aimed to keep fees low, and each local group sets its own membership fees, allowing for regional economic differences. The U3A in Saffron Walden, one of the first local groups, serves as an example:

From the very beginning it was decided that the enrolment fee should be kept to a minimum and that it should be the only charge, its payment entitling people to attend all open meetings and as many groups or classes as they wished. The fee for the first year was set at £1 and to date there is every indication that we can work effectively at this level. (Jones & MacElroy, 1984, p. 142)

Presently, membership fees are variable from group to group, but tend to range from about £5 to £20 (approximately $10 to $40) per year (Pile, 2006), and like in Saffron Walden, membership allows access to meetings, classes, and all of the resources provided by the National U3A. Costs are kept low due to the fact that most tasks, including teaching, organizing, and administrative and clerical tasks are done on a volunteer basis by the members themselves. Since the U3A was created by and for older adults, their unique circumstances were addressed from the very beginning and attempts have been made to minimize participation barriers. “The style of the U3A should be such that it makes opportunities readily available to older people wherever they happen to be” (Norton, 1984b, p. 116).
Summing up the Principles

Peter Laslett (1989), in writing these objectives and principles, aimed to create the foundation for an organization that would be truly responsive to older learners’ needs. In addition, he recognized that “Second Age principles cannot be sufficient for Third Age purposes” (p. 139). Although the initial inspiration for the U3A came from the French model, the resultant British model was radically altered. Shunning university and institutional support, local British U3A groups are created for older adults by older adults, so “actual ownership of the agency resides in the elderly membership, unlike in France where the elderly do not really own their institution” (Laslett, 1984, p. 33). This new conceptualization of the U3A recognized older adults as a population with capabilities, diverse experiences, and the agency of being active constructors of their own learning endeavors. Older adults were no longer portrayed as passive learners, needing to rely on others, but as “altogether capable of inventing their own educational destiny” (Midwinter, 1984b, p. 17). While this section discussed some of the principles that provide the foundation for the U3A, the next section will describe how the U3A is structured and organized.

The Organization and Structure of the U3A

U3A Nationally: The Third Age Trust

While each individual local group is autonomous, there are structures in place at the national, regional, and local levels to unify the groups and the movement itself. At
the national level, the unifying organization is the Third Age Trust, a national registered charity. Laslett’s (1989) eighteenth U3A principle is realized through the Trust:

Although the University of the Third Age in Cambridge will be the first of its kind in Britain, it is reasonable to expect that others will soon be founded in our country. Every effort shall be made to encourage interchange with these institutions at home and abroad, to exchange teaching with them, to collaborate on research with them, to unite with them in the furtherance of the intellectual interests of the elderly, especially in Britain. (p. 179)

The Third Age Trust has worked towards this goal by uniting and facilitating communication among the hundreds of local groups. From its beginning, the organization was chaired by Michael Young, one of the founders of the British U3A, who defined the functions of this committee. These foundations have been built upon and expanded alongside the growth of the U3A. It was Young who initiated the publication of the manual *U3A DIY* (University of the Third Age, 1982) to aid in the formation of new groups. He also started up a national newsletter and was largely responsible for the creation of the Third Age Trust, which granted charitable status to all affiliated local groups. These efforts at unifying the groups and the movement led to the first national convention in 1984, bringing together representatives and members of local U3As (Bourne, 1984). It is interesting to note that the creation of the National Committee coincided with the first full session of the U3A in Cambridge in 1982, and although the U3A in France had its first full session in Toulouse in 1974, a national organization (the Union Francaise des Universités du Troisième Age) did not emerge until 1980 (Radcliffe, 1984). It is likely that this development in France prompted the creation of a unifying organization in Britain from the outset, as Peter Laslett was in close communication with the French U3A; however, the new constituency of U3A members also felt a need for it.

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24 Previously known as the National Committee in 1982, the name was changed to the Third Age Trust in 1983.
While local groups wanted ultimate control over their activities, this did not conflict with
the desire for unification with other groups. “There must be a strong national body
whose function will be primarily one of liaison and service” (Norton, 1984b, p. 124).
Another U3A advocate stated, “I am glad there is such variety in the U3A. Every local
initiative is unique. There needs to be the maximum local autonomy but backed up by a
small national organisation which fosters an information co-operative for every locality”
(Rennie & Young, 1984, p. 104). Along with the felt need for an overarching unifying
organization, there was also a desire to keep it small. According to its members’ wishes,
the Third Age Trust has remained small, growing only in proportion to the growth of the
U3A itself.

Presently, little has changed in the mission25 of the Third Age Trust as it
continues its communication fostering and unifying activities; however, over time, these
activities have been expanded and improved upon in response to member and group
needs. Beyond aiding the creation and growth of new groups, the Trust presently carries
out a variety of functions that aid in the unification of already established groups,
including residential summer workshops, conferences, a national newsletter, and a
resource library. These activities aid in supplementing and advancing members’ learning
and involvement beyond the local U3A groups, connecting members from various
locales. Recently, online courses have also been introduced as a means of reaching older
adults who are unable to leave the home and/or attend meetings and classes. Perhaps the
most valuable activities of the Third Age Trust in enhancing U3A learning are the subject
networks and the Learning Support Group. Because groups propose, create, and teach
their own courses and study groups at the local level, it is possible that a group may have

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25 See Appendix K for the Third Age Trust’s mission statement.
an interest in an area that no members feel qualified or comfortable with teaching. Rather than leaving the interest unexplored, the Learning Support Group assists local groups by connecting them with other U3A groups, members, and resources that can be of use. Similarly, the subject networks bring interest group leaders together throughout the country based on their subjects of interest and involvement. The networks, which promote “working together to share ideas and materials,” encompass 28 subject areas including art, creative writing, environmental studies, and world religions (University of the Third Age, n.d.). The art group, called the National Art Network, publishes an online newsletter and serves as a place for members to share the experiences of their art groups. It gives updates on the formation of new art groups and the activities of existing ones. There are continual calls for art group leaders to describe their activities, such as “How many of you exhibit your work to your own U3A? Even braver, to the larger community? We should welcome news from you” (Loraine, 2006, p. 1). The responses are then posted in the following newsletter. This group creates a space for leaders of studio art, art appreciation, and art history groups to discuss their groups and potentially to spark new ideas, projects, and directions. The creation of the subject networks under the Third Age Trust provides an example of how the Trust evolves in response to the needs of local U3A groups and how they fulfill their role as liaison between groups.

Membership Nationwide

As the Third Age Trust unifies the 188,507 U3A members across the country, who are these members? On a whole, the membership is fairly homogenous. In relation to age, since it is an organization for retirees and older adults, the members are all 50 years of age or older. In addition, the membership is heavily female, with women
accounting for 74% of all U3A members. In terms of ethnicity, there is even less diversity, with an overwhelming 96% of its members being White (Third Age Trust, 2001). While these statistics may seem extreme, they are fairly consistent with the majority of adult education participation studies (e.g., Kim, Hagedom, Williamson, & Chapman, 2004). In addition to this, a reliable predictor for participation beyond initial schooling is previous educational level (Merriam & Brockett, 1997) with the U3A being no exception. “The U3A initially attracts those who have had at least secondary education, and many who have had a university education. Typically, as is the case in adult education, those who receive are those who have had some before” (Radcliffe, 1984, p. 70). Although most U3A members have obtained further qualifications beyond their initial schooling, the U3A has attracted those who have not, with close to a quarter of the membership receiving no further qualifications (23%). This is perhaps due to the U3A’s more holistic approach to the needs of older adults by offering a mix of educational, practical, social, physical fitness, and leisure groups. Nonetheless, with further education or not, once members join the U3A, it seems to satisfy their needs, as 65% have attended no other learning activities beyond the U3A in the past three years (Third Age Trust, 2001). So while the population of the U3A currently lacks diversity in terms of race and gender, it has made itself more accessible to older adults in terms of educational levels. The following sections return to a discussion of the structure of the U3A below the national level.

Regional U3A

Although the Third Age Trust exists to facilitate communication between groups nationally, several regional groups have been created in response to more local needs.
The creation of these groups was envisioned and planned almost from the outset. In 1984, Dianne Norton wrote about the creation of new local groups and stated, “But these groups will not operate in isolation. There will be regional networks such as those already developing in Sussex and Lancaster” (1984b, p. 124). Groups such as these take the goals of the Third Age Trust and bring them closer to home, thus allowing for members and leaders to physically meet more often. An example of a regional U3A group is the Association of East Midlands U3As, which encompasses Stamford U3A, the setting for the study.

The Association is a federation of U3As in the East Midlands region who have joined together to support each other in the promotion of informal learning and the cultural and social development of their members. The Association includes U3As in Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Derbyshire and northern Cambridgeshire. Any U3A in this area may join the Association as an affiliated U3A. (Association of East Midlands U3As, n.d.)

There are currently 48 local U3A groups that are affiliated with the Association, and there are two new groups in the planning stages. Just as the Third Age Trust aids the creation of new groups, the regional groups also assist, with the benefit of having local contacts with regional understandings. The Association provides local support to groups and is currently in the process of organizing special events for group leaders and committee members from various local groups to meet and share their developments, approaches, and concerns (see Appendix L for the Association’s full Learning Support Policy). The strength of this lies in the ability of sharing locally. The regional representative framed this potential for sharing, stating, “After the first 25 years we can celebrate the shared learning we have WITHIN our U3A and its Interest Groups. I suggest: In the next 5 years let us DEVELOP shared learning BETWEEN DIFFERENT U3As and their Interest Groups” (Morris, 2007, p. 11). This sharing between groups is
facilitated by the proximity of U3As affiliated with the Association and is furthered even more so by the support of Neighbourhood Groups which unite and promote communication between several groups that are geographical neighbors. The Association currently contains four of these groups, containing 32 local U3As.

The Local Groups

Although there are larger U3A structures in existence and these structures continue to grow in complexity, the U3A is not a top-down organization, as each group retains its autonomy. These larger structures exist only to provide support to local groups, to enhance their activities, and to facilitate sharing and communication between groups. These structures also allow for a unification of and a voice for the U3A movement itself on a larger scale, but the ultimate control of its form and activities resides at the local level. It was intended to be this way from the start.

Over the next few years many new groups will arise at local level. If, as seems likely, the local group is the most appropriate form for Third Age learning then it is possible to imagine thousands of such units covering the country. (Norton, 1984b, p. 123)

While written only two years after the creation of the first British U3A, the local group was seen as an important element in fostering the growth of the U3A. Within the present number of 668 local groups, there is tremendous variety. “A typical U3A has about 250 members but could be as small as 12 and as large as 2000” (Third Age Trust, no date-c, para. 1). Some U3A groups are small because they are located in remote and isolated areas, but other larger areas sometimes prefer to cap their enrollment. In this case, there is a preference to create a network of small groups rather than having one large one. In terms of “age,” there are some local groups that were created almost immediately after the creation of Cambridge U3A, and others that were literally created just days ago.
On the local level U3A is currently growing in an almost organic way. It flows freely in a variety of directions, filling crevices of need and carrying along activated resources in its wake. All its varying stages can be examined in different local groups. (Norton, 1984a, p. 21)

Along with variety in formation and size, as each group chooses its subject matter in response to members’ interests and needs, there is also variety inherent in what is offered from group to group.

Art in the Local Groups

Since local groups choose and design their own programming, the resulting offerings reflect their interests. It is interesting that despite the variety among groups, each local group’s offerings are heavily based in the humanities and in the arts. “The desire to learn something new tends to take a broader form as people get older and to be less narrowly confined to short-term vocational concerns” (Sargant, 1991, p. 20). This move away from work-related education allows older adults to pursue and explore their interests beyond the sphere of work. In the U3A, this has manifested itself as an abundance of arts-related subjects, which are themselves the subject of one of Laslett’s (1989) principles. “Insistence on learning as an end in itself shall go along with an emphasis on the value of making things and on acquiring and improving skills of all kinds …. Painting, sculpture and music shall be given high priority” (p. 179). This focus creates a space for art and art-related subject areas to flourish. Within the over-600 local U3As, almost every group offers at least one art class, and in some groups, there are a wide variety of art subjects to learn about, including art making, craft making, art appreciation, and art history. As an example, Cheadle U3A's varied art program encompasses general and more focused art and craft groups including: Paper quilling, Calligraphy, Card making, Crafts, Watercolours, Parchment craft, and Painting for
pleasure (Cheadle U3A, 2007). In Cambridge’s U3A group, there are 33 different art and craft classes, ranging from Portrait painting to (the history of) Sculpture to Turkish handcrafts (University of the Third Age in Cambridge, 2007). Since members decide what subjects are to be explored, their offerings can reflect individual and group interests as well as regional interests. The prominence of art and craft courses demonstrates these older learners’ interests in pursuing art education in their retirement. The following section provides the context for the research setting: Stamford U3A and its art and craft program. While this is just one local group amidst the diversity and variety inherent in the U3A, it serves to highlight the potential of the U3A in one of the many forms that it assumes. This is necessarily important since:

The example set by those in the Third Age in present society must inevitably be of significance to their successors, must serve as hints of what they might do or avoid doing when they themselves become members of that society. (Laslett, 1989, p. 197)

**The Research Setting: Stamford U3A**

Stamford: The Finest Stone Town in England…

Stamford U3A is situated in the town of Stamford in Lincolnshire county, just 90 miles north of London. This small town, with a population of 18,000 residents, is advantageously located off the A1 highway which is the main thoroughfare running north to south in England. Its central location has afforded Stamford a rich history spanning over 1,000 years. The town also has the good fortune of remaining well-preserved. With over 600 listed historic buildings, most constructed with local Lincolnshire limestone, Stamford is often referred to as “the finest stone town in England.” Adding to its charm

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26 The A1 highway is historically known as the Great North Road, which you may recall from the legends of Robin Hood!
are five historic churches, the 16\textsuperscript{th} century mansion Burghley House, and the picturesque River Welland.

![Figure 1. Stamford Town Centre.](image)

I first stepped foot in Stamford on December 21, 2006, and as I walked down the pedestrianized, cobblestoned High Street, a magical, almost surreal feeling overtook me. The modernized shops and storefronts on the street level allow the town to remain current and functional, but looking above this, you are able to get a sense of what the town was like hundreds of years before, as it remains relatively unchanged. The narrow stone alleyways, the street vendors selling sweets and doughnuts, and the towering church spires all add to the enchanting atmosphere. It is no wonder that “Stamford is a town which has always encouraged superlatives,” both historically and presently, and has been
proclaimed as “the finest sight on the road between London and Edinburgh” and “as fine a built town all of stone as may be seen” (Smith, n.d., para. 1). With such an awe-inspiring setting, it seems natural that Stamford would begin to gain popularity as a retirement community. One can live in the town and have no need for a car since all of the shops are within walking distance and the railway station is located in the center of town. In addition, Stamford is a historic market town, and each Friday morning the market overtakes the town, with vendors selling everything from locally grown fruits and vegetables to housewares. At the market, there is even an art supply vendor with drawing and painting supplies, and a craft supply vendor offering a wealth of cardmaking, papercraft, and beading supplies. The reason Stamford is deemed a historic market town is because this market has come into town at regular intervals for the last 900 years! The town also has an annual Mid-Lent Fair which originated over 1,000 years ago, and when telling me that the town’s newspaper, *The Stamford Mercury*, is the oldest newspaper in Britain, one of the U3A members exclaimed to me, “If you haven’t figured it out by now, everything in Stamford is old!” In relation to its long history, however, there is something in town that is relatively new: Stamford U3A.

**Stamford U3A**

Stamford U3A was founded in 1993 with 12 members and five interest groups. Since this time, it has grown to its present size of around 600 members with over 50 interest groups. The format of Stamford U3A follows the original Cambridge model, offering monthly lectures open to all members and smaller study groups covering a variety of subjects, interests, and activities.

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27 Said by Sir Walter Scott as quoted in Smith (n.d.).
Being a large U3A in a small town has presented issues, since there is a lack of ample and affordable meeting spaces available in town. As the U3A aims to provide affordable offerings, the venues for the organization’s happenings are typically community rooms, village halls, church halls, and members’ homes. The group’s monthly meetings take place in the Barn Hill Methodist Church, located in the historic Barn Hill area of Stamford. These meetings are held on the first Monday of each month and members begin arriving at the church at around 10:00 a.m. Upon their arrival, they walk into a large multipurpose room where five long tables are set up for members to sign-in and receive their copy of the Stamford Third Age Group Newsletter. After signing-in, those that are able make their way up the cramped staircase to another meeting space composed of two rooms. One is a smaller room with a service window. It is here where members go to get their refreshments: coffee, tea, and biscuits. This part of the meeting truly reveals the social nature of the U3A, as everyone can be seen engaging in conversation with each other, sometimes with other members that they only see once a month at these meetings. It is a lively scene, with small groupings of people chatting over their tea and coffee. In the adjacent room is a larger space that also bubbles with small conversations. In this room, there are small tables set up with sign-up sheets for upcoming trips, walks, and events. In the center of the room are display boards containing announcements for new groups that are starting up, volunteer opportunities, invitations to join ongoing groups, and news from the National U3A. This is the place to go to find out “what’s on” for the upcoming month. It keeps members connected with each other and also to the events and activities of the U3A, both locally and nationally. While all of this activity is occurring upstairs, there are some members who are less
mobile and unable to easily climb the stairs. Although this represents an accessibility issue presented by the physical space, it is accommodated for by serving refreshments downstairs, and social activity can be witnessed here as well. The tea time starts around 10 a.m. and the meeting officially starts a half-hour later. At this time, the members start making their way to the meeting space.

![Barn Hill Methodist Church.](image)

*Figure 2. Barn Hill Methodist Church.*

Inside the church, the group meets in the sanctuary. The church is plain, like many Methodist churches, and there is little ornamentations on the walls. The stained glass windows are simple squares of colored glass arranged in an ordinary pattern,
standing in stark contrast to the interiors of the grand cathedrals in the surrounding area.
Penny, the Chairman, explained to me that Methodist churches in Britain have
traditionally been used as community meeting spaces, and explained that the church
recently underwent a refurbishment, making it more up-to-date technology-wise. Inside
the sanctuary, there are rows of individual padded chairs, but when these seats are filled,
members have to climb another set of stairs to sit in the balcony on wooden, uncushioned
pews. About 250 members attend each monthly meeting and the space always seems to
be on the verge of reaching its capacity. There is not much room for growth!

The meetings begin at 10:30 a.m. with Penny making general announcements and
reminders to the group, followed by an introduction to the guest lecturer. The lectures
cover a broad range of topics and are intended to expose members to areas that are not
represented in the smaller study groups, potentially opening up new areas of interest and
exploration. Examples of the varied nature of the topics are reflected in the lectures from
recent years: Global warming, Modern communications, The serious business of humour,
Shakespeare, and Bomb disposal. While these meetings bring together members of all
interests, there are many other activities that the U3A offers to its members.

**Stamford U3A’s Activities**

Stamford U3A periodically organizes events for its members such as a Christmas
luncheon and a Christmas buffet with entertainment. There are annual get-togethers for
interest group leaders hosted by the Chairman, and there are occasional meetings planned
for new members that are intended to acquaint them with the U3A movement and to
introduce them to the committee, the group leaders, and the opportunities that are
available to them. In addition to these events, interest groups often plan trips that are
open to all members on a first-come, first-serve basis. Examples of these trips include an Osprey and Wildlife Cruise organized by the Bird Watching Group, a visit to the Bank of England Museum planned by the Antiques I Group, and a trip to the Jodrell Bank Radio Telescope arranged by the Science Group. The Travel Group, Theatre Group, and Art History Group also arrange a smattering of trips open to the general membership. In short, there are many activities and opportunities for members beyond the regular activities of the monthly meetings and interest groups.

There are also opportunities for involvement in the U3A on a larger scale in the form of Study Days, Learning Support Days, and workshops that bring together members from different local groups. These events are generally hosted by the regional East Midlands Association of U3As to which Stamford U3A is a member. Through the regional U3A group, a residential Summer School program is also offered. In two four-day sessions, this Summer School takes place at Harlaxton, a 19th century mansion in a nearby town, and courses are mostly based in the humanities, including a number of art-based options such as, *18th century British art, Art for all, Botanical illustrations, and Paper craft* (Harlaxton U3A, 2007). Beyond the sphere of the U3A, Stamford U3A also carries its activities into the community.

**Stamford U3A and Beyond**

Stamford U3A’s activities extend into the local community in a variety of ways and on numerous levels. In April 2006, an oral history project was completed by members which is now housed in the Stamford Museum. Another history project was recently undertaken in July 2007 documenting the history of the town’s Recreation Ground. The end result will also be added to the Museum’s records. Projects such as
these serve to highlight the ways in which members are adding to local understandings, creating knowledge to be passed on to successive generations, and extending their activities beyond the confines of the local group.

In the U3A, members serve as volunteers in all aspects of the local group’s activities, from leading groups to preparing refreshments to manning the sign-in tables, yet these volunteer roles also permeate into the community. Members are involved in local efforts that aid less mobile older adults, such as providing transportation to the Day Centre and bringing library books to the homebound through the Books on Wheels program. Volunteering in these activities is viewed as important, because, as the Chairman stated, “If these activities have to cease because of lack of volunteers they won’t be around when you might need to use them.” Beyond voluntary efforts with older adults, there are also activities that are aimed at younger children in the local schools, listening to children read, helping with projects, and occasionally, even acting as translators for foreign students. Whether with young children, older generations, or amongst other U3Aers, the members are immersed in a culture of voluntarism that extends far beyond the local group itself.

**Stamford U3A Interest Groups**

Although there exists a wide spectrum of roles to assume and activities to engage in, the main thrust behind the U3A is the smaller interest groups. Recognizing the importance of the interest groups, the previous Stamford U3A Chairman wrote, “Groups are the lifeblood of the U3A … It is very important for all U3A[s] to maximise the choice of activities available to their members and we certainly endeavour to keep this momentum going.” Just as many local U3A groups meet a variety of their members’
needs, including those of an educational nature and beyond, Stamford U3A is no exception. Currently, this group contains 56 interest groups, covering a range of activities. Beyond the educationally oriented groups (e.g., Science/technology and European studies), groups are also formed around fitness activities (e.g., Keep fit and Swimming), social activities (e.g., Discussion and Sunday lunch), and leisure activities (e.g., Mah jong and Scrabble) (Stamford U3A, 2007). (See Appendix M for a full list of interest groups at Stamford U3A).

Among these 56 interest groups are seven that are centered in art: Art History, Art I, Art II, Art Workshop, Handicrafts I, Handicrafts II, and Quilting and Embroidery. It is these groups comprising Stamford U3A’s art program that were the focus of the fieldwork as I attended all of these groups’ meetings and activities for five months. The following section will describe each group in detail. Although Stamford U3A was the research site, embedded within it are seven distinct settings and contexts from which the data were collected.

The Art History Group

The Art History group meets twice a month on Wednesday mornings, just as it has for the last three years. Penny, the Chairman of Stamford U3A, leads the Art History group. As a teacher for forty years, Penny has had a wide range of educational experiences, both as a teacher and as a learner. Explaining that she has always had “a lifelong interest in art,” she told me that she had “always wanted to study art history.” Upon her retirement, she took up her art history studies first via a correspondence course, and she followed this with two courses through the Open University. After the good fortune of stumbling upon an “absolutely fantastic art history library” at Harlaxton
(where the U3A Summer School is held), Penny began borrowing slides to start up an art history group at Stamford U3A.28

On Art History Wednesdays, members begin to arrive at around 10:15 a.m. at the United Reform Church Hall in the center of town. The group meets in a small room on the second floor of the building, but when members arrive, they first go to a tiny, adjacent room, where all the makings of their refreshments await them. With a kettle of hot water and coffee and tea, the members help themselves, and then proceed to the main meeting room; a warm carpeted room with six large windows on the left and right walls. Although they let in a good deal of light, these windows get covered over with black fabric and plastic and the shades get drawn overtop of them. While great lengths are taken to block out the light, a dark blue glow persists. Towards the back of the room sits Penny’s table with a small laptop, a projector, and several books. Chairs are set up in rows with an aisle down the center. These chairs face the front wall where the projector is pointing.

As the members file into the warm room with their beverages, they walk over to a small table on the far end of the room. Here they sign-in to the meeting and get information about upcoming trips. After signing-in, the members sit down, get settled, and engage in conversations with one another. Just like the monthly Stamford U3A lectures, this group follows the format of refreshments and social time followed by the lecture. At 10:30 sharp, Penny calls the group to attention. The members are all seated now and the room is full. There are typically 25 to 30 members at each session and sometimes more arrive than expected, so extra chairs are set up in the back of the room.

28 Although it was this collection of slides that led to the creation of the group, Penny “almost immediately went into PowerPoint.”
All Stamford U3A members are welcome to attend these meetings and they are announced each month in the newsletter, so the number that attends varies from meeting to meeting. Of those that attend, most are usually women, but there are typically five to ten men at each session. Overall, U3A membership, nationally and at Stamford, is predominately female, so in light of this, the Art History group is relatively gender-balanced. Among the members of this group, some of the regular attendees are familiar faces from the other art groups. As Penny calls the meeting to a start, she always begins by making several announcements; sometimes about upcoming trips or possibilities for ones that could be planned in the future. Sometimes she shares experiences concerning museums or galleries that she visited since the last meeting, or she informs the group of art history resources that she has come across. After these comments, she is always sure to welcome any new members. Once these announcements are made, the lights are dimmed, and Penny jumps right into her prepared talk.

At each meeting, she delivers a lecture about an artist or about a group of artists from the same artistic movement. She prepares a PowerPoint presentation for each session and projects the images onto the wall in the front of the room. Moving chronologically through periods in art history, she attempts to give a sense of how one movement led to the next. While following a fairly standard art history lecture template, she also connects her talks to past lectures and to trips that the group has taken. Dealing with each topic chronologically, she weaves a narrative about the artist, offering detailed biographical information. Showing the artwork, she offers a sense of the artists’ “typical style,” followed by deviations and shifts. Sometimes events from the artists’ lives are inserted to help explain these shifts, and occasionally, examples of the artists’ influences

29 This group is also the most gender-balanced of all of the art and craft groups that I observed.
are also shown. For each image that is displayed, a good deal of background information is given. Subjects in portraits are described, scenes in genre paintings are explained, and locations in landscapes are made clear. As in many art history lectures, Penny is always sure to point out subtle details that, perhaps, the untrained eye may miss. She uses a variety of rich, descriptive words, such as “swirling” and “voluminous,” and there are times where her description is so vivid that one could almost visualize the artwork without ever laying eyes on it. Perhaps due to her own dissatisfactions of being an art history student receiving one interpretation of an artwork that she did not always agree with, Penny tends to offer her own opinion, as well as the perspectives of other art historians. Using phrases such as “art historians can’t generally agree whether…” and “some art historians think… while others…,” she often gives multiple interpretations, and never keeps her opinions a secret.

During the course of the lectures, the members are typically silent. The only sounds to be heard are the occasional “hmms” in agreement with what Penny has said and the “aahs” in awe of the artwork shown. Several of the members can be seen making jottings in small notebooks, and occasionally, but not often, a member will interrupt with a quick question or comment. After Penny finishes with her prepared lecture, the members engage in a more free-flowing discussion as they comment on what they have just seen and heard. Sometimes comparisons between works are made, and other times, connections are made to previous lectures. During this looser discussion, Penny sometimes comments on the art history process itself, noting how she chose what images to show or how there is a lack of information and reproductions for some artists. As Penny facilitates this group discussion, the room starts slowly breaking into smaller
discussions, usually starting with the lecture topic, then straying to more general conversation. Once there are no more questions or comments, the meeting is over and the members begin to leave.

The meetings and lectures cover general topics, such as “An Introduction to Impressionism and the Impressionists” and “Pre-Raphaelites Part 1 and 2” and more specific lectures where one artist is studied in-depth, including “Mary Cassatt,” “Canaletto,” and “Sir Joshua Reynolds.” Beyond these usual meetings, the group often makes visits to art museums and galleries in London to see major exhibitions. In the past, they have attended the Caravaggio exhibition at the National Gallery, the Millais exhibition at the Tate Britain, and the Canaletto exhibition at the Dulwich Picture Gallery.\(^{30}\) As each trip is taken, the next is planned shortly after, and just as the lectures are open to all Stamford U3A members, the trips are as well. To sum up the Art History group, its main activities are its regular meetings where a lecture on an artist or artistic movement is delivered and its occasional trips to museums and galleries. This two-fold approach affords members the opportunity to learn about art history topics in-depth and also the chance to see some of these artworks in person, experiencing them firsthand.

The Art I Group

The Art I group meets twice a month on Tuesday mornings and each session lasts for approximately two hours. The group gathers at the Barn Hill Methodist Church, and the meetings take place upstairs, in the same room where refreshments are served for the monthly General Meetings. It is a small room and gets set up with six long tables and blue padded chairs. The tables are arranged in somewhat of a circle, but room is left in

\(^{30}\) I had the good fortune of joining the group on its trip to the Canaletto exhibition.
between so that members can easily maneuver between and around them. There are three large windows which let in natural light, but when the sun isn’t shining, the group relies on the overhead fluorescent lighting. In the far corner of the room, there is a door leading to an adjacent kitchen with a sink, so while this room was not designed as an art studio, the group is able to adapt the arrangement of the room to suit their needs.

The current group leader, Rose, has held this title for the past three years, but in relation to this, she states, “I’m just leader in name … I’m just a figurehead, shall we say.” Rose eschews thinking of herself as the “leader,” because in this group, the members work on their own projects individually with no one formally teaching or “leading” them. In this sense, Rose sees her role as one of an organizational nature. She helps confirm the meeting times, ensures the room will be available, makes general announcements and reminders, and serves as a contact person for the group. Rose is a petite woman with chin length hair that is straight, but curled under. She has bright blue eyes that sparkle with life and she is always neatly dressed. Somewhat soft-spoken, at the beginning of each meeting, she patiently waits until the group is settled, and then formally begins with any announcements that need to be made.

There are usually ten to 15 members at each session, even though there are 28 members “on the books,” and interestingly enough, if all of the members did happen to come to any given session, there wouldn’t be enough room for them! Nonetheless, the group is mostly comprised of women, with one to four men at each meeting. When the members arrive, they immediately go about setting up their workstations, filling up their water dishes, arranging their brushes and materials, and preparing to work. Each works on a project of his or her own choosing and the group’s mantra is “we do our own thing.”
Most of the Art I members do watercolor painting, but one woman works in chalk pastels, and some occasionally work on drawings. There is a range of subject matter attempted by the members, and while most work on landscapes, still lifes, and nature scenes, others can be seen working on figure drawings and portraits. They tend to work from some sort of a reference picture. Oftentimes, these are photographs from books or magazines, reproductions of paintings by other artists, or photographs they took themselves. For the first hour, the group works on their paintings and drawings in a relatively quiet manner. One can occasionally hear quiet conversations, sometimes about their projects and other times not. Rose works alongside of the rest of the group, yet there is someone who stays on her feet the entire session. This is Ruby. Before Rose took over as group leader, Ruby had led the group for ten years. Although she stopped leading the group for health reasons, she is still an active member, acting as the “expert.” While the others work on their individual projects, Ruby circulates the room. She looks at their drawings and paintings and offers advice, suggestions, and feedback. The members seem to truly appreciate this guidance. As a regular Art I member for about three years, Brooke explains, “Ruby’s very good because she’ll give you tips. You know, she’ll come around and she’ll say, ‘you want to do a little bit of shading there.’ You know, not anything critical, but she’ll give you some nice, helpful tips.” Ruby always offers a good deal of encouragement and tends to try to get them to try new things. She can sometimes be overheard saying, “Don’t get discouraged, have a go at it!” While Ruby typically advises and encourages, she occasionally does a short demonstration for the entire group. In February, she did a demonstration on portrait painting and there was one member, Gwen, who took notes, paying close attention and watching Ruby’s every
move. From that session on, Gwen starting painting portraits, and although she had never tried it before, she decided to give it a go following the newly learned tips and techniques. Ruby takes her role of helping the group along seriously and derives satisfaction from watching them improve. When asked about the best aspect of the group, she told me, “Well, I think that’s more or less covered in what they achieve …. And to see them develop—they probably can’t see it, but I do. I can see the development.” Although Ruby offers help throughout the meeting, the members also help each other out, offering suggestions and encouragement.

Approximately halfway through the meeting, the members start to take a break. Moving into the kitchen area, they help themselves to coffee or tea and sometimes a little biscuit. Returning to the meeting room, refreshments in hand, the quiet and focused atmosphere shifts to a lively social scene. During this break they take time to look at each other’s work. Asking questions like “What are you working on this time?,“ their conversations usually start by talking about technique-related issues, then move to the subject matter, and finally end up at general chats regarding family, recent travels, or recent local events. Benjamin, who has been working on painting a village scene, is eager to tell others that the scene is of a local town, Deeping St. James. He knows all about the town, and shares little stories about the village in the 1930s and 1940s and how it has changed since. Benjamin obviously knows a bit about it and is happy to share his knowledge. Brooke, who has been painting flowers, has two small bunches of fresh flowers in front of her that she cut from her garden that morning. As she loves flowers and gardening as well as painting, during the break she is able to receive technical advice and encouragement, but is also able to share what she knows about the flowers. This
more relaxed time of the session elicits informal exchanges both about the art making itself, but also about the members’ other interests. Once the break ends, they return to their workstations, and while the bustling activity and lively exchanges die down a bit, they don’t end and continue here and there for the rest of the session. As it nears the time to leave, the members come to a stopping point and begin packing away their materials. Rose makes any last minute announcement that need to be made and gently reminds the group when the next meeting is.

While the group’s main activities are “doing their own things” and helping each other in these endeavors, they also occasionally share their work beyond the confines of their Art I group. They have exhibited their work to the whole of Stamford U3A and at regional East Midlands U3A events. Extending even further beyond the U3A community, they are also involved in an ongoing exhibition where select paintings are displayed on the walls at Stamford Hospital for patients and hospital staff to enjoy.

The Art II Group

The Art II group meets twice a month on Tuesday afternoons. Like Art I, this group meets for two hour sessions and gathers in the same room at the Barn Hill Methodist Church. Art II is led by Chelsea, an older woman with short grey hair and glasses who always wears a nametag to the meetings, even through everyone seems to know her. Her area of expertise is watercolor painting and botanical illustration, but she has had experiences in a variety of art and craft areas. Chelsea has been the group leader for approximately four years, and it was she who founded the group. When Art I filled up and could not accept any new members (due to the size of the room), the Chairman at the time approached Chelsea and asked if she would start a new art group. As a result of
new members joining this group, membership of Art II is, on a whole, a bit younger in age than in Art I. There are 16 members “on the books,” and it is typical for the group to have anywhere from 10 to 15 present. This group is comprised mostly of women, with three men. When they arrive for the session, they all know just what to do. Taking out their supplies, they set up and jump right into their projects. Like in Art I, the group members work on individual projects of their choice and they “do their own thing.” Most of the members work from some sort of reference: a greeting card, a photograph, or a copy of a painting. During the spring months, Chelsea brings in flowers from her garden to encourage them to work from life. Most everyone works in watercolor and the preferred subject matter seems to be flowers and landscapes. While it may appear that they all work in the same manner (watercolors of landscapes from a referential picture), they each have their own ways of working and tend to approach their projects differently. Lilly worked on a project where she had three digital photographs that she had taken of her garden during different seasons. She decided to take these three images and piece together different elements of each to combine them into one composition for a painting. Situated near her was another woman who was painting some flowers that Chelsea had brought in. She began by sketching lightly, intending to finish it in watercolor. She had drawn and painted pictures of flowers before, but they had always been from looking at other paintings or photograph. This was her first time drawing from life.

Chelsea assumes the roles of group leader and “expert,” and as the members work on their drawings and paintings, she goes from table to table, offering advice when requested and giving encouragement. When giving advice, she will typically offer several options, beginning with phrases like “If I were you…” or “You could easily…,”
and oftentimes, she’ll sit down and make general conversation before moving on to someone else. She walks around the tables and seems to look for clues as to which members might need some help, sometimes asking “How are you getting on?” She does not want to be seen as a teacher, only as a member who can help the others. In reference to her role as leader, she states, “You see, I don’t teach. All I do is say, ‘Well, if I were you, I would do so and so…’”

After about an hour, the group takes a tea and coffee break, but conversations continue and work does not stop during this “break.” The social element does become more present; however, and a number of the members get up at this point to see what others have been working on. Like in Art I, conversations begin with advice and talk about technique. They then drift to comments on the subject matter, revealing stories of the members’ interests and their travels. The conversations echo throughout the room. Some are about art and some aren’t, but either way, everyone always seems to thoroughly enjoy themselves.

They continue working individually, and when they find that they need help, they will ask the person next to them or call Chelsea over. “Chelsea, can I have some of your guidance?” She quickly goes over, sits down, and tries to help. Sometimes she gives verbal suggestions, and other times she takes a piece of scrap paper and demonstrates a specific technique. Most of the members have seen Chelsea’s paintings and they make it evident that they value her expertise and respect her input.

The members’ prior art experience varies, from some taking art in school to others who have attended workshops and seminars. During one session, I saw Norma working on a lovely watercolor of a small English village. Impressed with her skill, I asked her
where she learned how to paint. She glanced up from her painting with a surprised look on her face and exclaimed, “I didn’t learn! I just come here!” For some members, their involvement in Art II is their first and only experience in art.

As the meetings come to a close, they all begin packing their supplies away, and Chelsea makes any last-minute reminders and announcements to the group. Most of the members leave at the end of the session, but there are usually two or three that stay behind, continuing conversations that show no signs of ending. To summarize the group’s activities, members always “do their own thing,” and while the leader’s main role is offering suggestions and helping the members along, they also advise and encourage each other. As Chelsea aptly put it, “Oh, I think you can learn from each other! They go around looking at each other’s paintings, and they learn from each other.”

The Art Workshop Group

The Art Workshop meets twice a month on Monday mornings, and sessions last for two hours. This group meets at the Essendine Village Hall, which is located in a village four miles from Stamford’s Town Centre. This is the only art group that does not meet right in town, so in terms of accessibility, members need to have transportation to and from the meeting place. While it may be more difficult for some to get to, it has the benefit of being located on the first floor, making it more accessible to those with mobility issues.

Upon entering the village hall, the members walk through a short vestibule leading into the meeting space. The room is large, almost double the size of the space in Barn Hill. The walls are a light green color, and half of the floor is exposed wooden planks while the other half is covered with an older, worn carpeting. Three large
windows are covered with dark green curtains, and when the curtains are opened, an
abundant amount of available light shines through. Like in Barn Hill, the room has an
adjoining kitchen where the members have access to a sink where they can fill their water
dishes, clean their brushes, and of course, make their coffee and tea. During the time that
I was there, the village hall was undergoing refurbishment. Sometimes entire walls were
covered in large blue tarps, and other times, the smell of fresh paint lingered in the air.
The members tried to make the best of it, knowing that it would be worth it in the end,
and on one day when there was a loud, persistent hammering noise coming from right
outside of the room, one of the members laughed, saying, “It’s okay as long as they hold
a steady beat!”

Within the center of the room, they set up small white tables and chairs. They are
the perfect size for one member to set up a self-contained workstation, and they arrange
them in a circle. Chairs along the perimeter of the room serve as a make-shift coat closet
where the members hang their coats and set down their bulky supply boxes. As they
arrive, they get situated and ready to work while Holly starts off with some
announcements. Holly has been temporarily leading the group of 10 to 15 members,
since the group leader, William, has been unable to attend. His wife fell ill, and because
William needed to care for her, Holly stepped in to help him out during this time. Holly,
who has experience leading other U3A groups, slid comfortably into the role. With her
vibrant and enthusiastic personality and her contagious laugh, she creates a warm and
caring atmosphere in the group. She takes the role of organizer, making sure the sessions
run smoothly. In describing the group, she stated, “We don’t have lessons. We don’t
have a teacher. We just have a leader and we do our own thing.” Indeed, the members
do their own things, and as they begin to work on their projects, a great deal of variety can be witnessed from one workstation to the next.

One woman is working with watercolor pencils from an instructional “how-to” book, following step-by-step directions to create a picture of a bird resting on a twig. Across the room is Maggie, who is working on the largest painting in the room. An acrylic with wax resist, the painting’s colors are vivid. Using geometric shapes, she has created a composition of strong, brilliant fields of color. When Maggie was on holiday in Greece, she was enthralled by the scene at the restaurant where she was dining. She quickly sketched it on a napkin, saved it, and was now taking that small napkin-sketch and transforming it into a large, lively bold painting. Seated near her is Robert, who is lightly sketching from a photograph of an older woman. Several sessions ago, Holly’s mother came to the group to sit for the group, as they had a figure drawing workshop. Robert had taken a photograph and decided to paint it further. Seated adjacent to him is Thomas, who is working in pastels, creating a portrait of a man leaning over, concentrating on something quite intensely. Something about the picture seems strangely familiar, but I can’t put my finger on what it is—then Thomas points diagonally to the next desk. He’s been creating a portrait of Robert creating a portrait!

As the members work away on their projects, there are extended periods of focused, concentrated silence where the only sounds to be heard are pencils scratching along paper and the splashes of brushes getting rinsed. These silences are occasionally interrupted by members addressing the group, perhaps about a recent art event. The Art Workshop members represent a wide variety of arts-related interests. Some lead music appreciation groups in the U3A, one is a graphic designer, some are active in crafts, and
others are involved and interested in theatre. As they have related interests, much of their
correspondence concerns the arts. Wasn’t the Monet, Whistler, and Turner exhibition a
disappointment? Were you able to get tickets to Swan Lake in Peterborough? I hear it’s
all sold out now.

Look out the window, see the man leaning against the phone booth? “It looks like
a perfect quick sketch—a perfect 30-second sketch.” See the way the folds of the
shirt go one way and the folds of the trousers go the other—a perfect S-curve.
“Oh! He moved!”

Their work continues, punctuated by art-related chats. After an hour or so, they
break for coffee, tea, and snacks. From here, they circulate the room, seeing what the
others have been working on. In describing the Art Workshop, William wrote, “No
instruction is given nor subjects or targets are set, though friendly constructive advice is
always available.” As they view each other’s projects, they offer hints, suggestions, and
encouragement, pointing out areas that they particularly like. Talk also revolves around
the subject matter. Holly, the acting group leader, works alongside the others. She takes
out a painting that she recently finished of her family at the seaside. She shows it to
Robert, asking what he thinks of it. He replies, offering a detailed, critical look at it,
commenting on the balance and the depth, and then commenting on the subject matter,
noting how it is entertaining. He finishes up his discussion with positive encouragement
saying, “You’ve got it!” Similar conversations take place around the room and the
members seem to delight in looking at Leo’s watercolor with its architectural features
portrayed in great detail. In the group, he’s regarded as “a very good artist,” and
although his painting appears to be complete, he’s not entirely satisfied with it as he
continues reworking certain areas.
Towards the end of one session, Maggie looked up from her painting after a long period of sustained concentration and asked about the time. Met with the response “ten ‘til,” she replied, “Ten ‘til what?! Eleven or twelve?” Shocked that there were only ten minutes left, she and the rest of the members hurriedly began packing up their supplies. While the time passed quickly, the group will meet again in two week’s time to continue working on their projects, to help each other along, and to engage in art-related and friendly conversation.

The Handicrafts I Group

Handicrafts I meets monthly for two hour sessions on Tuesday afternoons. As a small group, with approximately ten women at each meeting, the membership numbers need to be kept low as their meetings take place at each other’s homes on a rotating basis. While this necessarily limits the amount of Stamford U3Aers that can join, the limited enrollment and the informal atmosphere leads to a friendly, close-knit group. This group has been going for well over ten years and a number of the members have been attending since its beginning. Lynne is the group leader, a role that she has occupied for the last nine years. An older woman with glasses and short, curly hair, Lynne is full of life and her smile is radiant. She seems to really light up when talking about her crafts group! Within Handicrafts I, Lynne’s role is mainly one of organizer as she ensures that everyone knows the details for their next meeting. She also brings extra craft supplies to each session, so if someone forgets or brings the wrong materials, they can still join in on the project. Once the members have arrived and are situated, Lynne begins with

31 The memberships of all of the craft groups (Handicrafts I, Handicrafts II, and Quilting and Embroidery) are comprised entirely of women.
announcements, confirming the next meeting and asking for suggestions for upcoming projects.

Wherever they happen to meet, they usually sit around a table-clothed dining room table covered with materials and supplies for their projects. Since they only meet once a month, the members work on related projects in between sessions. At the beginning of each meeting, they tend to share what they have done with the rest of the group. Lynne shows two small baby blankets that she knitted for a local charity. The members are particularly taken by them and begin asking all sorts of questions about the yarn, the colors, and the techniques. As Lynne puts them away, Polly sets out three large stacks of cards, papers, and other cardmaking supplies. She recently acquired hundreds of different types of card and papers, and she brought them to share with the rest of the group. She told everyone to take as many as they wanted as the stacks were passed around the table. While they looked through the materials, Doreen produced three examples of decoupage cards that she passed around. As the group is currently working on this type of project, these examples are meant to give ideas and inspiration for the day’s work.

In Handicrafts I, the members generally work on the same craft, but each works on their own project. They are currently working on decoupage “together,” but each is creating their own. As Doreen is the most experienced in decoupage, she is the resident “expert” until they shift their focus and decide to undertake a new type of craft. While they tend to work on each project for several sessions, they have engaged in a broad range of crafts including Bargello tapestry, Elizabethan blackwork, beading, and paper quilling (See Appendix N for a full list of projects). Their repertoire of crafts is
fascinating and they enjoy trying out new ideas and techniques, even though they tend to prefer knitting projects. As Lynne explains:

Knitting is something that we all fall back on because it’s what we did when we were [children] and it’s familiar. But of course we do enjoy trying all the new things … It’s good to learn new crafts as they come on the market.

Since they have tackled such a range of projects as a group, they seem to have a good sense of each other’s strengths and areas of expertise. This group understanding leads to members, such as Doreen, becoming the “expert” for certain projects. Assuming this role means that Doreen will bring finished examples to share and that she will help everyone along, sharing the little tips and tricks that she has picked up in her more sustained decoupage efforts. The passing on of these more nuanced details is greatly appreciated by the members, as evidenced by Alicia, who stated, “[They] share by giving you information that they have learned themselves. Verbally and practically showing you things … Sharing any skills that one has.”

As they work on their decoupage cards, they periodically hold up what they have done to show the others. Some work quietly, wrapped up in their projects, and others chat away while they work, talking about family, travels, current events, and upcoming craft shows. They take a break halfway through with tea, coffee, and an assortment of pastries and cookies, but no one takes a break from their projects as they continue working until it is time to leave.

While most meetings are conducted in this manner, with the most experienced leading the chosen craft, the group has also undertaken projects together. Most of these group projects have been for various charities: on the local, national, and international levels. They have knitted baby jackets and made patchwork blankets for premature
babies at Peterborough Hospital’s Special Care Baby Unit. They also donated patchwork blankets for the Geriatric Unit at another local hospital, Oakham Hospital. They have knitted small teddy bears for children in ambulances and in hospitals through programs called Teddies for Tragedies and Trauma Teddies. Small, soft toys are made at Christmastime and sent to children in hospitals and orphanages in Romania and in Africa along with useful gifts such as combs and toothbrushes. They also have sent small baby sweaters to hospitals in Malawi. As Lynne stated, “We enjoy doing it and passing it on to less privileged people.” Beyond their charity involvement, the group has also exhibited its craftwork at Stamford U3A meetings, at regional East Midlands U3A events, and at the annual community event, the St. John’s Church Christmas Tree Festival. So while the group normally works on projects and crafts where they help each other along, their scope of activities extends their reach well beyond their ten-member group into the community and outside world.

The Handicrafts II Group

Handicrafts II meets for two to three hours once a month on Monday afternoons. Similar to Handicrafts I, this is a small group of eight women and their meetings are held in each other’s homes. This small group is led by Melody, a younger retiree who previously worked as a teacher. She dresses plainly and sensibly, and her manner is extremely laid back, calm, and composed. She has the type of personality that immediately makes you feel welcomed and comfortable. As the leader of the group for the past eight years or so, Melody serves as an organizer, confirming meeting times and places, working with the group to plan upcoming projects, and keeping the members informed of any changes. The group makes decisions together, and like in Handicrafts I,
whoever is the most experienced in the chosen craft is the one who leads the session. As Melody stated, “Everybody who’s got a good idea contributes it to the group.”

When the members arrive for their monthly meeting, the hosting member takes their coats and welcomes them in. They make their way to the table where they will be working, which is always covered with a protective tablecloth. The members’ homes are usually decorated with their craft projects. As an example, a quick glance around Melody’s home reveals her extensive involvement in art and crafts. From paintings, pastels, calligraphy, and fabric wall hangings to patchwork pillows and quilts, she is surrounded by items that she has made with her hands.

Once the members are inside and seated, the women start taking out their supplies. The meetings usually begin with the members showing and explaining projects they have worked on since their last session. At one meeting, Melody asked the group to save their Christmas and holiday cards that were homemade and to bring them in to spark ideas for future projects. Each member brought lovely examples. Some were handmade cards with little cutouts and decoupage. Others had little appliqués: beads, leaves, and glittery embellishments. One even had a small piece of homemade lace. Although they were to bring in handmade items, each woman also brought in things that were not homemade, but that could be used to inspire new projects. As they passed the cards around the table, small discussions broke out, commenting on them or explaining why they brought them in, using terms such as “color schemes” and “color compositions.”

Beyond sharing ideas for future projects, the group also shares what they have learned in between sessions. If any of the members attend craft workshops, they share what they learned from it, often bringing in examples of their creations. When Louisa attended a
workshop where she learned a Cathedral window patchwork technique to make a small
pillow, she brought it in and explained the techniques that she used to make it. After
sharing what they have brought in and the related discussions end, they begin to prepare
for the project at hand.

In the past, the group has undertaken a broad range of projects including paper
quilling, box making, paper sculpture, ribbon embroidery, and jewelry making. At one
session, the group worked on making beaded bracelets. The member most experienced in
beadwork, Ivy, led the activity. She brought in examples of her beading and jewelry
work for the others to see. As she passed these handmade earrings, bracelets, and
necklaces around the table, she explained where she learned the techniques. She learned
some from instructional kits and others from classes and workshops. As she began
introducing the beaded bracelet project, she distributed a two-page handout outlining its
steps, and after helping the group to get started, Ivy remained “on call” to answer any
questions and to help out with any snags.

About an hour into each meeting, the hosting member serves refreshments
including coffee, tea, and sweets, and everyone tends to continue working on their
projects uninterrupted. It is usually during this break time when Melody gets the group’s
attention to discuss ideas for upcoming projects. She sometimes takes out a large binder
that is over-stuffed with project examples, patterns, and handouts, and shows it to the
group. As they leaf through the wealth of ideas, they discuss what type of project to
tackle next. After tossing around a number of possibilities, they usually come to a
decision. Sometimes it is something straight from the binder, and other times, something
in the binder sparks another idea. At one meeting, the group decided that at their next
couple sessions they wanted to make cards using a technique called card pricking. As Molly is the most knowledgeable and experienced in this area, she would be called upon to lead the group. Once they have decided upon the next session’s topic, they return to the projects in front of them.

In Handicrafts II, the members take turns sharing what they know and learning from each other, and with each new topic comes a new group “expert” who leads and guides the group. When Ivy led the beading session, towards the end she exclaimed, “Next time, I want to be taught something!” Sometimes leading the group is also seen as an opportunity for the “expert” to practice and hone her skills. Melody was scheduled to teach a session on papercrafts at the regional U3A’s Harlaxton Summer School. While in the planning stages, she asked if she could try out some potential projects with them so that she could gauge how long they would take someone who was trying the projects for the first time. In this sense, she was sharing her papercraft knowledge with the group, but they were also simultaneously helping her with her upcoming workshop.

As their meetings come to a close, they show their completed projects to each other. Those who haven’t finished carefully put away their works-in-progress so that they can easily return to them. Although they all work on the same types of projects, often from the same patterns and templates, they always end up with unique, individualized creations. After sharing their projects, they start to clean up, and once their supplies are away, the women engage in friendly conversation before leaving. Over the next month, in between meetings, the members continue working on projects of their choice and are always sure to bring them in to share with the others at their next session. After the group finished up with Ivy’s beaded bracelet project, Louisa, who particularly
enjoyed it, created three more at home over the next month. One of these bracelets was given to a family member as a gift, and the other two were brought in to the next month’s meeting to share with the group. In response to this type of sharing, Melody states:

I think most people are very eager to share their knowledge and are very generous in doing so. I’ve never met the sort of petty people who will say, “That’s my pattern,” or something like that, or they won’t show you how to do something. It’s a very open, generous group.

The members of Handicrafts II share their knowledge. They also share responsibility of the group by taking turns planning and preparing activities in their areas of interest and expertise.

The Quilting and Embroidery Group

The Quilting and Embroidery group meets once a month on Monday afternoons, with sessions generally lasting two to three hours. Similar to the other craft groups, this group is small, consisting of ten women who meet in each other’s homes. This group has been meeting for the last six or seven years and is led by Emily. Emily, who has been with the quilting group since its inception, assumed the role of group leader just over a year ago. This group is actually a splinter of Handicrafts II which was experiencing a split between those who were interested in doing patchwork projects and those who were not. Those that were formed the Quilting and Embroidery group, and as a result, there is an overlap in the membership, with four members that attend both groups. Emily is a younger retiree with short, light-colored hair. Always neatly dressed, and with a refined, yet down-to-earth manner, she takes on an organizational role as the group leader, ensuring that the members are aware of meeting times and places. Although the group

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32 It is interesting to note that Emily, the Quilting and Embroidery group leader is a member of Handicrafts II, and Melody, the Handicrafts II leader is a member of Quilting and Embroidery.
decides what projects they will work on, Emily helps to facilitate these decisions and tries to “keep a theme … going so [they] don’t lose momentum.” Within the group, there are two new members and Emily takes extra care to ensure that they feel comfortable in the group and that they understand new techniques and methods when they are presented.

Once the members arrive for their monthly meeting, Emily typically calls the session to a start, beginning with announcements and giving updates on members who are not present. After these notices, the members start taking out projects that they have been working on since they last met. Sometimes these are completed projects and other times they are works-in-progress, but everyone is always expected to bring something in to share with the rest of the group. For this “show-and-tell” segment, the members take turns showing and explaining their projects. At one meeting, Melody shared a patchwork table runner that she had just completed as a gift. The group marveled at it, noting that it was entirely different from what she usually makes for herself. While she normally uses muted blues and greens, this piece had screaming oranges running through it. Calling it her “psychedelic patchwork,” she explained how she selected the pattern and described the techniques that were used. After this, another woman showed different materials that she recently acquired. Explaining where she got them, she consulted the group, asking what types of projects the fabrics could be best used for. The women share advice on techniques, patterns, and newly-learned tips and tricks, and they also share information on where to obtain materials and supplies. As all of the members are expected to share, they take turns. At one meeting, when one of the members hadn’t shared anything, another asked her, “Well, haven’t you brought anything to show us!” This is an important part of the meeting, as this is one of their main means of learning from each
other. The members occasionally attend workshops individually outside of the U3A, and when they do, they share what they have learned with the group, as “experiences people have had on workshops often introduce new techniques and ideas.” Once everyone has shared what they brought in, they put these items aside and prepare for the project at hand.

The group has undertaken a variety of projects in the past. They have worked on projects with a theme, they have done large group projects to which everyone contributed, and they have had “working days” where they brought in individual projects to work on in the group. Two of these recent large group projects have been quilts that were donated to local charities. Whatever they happen to be doing, they help each other along. The members know each others’ strengths and they capitalize on them. Emily explained, “Whoever’s done it teaches the rest of the group.” Their current project exemplifies this, as they are working on creating patchwork samplers. They are each creating their own samplers and choosing their own sizes, fabrics, compositions, and colors, but at each meeting they learn a new patchwork technique to incorporate into the final piece. Each of these techniques is taught by a different member, so at the end, the sampler will contain ten patches. In this manner, each member takes a turn leading the group. Emily described this as “someone doing the patch themselves, working it out, and then handing on their knowledge of it to everybody else, so they can all benefit from it.” So while they teach the patch, they also share their experience of trying it out first, pointing out tricky areas and offering tips that make it easier to learn. This is just one example, but the group typically tries to work on “new projects that involve everybody.”
As they engage in their projects at the meetings, everyone gets involved, and at one session, I overheard one of the members saying, “I want to see everyone’s hands busy!” While their hands are busy, they chat away. Their discussions often revolve around quilting, embroidery, and patchwork including recent and upcoming quilting shows, local craft shops, upcoming workshops and seminars, and other resources such as books, magazines, and websites. They also talk about their families, travels, and current events. A glimpse of the group in action reveals a friendly and informal group that delights in working and talking together. This social and welcoming atmosphere is enhanced by the refreshment break, where most members briefly stop their work for a bit of coffee and tea. While most of the art and craft groups tend to continue on their projects through their break, the Quilting and Embroidery group tends to stop and take some time to enjoy each other’s company. After all, it would prove to be quite difficult to continue sewing with a cup of tea in hand! Once the members are done with their refreshments, they linger back to their projects, and sometimes another round of “show-and-tell” takes place. They return to their projects, and while the room is often filled with friendly conversations, it is sometimes overcome by an aura of concentrated silence, as each member becomes lost in her work. They continue on their projects until it is time to go when they pack up and say their goodbyes until the next meeting. Some will see each other sooner at the next Handicrafts II meeting, but all will be working on projects of their own to share with the group at their next monthly session.

**Summary**

The U3A, although a worldwide movement, first made its entrance in Britain with the launching of Cambridge U3A in 1982. Modeled on principles of self-help,
independence, and self-sufficiency, the British U3A emerged as an organization created by third age individuals in response to third age needs and interests. While this organization is composed of national and regional structures, they mainly exist to support the activities of the local groups, as these are the mainstay of the U3A. One of these local groups, Stamford U3A, provided the setting for the study, and housed within it are the seven art and craft interest groups that were the basis of the fieldwork. Although these groups are similar in the sense that they share knowledge in order to learn from each other, they each approach their learning endeavors in their own, unique ways. This chapter provided the contexts in which these interest groups are situated, illustrating their basic structure and ways of working. The next chapter presents the data which emerged from these contexts.
CHAPTER 4:
THE LITERATURE VS. THE U3A—STUDENTS, TEACHERS, AND METHODS
The following three chapters will present the findings from the analysis of the older adult art education literature and the fieldwork in the U3A. Categories and topics were created through the analysis and examples were chosen which best illustrate the disconnects that I found between the two. Each of these topics will be presented in three stages: the literature, the fieldwork, and a discussion. In the literature sections, the topics will be explained from the views expressed in the literature. Only the writings from the data set will be included, with no outside or additional sources added. In the fieldwork sections, the same topics will be explored through the U3A. Only fieldnotes, transcripts, and relevant documents will be included. Stories from my observations and experiences with the U3A will be presented in italics. Finally, the discussion sections will provide a commentary, comparing the two stances, raising questions, and bringing in other views from outside sources, if appropriate. These discussions are in no way intended to be thorough, exhaustive overviews. They are meant to raise questions, to prompt rethinking of our assumptions, and to open up avenues for further inquiry. Outside literature is brought in to illustrate concepts or to introduce related theoretical constructs. The purpose of these chapters is to present different views that could expand our current thinking. This chapter will focus on learners, teachers, and methods.

The Experiences and Expertise of Older Adults

Life Experiences

*Life Experiences in the Literature.* A wide and diverse range of experiences accumulated over one’s lifetime is one of the most important strengths that older learners bring with them to the art classroom. “In their mental abilities, older adults have unique

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33 These writings are from the literature on art education from the U.S. See Appendix G for the full list.
strengths which assist them in the learning process. A lifetime of personal experience is their foremost asset and it distinguishes them from other age groups” (Kauppinen, 1990, p. 100). This major strength should be recognized and capitalized on by art educators who wish to design quality programs that are responsive to older students. By asking the fundamental question, “Do lessons take into consideration the life experiences of elderly persons, and maximize this as an important base for content?” (Barret, 1998, p. 122), educators of older adults can begin to realize the many ways this can be approached. But before relating content to experiences, we must first understand these experiences.

Although the life experiences of older adults are as diverse as the older population itself, there is one element of these experiences that holds special significance in the classroom: previous art involvement. Earlier encounters in the visual arts serve as powerful predictors of how older adults will approach their current and future art learning endeavors, but there exists great diversity in these experiences as well. Within a single class can be students who have never set foot in an art room before. Others may have taken art in school, but perhaps this was over 50, 60, or even 70 or more years ago. There may be some who have had a lifelong involvement in crafts, but who never formally studied art, and there may be some who have had extensive art experiences throughout their lives, perhaps even retiring from an art-related career. As a result of the great potential for diversity, older students cannot be conceived of as a homogenous group. Addressing this reality, Hoffman (1980a) states:

The present elderly population was schooled before 1930, a time when arts involvements were minimized in most public schools. This means that elders, in most cases, may hold misconceptions about the arts or hold them in low esteem. But the total population of older persons cannot be categorized. During their lifetime, elders may have confronted the arts in a variety of situations. (p. 137)
Due to this range in past art involvement, art educators must gain an understanding of students’ art experiences and attitudes, as these factors are strongly correlated to confidence levels and willingness to try new things. These factors can also relate to the settings where older adults seek out art experiences. Those with more experience tend to seek out more formal learning situations; possibly auditing university courses or enrolling in community college classes. Those with limited art experiences tend to exhibit less confidence and opt for more informal settings such as community classes or senior center programs. A study relating setting to confidence levels and previous experience reported that:

Overall the majority of formal context participants can be expected to have moderate to high levels of artistic, educational, and physical confidence. Informal students are apt to exhibit low to moderate cumulative confidence. Within each of the formal and informal courses, successively lower levels of cumulative confidence can be expected. (Bloom, 1982, p. 125-126)

Simply put, students in more formal art classes tend to have more confidence than those in less formal classes. Confidence tends to decrease proportionally with decreases in the levels of formality. Understanding prior art experiences and their corresponding levels of confidence can aid art educators in creating appropriate curricula, so understanding this element of older students’ experiences is paramount. Previous art experience is only one element of life experience; however, and the sum of older adults’ experiences have an important place in the classroom. Regardless of their art background, “older adults can use their experience to advantage, drawing upon activities they have encountered over a lifetime” (Hoffman, 1992, p. 82).

Bringing life experiences into the art room can be accomplished in numerous ways, encompassing every aspect of the curricula. “Instructors must treat the elderly
student as an individual with a life experience that can be used to benefit the class” (Hoffman, 1977, p. 6). The primary way that life experiences should be incorporated into curricula is by using memories and past experiences as subject matter for art making. “The many experiences of the elderly over the years may simply provide the extra bonus of a large repertory of potential subject matter” (Jones, 1980a, p. 23). While this may provide motivation for older students, it also allows them to engage in productive reminiscence and to record and make meaning of their lives. These types of undertakings can also be paired with writing, as each artwork can be accompanied by a description, thus providing a visual and written account. “Incorporating narrative as part of the artwork is another way of helping older persons to share their life experience” (Barrett, 1998, p. 123). This approach can be especially effective for those who lack confidence in their art making abilities, as their visual representation does not account for their entire project. It also allows students the opportunity to tell their stories in multiple ways.

Beyond art making, life experiences can also be beneficial in terms of understanding the artworks of others. Approaching art criticism and art history in terms of older adults’ experiences can allow them to be introduced to these elements of art in a non-threatening way. In terms of art history, artworks can be related to older adults’ cultural, historical, and personal understandings. Subject matter may spark memories that can be shared with the class, adding layers and depth to meanings and interpretations. In addition, it creates personal connections between the older learners and the artworks. In an article discussing these benefits, Kauppinen (1988) states, “Aged beholders can relate the subject matter to experiences in their own lives as they reminisce [sic], and can understand underlying meanings in the subject matter in relation to their own
resolutions of life’s conflicts and problems” (p. 19). Art educators working with older adults have the potential to incorporate the vast life experiences of older adults into art making and learning about other artists, facilitating and enhancing the natural process of reminiscence while simultaneously offering an opportunity to communicate about their pasts.

While these methods allow older adults a venue for sharing and better understanding their pasts, recently, art educators have begun to explore different ways of sharing these experiences across generations through intergenerational arts programs (e.g., Alexenberg & Benjamin, 2004; La Porte, 1998). These programs typically involve pairing older adults with younger generations (school children, teenagers, or college students) to engage in an art making endeavor. Usually, the older participants tell stories of their pasts which provide inspiration for the resulting art projects. Reported benefits are numerous. Older adults enjoy telling their stories and being validated. La Porte (2002) explains, “The intergenerational dialogue gave voice to seniors through the sharing of their personal memories and cultural histories …. Providing recognition and validation for their life experiences were empowering to those who had long been disenfranchised, ignored, or forgotten” (p. 61). The younger participants gain connections to historical events, and in many cases, their stereotypes of older adults are challenged and erased. It is the art project that initially brings generations together, but there are a wealth of positive outcomes for both the younger and older age groups. In this sense, older adults are viewed as having valuable knowledge and life experience and the potential to share this with others. “Older adults themselves, therefore, represent an
invaluable resource, if we could find ways to unlock its potential” (Kauppinen, 1990, p. 104).

In conclusion, the life experiences of older adults not only predispose them to certain types and contexts for art learning, but they also can and should be incorporated into the art curricula. As Barrett (1998) aptly states:

If an art instructor can look at a group of older adults and see them as valuable repositories of wisdom, humor, knowledge, and spirit, then it becomes easier to develop ideas for curriculum which will tap into these areas of strength. (p.123)

Life experiences can be best capitalized on by art educators who are willing to acknowledge their potential uses and benefits, as they can prove to be invaluable in making art and talking about art, and in intergenerational art programs. Knowing the backgrounds of older art students and finding effective ways of bringing these into the classroom are essential keys in providing quality art instruction.

Life Experiences in the U3A. In the U3A, the life experiences of older adults play an important role. As British U3A founder Peter Laslett (1989) states, “It is their having been through the whole of the life course to its culminatory stage which gives those in the Third Age their intellectual advantages for this purpose” (p. 177). While members use their life experiences in virtually all aspects of U3A activities, what are these life experiences?

The members represent a wide spectrum of experiences in relation to art and craft involvement: past and present. A number of the art group members and leaders, including Rose and Holly, are members of the local artists’ group, the Welland Valley Art Society, where they enter paintings into juried art shows twice a year. Others, mostly from the Art History group, are members of NADFAS, the National Association of
Decorative and Fine Arts Societies, where they attend monthly lectures on a diverse set of arts-related topics. Numerous craft group members belong to the local craft group, the Burghley Crafty Parchers, and others belong to calligraphy and bookmaking groups.

Beyond belonging to organized arts groups, members have had a range of recent experiences. Nora, a member of the Art Workshop, has sold some of her paintings. Most of the art group leaders have exhibited and sold their paintings at one point or another, including Holly, the temporary Art Workshop leader, who used to create paintings of people’s houses on commission. In the craft groups, some members have exhibited their work at national quilting shows. In all of the groups, there are a number of members who have attended various art and craft workshops and seminars. For some, this was a one-time experience, and for others, attendance at these events are ongoing endeavors. Some members, like Rose who attended an oil painting seminar on portrait painting, take advantage of local offerings at the Stamford Arts Centre. From the local Arts Centre to short courses at the Harlaxton U3A Summer School, U3A members can be found gaining additional arts experiences throughout the region. While attendance at such offerings is typical, there are others who have ventured into more formal learning situations, including adult education courses, classes through the Workers’ Educational Association, and even credit-courses at the Open University. Whether formal or informal, these outside opportunities are what prompted some to become involved or re-involved in art after their retirement. Chelsea, the Art II leader who had been told that her artwork was “rubbish” as a child, took up art lessons locally when she retired, stating:

So I went out to have a few lessons, out to Kings Cliffe, which is a village outside of Stamford, and well, I got hooked. And I met friends, and we used to go out together painting. Well, it just snowballed, really, from there.
Although a number of members had and continue to have art educational experiences beyond the U3A through classes, workshops, and societal memberships, most have a thing or two to say, both positive and negative, about their art experiences when they were school children. First, returning to Chelsea, as a child, she had the unpleasant experience of having an art teacher rip up her work, telling her it was rubbish. Another art member, Alicia, who was also discouraged from art early on, remembers, “At school—I’m going back over sixty years—I was told I was useless at art, and therefore, instead of the art alternative, I had to take Latin. I was told I was useless, ‘You are no good at art.’” While some had negative early experiences, others enjoyed art in school, sometimes excelling. Ruby “always got distinction-plus, which nobody else had ever had a distinction-plus,” and others took art classes at higher levels in school. Some continued even further, taking art courses in college and attending art colleges, but almost all, like Holly, put their art interests on hold during their working lives.

I just did art to O-level\textsuperscript{34} at school …. And then I did bits and pieces, and then had the children and work, and like everybody else, it just drops off. When I had more time, I just suddenly started up again.

Others had very limited early experiences, like George from Art II, who described his art background before joining the U3A in one simple word: zero. As should be expected, there exists great diversity amongst U3A members in terms of the depth, range, and positivity of their prior art experiences, but even more diversity exists in relation to life experiences beyond art.

\textsuperscript{34} O-level, which is short for “Ordinary Level,” is a qualification that was granted in various subjects in Britain from the 1950s to the late 1980s. O-level qualifications were typically obtained to go on to A-level (“Advanced Level”) qualifications. In the U.S., this would be akin to taking a general art course (O-level) as opposed to taking a more advanced course (A-level).
Members, on the whole, are involved in a smattering of community groups ranging from the Stamford Choral Society to the Hardy Plants Society to the Townswomen’s Guild. Others have teaching positions included in their life experiences, like Melody and Alicia who taught in the schools, and Penny who taught in the schools as well as in adult education. A number of members can add voluntary positions to their repertoire of experiences. Rose helps organize meals for the elderly, while Ruby volunteered for the Red Cross, Oxfam, and the Day Centre for the disabled and the elderly. Both Melody and Penny are actively involved in the Books on Wheels program where they bring library books to the homebound elderly. Within their voluntary activities some have unique and responsible positions, like Alicia, who is the Chairperson of the All Saint’s Church Women’s Fellowship, and Brooke, who is a Eucharistic Minister, traveling to ill parishioners to deliver the Blessed Sacrament. This position also involves regular visits to the homebound elderly and occasional visits to a nearby prison. While U3A members have rich, extensive, and diverse experiences in voluntarism, community affairs, education, and the arts, how do they capitalize upon them?

*In Art II, Edward has been working diligently on a small watercolor painting of the tail of a whale jutting out from the water. An extremely well-traveled man, Edward has had the opportunity to travel to diverse destinations worldwide. Through his extensive travels, he has grown a particular fondness for New Zealand, even forming friendships there. As he works on his painting, Chelsea comes by to see how he is getting on. Noticing that the small watercolor is perhaps too gray, she points out the subtle blues and greens in the water in the photograph he is working from. She also suggests that he might want to use a white gouache to highlight the crests in the waves. As she*
moves on to help someone else, Edward turns to his wife, who is seated next to him, and they talk back and forth about Chelsea’s suggestions. They agree that it is too dark, so Edward decides to scrap the painting and start all over again. He wants to make the painting the best he can, since he will be sending it to friends. It turns out that the picture he is working from is a photograph that he had taken on a whale watching outing with friends during one of his travels to New Zealand. Recreating the picture in postcard size, when he finishes, he will put a stamp on it and send it to his friends overseas. Keeping this in mind, he sets out at livening up the scene, infusing it with color, hoping that this attempt will be worthy of mailing. Edward proceeds to start over, this time armed with advice from Chelsea and his wife, as he embarks on whale-tail postcard take two.

In the Art Workshop, William is the group leader, but when his wife fell ill, Holly stepped in as acting-group leader until he would be able to resume his position. Holly slid comfortably into this role and the temporary change of hands occurred naturally, with no hitches. You see, Holly has experience as a group leader, so she knows just what to do and what is expected of her in this role. While stand-in leader for the Art Workshop, she also leads the Music Appreciation III group. Within the Art Workshop, she creates a friendly atmosphere, stating, “It’s a very close-knit group and I think that all the groups are the same.” She maintains the close-knit character of the group during the meetings, but her role extends beyond this, as she keeps in touch with members in between sessions. She explains, “We keep our eye on each other. If people don’t turn up we ring up and find out why and if they’re alright and if there’s anything we can do to help.” Beyond encouraging friendliness, Holly works behind the scenes to ensure that
the group runs smoothly; confirming the meeting dates and booking the village hall
where they meet. The members appreciate her organizational skills and she recognizes
leadership as one of her strengths. “I think I’m a natural leader .... Really, I’m more of
a leader than a follower, I must admit.” These qualities do not go unrecognized, and
when Penny, the Chairman, wanted to have an art exhibition at the Stamford U3A Annual
General Meeting, she enlisted Holly to contact all of the art and craft groups to organize
it.

In the Art History group, Penny’s past art history experiences are reflected in her
lecturing style. After retiring from forty years of teaching in the schools, Penny set out to
study art history, first embarking on a correspondence course. Completely dissatisfied
with it, she turned to the Open University. Beyond recognizing that the course was
outdated, she also took issue with the interpretations that she was receiving about
different artists and artworks. Was Berthe Morisot a very unhappy lady, or were her
tutors interpreting her artworks through a feminist lens? Did Rembrandt paint the Dutch
fur trader with the face of a weasel because he disapproved of furs? “Rembrandt loved
his furs. I’ve seen Rembrandts in furs, for goodness sake!” With mantras like “you must
not judge the nineteenth century by the mores of the twenty-first century” and “you must
not judge any century by your century,” what Penny really wanted was not to be
presented with a single interpretation. She wanted to interpret for herself. These
experiences as a student led to Penny providing multiple interpretations in her lectures;
often giving her opinions, along with those of other art historians. Sometimes she
addresses the group, asking for the other members’ thoughts as well. Regardless of her
approach, Penny never introduces a single interpretation during a lecture, and although she makes her own view known, she never pushes it on others as the only, true meaning.

Rethinking Life Experiences. In the older adult art education literature, past art experiences are seen as predictive of the contexts in which older adults choose to pursue art learning. Those with extensive art backgrounds will seek out formal learning situations, while those with limited backgrounds will choose informal settings due to their lack of confidence. Art and craft groups in the U3A defy this. As an informal learning structure, the U3A’s art and craft groups contain a broad range of previous art experiences, from those who have had “zero” experience to those who have attended art colleges. Some who have been engaged in art endeavors throughout their lives prefer the U3A over other venues due to its lack of competition, its informal nature, and its friendly and social atmosphere. In this sense, it is their extensive experiences that lead to their present satisfaction in the U3A.

In the literature, beyond art experiences, the life experiences of older learners are conceived of as resources used to enhance subject matter in art making and to facilitate discussions about artworks. In the U3A, life experiences are used for so much more. Edward relied on his past experiences when he decided to create the whale-tail postcard, but he also brings the project from the past to the future, by his intention of sending it to friends upon its completion. Holly relies on her experience of being a U3A group leader as she temporarily leads the Art Workshop, transferring her leadership skills from one to the other. Penny’s past experiences of teaching in the schools and her past experience as an art history student are reflected in her current style of delivering her art history talks.

35 The phrase “older adult art education literature” is used here and throughout to refer to the art education literature pertaining to older adults.
In the U3A, life experiences are used not only to make art, but also to lead groups, to teach, and to share. In terms of expanding the notion of life experiences, we can turn to the field of adult education where “learners’ life experiences outside as well as inside formal educational institutions are increasingly seen as important dimensions of learning” (Miller, 2000, p. 71). In adult education, there is a recognition and valuing of adults’ experiences far beyond academia, encompassing job-related and social spheres. “A common assumption underlying much of the theory and practice of adult education is that adults learn throughout their lives, from their work and leisure, from their experience in social and domestic contexts, and from their personal relationships” (p. 72). In this sense, if experiences in all of these contexts are valued, older adults enter their art studies with a wealth and diversity of life experiences which can be used to their benefit. In the U3A, members’ experiences in a range of areas (educational, artistic, work-related, and voluntary) are called into play and used for all aspects of their learning (including running the organization). They go beyond using life experiences in the classroom and use them to take responsibility for their own learning. Perhaps it is time to rethink and broaden our conception of the potential of older learners’ life experiences.

**Expertise**

*Expertise in the Literature.* Closely related to experience is expertise. An essential ingredient of any art program for older adults is a qualified instructor who is skilled in sharing his or her expertise with older students. Those wishing to work with older populations should be knowledgeable not only of appropriate and effective teaching methods, but also of issues of aging. Armed with a thorough background in these areas, art educators are better suited to reach older students and to attract those who have been
contemplating involvement in the visual arts. As most older adults have limited art experiences, it is up to art educators to reveal to them the potential of art studies.

Older adults are a ready audience who, for the most part, have not yet had the opportunity to benefit from the expertise of trained professionals. Until they have been exposed to quality art programming, they simply don’t know what they are missing. Art educators can offer them opportunities to experience art in a variety of ways. (Barret, 1993, p. 139)

Art educators need to rely on their expertise in the classroom, but also well before this point. Since there is currently a lack of suitable programming available and what is available is often in need of change, art educators first need to adopt the role of program planner. This helps to ensure that standards of quality are upheld and that programming will be as effective and responsive to older learners as possible.

Because the majority of older adults have not experienced a quality art program, art educators have a selling job to do. We must use all of our knowledge and expertise to develop such programs and let their positive results speak for us. If we do a good job, they will sell themselves. (Barret, 1998, p. 125)

Our present older adults need to be provided with opportunities to engage in quality art experiences and to benefit from the expertise of a qualified art educator. As the older adult population grows in size, it also is evolving in terms of educational attainment, with each successive generation retiring with higher levels of education. When the Baby Boomer cohort retires, they will become the most highly educated group of retirees in American history. It is inevitable that those who choose art studies will demand quality programs. They will easily be able to distinguish between those run by art educators with expertise and those that are not, as they “will see through some of what passes for recreation and the arts in our present settings” (Greenberg, 1980a, p. 44). Beyond creating and delivering quality programs, art educators may continually need to reassure older students that they are receiving the best possible art education, and “teachers will
also need to demonstrate their expertise from time to time” (Jones, 1980a, p. 18). Since as art educators we are best suited to share our expertise with older art learners, with extra training and education in aging and older adult issues we will be best able to effectively reach this growing population. “We can’t continue to cheat the elderly of our expertise!” (Greenberg, 1985a, p. 40).

Although art educators are best suited to share their expertise, a qualified instructor will also recognize the potential for expertise amongst older students. As Greenberg (1987a) warns, “Don’t underestimate the people you are teaching. Some of them may be expert in the topic at hand; make use of any information of value they may have to offer” (p. 97). Since a great diversity of previous art experiences may exist in a single classroom, there may be older students who have a wealth of experiences that can be utilized to the benefit of the rest of the class. A number of exemplary programs have capitalized on older students’ areas of expertise (e.g., Denney, 1987; Hoffman, 1975a; Timmermann, 1977). While this can be accomplished in numerous ways, it typically takes the form of older students helping others in their area of expertise, sometimes even assuming volunteer and teaching roles. This is a creative way of acknowledging and validating the expertise of older adults and capitalizing upon it to the advantage of the entire class. “Finding ways to use participants as leaders, to make the best use of their expertise, is an excellent way to involve people (Bogen, 1981)” (Greenberg, 1987a, p. 8).

In closing, while art educators should be qualified to teach older adults and possess the ability to share their expertise, they should also recognize the expertise of their students and invite them to take on other roles when appropriate.
Expertise in the U3A. In the U3A, members rely on each other’s expertise for virtually all activities. Those that have experience and knowledge share it with the group in order to learn from each other. Their expertise is acknowledged and validated both within the local group and beyond it. At April’s monthly General Meeting, the guest lecturer, a woman with a Ph.D. in Literature and an international speaking career, began her talk on Shakespeare by addressing the group, adding, “I realize there’s so much expertise in the room!” While U3A members capitalize on their expertise by sharing with each other, being an “expert” is not always important. In some groups, the leader does occupy an “expert” role, but in others, the leader is more of an organizer. A document from Stamford U3A entitled “The Role of a Group Leader/Organiser” confirms that the leader is not always the expert:

A Group Leader is NOT expected to be:
- necessarily an expert
- different from members of the Group
- or feel that he/she has to be knowledgeable about something.

Accordingly, in many groups, the leader is not the expert. The role of expert varies from group to group. In Penny’s Art History group, she assumes the roles of both leader and expert, as she delivers her carefully planned and researched art history talks. In the Art I group, Rose is the group leader, but Ruby offers her expertise throughout the session. In Art II, Chelsea is both the group leader and the expert as she circulates the room offering advice and encouragement to the other members. In the Art Workshop, although Holly is the leader, there is no “expert” and the members equally share in helping each other along. The craft groups operate a bit differently as roles are more fluid. Each of the three craft groups has a designated leader, but they are not necessarily the “experts.” Instead, whichever member is most experienced or proficient (or “expert”) in the chosen craft
project is the one who takes the responsibility for that session, possibly choosing the
project, but always helping the other members. In this sense, the “expert” can constantly
shift from one session to the next. There are also occasions when the groups try
something for the first time and there is no expert. In these instances, the group works
together, figuring out the techniques and processes as they go along.

Regardless of the roles they assume, the members tend to eschew the terms
“expert” and “expertise,” instead emphasizing their shared approach to learning. As
Holly explained, “Well of course in the U3A, we’re not experts, we’re just people who
have had experiences.” Even those who occupy roles involving leadership and expertise
don’t like to think of themselves as “experts.” Ruby considers herself more of an advisor
than an expert, stating, “And then when it came to the groups here, my feeling is, ‘Well, I
could advise them this, I could advise them that.’” Chelsea follows this line of thought as
she states, “Well, I don’t think it’s to be an expert on things, I think it’s just to have a bit
of general knowledge, really. You see, I don’t teach.” Other group leaders echo these
sentiments. “Well, I don’t think you have to be an expert to lead a group. I think you’ve
just got to have an interest and be prepared to organize it, really.” “I don’t think I’m an
expert in anything really.” Although the members don’t like to think of themselves as
“experts,” there is a vast amount of expertise residing within Stamford U3A’s art and
craft groups. How is this expertise acknowledged and utilized, and what does it mean to
members?

In Art I, Ruby is the “expert,” offering advice, encouragement, and suggestions
throughout the session, and occasionally doing a demonstration for the entire group. As
members find that they need help, they call her over. Ruby circulates the room while the
other members work on their own projects, “doing their own thing.” Quietly working on his “own thing” is Alfred. As the group is chatting away about gardening and other random things, Alfred is silent, completely absorbed in his work, as he paints a scene in extraordinary detail. On one side of his workstation is a photograph that he had taken on a recent trip to the North. It is a digital image that was enlarged and printed, and then cropped to the field that he wanted to paint. As he paints away, the details are amazing, particularly for watercolor, and while he is copying from the photograph, he also makes changes and additions where he sees fit. There are beautiful purple, pink, and white clouds that cannot be found in the photograph. On the other side of his workstation is another sheet of paper. On this, he tests his paint before applying it to his painting, attempting to get the colors exact. As this test sheet is filled with hundreds of swatches of color, it is evident how meticulous his style of working is, ensuring each color and detail is perfect. Seated across from him is Janice, a new member, who is attempting to create a landscape in watercolors. She realizes that she needs help and immediately calls Ruby over, pointing out that she needs help painting the greenery. While she already has some fields of color down on the paper, she wants to go back in and make it more detailed. Once Ruby sees what Janice is asking, she tells her that for advice on how to paint detailed leaves, she should talk to Alfred and look at his work for ideas.
In Handicrafts II, the members know each others’ areas of expertise and use this knowledge to learn various craft techniques and projects. As each project is led by the most experienced in the chosen craft, Ivy led the last two sessions. Her specialty is beading, so when the group decided that they wanted to try two new beaded jewelry making techniques, Ivy assumed the role of expert. After completing these projects, the group moved on to cardmaking, using a technique called card pricking, where small holes are pricked into the card in a patterned design, and then sewn with colored embroidery floss. Molly is most experienced in this craft, so she is leading the group, taking over as expert. She brought in a large binder filled with various patterns and presented it to the group. As each member peruses the possibilities for her project,

Figure 3. Alfred's detailed painting.

36 All of the members of Handicrafts II are women.
Melody spots the one she wants to attempt, choosing one with a butterfly motif. Although the patterns appear to be nothing but small black dots, she can envision in her mind what it might look like once it’s done. She quickly goes to work, punching out the holes and picking out the perfect colors. Finishing this phase, she moves right into adding the colors. Occasionally, she finds that the pattern is a bit confusing and turns to Molly, who talks her through it. She continues working on her project until the very end, when she realizes that the final steps are quite different. While the wings of the butterfly relied on card pricking techniques, its body requires the use of small beads. Melody turns to Ivy, asking for advice. Do I need to use a different needle? What size beads should I use? Ivy lends her expertise and Melody returns to her project, adding the final touches.

![Figure 4. Melody’s card pricking.](image)

Members in the U3A define “expertise” through the ways in which they carry out their day-to-day activities, but they were also asked to verbally define the term. These explanations typically included notions of refined skills, as evidenced in the following:
Obviously one needs a knowledge of it and a skill. And being able to produce whatever it is you’re an expert in. I feel, yes, you certainly need good background knowledge and skill in whatever it is that you’re doing.

Others take a more holistic approach to “expertise,” moving beyond skill and knowledge, incorporating other elements. “Well, I think it’s the ability to do something which you’re interested in.” “Expertise, oh good one! Well, the ability to be confident—and practice. There’s no shortcut to anything other than, you know, you’ve got to practice.” “I suppose it’s having a wide experience, and knowing perhaps how to put it across to others and help people with what they want to do, really. And how you can apply it to whatever problem comes up.” In the U3A, members define expertise holistically, in theory and in practice, going beyond skills to include notions of interests, confidence, and the ability to share what you know. In Stamford U3A, this is enhanced by the Chairman, who would prefer to have group leaders with a genuine interest rather than a reputation for being an “expert.”

I define expertise as a person’s enthusiasm …. And I like the fact that a lot of our group leaders are led by passion …. I think having a qualification in something doesn’t make you necessarily good at that thing. But somebody with an enthusiasm for their subject is much better than long qualifications.

Rethinking Expertise. In the older adult art education literature, expertise is most often referred to in terms of the expertise that qualified instructors share with students. Expertise is mainly equated with the teacher, but there is sometimes recognition of older students’ expertise with an accompanying suggestion of allowing these students to occasionally assume helping and teaching roles. This is similar to the way Ruby directed Janice to look at Alfred’s detailed painting style. Although she typically is the one who offers advice, Ruby recognizes Alfred’s expertise and facilitates his sharing of it to the benefit of other members. While the literature acknowledges these uses of expertise,
U3A members, particularly in the craft groups, take it a step further. As close-knit
groups, they know each other’s strengths and areas of expertise, and take equal turns in
sharing the “expert” role. This is exemplified by the card pricking project, where Molly
is the expert, but if others’ areas of expertise are needed, there is no hesitation to call
upon them. With no “teacher” and sometimes no “expert,” questions of expertise are
raised.

Theories of context-based learning provide a powerful and egalitarian way of
viewing knowledge production. Knowledge, skills, and abilities of those whom
Lave (1988) refers to as “just plain folks”—those who historically and
traditionally have not been counted as “experts” … —are valued. (Hansman,
2001, p. 49)

In the U3A, the expertise of its members, who on the whole are “just plain folks,” is
valued. Everyone is equally qualified to contribute. Their emphasis on shared learning
downplays the importance of anyone being an “expert” and allows them to take a holistic
stance on “expertise,” moving past skills and qualifications and into reams of confidence,
problem-solving, and helping others. Perhaps taking a similar stance could help art
educators in moving from the conceptualization of teacher as expert to a broader stance
where expertise can be found throughout the classroom.

Experiences and Expertise Summary

The previous stories from the U3A force us as art educators to rethink our
assumptions and to begin asking questions. How do we conceptualize our
understandings of older adults’ life experiences and their potential in art learning? How
do we define expertise and who has expertise in the art classroom? Broadening our
notions of life experiences and expertise can expand the possibilities of older adult art
education, potentially creating more an inclusive and participatory art education, opening up a variety of new roles for older learners.

**What to Do: Methods and Approaches from Art Education**

**The Student-Teacher Relationship**

*The Student-Teacher Relationship in the Literature.* In older adult art education, the relationship between teacher and student is best described in terms of a continuum, from highly teacher-directed to entirely student-centered. This relationship depends on both the context and the curriculum, and may differ from classroom to classroom and from lesson to lesson. It takes a qualified instructor to recognize these nuances and to choose the best approach for each endeavor. While the relationship is highly dependent on context, there are some guidelines that can aid the teacher in understanding his or her role, as some situations generally call for specific approaches. Although it is typically best to aim for an atmosphere where older learners feel as though they are in control of their learning, there are situations that require the teacher to take a directive role. For example, when introducing a new project, the teacher must take control of the class to ensure that everyone pays attention to the instructions and procedures. As Clements (1980) describes:

> At the beginning of a new art project, the participants as a group were given an explanation of the project, with no distractions. Their main purpose at this point was just to listen, to get instructions, and to be motivated. This quiet listening time together established their individual attention to the teacher. Without attentive listening, instructions would need to be repeated 15 to 20 times. (p. 65)

In this instance, the instructor understands the benefits of sometimes assuming a directive role to ensure that all students gain a thorough grasp of the project at hand, minimizing confusion. Beyond delivering instructions, there are other times when it is appropriate to
be more directive, particularly in terms of discussing art. As most older adults have limited experience in art history and art criticism, they are likely to be uncomfortable with their first attempts at talking about art. Taking a teacher-directed position, the instructor should ease older students into discussing art as they will often “need appropriate guidance for their interpretation” (Kauppinen, 1988, p. 18). Any new area is likely to require adequate guidance from the instructor. A final area that will typically call for a directed approach is assessment. “Every student should be encouraged to ask questions about his or her own work, guided in part by instructor-initiated analysis of classroom examples” (Hoffman, 1992, p. 109). Self-assessment is an essential element of older adult art learning since it allows students to see their progress and to identify new directions and avenues to explore. “Used alone, self-evaluation can lead to feelings of failure [so] self-appraisal must be judiciously combined with instructor-initiated analysis” (p. 109). Teacher involvement and monitoring can assure that this process is encouraging and growth-fostering, rather than negative and discouraging. While there are situations such as these where there is heavy reliance on the teacher, it is important that there are opportunities for student-direction.

“In addition to needing help from a teacher in organizing and structuring their learning, there seems to be a critical need among the elderly for a student-centered approach and individual instruction” (Jones, 1980a, p. 22). In the center of the teacher-student continuum is an approach where the teacher allows for student input. Again, dependent on the situation, input can be considered throughout the course from initial program planning through to final assessments. “Adult learners should be given ample opportunity to actively participate in the decision-making instructional policy” (Jefferson,
Giving older students a say in their art endeavors allows them to feel a sense of control over their learning. This notion stems from the concept of andragogy from the field of adult education. One of the main tenets of andragogy is that “adult education is collaborative, between learner and facilitator and among members of the learning community” (Durr, Fortin, & Leptak, 1992, p. 150). Taking this approach, the instructor starts off directive, but slowly guides students to taking responsibility for their learning. The end goal is “creating self-directed independent learners rather than teacher focused and dependent learners” (Gibbs & Boughton, 1998, p. 41). By altering the traditional student-teacher relationship, older art students can become active constructors of their learning, ultimately choosing their own projects, finding their own ways of working, and setting their own goals.

As learners move towards the student-centered end of the continuum, they may also begin to advise each other, altering the teacher’s role even further. In a student-centered classroom where older students worked on projects of their own choosing, Agostinone-Wilson (2001) describes, “Oftentimes other members of the group were sources of ideas and challenges …. The suggestions from peers were almost always tried on for size, so my ‘authority’ as an art teacher was de-centered in a positive way” (p. 30). In this situation, learners radically alter the roles of student and teacher by helping, advising, and occasionally teaching each other.

In conclusion, the student-teacher relationship is an ever-changing variable that is highly dependent on the context and the scope of activity. Some activities, particularly new ones, require the teacher to take a directive role. Once older students are comfortable enough to start working on their own, instructors should allow them the
freedom to follow their own paths. It takes a qualified art instructor to be able to
recognize the role he or she should assume for each undertaking. Kuhn (1998) perfectly
describes this balance:

When the student is conceived as the initiator of his or her own learning venture,
the teacher is placed on the sidelines instead of a control position. Learning is
central rather than teaching. The student rather than the teacher becomes the hub.
Agreement between the student and teacher as to what is to be learned is essential.
And when the learner does not have the knowledge maturity regarding the task at
hand, there must be an acquiescence to allow another to lead. These basic
agreements allow learners to be in control. (p. 10)

*The Student-Teacher Relationship in the U3A.* The first principle of the U3A
states, “Those who teach shall also learn and those who learn shall also teach” (Laslett,
1989, p. 179). Written into the objectives is the erasure of the student-teacher distinction,
calling for “no distinction between the class of those people who teach and the class of
those who learn” (p. 177). Abandoning the term “teacher” altogether in favor of the title
“group leader,” U3A founder Peter Laslett believed that “there is in fact no final
justification for the division between classes of persons into teacher and learner in the
educational process” (p. 166). The elimination of the student-teacher dichotomy is
replaced with an emphasis on shared learning, but are these principles carried out in
actual practice?

Absolutely! This principle is consistently adhered to at Stamford U3A. Those
that lead one interest group can be found as members in others. Melody, who leads
Handicrafts II, is a member of the Quilting and Embroidery group, and Emily, the
Quilting and Embroidery leader, is a member of Handicrafts II. In fact, all of the art and
craft group leaders are members of other interest groups. Throughout Stamford U3A
there are countless examples of this, making it apparent that those who are leaders (and
possibly “teachers”) at one group are members (and learners) at the next; however, this principle is also at work within some of the groups. In the Art Workshop, members work alongside of each other, equally sharing with helping and advising each other. In the crafts groups, members take turns “teaching,” shifting the “teacher” role at each session, with everyone eventually sharing. In this sense, within these groups, all members are teachers and all are learners. While they work at disrupting traditional notions of education and who is considered a “teacher,” what types of roles are assumed and how do members understand the student-teacher relationship?

In the Quilting and Embroidery group, the members are nearing completion of a large group project: a quilt to be donated to a local charity. As they reach the halfway point of their meeting, they take a break for refreshments. Taking a few minutes away from their intensive project, the women enjoy some tea and coffee, and at this point, Emily takes the opportunity to address the group, asking what they would like to do once their group quilt is finished. Silence overtakes the room, followed by an explosion of questions. Should we do another group project? A round robin? Work on our own? Could it be something more individual so we don’t have the pressure of sticking to specific timelines? Emily doesn’t answer their questions, replying that it’s up to them, but she does point out that they should try to choose a project where they can introduce new techniques and patterns to the two new members. She then asks Trisha, a new member, if there is anything in particular that she would like to learn. She replies cheerfully, “I’m happy to learn anything new!” The group continues tossing ideas around and comes to an agreement on a patchwork sampler project, eventually deciding that each member will teach a different technique at each meeting. While every member
will lead a session over the next ten months, Emily continues organizing the details. When she asks who would like to start it off and lead the first patch, the room falls silent again. No one volunteers. No one wants to be first. After waiting several moments for a response, Emily breaks the silence by offering to start it off. Once these decisions are finalized, the women return to working together on the charity quilt.

Within Stamford U3A, members tend to prefer their informal\textsuperscript{37} learning environment with “no teacher and no authoritarian” over formal learning structures. In the Art Workshop where “we don’t have lessons” and “we don’t have a teacher,” the members enjoy their freedom and their lack of authority. Expanding on the group’s mantra, “we do our own thing,” Holly explains:

We tend to really do our own thing and let people free. Because you see, if you have a teacher, they’re putting their own ideas onto you …. No, we like the freedom of just doing what we like …. Guidance is alright, but I don’t think people should be taught. Because it’s got to come from yourself, and you get more satisfaction from that. It’s better to come from yourself.

Penny, the Stamford U3A Chairman and Art History group leader, has experience teaching in both formal (Workers’ Educational Association [WEA]) and informal (U3A) adult education settings. “I did do some WEA, but like many other WEA tutors, I stopped because the paperwork was just ridiculous.” While teaching a Spanish course through the formal structure of the WEA, Penny was required to write up lesson plans with aims and objectives for each class session, and at each class session, each student was also required to write up his or her aims and objectives as well. Although she enjoyed teaching the class, the formalities involved were “just so time consuming,” so she eventually stopped teaching it. Soon after, she began to miss teaching the Spanish

\textsuperscript{37} Here and throughout the chapter, “informal” refers to the word’s common usage. It does not refer to adult education’s distinctions between formal, non-formal, and informal education. See Appendix O for adult education’s definitions.
class, so she decided to start up a new group, this time, on an informal basis. The new
group now meets “on a Monday afternoon, but they just put some money in the kitty for
the hire of the room and we just have an informal Spanish class, and it works much
better.” From her experiences as a WEA tutor and a U3A group leader, she compares the
two:

The WEA is much more “I’m the teacher, you’re the student,” but the U3A is a
much more unstructured thing. You’re the group leader, but you’re amongst
equals. There’s no sort of teacher-student relationship whatsoever …. There’s an
input. People want to share their ideas. If they’ve got an interest, they’ll bring
something in.

Rethinking the Student-Teacher Relationship. In the older adult art education
literature, there is always a definitive teacher who has been properly trained and has
expertise to share with older students. There are often, specifically in more recent
writings, recommendations for moving from a teacher-directed to a student-centered
approach. In the U3A, all activities are necessarily student-centered, as the members
themselves propose, design, and carry out every facet of their learning projects and
endeavors; however, they would likely hesitate to call themselves “student”-centered.
Deliberately downplaying the student-teacher relationship, they typically refrain from
using the terms “students” and “teachers.” Due to this, the U3A is better described as
taking a “learner”- or “member”-centered approach.

The disavowal of the word “teacher” is also widespread in adult education.
“Rather than ‘teacher’ or ‘instructor,’ adult educators prefer to use the word facilitator,
which denotes a more collaborate, student-centered mode of interaction” (Merriam &
Brockett, 1997, p. 16). This change came about through the introduction of Knowles’s
(1970) concept of andragogy which calls for “a spirit of mutuality between teachers and
students as joint inquirers” (p. 41). While andragogy itself is no longer an unquestioned foundation of the field (Grace, 1996), the reconceptualization of the role of the teacher—or rather, the facilitator, mentor, or guide—remains. Other theoretical constructs have addressed the student-teacher relationship. The concept of communities of practice defines learning as membership, erasing “teachers” and “students.” Here, there are only members with more or less experience who learn from each other. “Rather than a teacher/learner dyad, this points to a richly diverse field of essential actors and, with it, other forms of relationships of participation” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 56). Expanding notions of learning far beyond the classroom, new learning roles are recognized and validated. A final concept that alters the student-teacher relationship is free-choice learning, which is simply defined as “learning that occurs in an individual’s free time and that is motivated by choice rather than necessity” (Falk, 1999, p. 273). In free-choice learning, “learning can, and often is, facilitated by teachers, but our teachers are not always authority figures standing at the front of a classroom” (Falk, 2002, p. 62). All of these concepts provide different lenses for rethinking of the role of the teacher, perhaps as a facilitator, a mentor, a joint inquirer, or a member.

While the student-teacher dichotomy is abandoned throughout the U3A, in some groups, roles are blurred even further, as evidenced in the Quilting and Embroidery group. While Emily prompted the group to decide what to do for their next project, the decision was left entirely to the members. As group leader, she did not choose the project, nor did she take any efforts to persuade their decision. Interestingly enough, they moved from a group project where everyone was equally involved to a project where they will take turns “teaching” each other. Penny’s avowal that “you’re amongst equals” is
echoed in the Art Workshop where members help each other equally. Enjoying the freedom to work on projects of their choosing, the term “teacher” is viewed in a negative light, as someone who “puts their ideas onto you.” The literature refers to “allowing” for student input, but Art Workshop members (and all U3A members) don’t need permission. They “do their own thing!”

Following the U3A and other lines of thought, older adult art education should begin to question the student-teacher relationship that is promoted and maintained. Are there ways through which we can rethink and blur notions of teacher and student? Are there approaches that we can adopt that open up new and more active and participatory roles to “students?” The differences in language, from student/teacher to leader/member signal a shift, not only in roles and relationships, but also in the approach that is adopted.

**Teaching versus Sharing**

*Teaching versus Sharing in the Literature.* “Older students want to develop skills, to discover new horizons, to function creatively. Only the best instructors are capable of seeing that this does happen!” (Greenberg, 1987b, p. 7). As art educators, it is our responsibility to teach older students in ways that guide them to understanding and experiencing the life-enriching potential of the arts. But with such diversity amongst older adults, how do we design appropriate learning situations? Greenberg stresses that art educators must take a flexible approach:

We serve a diverse population for whom no uniform curriculum is possible or desirable. As we work together to meet the present needs of these students and expand their horizons, our curricula will change and grow. A good curriculum must do just this, change and grow to suit the wide range of needs of older adults interested in the visual arts. (p. 7)
Although a flexible approach to curriculum and instruction must be adopted, this does not imply a *laissez-faire* attitude (Hoffman, 1992). Just because most instruction will be situated within informal contexts and not in traditional classrooms does not mean that older adults’ art studies should not be taken seriously. “The basics of good art programs shouldn’t be lost in the context of teaching art outside the traditional school setting with nontraditional students” (Ball-Gisch, 1998, p. 61). In this sense, art educators need to adopt a serious attitude towards older students, and once a program is established, they need to devote ample time and thoughtful consideration to designing appropriate learning activities. Advance planning is key to ensuring that activities are cumulative, building upon each other and upon past experiences. They should be “arranged in an orderly fashion to advance knowledge” (Hoffman, 1992, p. 82). While this seems like good practice in general, one also has to acknowledge the potential for diversity and the importance of allowing for student input. Hoffman offers guidelines for developing units:

Every group of learning experiences should:
- relate to the interests and needs of the older arts student;
- begin at the educational level of the participants;
- develop increased knowledge of the arts;
- grow from the present concerns of older students and build upon their experience;
- provide opportunities for joint selection of activities, methods, and evaluation;
- provide older persons with carefully designed, success-oriented opportunities;
- allow each participant to use talents and interests for the benefit of the group.

(p. 82)

Once units and lessons are planned, teachers must maintain a flexible teaching style, allowing for adjustments based on older students’ preferences and learning styles. In order to be most responsive and effective, teachers must be willing to adapt to their needs. Factors such as setting, previous art experience, and confidence levels should
provide important clues on how to approach teaching. For example, those with low confidence will need more encouragement and positive feedback, and those who are more experienced in the arts will need more challenging activities to keep them from growing bored or feeling that their efforts are wasted. In short, the most important element of teaching older art students is a knowledge of who your students are and a willingness to adapt your curriculum and teaching methods appropriately. Several art educators have written about successful teaching approaches from research and firsthand experience (e.g., Fitzner, 1980a; Greenberg, 1985b; Jones, 1980a), which can be beneficial in providing ideas for those entering the older adult art classroom for the first time. While curriculum development and the design of appropriate teaching methods are responsibilities of the teacher, input from students is advisable and there are other ways in which students can share within the classroom.

Those who have had previous art experiences can bring in their creations to share with the rest of the class, and at the end of each activity, students can share their results with each other (Greenberg, 1987a). Another way in which teachers can encourage sharing, this time beyond the classroom walls, is through exhibiting students’ work. “A question that usually arises is: Shall we show some works so that we can share what we’ve been doing with the community at large? This can be an exciting experience for everyone involved” (p. 104). Exhibiting their artwork can boost older students’ confidence levels and allow them to take pride in their accomplishments. It also has the benefit of raising awareness of community art programs, perhaps even motivating others to get involved. Above all, exhibiting the work of students displays to the community the benefit and potential of a quality art program.
Teaching versus Sharing in the U3A. In the U3A, where group leaders declare “I don’t teach” and the notion of “authoritarian instruction [is] impermissible,” the terms “teacher” and “teaching” are typically shunned (Laslett, 1989, p. 164). In February, I was afforded the opportunity of seeing these ideals on a higher organizational level, when Penny extended an invitation to accompany her to the regional meeting of the East Midlands Association of U3As. At these quarterly gatherings, one or two representatives from each of the 48 associated local U3As meet to discuss issues and to help organize their efforts. The main purpose of the regional association is to provide support to local groups, their members, and their activities. At the February meeting, the idea of a series of workshops was proposed which were to provide training to group leaders. This idea was met with a good deal of debate. The benefit of sharing and gaining new ideas and perspectives was discussed; however, the main issue was that it was referred to as “training.” Opponents warned of the risk of making the U3A too formal by introducing group leader training, reminding others that “it’s the informality of the U3A that appeals.” A lengthy debate followed. No agreement was reached until the term “training” was abandoned. Now presenting it as meetings with “no imposition” that would “never be made mandatory,” it was described as “opportunities for those who wish to opt in” that would enable members to “be made aware of the support that’s available.” The refusal to accept “training” and the resultant shift in terminology serves to highlight the strict adherence to U3A principles and the reluctance to institutionalize “teaching.” If “teaching” doesn’t take place in the U3A, how do they go about approaching their learning? How do they learn from each other if they don’t teach? Returning to the local level, Emily explains, “I’m not expected to teach them, you know that, unless it’s
something I’ve specially prepared …. The Patchwork group is much more casual sharing of information.” Just as the East Midlands representatives shifted their rhetoric from “training” to “support,” on the local level, “teaching” has become “sharing.” Sharing is an ever-present feature in all of Stamford U3A’s art and craft groups.

_In Art I, one of the members, Laine, is painting flowers. With a small vase in front of her containing three beautiful camellia blooms, she has already penciled in a faint sketch and is now beginning to add color. As she goes in with a rich pink hue, the woman next to her comments on how beautiful the flowers are. Laine proudly tells her that they are fresh from her garden. The other woman, Nellie, asks if they are difficult to grow as she’d love to have them in her own garden. Laine explains how to grow and take care of the flowers, finishing up by saying, “Have a go and let me know how you get on.” As they end their conversation, they return to their paintings, but Laine soon finds that she needs a bit of help. Looking around the room, she spots Ruby, but she is preoccupied with advising someone else. She then turns back to Nellie and presents the problem she’s having. Nellie studies the painting and the flowers for a moment and offers a suggestion. Pointing to the painted petals, she adds, “Put it on dry to get a deeper color.” She continues with an elaborate explanation of other options. Afraid that perhaps she overstepped her boundaries, Nellie starts to ask, “I hope you don’t mind,” but is immediately cut short by Laine asserting, “No! Every bit helps!”_

_In Handicrafts I, Polly tells the other women about an egg painting kit that she recently acquired. She has read the directions already, and explains to the group that the eggs are first pierced and blown so that you’re left with just the shell. The empty shell is then painted and dyed with a wax process that she compares to batik. She continues,
explaining that the kit is small, only containing enough materials to make three painted eggs. The group typically works on projects together, but due to the limited materials in the egg kit, this won’t be possible. Polly asks for volunteers to try it out with her. Lynne and Heather express their interest and the three members organize a small meeting before the next session. They will try it first to see how it works out, and if it’s a success, they’ll try it out with the whole group. At the next session, right at the beginning, Polly and Lynne take out their painted eggs to show the other members. Laughing heartily over the results, they describe (in between chuckles) the numerous problems they encountered. As they comment on the messiness of the processes, Lynne recounts the experience of using “lighted candles and jars of dye.” Summing it up, the three members explain that “it wasn’t overly successful,” and while they had a good laugh, it most certainly wasn’t worth the effort and the trouble (and the mess!).

In addition to activities contained within individual art and craft groups, there are also instances where they extend beyond their groups. These extensions take place between other Stamford U3A groups, between other local U3A groups, and within the community and outside world. All of the art and craft groups have at one point or another exhibited their work at Stamford U3A meetings to show other members what they’ve done. Some of the groups have even displayed work at regional East Midlands U3A events, sharing their endeavors with the larger U3A community. Sometimes members from different local U3A groups get together for specific projects.

Returning to Handicrafts I, several years back, the group organized a project with another local group: Bourne U3A. The town of Bourne is only 12 miles from Stamford. One of Stamford U3A’s members, Doreen, is also a member of Bourne U3A, so she
facilitated the organization of the project. Half of Stamford’s Handicrafts I members went to meet with Bourne U3A’s Handicrafts group. During this session, Stamford’s crafters worked alongside Bourne’s crafters to learn how to make a fabric box. The box utilized an interesting design that unfolds to hold sewing and needlecraft supplies. Upon completion of the project, the Stamford women returned home to their Handicrafts group. The half that went to Bourne led the rest of the group in creating their own fabric sewing boxes.

U3A members also take their activities beyond the comforts of the U3A, impacting the local community and the wider world. Handicrafts I has been involved in charity projects close to home by sending knitted blankets to local hospitals. Other projects have gone far beyond national boundaries, sending knitted toys to orphanages in Romania and making tiny sweaters for premature babies in Africa. Returning closer to home, the Quilting and Embroidery group just finished a group quilt that was donated to a local charity where it was raffled off to raise money for cancer research. The project took a tremendous amount of work, but each member contributed to the effort, and one of the members, Robin, assumed an organizational role on top of working on the quilt. She maintained contact and communication with the charity and helped to organize publicity. While tickets were being sold for the raffle, the quilt was on display at a variety of local venues, leading to a write-up, pictures in the local newspaper, and an article in a quilting magazine.

Thus far, examples have been given of sharing within each group, and outside of these contexts, sharing with and within larger U3A structures, the local community, and
beyond. While these stories only provide a glimpse into the extent of the art and craft
groups’ involvements, a final example illustrates sharing on an individual level.

At Handicrafts II, as the group works on a cardmaking project, they are chatting
away about different craft supplies. Where to get this or that, what’s difficult to find, and
so on. Molly then mentions someone she knows from Welland U3A, describing how the
woman is very interested and involved in cardmaking. When she gets a chance, she’ll be
sure to ask her where she gets her supplies. This reminds Louisa of something that she
had been meaning to tell the group, and although she tends to be quiet and soft-spoken,
she jumps right into the conversation. She too has a friend who has taken a recent
interest in cardmaking. When this friend visited Louisa last week, their conversation
drifted to crafts. Describing her newfound interest, she told Louisa that she just went out
and spent hundreds of pounds on cardmaking supplies. To her surprise, Louisa
explained to her that she doesn’t have to spend nearly that much. She continued, offering
her some ideas from projects that she’s learned in the Handicrafts group. After
describing the various projects that she shared, Louisa happily told the group that the
woman was going to have a go at some of the projects and that she was very grateful for
the new ideas. As abruptly as Louisa started her story, she quickly ended it, quietly
returning to the cardmaking project at hand.

Rethinking Teaching versus Sharing. The older adult art education literature
stresses the importance of carefully designing curricula that are tailored to the needs and
backgrounds of older students. Following this, teaching methods must constantly be
adapted accordingly. In the U3A, the notion of a “teacher teaching” is strongly
discouraged at all levels of the organization, from the founding principles to the regional
level to each individual interest group. Rather than teaching, the U3A encourages sharing and shared learning. In Art I, Laine shared her gardening knowledge with Nellie, and moments later, when Laine was having trouble with her painting, Nellie offered helpful suggestions. In-group sharing also went beyond the level of one-on-one interactions when three Handicrafts I members tested out a new project, providing a full report to the rest of the group. Although they felt that it was entirely unsuccessful, terribly messy, and quite comical, at least the rest of the group is now armed with that bit of knowledge.

Shared learning may be an approach that is particularly suited to older adult learning. In relation to older adults, Falk and Dierking (2002) state:

> With so many life experiences under our belts, sharing those experiences becomes important and rewarding for the one sharing and the one experiencing the sharing. Thus free-choice learning at this stage is a mechanism for fulfilling two learning needs:
> 1. A desire to explore new avenues.
> 2. A desire for closure in life, which for many means sharing what one has learned with others. (p. 126)

Identifying the sharing of knowledge and experiences as a learning need of older adults provides a rationale for the U3A’s shared learning approach. Another construct that relates to U3A activities is “co-learning,” which “challenge[s] … the notions of expert and novice, teacher and learner” (Curry & Cunningham, 2000, p. 73). In co-learning, small groups (like U3A interest groups) learn together, with no teacher, no authority figure, and no “leader who has the responsibility of validating the group’s knowledge” (p. 78). “Co-learning is one way to equalize power relationships and to deny socially constructed privilege or the privileging of one knowledge over another” (p. 75). U3A members are co-learners. With no teacher, members are equal as they work and learn
together. Approaching their learning in this way, they necessarily challenge the power dynamics inherent in a traditional teacher-led classroom.

Teachers teach. Members share. And while the teacher and teaching are confined to the classroom setting, sharing can easily extend beyond these contexts. The complexity of sharing interactions stemming from small U3A interest groups is impressive (and even more so considering that some groups have as few as eight members). Sharing exists on many levels, both within the interest group and far beyond it. The commitment to sharing and the resultant impacts can allow us to rethink our roles and our purposes. Are our methods emphasizing teaching (teacher-centered) or sharing (learner-centered)? Are there ways we can encourage and include more opportunities for sharing? Can we challenge notions of who has knowledge worth sharing?

Although deliberately not called “teaching,” there are “methods” that are employed within U3A groups; however, the emphasis on sharing has a strong influence on the types of strategies employed.

**Teaching (and Sharing) Methods**

*Teaching (and Sharing) Methods in the Literature.* One of the worst (and most easily corrected) mistakes made by teachers in the older adult classroom is taking the same approach they would use in teaching children. Older adults are certainly different and tend to have different ways of learning from children and even younger adults. The teacher must have an understanding of these differences and be willing to adapt his or her teaching methods accordingly. A major difference stems from the lengthy amount of time since most older adults have adopted the role of student.

A central problem of the elderly appears to be an inability to use efficient learning strategies on their own. However, most studies report that when elderly persons
are instructed on how to learn, their performance shows significant improvement. Consequently, it would seem useful for the art teacher to encourage the elderly to be reflective and to provide them with cues on how to learn. (Jones, 1980a, p. 19)

Since it may have been well over 50 years since older adults have set foot in the classroom, they will likely need help with reentering this role. This is in stark contrast to children and young adults for whom this is often a primary role. In relation to younger students, teachers of older adults “may have to provide more direction for approaching a task, more time for the task, more attention to perception skills, more sensitivity to the personal goals and preferences of the student, and more reinforcement in the whole undertaking” (p. 28). These guidelines are simply that, guidelines. While they can help in addressing the class in the beginning, as time progresses and the teacher becomes more familiar with older students and their needs, methods must be altered and fine-tuned to best align with individual learning styles. Overall, however, “many older people want to take part in discussions rather than be lectured to” (Greenberg, 1985b, p. 214), so it is important to choose methods that allow for high levels of interaction. With the final aim of creating students who are active participants and who are self-directed, it is important to provide a strong foundation for attaining this goal. The elements of art and principles of design can prove to be a solid starting point. “The principles of design, balance, emphasis, and unity add order to works of art. They are usually discussed in conjunction with a study of the art elements of line, shape, value, space, texture, and color” (Hoffman, 1992, p. 104). Introducing these elements and principles must also include guidance on how students can effectively use them in their own art making, as “basic design principles help the novice designer to create for the first time with success” (Clements, 1980, p. 65). Since older students will likely approach first encounters in the arts with
trepidation, teaching these elements can provide them with beginning tools that allow them to approach their art making more confidently. Beyond providing basic tools and understandings, teachers will need to work tirelessly at boosting the confidence levels of their students.

A quality art instructor always “teaches from a stance of encouragement” (Barret, 1998, p. 120). Older adults need encouragement and reassurance throughout their art studies, particularly if they are first-time students. Higher levels of confidence can lead to bold and daring artistic ambitions, moving from cautiousness to expressive and meaningful art engagements. Therefore the art teacher must encourage whenever he or she can. “Praise students adequately when it is deserved, and inspire those who move ahead, even in small increments, by giving them a sense of satisfaction because YOU appreciate what they have accomplished” (Greenberg, 1987a, p. 91). Teacher approval is typically needed, and those who are uncertain may need positive feedback throughout every step until they gain more confidence in their own ideas, abilities, and decisions. Students may also, once confident enough, “offer positive feedback and encouragement to their friends” (Barret, 1998, p. 119).

While encouragement is paramount in all classroom activities, instructors also need to add advice, put forward in a positive way, to help students develop and to guide them in the right direction. “Sincere praise and positive feedback are motivational tools which an instructor can use. One can always find something to celebrate in an individual’s artistic expression, while at the same time offering suggestions relating to technique or elements of design” (p. 121). Students will often rely on the teacher’s expertise, especially in the beginning, in terms of selecting subject matter and making
artistic decisions. “After a few weeks of working, it is important to look over what has been produced and discuss with each student some next steps or new directions” (Greenberg, 1987a, p. 86). Relying on his or her art knowledge and expertise, the instructor needs to strike a balance between offering technical advice so that older adults can improve their art making skills and encouragement to help older students progress in their willingness to take risks and try new things. While it is important to advise students, it is crucial that advice and suggestions do not become impositions.

Since older learners need to feel as though they have some degree of control over their learning endeavors, “we can provide suggestions, show possibilities, but then options are to be left open for the taking” (Agostinone-Wilson, 2001, p. 28). Providing a range of options is important for more experienced as well as new art students. Those who are more experienced and confident will need as many options as possible in order to allow for them finding and following their own paths. Lack of options may leave these students feeling stifled, eventually looking elsewhere for more flexible programming. On the other hand, those who are new to pursuing art studies need options that demonstrate the many avenues they can explore. Possibly unaware of the diversity in the visual arts, lack of options could lead to reinforcing a limited view of art. In this sense, “breadth exposure in a variety of art processes and media is suggested for beginners” (Bloom, 1980, p. 93), thus allowing for an understanding of the available options. It is critical that new students “get a taste of the many possibilities available to them” (Greenberg, 1987a, p. 94). Presenting a range of options to students, whether experienced or beginners, is an important element in a student-centered approach which aims to foster self-directed learning. Durr, Fortin, and Leptak (1992) describe the approach of a student-centered oil
painting class for older adults, “The students choose the subject, style, and method. Mary [the instructor] helps students identify options, but the choices are always theirs” (p. 59). In this studio class, the instructor is sure to lend her expertise and help students in their endeavors, but ensures that they remain in control. It is always important to offer options that expand students’ understandings.

One way of expanding options is through conducting demonstrations. Hoffman (1992) explains:

Limiting choices to one arts area such as painting excludes many individuals interested in pursuing other areas of the visual arts. Sometimes, demonstrations of little-known areas will pique the interest of individuals watching from the sidelines but searching for an excuse to become involved. (p. 111)

Again, while this is an effective method for beginning students, it is also recommended for those who are more advanced. For these students, demonstrations of other media can prompt them to branch out into a new medium or to find new ways of combining media, thus supplementing and enhancing their current studies. Beyond demonstrations, art instructors can present options to the class via other means. Greenberg (1987a) advocates showing a slide presentation to older adults which demonstrates a variety of media and styles. Clements (1980) takes a similar approach to choosing projects with her older students. Bringing in and displaying a variety of completed art and craft projects, she allows them to get a sense of the projects they could do. While the projects are undertaken as a class, she describes how elements of choice were introduced. “Votes were taken. Most popular projects were done first” (p. 63). In this case, older adults are presented with options and have a collective say. By bringing in physical examples, students are not only able to see the projects, but also have the opportunity to gain a sense of their textures, materials, and physical properties before making their decision.
In conclusion, when choosing teaching methods, art educators must opt for methods that help older students gain confidence and learn to be self-directed. Starting with the elements and principles while also introducing effective learning strategies provides older adults with a solid foundation to continue their art studies. Methods should be devised that encourage and advise students while allowing for numerous options. Once students become more confident, begin exploring their options, and start taking risks, the benefits of a quality art program for older adults will be realized by all involved.

*Teaching (and Sharing) Methods in the U3A.* In the U3A, members are responsible for every aspect of their learning. “They choose their own subjects, their own teachers, their own methods of learning” (Laslett, 1989, p. 172). While members devise their own methods, Stamford U3A issued a handout entitled “Notes for Group Leaders” which offers some basic guidelines:

**Learning Methods**

Learning best takes place when Group members:
- study and discuss what they are interested in
- are relaxed and supportive of each other
- participate fully in the group
- learn to listen to each other and hear about each other’s different ideas and experiences.

All of the art and craft groups follow these suggestions, each in their own way. In the Art History group, which is the most formal in terms of methods, members listen to Penny’s prepared talks; however, following the lecture, they share the opportunity to “participate fully” and “discuss what they are interested in.” At this time, the members candidly discuss that they have just seen and heard, beginning as a large group discussion and eventually evolving into ten to fifteen smaller conversations.
Penny, after finishing her talk on Gainsborough, goes back to what is the artist’s best-known and most well-received painting. Penny posits, “I don’t know if I agree that this is his best work.” Some members agree, while others don’t. Soon, the entire group is engaged in a large group discussion of Gainsborough’s work. Some give reasons why this painting is definitely the best. Other members put forth other paintings that they feel are much better. Vocalizing their opinions and sharing them with the group, they always provide their rationale, which leads to others jumping into the conversation. Soon, the intrigue of discussing Gainsborough’s best work becomes too large to be supported by one large discussion. Some, not wanting to wait to address the group, start talking with their neighbor about the topic, leading to a room filled with small conversations on Gainsborough’s paintings.

In the other groups, which all involve hands-on projects and activities, the approach is a bit different. Members help each other along when necessary, whether they are working on an individual or group basis. In these groups, offering advice and encouragement is primary. With phrases like “It’s coming along!” and “I admire you for having a go!,” members are continually encouraging each other and pointing out their accomplishments and successes. These encouraging words typically lead to advice and suggestions as well. While those being praised often accept it, they tend to note what they’re not happy with and the problems they’ve been encountering. Upon hearing these self-criticisms, those who are encouraging shift to advising, helping in any way they can. U3A members do not like to see their peers discouraged.

In Art I, the members mainly work on watercolor paintings, but Mabel can always be found with a box of chalk pastels in front of her. Using vivid colors, she typically
works diligently throughout the entire session, adding new colors and softly blending them on the paper for a wispy, almost feathery effect. But today, she seems to be very frustrated. The color’s all wrong... something seems off. Continuing to try to work through her problems, she feels as though she can’t resolve any of them. Finally, having had enough, she shoots up out of her seat and declares, “I think I’m going to give up on this thing! I’m going to pack up now.” She goes to the adjoining kitchen to wash up, preparing to leave, but when she returns, Alfred, the detailed painter, is at her workstation. Looking at her pastel landscape, he offers some advice and encouragement. Although ready to leave, Mabel sits back down and continues working.

Examples of offering advice abound in U3A art groups, as it is the main way in which they help each other along. In the Art Workshop, all members are equally involved in advising each other, and in Art II, the group leader, Chelsea, devotes all of her time every session to lending her technical expertise. On an individual basis, she gives tips and suggestions when requested. Often trying to lead the members to more challenging compositions and techniques, she helps with their immediate technical problems, then shows one or two other techniques for future projects.

Sitting down with Joann, Chelsea explains, “If you darken all around there and all around here, it’ll bring the petals forward.” Continuing, she takes a piece of scrap paper and loads her brush with a rich green hue. She demonstrates a new brushstroke technique. Talking Joann through it, Chelsea then hands her the brush asking, “Do you see how I did that?” It is now Joann’s turn, and as she tries the brushstroke, Chelsea watches closely, making sure that she understands. Happy with the results, Chelsea advises that she should continue practicing the brushstroke on a separate paper before
trying it on her actual painting. Satisfied that Joann is equipped with a new technique, Chelsea moves on to Lilly who appears to be getting frustrated.

The crafts groups also actively advise each other, creating an environment where the members are supportive of each other.

*Trisha, who is new to the Quilting and Embroidery group, brought in a book with patchwork patterns to today’s session. Flipping through it, she stops at a particular pattern. As she explains to the group that she wants to create a gold patchwork table runner, she holds up the pattern from the book and asks what the others think of it. Is it too difficult for a beginner? Do you think that it would be appropriate for a runner instead of a quilt? Answers start flowing from the members as freely as the questions come. Perhaps you should try it with scrap materials before you use the actual materials for the runner. You could learn that technique, it’s fairly basic. There’s just one tricky spot. Here, let me show you. I have another book you might want to look at. It has easier templates. Shall I bring it next month?*

Since members are eager to help each other and to lend suggestions in a positive manner, this form of help is greatly appreciated. “There’s always someone in the group who can look at your picture and say, ‘If you put a little darkening here, or a little shadowing there,’ and it suddenly brings the whole thing to life.” “And we can crit—, what I like is we get to go around, and not necessarily to criticize, but to give a little bit of guidance if they can.”

Having someone to give you advice and helpful criticism. I suppose you could call it constructive criticism, about what you’re doing. You know, if you have a problem, you can take it in and somebody will suggest something and you can perhaps sort it out.
While advice giving is primary and typically takes place on a one-on-one basis, in Art I, every couple of months, they have a demonstration led by Ruby.

Today, Ruby is showing us how to soak watercolor paintings to remove areas that are too dark or that have too much paint on them. Watching the demonstration is completely optional, and while most members have assembled in the kitchen by the sink, there are two or three members that never leave their workstations, continuing their work on their own projects. With everyone standing around the sink, Ruby explains that she wants to show us this “so you’re not scared to try it for yourself.” Bringing in a painting from home for the demonstration, she proudly explains how this is a left-handed painting. As a natural “right-ey,” when she broke her wrist several years back, she was told that she’d never be able to write again. While this news would be devastating for most, Ruby saw it as a challenge as she immediately began practicing painting (and, of course, writing) with her left hand. After this quick story, she starts off the demonstration by dunking the painting into the now-filled sink. The members gasp a bit, possibly still “scared to try it for themselves,” but Ruby thoroughly describes the process of the paint lifting off of the paper and why it works. Adding little tips and tricks, she shows how you can use a paintbrush to agitate the areas where you want to remove the most color. She also answers questions as they arise. How long should it stay in? Is it harmful to the paper? Listening intently to the answers, some scratch some quick notes on scrap paper. After all questions are answered, Ruby explains that the painting has to stay in the water for quite some time, so there is no sense hanging around in the kitchen. Leaving the left-handed painting behind in the sink, they return to the main room and begin working on their projects. They continue working until the very end of the session when we return to
the kitchen. Ruby retrieves the soaked painting from the water to finish off her
demonstration. Running out of time, she quickly shows how the paper can be blotted in
certain areas to lift off more color. As she finishes, everyone returns to the main room
and begins getting ready to leave as there are only about five minutes left. Next month,
Ruby will be doing a demonstration on portrait painting, which nearly everyone is
looking forward to!

In Quilting and Embroidery, the current project involves members demonstrating
new patchwork techniques to each other, but recently, there have been a number of
additional demonstrations for the benefit of the group’s two new members. While they
are both expert seamstresses, they have little experience in quilting, embroidery, and
patchwork. The group is eager to teach them the basics, resulting in demonstrations on a
variety of techniques such as rotary cutting and quilt pinning.

Coming to the final stages of a small group quilt, the patchwork pieces are laid
out on the floor atop of the backing material. The members work to carefully smooth it
out as they tape it to the carpet, removing any lumps and bumps in the layers of fabric.
While doing this, Robin tells the new member, Trisha, that they decided to finish the quilt
off there so that she can see how it’s done. As they start to pin it down, Louisa explains
that everything has to be pinned very closely so that it doesn’t slip when it’s machine
quilted. Make sure that you are pinning all of the layers, but make sure that you don’t
pin the carpet too! Janet describes how the pinning has to start in the middle, so that
they can smooth it out as they go along. This helps to prevent ending up with a big lump
in the middle. Trisha works alongside the more experienced members, pinning down the
layers of the quilt, but also learning the ins and outs of finishing off a quilt.
A final major method employed in all of the craft groups (and in the art groups to a lesser extent) is conducting sessions of “show and tell.” This is heavily relied upon in the Quilting and Embroidery group and sometimes accounts for up to an hour of their meeting. In these sessions, everyone brings what they have been working on since their last meeting and describes how they went about it.

Robin took out a blue fabric that the group needs to finish off the border of their group quilt. Running out of their supply of the fabric for the bold blue border, they were nervous that they wouldn’t be able to find a match. Robin found an exact match! Next, Emily unfolded a large quilt that she recently completed, followed by Janet who displayed a wall hanging. It is now Louisa’s turn. Laying out twelve patchwork squares that are already joined together, she shows that she has another stack of about 20 more that she has yet to add. She explains how the technique is done and how to piece them together once you have enough patches. Trisha asks if the technique is hand-sewn, as she loves hand sewing, but she learns that it is machine-sewn. As Louisa answers, she takes out a photocopy of the template to explain it further. Once all of the members fully understand it, and no more explanation is required, she passes around the photocopy for everyone to see. If they want, they can borrow it and bring it back. As Louisa picks up the patches that are laid out on the floor, she begins to put them away. As she does this, Melody is already starting to lay hers out to show the patchwork sampler that she brought in.

Rethinking Teaching (and Sharing) Methods. Since the literature focuses on teaching and the U3A focuses on sharing, the approach to teaching (and sharing) methods differ. The literature proposes that older students need to be taught to learn properly.
Relying on teachers only in the beginning, methods should be employed that raise students’ confidence levels so they can become more self-directed. The concept of self-directed learning comes from adult education and is defined as learning where “the learner chooses to assume the primary responsibility for planning, carrying out, and evaluating those learning experiences” (Caffarella, 1993, p. 28). While recognizing that many adults do embark on their own individual learning projects, adult educators aim to improve students’ learning skills in order to increase and promote their self-directedness. “Those grounded in a humanistic philosophy posit that self-directed learning should have as its goal the development of the learner’s capacity to be self-directed” (Merriam, 2001, p. 9). Adult educators create self-directed learners, just as art educators speak of moving students to a point where they can be self-directing. In this sense, are we seeking to direct self-directed learning? Nonetheless, in the U3A, left to their own devices, members already are self-directed. Since they work and learn together rather than individually, the term “self-directed” may be better changed to “group-directed.” While some may lack confidence from time to time or occasionally come to points where they get stuck, they are all there to encourage each other and help out whenever they can. Just as Chelsea gives technical advice and Alfred keeps Mabel from getting discouraged, all U3A members adopt advising and encouraging roles whenever necessary. In Quilting and Embroidery, the more experienced quilters help the two new members in whatever ways they can. No matter what the group decides to do, Trisha and her friend can be assured and confident that they will not be left in the dark, since anything that they are unfamiliar with gets fully explained or demonstrated to them. Advising is a major function in the art and craft groups as they “learn to listen to each other and hear about
each other’s different ideas and experiences.” This is akin to learning in communities of practice where members learn from each other. Communities of practice are defined as “groups of people informally bound by their shared competence and mutual interest in a given practice, which makes it natural for them to share their individual experiences and knowledge in an informal and creative way” (Choi, 2006, p. 143). In these communities and in the U3A, members share what they know. Beyond helping each other, the members rely on other strategies as well.

Between the literature and the U3A, there is definite overlap in some of the methods. Both call for offering advice and suggestions, conducting demonstrations, and making a wide range of options and choices available. The difference, then, comes from the key players. The lack of a teacher in the U3A changes the conduct and dynamics of the methods. In the U3A, show and tell sessions involve members bringing in different projects and examples to discuss. This occasionally leads to others trying the new ideas themselves, but always results in all members learning the techniques and being exposed to others’ interests and undertakings. When Louisa explained the new patchwork technique to the group, each member gained an understanding of it, and Robin went on to try it out on her own. In the literature, this idea of show and tell can be likened to Clements’s (1980) method of bringing in completed projects to the class to let students vote on which to tackle first. While this allows for an element of student choice, it still is limited to the options that are presented by the teacher. Art educator Andrews (2005) states, “A student-driven curriculum is more than a choice about art project options; it is a responsibility” (p. 40). In the member-driven U3A, members take responsibility for all aspects of their learning, including the methods they employ. As older adult art
educators, do our methods allow older students to take a responsibility for their own learning?

Methods and Approaches from Art Education Summary

When the student-teacher dynamic is shifted, all other elements of the learning experience shift. What if we were to shift from “students” to “members,” from “teaching” to “sharing,” and from a teacher-directed (possibly with some input) to a truly learner-centered and learner-directed approach? The notion of sharing can be a fruitful path to follow. Beyond validating the fact that older adults have knowledge and skills worth sharing, it also puts older learners in more control over their learning. Spigner-Littles and Anderson (1999), educational gerontologists, state, “Our experiences in teaching older learners have revealed that such students tend to do well when allowed to have some control over the learning environment” (p. 204). The U3A is representative not of “some control,” but of total control.

Stepping outside of education for a moment and turning to gerontology, we can see just how important a sense of control can be to older adults. Feeling that one is in control of his or her life is significant to older adults, especially those experiencing aging-related losses. A positive sense of control is related to numerous physical and psychological benefits as well as to an overall improvement in quality of life (Rodin, 1989; Schaie & Willis, 2002). Along with the benefits associated with control, there are accompanying deleterious effects associated with the loss of control. The most poignant of these outcomes is learned helplessness. This is defined as “the belief acquired through experience that one has no control over what happens in life” (Morgan & Kunkel, 2001,
The following story is an example of learned helplessness, also called learned dependency:

*I’m in the kitchen making dinner. Tonight, pasta and garlic bread are on the menu. As I try to open up a jar of marinara sauce, I struggle a bit. My husband sees me having a hard time with it, and knowing that he’s stronger, takes the jar and opens it. This process gets repeated during several more dinner-making endeavors. Now, I don’t even attempt to open the jar anymore. I just hand it over to my husband.*

Here, I learned to be dependent. Although I know that after several tries I could probably do it on my own, I have ceased trying. While this is an example of minor consequence, try to imagine what learned dependency could mean for the older adult, especially considering that “dependency in old age is expected and viewed as acceptable” (Schaie & Willis, 2002, p. 297). Framed in this way, older adults’ control over their learning takes on extra significance. Are our teaching methods creating learned dependency or fostering a sense of control?

**Summary**

This chapter focused on issues related to learners, teachers, and methods found in the older adult art education literature and in the U3A. Outside perspectives were also added in an attempt to introduce multiple perspectives and viewpoints. While this chapter was organized around what the literature says should be done, the next chapter will focus on what the literature says should *not* be done.
CHAPTER 5:
THE LITERATURE VS. THE U3A—MYTHS, ASSUMPTIONS, AND PROHIBITIONS
This chapter continues the presentation of the data by framing issues from the perspectives of the older adult art education literature and the U3A. The following topics are organized around elements and mindsets that the literature asserts should never appear in a quality art program.

**What Not to Do: Art Education No-Nos**

**Art vs. Craft**

*Art vs. Craft in the Literature.* Art educators have a responsibility to provide quality art experiences to older learners, but “a review of the literature reveals that most art programming for older adults has been craft-oriented in nature with little input from the field of art education” (Barret, 1998, p. 122). Approached improperly, instituting crafts-based programs deny older adults the opportunity for meaningful, creative, and expressive engagements in art making. Noting the dangers of this approach, Hoffman (1992) warns:

Widely practiced in many ways, crafts in its broadest definition encompasses many traditional areas which limit creativity. Folk crafts, kits marketed through discount stores, ceramic mold-pouring, and other techniques requiring recreation of previously designed patterns or products should be avoided at all costs, especially if the development of creativity is a major goal of the program. Although interesting to explore for their historic value, they allow for little variance. Chair caning, for example, is a craft passed from generation to generation. One must follow preconceived plans, or function will be adversely affected. The amount of creative thought utilized during the weaving of a traditional pattern is minimal. (p. 121-122)

Crafts that erase notions of creativity should indeed “be avoided at all costs;” however, the split between art and craft needs to be clarified. In addressing a research agenda for older adult art education, Jones (1980c) urges art educators to rethink the fine art and craft dichotomy. “The concept of art itself and the nearly-buried distinctions between fine arts and crafts will have to be reviewed and discussed in the adult education context”
Although these distinctions have no absolute definitions, there are several elements of this debate that can be agreed upon by art educators wishing to design effective art programming.

Crafts activities can be successfully integrated into an art program as long as they meet certain criteria. First, crafts projects can be used to teach artistic ideas. Beyond merely mindlessly executing projects or mastering repetitive techniques, crafts activities should be approached as if they were art activities. As Clements (1980) exemplifies, “While working on God’s eyes, art principles and elements, color relationships, repetition, size relationships, and pattern were emphasized” (p. 64). Addressing art ideas and terms through crafts can be accomplished through a variety of projects. Clements continues, stating, “While creating clay bowls, we not only talked about their practicality, but also of pattern, of texture, of thickness and thinness, and of sound clay structure” (p. 64). Learning about art through crafts teaches older adults skills that can later be transferred to art making. This leads to the second criteria.

Crafts should be approached in a serious way, never as a meaningless, mindless time-filler. In this sense, older adults learn to work as artists work. “They will be working the way adult artists do, not called upon for some junk artsy-craftsy hour or two to make some kind of garbage neither they nor their teacher really considers worthwhile” (Greenberg, 1980a, p. 47). When teachers introduce crafts seriously, students will engage in them seriously. Learning the mindset of working as an artist will surely benefit older learners as they move from the crafts into fine art studies.

The third, and most important, criterion for the inclusion of crafts is that they must allow for expression. “Crafts have a place in creative expression” (Lokken, 1980, p. 38). A God’s eye is a traditional Mexican craft that involves weaving.
Students must be taught crafts through which they are able to make design choices. It is imperative that they have the opportunity to express their own aesthetic preferences. All completed projects should look unique. If they do not, it is likely that the approach was too directive and was lacking in opportunities for expression. Crafts projects need to involve decision making processes. The simple following of directions stifles creativity, leading to projects that all look identical. Students may have learned how to follow directions or how to execute a step-by-step technique, but they have not learned how to think artistically and how to express themselves creatively. “A question to examine here is the difference between craft as a time filler and craft as a vehicle for self-expression with the potential to be a significant form of art” (Clements, 1980, p. 65). Asking this question each and every time a new crafts project is introduced can allow art educators to unlock the creative and expressive potentials within their older students.

Although the realm of the fine arts is something that is foreign to the majority of older Americans, crafts represent much more familiar territory. A survey of older adults (Anderson, 1976), reported that while only 23% of older adults had engaged in drawing or painting, 70% had engaged in some sort of craft. As most older adults have engaged in crafts at some point or another, crafts may be a critical component of beginning art studies. “Folk art and crafts are the arts that many lifelong learners are most familiar with. By starting where students are, by respecting their beliefs, we can invite them to explore and expand their notions of what art is” (Ball-Gisch, 1998, p. 62). Beginning with crafts can ease students into the arts and give them more confidence (Greenberg, 1985b). Once creatively and expressively working in crafts, older adults may gain enough confidence to move away from crafts and into the fine arts.
What we tend to call the fine arts requires giving of oneself more than may at first be comfortable. People new to the visual arts seem to feel less fearful if they start with a craft rather than painting or drawing. After success with a craft, many are willing to risk doing a drawing! (Greenberg, 1987a, p. 96)

Additionally, if crafts are presented in a meaningful way where students learn art principles and work creatively, the transition should take place naturally. With a bit of guidance from the teacher, the older student should be eager to take on more challenging and more expressive projects, ultimately leading to uninhibited and bold art making endeavors.

In closing, while repetitive and rote craft forms can stifle and stunt creativity, when properly introduced, crafts can encourage and foster expressiveness. Starting off beginners with crafts can help ease them into the fine arts. With the end goal of leading older adults to a realization of their true artistic and creative potential, crafts may be the first stepping stone on this journey.

Art vs. Craft in the U3A. How do U3A members understand the distinctions between art and craft? To some the split is crystal clear, based on the medium used. “Well, craft includes many things. Art is specific to painting and drawing.” Others agree that there is a distinction, but they base their rationales on other criteria. Ruby notes the difference based on the motives and the utility of the created objects.

Do you see a difference between art and crafts?
Very! Yes, yes.
Where would you draw the line?
Well, as I told you, I did, I made all my own clothes. I used to make a garment a week. Every single week. That was sheer necessity. That was necessity.

Some members note the differences in the skills and the thought processes involved.

Lynne, one of the craft group leaders, explains:
Because art is a little more individual in your head, isn’t it? Your ideas in your head, whereas craft really is expanding on an idea, a set idea. The actual craft is doing it in such a way. It’s not quite as creative as art, I wouldn’t have thought.

Another crafts leader, Melody, follows this same line of thought:

Crafts on the whole can be learned. They can be improved upon with an artistic mind, but certain basic crafts, I think, most people could have a fair go at. But to make something great art, there’s got to be something up here [she points to her head] that takes you further.

For some, the difference lies in the types of skills involved:

Well, in as much as you’re painting and you’re doing craftwork, you’re actually using your hands. But I quite like using my hands as well …. But there is a difference because the craft people couldn’t necessarily paint a picture, but I think an artist can create some crafts. So I suppose that’s the difference, isn’t it really?

A final distinction involves expression: “Because with the art, you know, you’re actually putting your own feelings into it …. You are actually, you’re expressing yourself more with art.”

The previous statements come from responses to the interview question “Do you see a difference between art and craft?” With no advance prompting or knowledge of the interview questions, members had no time to ponder their answers in advance. As a result, and certainly due to the complexity and messiness of the question, some members talked out their responses candidly. These verbalized thought processes start with articulating differences, but end up talking through the complexity of making a distinction. The following comes from an art group leader:

Yes. I would definitely say that there is a difference. Mind you, nowadays, when paintings are sometimes crafted. You know, people make things, then put them onto the paintings, and then paint them into them. That’s another thing, isn’t it really? …. It’s not a collage or anything, but it’s something that’s forced into the painting. And a lot of well-known artists do things like that. And also use factories for making part of their pictures, then it’s all put together. So it’s difficult, isn’t it?
A similar explanation comes from Emily, the leader of Quilting and Embroidery:

I think of art as more expressing moods and feelings, whereas crafts are more practical applications. You can still like what you’re doing and choose colors that you like, and things like this, but you’re actually going to end up with a useful article, rather than a—But that’s not true. I mean there’s so many exceptions that it probably isn’t true. I mean a painting is something that you end up with and you have it on the wall perhaps, but a lot of people do create patchwork that is really more like a picture and less of an article. So, I’m not very good on that one, I’m afraid!

Finally, there are members who see no difference between art and craft as evidenced in short, to-the-point responses, such as, “I think it all ties in together.” Alicia, a former teacher, who is a member of both an art and a craft group, provides a more lengthy explanation:

A difference? Both use one’s hands. Both use your own skills. Difference? Not really. No, no I don’t think. Because at the end of whether it’s art or craft, you can produce something at the end and it’s something that can be seen: a picture, a garment, a card. So no, I can’t see a difference between. They’re often put together as well, aren’t they? In schools they’re often put together now, whereas they used to be separated …. They overlap.

As I received replies from one end of the spectrum to the other, it became evident that there is definitely no consensus among the art and craft group members. What is interesting, however, is that while some see a black-and-white distinction, overall, Stamford U3A treats art and craft equally. Since members’ interests are the only criteria for creating interest groups, it could be said that levels of interest in both art and craft are equal, with three art groups and three crafts groups. In addition, when these groups display their work at Stamford U3A or East Midlands regional U3A events, they exhibit alongside of each other.

Valued equally and treated equally, these groups remain separate, but within the separation of art and craft, there exist connections and interplay between the two. Several
members belong to both art and craft groups, spanning the divide. Others are active U3A craft group members that engage in art beyond the U3A. The same is evident in art groups. Ruby, the Art I expert, has had a lifelong involvement in crafts, including dressmaking, embroidery, and smocking. Emily, from Quilting and Embroidery and Handicrafts II, takes weekly art classes outside of the U3A. Chelsea from Art II has had a wide range of craft experiences: tapestry, silk flower making, metal working, woodworking, and furniture making. Melody, active in U3A crafts, frequently attends art workshops in addition to her regular art classes beyond the U3A. She has even exhibited some of her paintings.

The crossover of the interests and involvements of members often permeate into the interest groups, leading to art groups discussing crafts and craft groups discussing art.  

*In Handicrafts I, as they work on their decoupage cards, the women engage in lively conversation. Drifting from places they’ve been on holiday to recent car troubles to computers and digital cameras, they arrive at discussing programs they’ve recently seen on the telly. Addressing the group, Heather asks if anyone had seen the program about the artist, “the one who makes things out of stones, rocks, and sand.”* After a brief discussion of it, describing the beautiful and lovely natural sculptures, she concludes, “They call it art, you know!” They continue working, and as one of the women finishes a card, she holds it up to show the rest of the group. With only three small squares affixed to the front, she laughs, saying, “It’s minimalist!”

*In the Art Workshop, as the group finishes up their cups of coffee and tea, they slowly return to their workstations. The conversation starts to die down as they become more focused on their artwork. This is short-lived however, as Holly starts chatting with*
her neighbor about gifts. As she notes the beauty and loveliness of the images on wrapping paper these days, Polly, who is also in Handicrafts I, chimes in from across the room. She explains how wrapping paper is great for making decoupage since the paper is thin and the pictures repeat themselves. The silence vanishes. Polly asks me if I’ll be at Handicrafts next week. She’s meeting with two other crafters on Wednesday to try out the egg painting project and is excited about reporting back to the group. While we discuss the upcoming meeting, the rest of the room is abuzz. Moving from decoupage, they’re now talking about quilting. None have personally tried it, but some have been to quilting and crafting shows. Others have family members and friends who are avid quilters. The conversation, lively and animated a moment ago, is now waning, and the members, one-by-one, drift back to their drawings and paintings.

As I arrive to Art II, Chelsea immediately calls me over. She brought in some of her artwork to show me. Ushering me over to an open seat, she motions for me to sit down. Once seated, she sets a stack of her creations in my lap. As the other members arrive and set up their workstations, I leaf through her work—beautifully rendered flower paintings, precise botanical illustrations, and lush landscapes all in watercolor. Working my way through, I come to the very end, to an item that is very different from the rest—a tapestry. Only half completed, it features brilliantly colored orange lilies. When she comes by to see what I think of everything, I ask where she learned tapestry. “Oh! I’ve always done that!” The group carries on as usual through the entire session until they begin cleaning up, packing away their supplies, and leaving. I say my goodbyes as well, but on my way out, I notice Chelsea talking with three other women towards the front of the room. As she shows them her tapestry, she describes other projects she’s done. One
of the women adds that she’s done tapestry as well. They’re all still actively conversing, sharing tapestry experiences, as I set off for home.

Figure 5. Chelsea’s botanical watercolor and tapestry.

While there are countless examples of the permeation of crafts in the art groups and vice versa, the groups remain separate. Regardless of the distinctions they make between art and craft, both areas are valued and treated equally in Stamford U3A.

Rethinking Art vs. Craft. In the literature, crafts are viewed as permissible—under certain circumstances. They are valued when they help to introduce students to the elements of art and the principles of design. If crafts are introduced from an art-oriented stance which offers opportunities for creativity, the transition to expressive art making should be smooth. After all, crafts are just a stepping stone—a springboard—to art making. The policy of deeming the fine arts as more worthy of study than crafts serves to reinforce the modernist hierarchy of valuing the “high arts” over the “low arts.”

The elements and principles of design, like the fine art/craft dichotomy, is another modernist perspective relating to teaching, learning, and talking about art. For further reading on the background and recent questioning of this modernist tenet, see Efland (2004), Feldman (1992), Gaudelius & Speirs (2002, pp. 6-8), Johnson (1995), and Stankiewicz, Amburgy, & Bolin (2004, p. 45). It is important to note that although art educators have questioned the elements and principles, they remain unquestioned in relation to older adults.
Terminology is key here, as the word “craft” carries a connotation that is less valued than the elevated status of “art.” Markowitz (1994) explains:

We have become quite comfortable in the past century with the phrase “arts and crafts.” We use “arts” to refer, for example, to the products and practices of painting, sculpture, and printmaking and “crafts” to those of ceramics, weaving, and wood- and metalwork. We also assume that the arts and the crafts are similar in important ways (or else why would we routinely group them together?) but also somehow different (or else why would we need two terms?). To get clear about these similarities and differences, though, is another story. Part of the problem is that “art” has a positive evaluative connotation that “craft” lacks. Some critics, with good reason, claim that this difference in evaluative meaning reflects our culture’s elitist values: what white European men make is dignified by the label “art,” while what everyone else makes counts only as craft. (p. 55)

Crafts themselves go by many names, none of which have the same positive meaning as “art.” These include “handicrafts,” ‘hobbies,’ ‘folk arts, domestic arts,’ ‘handcrafts’ and ‘feminine’ or ‘hidden stream arts’” (Mason, 2005, p. 262). Lauding crafts as a good “starting point” immediately designates it to a lower status. It’s okay to start there, as long as you progress beyond it.

In the U3A, crafts are valued in their own right. Members that attend craft groups do so because they want to learn and engage in crafts. They are not easing themselves into art making. Many crafters, however, do engage in art making, but the same is true in the art groups, where many members are actively involved in crafts. When art members do crafts, are they taking a giant step backwards? Are they regressing from the creative potentials and powers of art making to the mindless tedium of craft? They don’t think so! This serves to highlight one of the major strengths of the U3A. As members follow their own interests (their third age interests), they are not faced with the impositions, definitions, and canons of the second age. In the U3A, where members decide what to learn, equal emphasis is placed on both art and craft.
While art education on a whole has begun questioning these hierarchies (e.g., Efland, Freedman, & Stuhr, 1996), the art/craft and high art/low art distinctions are maintained and continue to go unchallenged in terms of older adults. It is time to begin to question and rethink this split—especially in terms of older adults. In the first half of the last century, when our present older population of older adults were children, crafts were valued (for various reasons) and included in many school art programs (e.g., Stankiewicz, 2001; White, 2004). Now, if they choose to pursue art in retirement, crafts are no longer acceptable. Imagine the woman who has been engaged in paper craft (or knitting, embroidery, or woodcarving) throughout her life who is told that she should move beyond it.

The problem with artist-oriented theories of craft is their fixation with creativity and narrow conceptions of aesthetics and design. To insist that makers control the entire design process, use raw materials and take responsibility for the majority of working processes, is to eliminate forms of skills-based crafts, such as furniture restoration and model-making [and chair caning?], that are creative in the sense that they enable self-realisation and are engaged with aesthetic intent. (Mason, 2005, p. 262)

Activities valued by older adults should not be devalued in the art room. They should be honored. Older adults engage in crafts because they want to engage in crafts—not to move on to expressive art making. It is time to begin to question and rethink the art/craft split and its resultant hierarchy. As educators, we must begin to respect and value each area equally as is done in the U3A. We should begin to understand how older adults view art and craft and adjust our approaches accordingly, and most importantly, we must not continue to see crafts as a starting point for arriving at what we think older learners should be doing in their “art” endeavors.
**Process vs. Product**

*Process vs. Product in the Literature.* In the older adult art classroom, it is imperative that the emphasis is placed wholly on the process. “Most beginning students of the arts, especially older adults, pursue arts technique rather than exploring the intellectual satisfactions provided by the creative act itself” (Hoffman, 1992, p. 1).

While this type of attitude is prevalent, it is important that the teacher choose projects and activities that are not product-oriented. Older students need to experience the benefits of the art making process firsthand. “Many older adults suffer from the belief that development of a final successful product is the most important goal, when in fact it is the process of creating which is most valuable” (p. 41). It is the teacher’s responsibility to gradually ease students into this mindset, as many, from the very beginning, will expect to leave each and every session with a final product in hand. As Greenberg (1987a) explains:

> There are a few in every group who will say, “What am I going to do with this?” “What do I need it for?” They need to learn that it is the process of creating that is important, not only or always the final product. When the product happens to be a satisfactory piece of work, that is an added bonus. (p. 86)

When older students become preoccupied with mastering skills and perfecting the final product, expression and creativity suffer. To prevent older adults from becoming too absorbed in worrying about the final piece, the instructor must emphasize the art making process itself.

There are several ways in which the art teacher can work to deemphasize the product. First, short “exercises” can be introduced. These can be anything from craft techniques on scrap material to quick imaginative sketches. Regardless of the activity chosen, it should simply remain an exercise. Lessons that lead to no final product, but
that emphasize various creative processes, should help students in moving away from a dependence on always needing a final product to take home. Another way to deemphasize the product is to literally have students throw things away. When not all products are saved, the process itself is sometimes all that remains. Greenberg (1987a) explains:

Not everything one attempts, while learning a skill, is meant to be cherished or saved for posterity. People need to be able to look at what they have made and evaluate what should be kept, and what should be discarded. It is important to see how much one has progressed from the first attempt to the latest one. After a given period of producing, decisions need to be made as to what is worth holding on to and what needs to be discarded. (p. 104)

This also serves to teach older students evaluative and judgmental skills as they decide what is worth saving. Looking back over their work, students are also able to see their progression and to reflect upon the process of arriving at their current level. While these are some ideas for shifting the emphasis from product to process, what about students who are completely wedded to the idea of a product?

Understanding that older adults have different motivations for engaging in art, it must be recognized that some may want to create products to give as gifts. “People are sometimes motivated to create works which can become gifts. While this should not be the only reason for holding such classes, it may be one way of getting started” (Greenberg, 1985b, p. 220). Rather than forcing students to put aside their emphasis on the product due to a desire to create gifts, art educators can work from this motivation. Once these students experience the enjoyment and satisfaction of the processes they learn to use, they will be eager to continue creating. This initial motivation may even lead into more challenging and expressive projects, and the teacher should help by gently pushing the student in these directions.
So while it is important to emphasize the process, in some instances, it is just as necessary to recognize the emphasis that older adults may place on the product itself. Some older adults may also wish to create things to give to family members as a way of being remembered. Art educators need to understand this desire. Reminding art teachers of the importance of validating and respecting this need, Taylor (1987) explains:

To be comforted and later remembered is a universal wish among elders …. Even if older adults are not destined to produce great works of art, their art work will be left behind with a friend as a visual memory, however transient, of themselves. (p. 14)

A sensitive and understanding art instructor should learn to discern the motivations of older students. Sometimes the process must be emphasized, exposing older adults to the joys of art making and the creative process. Sometimes product-oriented gift making should be used as an initial motivation, slowly transitioning into a process-oriented mindset. Finally, sometimes students should not be discouraged from a product oriented approach, as the need to produce something to be remembered by must be respected.

**Process vs. Product in the U3A.** Within the U3A art groups, members tend to be equally concerned with both the product and the processes; however, almost all undertakings lead to some sort of a finished piece. As members do their own thing, it is usually the final product that motivates members to learn new processes. Regardless of which is valued more, many of the members enjoy talking about the processes and techniques used in their works.

*Wendy in Art I explains to others the project she’s working on. Using a wet-on-wet watercolor technique, she talks others through the process of creating it, up to the point that she’s currently at. Using no picture as a reference, working solely from her imagination, she describes how she decided to put what element where. If she can tell*
that you’re interested, she’ll continue—adding every thought process along her journey of creating an imaginary watercolor landscape.

In Art II, Angela is ready to begin working. She has a greeting card with a photograph of seashells to one side. Directly in front of her are five actual shells, all from the New Zealand coast. Explaining how she’s having a bit of a problem getting the shapes of the shells right, she says that she’s working on her observational skills. Looking closely, she points out the wealth of little, tiny lines that make up the shells. Realizing the complexity, she now considers not painting it in watercolors as she had intended, but instead using ink. This way, she is able to show all of the tiny lines that she sees.

In the crafts groups, each project undertaken leads to a product of some sort, either decorative or useful. In describing her craftwork, Emily explains, “I suppose I quite like to do things which are practical and have an end result. I like to not do quite so many samples and things like that. I want to actually make something.” Another craft member, while acknowledging that she’s learned a wide range of new skills and craft making processes, expressed the desire to finish more of her projects. As the group tends to do something different at each meeting, she often doesn’t get a chance to finish many of the things that she begins. She explains, “And I have a bag at home that is filled with unfinished work.” Continuing, she states, “I enjoyed everything in what I’m doing … but I got a little bit disheartened because whatever I was doing wasn’t completed.” In this sense, the processes lead to enjoyable experiences which are overshadowed by the lack of completed projects. The unfinished projects pile up without the satisfaction that comes
from completion. While this crafter saves all of her projects, finished or unfinished, this is typical in both the art and craft groups.

Describing her tendency to keep all of her paintings, an art member describes, “I do it merely for pleasure. And I don’t like to part with my pictures. So I’ve got drawers and wardrobes full of the damn things!” Similarly, in Handicrafts I, Heather keeps what she calls her “First Attempts Box.” In it, she keeps her first try of every project she’s had a go at. When looking for something to do or for some fresh ideas, she goes to the box to see if there’s something in there that she wants to learn more about.

While members tend to hold on to their creations, some are made with the intention of giving away. The creation of gifts is much more common in the crafts groups; however, occasionally, art members create paintings for others.

In Art I, Clayton is working on a colorful and playful watercolor of an American alligator. As others come by to see what he’s doing, he looks up and smiles, explaining that when showing his grandchildren his paintings, one of them asked if he wouldn’t mind making an alligator picture next.

The process of creating things for others is more prevalent in the crafts groups, with most members creating gifts at some point. During the holidays, a number of the women send out Christmas cards that they have made themselves. Beyond notions of gift-giving, there are deeper, more sentimental values assigned to some creations.

In Art I, it is nearing the end of the session, and Paige, a relatively new member, is getting ready to leave. She’s just about to put away her painting—a beautifully rendered watercolor of American buffaloes in Yellowstone which is nearly done except for the finishing touches. Before she gets a chance to tuck it away, Ruby comes over.
Noting its beauty and praising the wispy and mist effect that she’s achieved, Ruby looks Paige in the eye with a serious expression on her face, asking, “Do you sign your pictures?” Without waiting for an answer, she continues, “You must! You have children, right?” Paige responds that she does, so Ruby goes on, “When they look back, they’ll know that this is what their mother did. And it’s lovely!”

![Figure 6. Paige’s buffalo painting.](image)

While individual projects can be significant to family members, in the craft groups, group projects carry their own special meanings.

*In Quilting and Embroidery, during a show and tell session, Louisa patiently waits for her turn. When it is time, she takes out a nearly completed patchwork quilt and carefully lays it on the table. The other members recognize it immediately, as it is a group project that they worked on some time ago. Some point out patches that they remember doing. As Louisa introduced this project, it is her responsibility to finish it off and decide what to do with it. All that is left to do now is to add a border and finish it off. Louisa asks for advice on what color would be best for the border. As they offer suggestions, Robin changes the subject, asking Louisa what she plans on doing with it*
once it’s complete. Are you going to give it away? It would make a lovely gift. Perhaps to someone in your family? Louisa, somewhat surprised, offers her reply. I’m definitely not going to give it away! It’s special to me, as each of you did something to contribute to it.

With many art and craft group members assigning sentimental value to their creations, they add layers of meaning to the product. Knowing this, it seems natural that U3A members would focus on the product. This does not, however, imply that they ignore or devalue the process. In the U3A, the processes are highly valued, as they help members complete projects and achieve their goals, whatever they happen to be.

**Rethinking Process vs. Product.** The separation of the process from the product and the resultant elevation of the process itself is deep-rooted in art education, going back to Lowenfeld’s influence on the field from the 1940s onward (Gaudelius & Speirs, 2002). “In child-centered art education, children’s art should not be evaluated by the quality of the product, but rather growth should be measured by the creative process of the individual child expressing thoughts, feeling, and interests” (p. 9). Focusing on the product takes away from children freely expressing themselves. This notion has carried over to older adult art education, where older students should learn that the product is irrelevant. It is the processes that are most important. While this was a dominant theme in art education for children, it has been challenged. Eisner (1973) states, “A third myth in art education is the belief that what’s important in art education is process not product” (p. 11). After noting the interplay of process and product and their dependence upon each other, he concludes:

Process and product therefore cannot be dichotomized. They are like two sides of a coin. Processes can be improved by attending to the product and products
improved by making inferences about the processes. To neglect one in favor of
the other is to be pedagogically naïve. (p. 11)

While art education has shifted to a holistic view of process and product (e.g., Sullivan,
2004), this has not happened in relation to older adults. Recognizing that many older
adults come to the classroom to “make something” (product-oriented), it is the educator’s
job to alter this mindset, pushing older students to value the art making process more
(process-oriented).

Although the literature focuses on the process, in the U3A there is much emphasis
on the product, whether it be art or craft. In many cases, it is the product that motivates
members to learn new processes and techniques. Remember Angela focusing on her
observational skills with the intent of drawing seashells? Or Wendy using her painting to
explain the processes to anyone who took an interest? In the craft groups, product is
almost always the focus, since most projects lead to craft objects that are decorative and
functional. A denunciation of the product necessarily devalues crafts, returning to the
for the importance of the product to many older art students.

The simplest act of painting a mold-poured figurine can represent a ritual of
decoration or gift giving. And it is just as significant an act for that person as any
college trained art major’s work is for the purpose of self-expression. Irene, a
retirement center resident in her seventies argues this point quite nicely: “Why do
I want to waste my time being self-expressive when there’s gifts to be made?” (p.
31)

When making things intended as gifts, the end product becomes of the utmost
importance. Gift-giving is prevalent in the U3A. Members make paintings, cards, and
craft items for children and grandchildren, friends and family, and charity organizations.
In many cases, the products take on added significance. Ruby encourages the other
members to sign their pictures so that their children will know what they’ve done. Here, 
the products serve as something to be remembered by. “Things” (art and craft projects) 
can carry, communicate, and generate their own meanings and significance. Sociologist 
Komter (2001) explains:

> Things convey symbolic messages, referring to the nature and (actual or desired) 
status of the relationship between human beings. Things are “tie-signs”: signs of 
social bonds (Goffman, 1971). There is no meaning inherent in things 
themselves; the meaning of things derives from human relationships. (p. 60)

Things are given their meanings through social relations. If we stop to think of our most 
cherished possessions, they are likely valued for the meanings we ascribe to them. I have 
a crocheted afghan that was given to my mother as an engagement present from my 
Great-Great Aunt Anna Siragusa. The afghan was passed down to me, and although I 
ever met my aunt, I feel as though I have some sort of connection with her. I have 
something that she made with her hands. To this crocheted creation (a product), I ascribe 
a good deal of meaning.

In the U3A, members value being able to create things to give to loved ones. The 
quilt that was made in the Quilting and Embroidery group will be kept and treasured by 
Louisa. It is significant to her as it represents all of the members in the group.

We can learn a lesson from the more recent art education literature and its holistic 
view on process and product as intertwined and inseparable. With an equal concern with 
product, we can learn to value the motivations of older adults to create gifts and things 
that have meaning and sentimental value. As art educators, we must no longer continue 
to look down on these motivations or see them as starting points for more “important” 
ones.
Copying Images

Copying Images in the Literature. “The scope and quality of older adult programs encompass an immense variety of activity, ranging from the most advanced techniques to poorly organized, rudimentary copying activities” (Hoffman, 1992, p. 2). While a quality program fosters creativity, expression, and imaginative ways of working, there currently exist many programs where older students are denied these benefits. “In hundreds of such situations, promising older artists spend hours copying from photographs and postcards … activities that seem creative but in truth severely limit their thinking by forcing conformity to unrealistic standards” (p. 3). The act of copying from the work of others denies older adults the chance to make their own artistic decisions, to learn to work as artists work, and to creatively express themselves. If we wish to create meaningful and growth-fostering programs, we need to encourage older students to use their own ideas, rather than rely on the ideas of others through copying. Discouraging copying forces older students to think for themselves and to rely on their own imaginations, allowing them to fully immerse themselves into the artistic experience.

If copy work removes creative opportunities, then why is it so common in the older adult art classroom? There are several explanations. The first of these is that many teachers are not properly trained in the arts and they simply do not understand the creative powers of older adults. Rather than designing activities that allow creativity to blossom, they unknowingly erect roadblocks to expression. “Their misinterpretation of the creative act automatically leads to poorly designed opportunities which impede rather than advance artistic growth and development” (Hoffman, 1992, p. 3). Without a proper understanding of creativity and the arts, it is unlikely that teachers and program coordinators will be able to design and carry out a meaningful program. As a result, they
rely on simplistic copying activities. “Many programs developed in the recent past were often geared toward copy work or kits, or junk-made-into-more-junk because employees had little or no visual arts background” (Greenberg, 1985b, p. 215). This massive impediment to creativity can only be resolved by art educators getting involved. We know how to design and teach programs that foster creativity, and we know better than to reduce students to mindless copying exercises. “Activities leaders or teachers may opt for ‘the easy way out,’ such as using kits, copying works from post cards, calendars, or ditto sheets hoping that easy success will entice new students to sign up for courses” (Greenberg, 1987b, p. 6). Qualified art teachers know that there is no “easy way” to engage in art studies and that students will reap the most benefits from total immersion in the creative process. While copying in the art room is often a result of unqualified and unknowledgeable teachers, this problem may also be perpetuated by older students themselves.

Many older adults, particularly those with little to no previous art experience, maintain a limited view of what art is. To them, being a “good” artist is strongly linked to the ability to realistically portray their subject. As a result, their main goal is realism, leading to the desire to copy. If an image can be copied exactly, then the ultimate goal has been attained. Hoffman (1992) describes this mindset that is upheld by many older art students:

Exponents of this technique choose a subject either from nature, a magazine photograph, or another work of art and copy the subject, colors, and design of the piece. The goal is simple mastery of technique and absolute replication of the subject. A copying exercise provides answers and limits the number of problem-solving opportunities that would usually be available to artists during a more creative process. Instead, design and content decisions have already been made by others. (p. 40)
Copying, while stemming from older adults’ desire for realism, can actually limit development. If we wish to move older students beyond the shortsighted view of art as realism, we must work to expand their notions of art. Moving beyond copying and realism will open up a whole new world with limitless opportunities. Making this transition may not be simple, however, since most older adults have maintained their views for many years. Completely bound to realism in art, older students may, at first, resist attempts to alter their views. In light of this, it may be necessary to start with realism, slowly moving beyond it. “The elderly seem to prefer certain styles in art to others, and consequently the art teacher may need to operate within these, at least initially, for the greatest motivational impact” (Jones, 1980a, p. 23). In terms of starting with students’ understandings and ideals, Greenberg (1987a) explains that this is even more important when working with students with lower educational levels. Describing moving beyond copying activities, she states:

It is the educated, NOT necessarily the rich, who go for high culture …. It is easier to copy a scene from a postcard (low culture) than to do the demanding work involved in creating a scene yourself (high culture). In light of this situation it is important that those teaching art, for example, at a local housing complex or senior center, to keep in mind that, depending on the location, it may be attracting more people interested in “low culture” than “high culture.” To survive, the program must attract the neighborhood population. Getting people started where they are and gradually expanding their horizon might work better than offering programs beyond their desire or willingness for involvement and seeing the program fail. (p. 22)

Noting that many, due to their backgrounds, may be initially unwilling to give up their desire to copy and produce realistic images, Greenberg advocates starting with students’ interests and notions of art and creativity. From there, however, teachers must seize opportunities to help older students move beyond their limited views. Although starting with copying, the end goal is still to create older students who are developing their own
compositions by expressing their own unique thoughts and ideas. It is paramount that teachers eventually do make this transition from copying to more creative and expressive ways of working. If this shift to creative artistic involvement is not made, a great injustice is done to older students. “Initially, copying may seem harmless, but ultimately it leads to a reliance upon the work of others, stifling the urge to be creative” (Hoffman, 1992, p. 113). If our end goal is to unleash the creative potential of older students, we must begin offering quality programs taught by knowledgeable instructors who know the joys of creative endeavors in the visual arts. We must move older art students beyond their urge to copy realistically and into the true artistic and expressive experience.

_Copied Images in the U3A_. In Stamford U3A, the members of the three art groups rely on a variety of resources. In Art II, Trisha works from a botanical illustration book, Edward works from a photograph that he took of a whale’s tail, and Janice works from the magazine _Leisure Painter_, which offers step-by-step instructions to create a painting. In Art I, Laine works from life, with flowers from her garden in front of her at her workstation. Nearby, Wendy is creating a landscape from her imagination, and Gwen is working from a magazine advertisement for her first go at portrait painting. Brooke works from live flowers in her garden, but also from instructional books. “I belong to an art thing where I get a book every two months, you know, just a little book. But it gives you a picture and it works you through it. So I use that sometimes.” In the Art Workshop, Polly works from an instructional book, Maggie works from a quick sketch that she made on a napkin and uses her memory to fill in the details, and Irving is working from another painting; however, he’s painting it upside-down. In the U3A, while members occasionally draw and paint from life or from imagination, they typically
use a reference picture of some sort—a painting, an instructional book, a postcard or picture card, a photograph from a book or magazine, or a photograph that they took themselves. Regardless of the reference, whether it be life or image, the art members engage in copying on many levels. Some members attempt to copy their subjects realistically and precisely with no deviation. Art I leader, Rose, explains, “Here, we’re just mostly copying from books.” If they are actively copying, are they limiting their creativity? In describing what creativity means to him, George explains, “Maybe a copy of somebody else’s, but you’re still creating that painting or drawing yourself.” So what are they copying, and consequently creating, themselves?

*Remember Edward from Art II? Painting the whale tail postcard? Edward is copying. Working from a photograph he took on a recent holiday to New Zealand, he attempts to reproduce the image as realistically as possible in watercolors. With the first attempt not accurate enough, as he’s missed some of the brilliant blues and greens, he starts fresh. Since he’s sending the final postcard-sized painting to friends in New Zealand, he wants it to be the best that it can be.*

*In Art I, Paige brings in a competed painting of a fairy, possibly to display at the upcoming art and craft exhibition at the Annual General Meeting. She’s just begun working on a new painting. The subject is two big wildcats, perhaps cheetahs; however, she is getting frustrated, as she is having difficulty mixing the colors that she wants. Towards the end of the session, I go over to see how she’s getting on. Explaining that she’s getting discouraged with it, she takes the fairy picture back out. She puts it on the table and starts to tell me all about it. The delightful and whimsical scene was created by copying a painting by an artist who paints all sorts of pictures featuring fairies and*
flowers. After telling me all about the artist and his work, she starts talking about the fairy in the picture. Not only does she know a lot about the artist, she also is well versed in the subject itself! While learning the fairy’s name, where she can be found, and other fairy tidbits, I was soon surrounded by two other members, one on either side, who each was interested in learning about the fairy.

In the Art Workshop, Evelyn is sketching from a photograph. As she is also the leader of the Photography group, she takes all of her own pictures. The picture that she has begun working on is one that she took on a recent holiday to Athens, Greece—an image of the Porch of the Caryatids on the Acropolis. She explains that she selected it because it seemed like a lovely, and an easy, picture to paint. She starts by sketching it lightly, but has trouble getting the angles just right. Polly helps out by offering advice and a little hinged tool that helps with angles. Spending a significant amount of time on the initial sketch, she wants to get the right perspective on the statued columns before she starts adding paint. Once she feels that the sketch is ready, she’s truly looking forward to painting it; already planning and thinking about what techniques she might use.

While some take great care to copy their subjects exactly, other members make changes to the originals from which they’re working. In a recently completed painting, Holly, working from a photograph of her family at the seaside, changed some of the colors, inserted an umbrella into the composition, and used a restricted color palette. In Art II, Joy and Justine both worked on landscapes from paintings in magazines. Their renditions looked very different from the originals, however. Joy’s turned out much more washy-looking, as she used large fields of watery, sweeping colors. Justine, working from a stormy and wintry scene, created hers much brighter, making it cheery,
warm, and welcoming. These changes are typically reflective of the members’ aesthetic preferences; toning down bright colors, adding more color, or adding or removing elements to provide balance. They are done to make the picture more enjoyable and visually pleasing to its creator. Sometimes the alterations are more dramatic and striking.

*In Art I, Ruby is circulating the room, offering advice, suggestions, and encouragement, when she happens upon Janice’s workstation. Janice explains that she was working from a book at the last session when she created the first half of the painting—the background and some elements off to the right. But she couldn’t seem to find the book to bring to today’s meeting! She explains to Ruby that she found a similar picture to work from. Choosing certain elements, she added what she could, where she could. She was then confronted with a problem. How do I tie them together?! Using similar colors and adding her own elements to it, she brought unity to the composition. Impressed with the new member’s inventiveness and problem solving, Ruby praises her.*

“To me that’s lovely! Now it’s yours!”

*Across the room from Janice, Wendy takes a short break from her painting and motions for me to come over. She holds up the painting that she was working on last session and explains that she finished it at home. It is now matted and set in front of her so that the other members can see it. She explains to me that the subject came from a magazine. She brings out her copy of Leisure Painter, showing how there’s always little projects in the book that teach different techniques. Following the steps until completion, she felt that the final product was dull and lifeless. It was missing something. The interior scene needed something to make it more interesting. After studying it, she decided to add a ray of light entering the scene from the window. Adding water and*
rubbing out extra pigment, she introduced a prominent diagonal band of light into the center of the painting, creating a visually interesting focal point. After seeing Wendy’s light infused scene, it is hard to imagine the painting without that amazing ray of light (even after I saw the ‘original!’). Perhaps Wendy should design the activities for Leisure Painter.

*Figure 7.* Wendy’s “copied” watercolor.
Whether copying directly or making alterations, the subjects that they choose, wherever they may come from, tend to have meaning and significance to the members. Sometimes meanings are related to memory and to geographic places. Alfred, Art I’s detailed painter, chooses his subjects from places that he’s visited and his reference pictures are often photographs that he’s taken on his travels. Benjamin, also in Art I, paints village scenes from photographs and other paintings. His subjects are usually from local villages, as he is interested in and knowledgeable about local history. His most current picture of Deeping St. James sparked discussions with the other members about the history and changes of the village. In the Art Workshop, both Maggie and Evelyn are working on subjects that relate to their recent travels to Greece. The meanings of subjects are not restricted to place-based significance, as they also represent general interests.

In the Art Workshop, Carolyn works on a watercolor painting from a photograph. She took the picture several months ago at a garden that she visited. As a member of a local garden club, she frequently visits private and public gardens. You see, Carolyn loves flowers. She gardens herself, but is quick to point out that she’s only a beginner, as it wasn’t until she retired that she was able to have the time to tend her own garden. The photograph that she’s currently working on is from a garden that she particularly loved, with its soft, muted pasted flowers and its cascading pale lavender flowers leaping from the garden walls. This is her second project using this photograph. First done in chalk pastels, she’s now attempting to paint it in watercolors.

In Art I, Brooke works on a picture of a small bird from a painting in a magazine. With a great love for nature, flowers, birds, and gardens, these elements usually wind up
being her subject matter. Also active in crafts, she explains, “I did a lot of embroidery ...
I did a lot of flowers and birds in embroidery.” Although receiving satisfaction from
creating crafts with the subjects she loves, she had to give it up, due to increasing pain
from arthritis in her hands. Now, turning to painting, she creates the same subjects, only
now, they are in watercolor. Getting inspiration from pictures in books and magazines,
she selects ones that she finds to be lovely and which she would like to spend more time
with. Always working from some sort of reference, whether pictures or fresh cut flowers
from her garden, Brooke explains, “I need guidelines, I’m not very good at producing
something on my own, completely on my own. I need some kind of a guideline, even if
it’s just looking out the window.” From the references that she selects, her love of nature
always shines through, and although copying, she knows that she’s creating something
on her own. She states, “You’re actually putting some of your own feelings into it. Even
if it’s only deepening up a color that you see, and you’re putting a deeper color because
you like it better.”

Figure 8. Brooke’s watercolor.
In the U3A art groups, while some members work from their imaginations, copying is the most common activity. Obtaining their subject matter from a wide variety of resources, their choices always have some sort of meaning; perhaps an interest in fairies, memories from recent travels, or local history significance. Sometimes members copy these images precisely. Other times they make alterations to them, to make them more personally pleasing and satisfying. Whether copied exactly or altered, their choices reflect their preferences and their interests and they “just do what we like” and “do our own thing.”

Rethinking Copying Images. Seeing copying as limiting creativity, like the process and product debate, is rooted in earlier conceptions of art education for children. “The natural activity of reproduction [copying] has been discouraged in education, especially in art education. It has been viewed by progressivists in the field as promoting damaging results to the child’s creative potential” (Kozlowski & Yakel, 1980, p. 25). The older adult art education stance comes from this line of thinking. Copying should never appear in a quality program since it stunts creativity and stifles expression. While this view is maintained in relation to older adults, art education on a whole has questioned it beginning, for example, with Wilson’s (1974) article about J.C. Holz. Holz created hundreds of comic books and characters, and he learned how to make them by copying and learning from other comic books. Seeing how J.C. learned through copying, Wilson (2005) questioned the notion that copying works against and limits creativity. He states:

J.C.’s comics challenged the foundation of beliefs on which modernist art education had been built. The followers of Cizek and Lowenfeld believed that children’s art came from the child’s natural inner-being—that anything copied or
influenced by adult images was bad .... J.C. demonstrated that kids could find their own sources in order to teach themselves. (p. 23)

Acknowledging copying as a source of learning, Wilson opened up the subject for debate.

Framing the copying debate, Duncum (1988) states:

*To copy or not to copy* has been a topic of debate for as long as drawing as been taught in schools (Ashwin, 1981, pp. 109-110). “*Never let a child copy anything!*” italicised Lowenfeld (1957, p. 14) .... Yet, over the past two decades many voices have been raised to counter this anti-copying position, and some have even appeared to champion copying with the same fervor others have opposed it. (p. 203)

This debate has educators on both sides; those who feel copying will limit creativity and those who feel that it is perfectly natural in skill development. It has been questioned, and various positions have been brought forward. In relation to older adults, however, there is only one position—don’t copy. If older adults want to copy and produce realistic pictures, it’s because they have a narrow and limited view of art. My experience with the U3A counters this.

In the U3A art groups, copying is widespread. Many members, however, are quite knowledgeable about art beyond realism. As an example, Wendy frequently visits art galleries and has an understanding of and interest in modern art, abstract art, and nonrepresentational art. When she comes to Art I, she works from books and magazines in a realistic style. She does not have a limited nor a narrow view of art. Her manner of working and her subject matter is her preference—her choice.

There is no stigma associated with copying in the U3A. Each member makes his or her own choices and each has his or her own reason for choosing so. Paige copies from artists whose work she likes and admires. She is highly fluent in the backgrounds of the artists as well as the subjects of the paintings. Edward works from a photograph to
send to friends, to remind them of their whale watching adventure. Evelyn sketches from a photograph from a trip to Greece. This endeavor, initially perceived to be easy, provided many sources of challenge, causing her to examine angle, proportion, and perspective closely. Memories from travels are popular subjects in the art groups. Others choose subjects related to their interests, like Carolyn and Brooke. Through copying, they are connecting, learning, and expressing. While the literature would say that these members are denied the opportunity to express themselves, it turns out that they actually are expressing themselves. They copy images that express their interests. Members also sometimes make alterations to the original images: alterations that express their artistic preferences. Taking the cue from art education and the U3A, we should begin to rethink our stance on copying.

Craft Kits and Patterns

Craft Kits and Patterns in the Literature. Craft kits and patterns have no place in a quality art program for older adults! Craft kits are retail products that include directions and all of the necessary materials to make a single craft project, while patterns provide a set way of making crafts. These “tools” severely limit creativity and expression, yet they are commonly found in many older adult art programs, as “research reveals that many of them are oriented toward craft-kit production or stereotypical artwork” (Barret, 1993, p. 137). If these items are so detrimental to the quality and potential of art learning, then why are they so prevalent? The answer lies in the art background of teachers. Just as unqualified teachers perpetuate mindless copying activities in the art room, they also rely on kits and patterns when introducing crafts. Greenberg (1980b) explains:

At this time there is no licensing or certification for people teaching in adult education settings, nursing homes, or hospitals. As a result, some current
practices leave much to be desired. People lacking in qualifications to teach art fall back on kits, and on gimmicks which lack any aesthetic quality—“busy-work” time-killers. (p. 38)

Unqualified teachers, unaware of the creative process, call on craft kits and patterns as an easy solution to teaching arts and crafts. “It is, after all, more difficult to teach in a creative-intellectual manner than with patterns or craft kits” (Hoffman, 1980b, p. 7).

Properly trained and qualified teachers know that craft kits and “other techniques requiring recreation of previously designed patterns or products should be avoided at all costs [italics added], especially if the development of creativity is a major goal of the program” (Hoffman, 1992, p. 121). The following discussion will describe the problems of relying on kits and patterns and why they must be avoided.

With kits and patterns, the only skill that is required and “learned” is how to follow directions. They “can be used by anyone who can read and follow instructions” (Greenberg, 1980a, p. 44). This would be acceptable if our goal were to create expert direction followers, but becomes entirely unacceptable if we have goals related to creative thinking and personal expression. When introducing step-by-step kits and patterns and when instructions are followed properly, all final projects look the same. There is no room for choice or decision making as teachers “get everyone using the same pattern and making the same thing” (p. 45). All decisions have already been made, leaving none to the crafts student. They are limited in virtually every aspect of the artistic process. “But crafts often come with ‘crutches’ in the form of kits. These are someone’s ideas which require that one knows how to follow directions, but which allow little personal creativity or thinking” (Greenberg, 1985b, p. 216). Older students, by using kits and patterns, are automatically limiting their potential to create, to express, and
to grow artistically (Bloom, 1982). “Little or no aesthetic growth takes place” (Greenberg, 1987a, p. 83). While teachers must not introduce these products into the classroom, they must also realize that some older adults may find the use of kits and patterns to be alluring, especially those with little or no previous art experience.

For those new to the arts, crafts kits and patterns appear to guarantee success. With all of the steps laid out, there is little chance for error. Anyone who follows the directions properly is sure to end up with a correct final product. Bloom (1982) explains, “Production-line programs represent the highest levels of explicit structure and the lowest levels of content ambiguity and student risk of failure …. the student’s risk of failure is virtually eliminated if instructions are followed” (p. 121). This may be highly attractive to older students with low levels of confidence. They are guaranteed success, but at what cost? The art teacher needs to ensure that he or she will provide activities and projects that foster growth, not limit and stunt it. Abundant amounts of encouragement should be given to students who lack confidence. Encourage them to work creatively. Encourage them to express themselves. Encourage them to explore their ideas artistically. But do not encourage them to undertake projects with craft kits and patterns. Do not teach them to limit themselves.

Craft kits can demonstrate technique, but they cannot teach how to be unique. Greenberg (1985a) describes this in terms of a rug hooking kit. “That may teach them how to use the tools of rug hooking, but they may not have the opportunities and support that would allow them to create something unique” (p. 38). Activities must go beyond technique and direction following to provide opportunities for absorption in the creative art experience. A quality art program must not reduce older students to time fillers, busy
work, and “mindless kits” (Lewis, 1987b). Arguing against a “craft-kit orientation,” Barret (1998) states, “If art classes are to have value and meaning beyond merely keeping hands busy, then they must draw upon the individual’s inner life, fostering personal choices and self-reflection” (p. 123). If we wish to create meaningful and responsive programming, we must avoid kits and patterns.

Beyond all of the limitations of these “crutches,” it is also important to note that they can also lead to a dependence. Bloom (1980) sums up the “production line” or craft kit approach:

While a product is created, student involvement is superficial. The process, materials, and product are predetermined by someone other than the student—the teacher or kit designer. Student risk of failure is virtually eliminated. If instructions are followed, the product is guaranteed. Although the student’s confidence may be bolstered sufficiently for him or her to attempt more idiosyncratic work (in other contexts), dependency on others (which minimizes potential for art growth) can be fostered. (p. 84)

If we want to reduce teacher dependency and move towards learner-centered and student-directed approaches, we need to design curricula and activities that work towards this goal. Kits and patterns will only serve to hinder self-direction, as students will become dependent on them. Although, in the case of copying, it is sometimes necessary to start within the comfort zones of students, this is not advisable when dealing with kits and patterns. Greenberg (1987a) explains:

Some believe it is possible that one small success with such a kit might give someone the nerve to try something allowing for greater freedom. But in most cases people want a sure “success,” and only another kit (or so they think) can give them this. (p. 83)

It is best to never introduce such activities into the art room, as one could mark the beginning of a vicious cycle of dependency.
In closing, kits and patterns must be avoided at all costs. There should be no room and no excuse for introducing such time wasting and creativity numbing activities. In their place, we must introduce projects and activities that foster thinking, growth, imagination, and creative expression.

*Craft Kits and Patterns in the U3A.* The U3A crafts groups use a vast variety of resources for coming up with and carrying out projects. In terms of locating resources, craft group leader Melody states, “But you know, you perhaps see something in a magazine and think, ‘Oh, well we could perhaps tweak it, or do something like this.’ Or we could utilize a previous skill and do something.” Another leader, Emily, explains where the group gets ideas. “Well, we have books, magazines. Experiences people have had on workshops often introduce new techniques and ideas …. And also going to the shows and seeing what other people have done.” Lynne, the Handicrafts I leader, uses similar resources:

> Well, I think really, it’s sort of seeing things either in the shops or when you go to the craft shops there are new projects …. And sometimes we sort of learn from a book, a new project. And as I say, craft fairs. You see something perhaps that they’re selling that you think is a good idea and you could do. And we try it, yes. I mean, obviously, there’s always books, craft books. I think we’ve all got a library of our own of craft books.

From books and magazines to craft shows and workshops, no resource is off limits; not even craft kits and patterns. In fact, the craft groups use patterns and kits quite often. The nature of their activities, particularly in Quilting and Embroidery, call for the use of patterns and templates for nearly all projects. How are patterns and templates used these groups?

In Handicrafts I, I’m working alongside the group. We’re making cards using a technique called “iris folding”—a paper craft from Holland requiring the cutting and
folding of paper strips which are then affixed to an aperture card in a geometric pattern. On the table is a beautiful array of paper in every color, pattern, and design imaginable. Matte papers, glossy papers, and ultra-slick metallic foils. After selecting our colors (which get repeated) and our patterns, we get to work. Lynne talks me through the process, showing me an example of what it might look like when it’s completed. With five basic patterns to choose from, there are also two iris folding books on the table with more complex and intricate patterns. All members work on iris folding, but each one does something a bit different. I selected a simple circular design with four colors. Burgundies and golds. Across the table, Heather is working on a dolphin-themed card. With a card containing a cutout in the shape of a dolphin, she is using “dolphin colors” to keep with the motif. Lynne, like me, is working on a circular pattern. Hers are in brilliant blues and dazzling silvers.\(^\text{40}\)

![Figure 9. Examples of iris folding.](image)

\(^\text{40}\) After learning iris folding, I went to the crafts stall at Stamford’s Friday Market and obtained more supplies. I went on to teach iris folding to my husband. In April, when my mother and aunt visited, my husband and I taught them both how to iris fold. They, in turn, plan on having a ‘craft day’ with their cousin so that they can teach her!
The Quilting and Embroidery group relies heavily on patterns and templates obtained from a variety of sources. When Dawn learned a new technique at a workshop, she brought it in to share with the group. After laying out the beginnings of a triangular patchwork quilt on the table, she explained the instructions for using the pattern, showing how you end up with a diamond in the middle of a square. She told how the colors and the fabrics are picked out randomly and that the only method of picking colors is that they alternate from dark/medium to dark/light. Learning this technique at a workshop, she taught it to the group. It necessarily relies on a pattern, ensuring uniformity and leading to the particular design. In this case it is diamonds, squares, and triangles.

The group’s most current project is based on templates, as each member introduces a new patchwork pattern to the group at each session. On the first day of this project, Emily led the group in two templates: the “log cabin” and the “pineapple.” She explained that the pineapple patch is simply a more complicated version of the log cabin. If anyone was apprehensive, they were encouraged to try the log cabin first, and then move on to the pineapple. In between sessions, each member tried the pattern for herself. At the next meeting, they show what they have done, discussing any tips and tricks and sorting out any snags or confusions they encountered.

*Melody lays her pineapple patch on the table: a small green and purple patch.*

*Charlotte goes next. Hers is larger, around a foot in length, and is a pineapple in shades of purple with little hints of gold.* *The new member Trisha takes out her first attempt at the log cabin. Although unfinished, she receives some helpful hints for continuing her work on it.* *The rest of the group put their patches on the table. A variety of shapes, sizes, colors, and stages of completion are represented.* *They begin talking about*
problems they had, and share tips on cutting and making the stitches. Next session, it is Louisa’s turn to teach a pattern. She’ll be sharing her favorite template with the group: the “attic window.”

With this project, the members learn the template and can make the patch using whatever colors, fabrics, and sizes they choose. Their last project, a group quilt, required all members to use the same template.

This project is a small patchwork blanket to be donated to the charity organization Project Linus UK. The charity gives handmade blankets and quilts to children who are ill, in hospice or hospital, or who have suffered trauma or pain of some sort. They are intended to be comfort blankets. With everyone using the same template, squares are produced to add to the quilt. Emily even taught me how to make the squares, so I contributed as well. It made me feel wonderful to know that I took part (however small) in such a lovely cause. At each session, more squares are added and more progress is made towards the final blanket. After completion, the blanket is sent off to Project Linus and Emily writes to Stamford U3A’s newsletter, sharing the results of the project:

Last October we embarked on making a Group quilt to donate to charity. We collected all our scraps of bright material which we put together to make a lively patterned top with rich royal blue borders. The work was largely done during the meetings with everyone adding their colours and fabrics to the mix. It also provided a learning experience for our two new members. The quilt is now finished and delivered to the “Linus Project” named after Linus in the “Charlie Brown” cartoon, who always had his comfort blanket with him. The Project collects quilts donated by groups and by individuals. These are given to children, from babies to teenagers, who because of illness or abuse need the comfort and security of something to wrap themselves in. The recipient of our particular quilt was a nine year old boy called Bradley who developed a brain tumour just after his first birthday and had to undergo chemotherapy which

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41 See Project Linus UK (n.d.) for more information on this charity. See Project Linus National Headquarters (n.d.) for information on this organization in the U.S.
resulted in some brain damage. However, he is now in remission .... We are delighted that the quilt has gone to such a wonderful boy.

While the patchwork blanket was created for a lovely cause, Emily also notes that it “provided a learning experience for our two new members.” Trisha and her friend Connie learned their first patchwork and quilting pattern: the “crazy quilt” patch. Trisha, who is very enthusiastic about learning quilting, made a number of squares at home in between sessions. Then she tried something different.

*The meeting is just beginning, and as usual, it starts off with a session of show and tell. Trisha eagerly volunteers to go first, as she takes out two small patchwork handbags that she recently made. She explains that she got the fabric and the plastic handles from her daughter who sent them from America. The other women lament that*
they can’t get any good materials like hers in the local shops. As she passes the handbags around the room, Trisha proudly points out that the pattern she used was the one for the Linus quilt: the crazy quilt patch. The one that she just learned from the group.

Just as the craft groups use patterns and templates, they also use craft kits. Remember the egg painting kit in Handicrafts I? Three of the members tried it out, and then reported back to the rest of the group. Although they found it to be unsuccessful and not worthwhile, they were still able to share their experience. This group also participates in an annual community event at Christmastime: the St. John’s Annual Christmas Tree Festival. For this, anywhere up to 40 local community organizations decorate small trees set up in the historic church. They remain on display for the entire town to come and see. The Handicrafts group decorates their tree with all handmade ornaments. They also sometimes display homemade holiday cards underneath the tree. For this coming year, they’re planning to make a knitted nativity scene for their display, with each member making a piece of it. Lynne has a kit to make it, if they decide to go down this route. Polly also has a pattern for a similar project. As they continue planning for the event, they’ll have to decide which nativity scene to create. Another craft group, Handicrafts II, also uses kits as resources.

Today, Ivy, the group’s resident beading expert, is teaching us how to make a beaded bracelet. Before she introduces the project, she passes a number of her beaded creations around the table: earrings, bracelets, and necklaces. As we admire the beauty and precision of her work, Ivy explains where she learned some of the techniques, listing an eclectic range. Some were learned from intensive classes, other from adult education
workshops. Included in the list are books and kits. She explains that she learns skills and techniques from all of these sources, then applies them to her own projects. Once everyone is done looking at them, she passes out a handout that outlines today’s project. The top of the sheet reads “One Hour Bracelet” and it contains the instructions for the beading technique, along with helpful diagrams. Everyone jumps right into working. When we need help, Ivy offers her expertise. She tells us that she learned this technique from a craft kit, so it is copyrighted. This means that you can’t make them to sell. While no one in the group sells their crafts, Ivy mentions it just so they know. Dawn pipes in, noting how companies have no right to hold the rights to craft patterns and techniques that have been passed through generations. If it’s a tradition that has been passed from grandmothers to mothers to children, who has the right to own it? We continue with our discussions while beading away. Several times, the conversation drifts back to craft kits. They can be quite pricey, but once you buy them and learn the technique, you can keep on using it as much as you like for future projects. As the session comes to an end, we all show our bracelets, laughing about how most of us didn’t finish the one-hour bracelet in our nearly three hour session! Each one looks different, with variation in the colors, sizes, and alterations of the beads.

The craft groups rely on craft kits, patterns, and templates, among the many other resources that are introduced into the groups’ activities.

Rethinking Craft Kits and Patterns. In the literature, craft kits and patterns are to be avoided at all costs, since they lead to mindless activities that lead to more mindless activities. Once a student has an easy success with a kit or pattern, they will only be able to operate within those realms. In the U3A, they are frequently, but not exclusively used.
One encounter with a craft kit did not lead to a complete dependence. They do not see these as “crutches” or as things to be avoided. Instead, they are simply seen as resources, among many other types of resources. In Handicrafts II, skills are learned from kits, and are then, perhaps, applied to another project, or perhaps are taught to each other. They learn from books, formal classes, from each other, and from kits and patterns. They are constantly looking for new ideas and new skills to learn and share. The source is irrelevant. Kits are not seen as “limiting” or “stifling.” They are just another way of gleaning new knowledge and new techniques. In addition, it is repeatedly stated in the literature that all final products look the same with kits and patterns, yet when the U3A uses these resources, their results are always strikingly different.

Some crafts, such as iris folding and quilting, require the use of patterns, templates, or guides. It is simply the nature of the process. If iris folding didn’t follow the geometric and repetitive pattern, it wouldn’t be iris folding. Perhaps this brings us back to the modernist preference of art over craft. Some crafts do rely on patterns. If we abolish patterns, we are automatically removing certain craft forms and taking away from the diversity of crafts. It seems like a good policy to promote maximal exposure to art and craft, not narrow and limit opportunities. How do we tell students that the crafts or projects that they are interested in are not “creative” or “good” enough? In the only argument condoning craft kits that I’ve come across in the literature, Agostinone-Wilson (2001) states:

An art class setting where freedom and experimentation are encouraged is wonderful, but what double message do adult students receive when self-selected patterns and kit crafts are condemned with no room for argument? This is a concern I have when we’re talking about working with elderly women, who often bring such projects into the art studio. (p. 32)
If working from kits and patterns were boring, mindless, and a waste of time, why would older adults engage in them? In the U3A where members are free to do exactly what they like, why would any of the members engage in projects they found to be worthless?

When the Quilting and Embroidery group used the same pattern to create a patchwork blanket for a child of trauma, were they simply filling their time? Was Trisha mindless when she showed the group a new way to use the patch? When Ivy learned a beading technique from a kit and subsequently taught it to the group, was anyone limited? In relation to crafts and folk arts, Irvine (1985) states, “Once you learn a new technique, even from a trite source [italics added], the work you develop with your students can be creative and original, influenced by traditional or contemporary objects and approaches” (p. 46). Surely, learning from someone else’s knowledge cannot be seen as a problem, but does it make a difference where this knowledge came from? If it was acquired through an adult education class or a pattern or a creativity-stunting kit?

Art Education No-Nos Summary

The older adult art education literature sets forth a canon of “no-nos”—things that should never take place in a quality program. These are the things that will turn older adults away from our programs. What they really want is a space where they are free to express themselves and to pursue their studies seriously. What is interesting about the list of elements that should never appear in a quality program is that they are all commonplace in U3A art and craft groups. Even more, these things are not seen as negative. After all, participants choose them for themselves, and in the process, they challenge us to rethink our assumptions about older adult art learning. Their freedom from second age impositions allows members to follow their third age interests. While
many activities may seem traditional (e.g., landscape painting and quilting), the way they go about it breaks tradition. With no teacher, members engage in shared learning. This is akin to co-learning (Curry & Cunningham, 2006) where “we refuse to privilege official knowledge; we do not want to allow formal roles (teacher-learner) that are rational extensions of asymmetrical power relationships in society to frame our learning” (p. 80). In the U3A, shunning second age teachers and their canons and established norms allows art and craft members to choose their own projects, methods, and goals. Through this, they call into question and challenge a number of deeply embedded art education taboos. Each member engages, to some extent, in activities or mindsets that professional art educators have denounced. They are all satisfied with their art and craft groups. Perhaps the difference, then, is who makes the decisions. Agostinone-Wilson (2001) raises questions about craft kits, if they are “self-selected” by older students. In his review on copying, Duncum (1988) states, “Those who adopt a relaxed attitude to copying are not so much advocating that children be instructed to copy as arguing that if children choose to copy they should not be prevented from doing so” (p. 204). U3A members choose for themselves. Nothing is forced upon them. By questioning our assumptions about older adult art learning, perhaps we can begin to be more accepting, validating older students’ preferences and goals rather than trying to change or “better” them.

**Summary**

The previous two chapters focused on disconnects between the literature and the U3A, and were organized around notions of what the literature posits should and should not be featured in a quality art program for older learners. The next chapter will continue
a presentation of the data following the same format; however, the focus will shift to motivations and benefits: why older learners participate in arts programming and the benefits of doing so.
CHAPTER 6:
THE LITERATURE VS. THE U3A—MOTIVATIONS AND BENEFITS
This chapter concludes the presentation of the data and will continue the format of presenting the stances of the literature and the U3A followed by a discussion. This chapter will focus on the motivations for participating in visual arts programs in later life and will address the benefits of participation. Social and individual concerns are explored including the social importance of the U3A to its members.

**Why do they Bother: Motivations and Benefits in the Art Room**

**Motivations and Benefits**

*Motivations and Benefits in the Literature.* In the coming years, as the Baby Boomer cohort retires, there will be an explosion in the number of older adults. Along with this massive population shift, the Baby Boomers will find themselves with unprecedented amounts of leisure time. Just as experienced by retirees of previous generations, the transition from structured work routines to retirement “means that many elderly are searching for leisure activities that will provide a ‘social identity and a concept of self,’ and can serve as a substitute for work roles of the past” (Hoffman, 1975b, p. 21). Leisure activities can aid in the transition to retirement by providing a replacement for paid work that is meaningful and fulfilling. Clements (1980) describes the significance that art can have for retirees:

> For many, old age can be a time of change physiologically, emotionally, and spiritually. Life long work patterns change with retirement; satisfactions gained from work must be found elsewhere …. Art helps the elderly adjust to their world. Personal benefits come through the process of creation. (p. 66)

In order for art to have the most significant, beneficial, and fulfilling results, older learners must take their art studies seriously. Art engagements should go beyond mere leisure and the filling of time to occupy a more prominent role.
Increasingly, [the] elderly want to learn to use time rather than just fill it. Those who are exploring the visual arts want skills and opportunities to express themselves, not simply for leisure but for aesthetic experiences which can be part of their lives. (Greenberg, 1985b, p. 213)

Opportunities must be made available to older adults who wish to pursue arts studies seriously, as they should certainly be encouraged to see how art can take on real meaning in their lives. A study by Davisson, Rush, and Fitzner (1982) found that over a third of older adults in community-based art programming “considered themselves serious students” and “were motivated to pursue art in a professional manner” (p. 139). Greenberg (1985b), understanding that not all older students will pursue their studies seriously, advocates for a serious approach to be taken by the teacher. “Naturally, not everyone who comes to such classes will develop this attitude of seriousness, but it should be in the air to avoid making it just another way to pass the time” (p. 216). When the teacher adopts a serious attitude, students are more likely to take their studies seriously, leading to the realization of the most benefits. While serious art learning can lead to benefits, what exactly are these benefits?

Involvement in the visual arts leads to a total absorption in the creative process. When older learners are completely consumed by art making, the artistic experience itself becomes the primary focus. Other problems fade into the background. It is a time when one is able to focus on the creative task at hand, losing oneself and forgetting present concerns. “People often forget aches, pains, and family problems” (Greenberg, 1987a, p. 105). Physical and emotional pain can take a momentary interruption, however fleeting, through the escape of art making. “As one man explained, ‘Only my painting class can take my mind off my aches and pains’” (Timmermann, 1977, p. 15). Engaging in art can provide a haven from the many changes associated with aging. As Jones (1980a) aptly
explains, “The art class is the site of reaching out for new experiences, a place where the problems of growing old take a back seat to the excitement of learning” (p. 28).

Beyond forgetting pain and the problems of aging, art making can also provide an outlet through expression. It can help older adults make sense of the changes they are experiencing by exploring their emotions and ideas in a creative way. Kim (1980) states:

The arts can be the language of the aged, a language that has been created through the course of the older person’s life, yet has been lost in the process of maintaining daily activities prescribed by society during his [sic] younger years. Ordinary language is so insufficient that creative older persons tend to use abstract languages such as music, visual art, crafts, poetry and other forms of writings as means of communication. (p. 14)

Art as a form of communication can be highly meaningful, particularly for those, who, due to disease, are no longer easily able to communicate verbally (Greenberg, 1987a). Art can provide an outlet for ideas and thoughts. Communication, creativity, and expression through art, while significant for those coping with aging related problems, can also help in minimizing these problems. Preliminary studies (Dawson & Baller, 1980) suggest that involvement in creative activities, such as art, can lead to improved health and longevity. With so many potential benefits, physically and psychologically, art engagements also offer the older students something on a very personal level: enjoyment and satisfaction.

Older adults pursue art learning because they want to. Their attendance is voluntary. Leeds, a retired art educator who now teaches older adults, explains, “The situation is looser, since there are no grades—there are no extrinsic rewards or punishments. Everything is done for intrinsic rewards. That is why the students are there in the first place” (Kellman, 1999, p. 44-45). During older adults’ working lives, interests had to be put on hold. Once retired, they have the opportunity to explore their
interests fully. For many, starting or returning to art studies is something they have been meaning to do. “Now, with plenty of time available, they seek out different ways to spend this time. If they dare to try some art form it is for their own pleasure, to gain some feelings of satisfaction” (Greenberg, 1987a, p. 104). Older learners enter the art class for a variety of reasons. Some are looking for new experiences (Davisson, Rush, & Fitzner, 1982), others are returning to previous art involvement, and others are seeking new ways to express themselves. Regardless of the initial motivation, all are there for enjoyment. If arts activities do not bring enjoyment and satisfaction, why would older learners bother? The satisfaction that comes from serious engagement in the arts is an important motivation for and outcome of art learning. Jones (1980a) explains:

There is strong evidence that elderly persons who become involved in an art class are motivated to put forth creative effort and energy and that the pleasure of the experience makes a profound impact on many aspects of their lives. (p. 25)

She continues, noting the capacity of enjoyment in relation to younger students.

“Overall, elderly art students may greatly outdistance younger adults and other nonstudent elderly in their ability to enjoy the learning experience and to integrate it into their lives” (p. 25). Teachers must not underestimate the element of enjoyment in the older adult classroom. Every effort must be made to allow older students to realize their potential for enjoying the arts. Activities must be designed to capitalize on the joys of art making, learning, and expression. Teachers must approach older students with the mindset that “art can be the key to satisfaction and fulfillment in the later years” (Lewis, 1987b, p. 5).

Although there are countless benefits to be had from art learning, the most common motivation for beginning art studies is a desire to become technically proficient.
“Development of technical expertise serves as the single most important initial motivating force leading to continuous visual arts involvement” (Hoffman, 1992, p. 110). While originally wanting to be able to paint a realistic landscape or to create a flawless piece of pottery, older learners move beyond their initial motivations once they have had a taste of what art has to offer. Moving past technical proficiency, they develop a drive to create. The process of creation itself can take on its own significance. “Art is one way for the elderly to remain in touch with an often-reduced material world. By handling materials, they see themselves as producers and inventors, not just passive observers” (Agostinone-Wilson, 2001, p. 31). Creation, enjoyment, and total absorption in artistic endeavors are the results of an art program that is responsive to older adults’ learning needs. Commenting on the variety of motivations for older adults enrolling in art classes, Timmermann (1977) notes a common outcome, “They did share one thing in common: All were enrolled because they were experiencing a joy in creative expression and in learning. They all felt that their art experiences were enhancing the quality of their lives” (p. 15). Quality of life can be enhanced. Art can add meaning to the lives of older students (Kauppinen, 1990). They can find an avenue though which they can forget their problems and their pains. They can be introduced to the satisfaction and enjoyment that comes from creating artistically. They can find new ways to express themselves and new modes of communication. Through serious art involvement, all of these benefits and more can be had. Opportunities need to be created and expanded to bring these benefits to fruition. It is time for art educators to begin to recognize and validate the potential of art for the oft-neglected older population. We have a pressing responsibility to provide
quality programs and quality art experiences to older adults, as it is only through meaningful art endeavors that these benefits may be realized.

Motivations and Benefits in the U3A. Stamford has a variety of venues through which older adults can pursue art studies from adult education workshops to lessons at the local Arts Centre. So how do older adults come to join the U3A? For many art and craft group members, trying out the U3A was simply a choice based on the recommendations of friends. Penny, the Art History group leader and Stamford U3A Chairman, joined after one of her golfing friends told her about it. Emily went to her first meeting after talking to her friend Melody. Rose, the Art I leader, explains how she became a member, telling a story that is common among current members:

Well, I had some friends who were in [the U3A] at the beginning and there were only a few people involved, and I thought it was interesting and it had a wide spectrum of things to do, which interested me. So I thought, “Well, I’ll give it a go and see what happens,” and I’ve been with it ever since.

Most of the members that I talked to heard about the U3A through friends and decided to try it out, keeping in line with national membership trends. A survey conducted by the Third Age Trust (2001) found that 73% of members learned of the U3A through “word of mouth, friends, relations, etc.” While most joined after hearing about it from a friend, others were actively looking for something for themselves. The U3A proved to be a good fit. An art group member explains:

Well, I suppose I was looking for something. See, when I retired, my husband was ill, so I nursed him until he died. And then my daughter was ill. And then I was looking for something for myself, basically to give me a break, you know. Although she was still with me, I was just looking for something. I didn’t know what I was looking for really. I went to the U3A basically with a very open mind and I thought, “Well yeah, I’ll join this and see where I go from there.”
However arrived at, the variety of activities and interest groups (both art and non-art) was
great enough to keep them coming back. With one art history, three art, and three craft
groups, a range of arts activities are represented, affording the opportunity to pursue a
new interest or resume an old one. Penny explains, “You know, people have got interests
that once they’ve retired, they can think, ‘Well, let’s go down that avenue,’ and pursue
interests that they hadn’t the time to pursue when they were working.” Some art and
craft group members are taking up art in the U3A for the first time since their school
days. An art member states, “I hadn’t done any art since I was at school and it seemed
like a good idea to get started again. I just started doing it on my own so I came to the
group.” Others, like Melody, saw retirement and entry into the third age as an
opportunity to resume their involvements in art and crafts:

At school I did art … and I did some art at college as well. But I trained to teach
small children, so we did all sorts of things. We did woodwork, all sorts of
craftwork. So they gave you a fair grounding in that at college, really. But then
when you get married and you have children, you don’t do anything but work and
have children for a long period of time. So it was when the children were off,
finally I took up painting again. And then, as I say, when I retired, I threw myself
into all sorts of things.

Whether rediscovering an old interest or embarking on a new one, members find that the
U3A suits their needs. As U3A activities are determined by its members, they are free to
tailor offerings to their own interests. “We’re autonomous. We can do exactly what we
like—within certain rules and regulations. But we can, we can do things our way, as it
were.” After finding the U3A as a place where they can pursue their interests on their
own terms, what do members perceive as the benefits of membership and participation?

First, members enjoy the activity itself, whether it be art or craft related. In the
Art Workshop, as the members look at each others’ paintings and drawings, Holly is
overheard talking about the U3A, saying, “If you’re on your own, there’s no excuse for having nothing to do!” Simply staying involved and active is highly valued. It is valued in the craft groups, where a member explains that they “try to keep ourselves occupied,” and in the art groups, where a member describes how her U3A involvement provides structure in her life. “It breaks down the week, and that’s important, isn’t it?”

Eschewing idleness, some members, like Melody, feel that they’re actually much busier in their retirement than they were while they were working. Alicia explains, “I keep busy, I keep busy. I do all sorts of things!” Activity in the art and craft groups varies considerably. One art member claims, “I only paint here.” Others paint and attend workshops in between sessions, and some who currently work only at meetings plan to start working at home—as soon as they find the time. In the crafts groups, which only meet once a month, almost all members are actively crafting in between sessions, bringing in what they’ve done to share with each other.

Beyond the value of activity for its own sake, many of the art group members find the atmosphere of the U3A to be very comfortable and conducive to exploring their interests. “I like being with this group because it’s relaxed.” “It’s a peaceful time.” “Well, you’ve got two hours where you’re not really thinking of anything else. So you can actually come in here and know you’re going to do something positive with your time. And plus, it’s a restful time.” Those who have taken workshops and classes outside of the U3A come to appreciate the informality of the U3A even more. “Though I have enjoyed them, it’s not as relaxing as this one.” A glimpse at any of the art and craft groups reveals moments of intense concentration marked by a focused, yet peaceful, quieting atmosphere.
In Art I, every member is wrapped up in their work. Whether lightly sketching, working in pastels, or painting in watercolors, everyone is consumed in their chosen project. Almost entirely silent, the noises in the room are of pencils tapping on paper, the sweeping away of erasures, and the clinking of brushes against glass water dishes. Janice, who has been in the kitchen preparing herself a cup of tea, reenters the room and stops for a minute. In a loud whisper, she says, “It’s very quiet, isn’t it?” Mabel momentarily looks up over her pastel landscape and quietly replies with a smile, “We’re concentrating.”

This relaxing aura is more prevalent in the art groups, as the members become absorbed in their individual work. In the craft groups, it is common to find members working on group projects, often for charity. Working on these projects together provides motivation as evidenced by Emily, who speaking about the Quilting and Embroidery group, states, “I think charity is probably one of the other parts of our aims as a group.” Another member of this group, Louisa, explained to me that she not only likes to feel busy, but also to feel as though she’s doing something useful and something that can help others. In Handicrafts I, the members are also motivated by their charity projects. Lynne explains, “We enjoy doing it and passing it on to less privileged people …. As I say, we always fall back on knitting, and it’s a way of us giving to charity, isn’t it? To knit things.” The craft groups find motivation in their charity efforts and the art groups find solitude in their peaceful, relaxing sessions; however, all groups provide enjoyment.
Participation is voluntary and certainly not mandatory. Members attend sessions because they want to, because they find enjoyment and satisfaction in it. Alicia, from Art I, explains:

The main interest is getting satisfaction—probably a landscape where there is a tremendous amount of color. And to me, I get a lot of satisfaction. Going out and seeing—I mean just looking out of this window at the moment. The reds against the greens of the trees, the leaves. I think it’s just pleasure in the color that one can see and to be able to put it down on paper and then feel, “Yes,” satisfaction that I’ve done that. I think that’s probably the main interest is the color of it …. As I say, the satisfaction, the pleasure it gives me, seeing myself put color—that’s the best aspect …. Nobody’s being paid for it and we haven’t got a professional artist here. We’re just all doing it for pleasure, and that, you know, it’s fun. I enjoy it. It’s why I come!

In the crafts groups, members also take pleasure and find satisfaction in their activities. Emily explains, “I just really like doing all sorts of crafts. I’ve done a lot out of the groups as well. I’ve done weaving and all sorts of things. I generally just find it very satisfying to do them.” Melody echoes this. “I just enjoy it. Whatever new idea I’ve got, I go for it and learn something new.” Continuing, she describes how the group finds enjoyment in each other as well as in their individual activities. “I mean, it is a social group as well. I think we enjoy one another’s company.” The same is true in the art groups where the members themselves provide sources of satisfaction to each other. Ruby, when asked about the best aspect of Art I, stated, “Well, I think that’s more or less covered in what they achieve …. And to see them develop. You can’t see—they probably can’t see it, but I do. I can see the development.” Another Art I member similarly replied:

And also, I love getting a cup of coffee and going around and seeing what the others are doing. Because it gives me a little bit of a boost to see—I can remember, oh, she didn’t do a very good picture, and look now, she’s got this beautiful picture. It gives me a boost to see what the others are doing.
Beyond art as a worthwhile activity, crafts for charity, and the relaxation and enjoyment inherent in U3A endeavors, the benefits and motivations related to learning must be acknowledged. The U3A is, after all, a learning organization. U3A founder Peter Laslett (1989) states, “Finally it can be said that all new knowledge, however arrived at, adds something worthwhile to experience—personal and collective” (p. 171).

What do the members have to say about the experience of gaining knowledge?

*In Handicrafts II, the members are discussing the different types of crafts they enjoy.* Molly loves card pricking, adding that Ivy has a real knack for beading and that her creations look very professional. Molly continues, noting how it’s interesting that although they all try different crafts, everyone takes a liking to a certain type of craft. Emily adds that she loves making books. Molly sums up the conversation by pronouncing the “good thing about a craft group.” We all learn so much and so many different types of crafts. You get to learn what you’re good at and what you truly enjoy doing on your own.

Before joining the Quilting and Embroidery group and later becoming the leader, Emily actually knew very little about quilting. “I had just on my own—I’d done one quilt I think …. But otherwise, I haven’t done a lot on my own. So anything I know I learned through the group basically.” Noting benefits of group membership, she includes, “Learning, obviously, about new techniques,” and discussing the goals of the group, she states:

I think it’s probably a joint goal, really, but what we’re trying to do is to help teach people about patchwork so that they can become more knowledgeable and enjoy what they’re doing. And just keep it going, really …. Spread the knowledge and get everybody doing it.
Alicia, describing the benefits of U3A art involvement, states, “I have learned new skills. Yes, I have learned new skills.” In relation to her goals, she says, “I don’t intend to have an exhibition of my work or anything like that! Just increase my knowledge and skills, that’s all.” Holly notes how the benefits of learning can extend beyond the membership as well.

It brings everybody together. It gets them out of their houses. And when they go away, they’ve got—we’ve been talking, and they’ve got some knowledge from other people which can be passed on to, perhaps, somebody at home who can’t get out.

Overall, regardless of their motivations and the resulting benefits, art and craft members find their activities in the U3A to be worthwhile. Whether there to better structure their time, to enjoy making art in a relaxing and supportive atmosphere, to pursue an interest, or to learn something new, members find that the benefits that they reap are up to them. As they do their own thing, they are free to follow their own motivations and to realize their own benefits.

_Rethinking Motivations and Benefits_. In the literature, older adults are to go beyond mere leisure to engage in their art studies seriously. Through serious art involvement, a number of benefits can be realized: escape, communication, enjoyment, and expression. In the U3A, members approach their art and craft involvement with varying degrees of “seriousness.” Some engage in activities only in meetings while others are extremely active between sessions. There is variation in motivations as well, with some members there to structure free time and others motivated by the learning experience itself. While there are differences in terms of the level of “seriousness” needed to reap benefits, a common element in the literature and the U3A is enjoyment. Since older adult education is voluntary, wherever it happens to take place, it makes
sense that older students would find pleasure in their endeavors. On the subject of enjoyment, Alicia states, “We’re just all doing it for pleasure, and that, you know, it’s fun. I enjoy it. It’s why I come!” The elements of interest and satisfaction have been found throughout educational gerontology to be important motivators (e.g., Boulton-Lewis, Buys, & Lovie-Kitchin, 2006). A qualitative case study of older adults (Duay & Bryan, 2006) found that, “To maintain mental alertness, participants stressed the need to continue to learn new things. Yet learning was not something that these participants did just to stay mentally fit. Many truly enjoyed learning [italics added]” (pp. 439-440). Overall, there is general agreement on some aspects of art involvement. Enjoyment, satisfaction, and relaxation are important in both the literature and in the U3A. The only disconnect here is the level of seriousness required. We could learn to accept those who come to art classes for leisure. Rather than trying to turn them into serious art students, it seems as though it would be beneficial to learn to understand and respect their initial motivations. While this is a minor issue amongst general agreement, more substantial contrast is grounded in individual and social concerns.

Social vs. Individual Concerns

Social vs. Individual Concerns in the Literature. Older adults come to the art room to meet both social and individual needs. As the art class is an inherently social space, it provides a site for older learners to meet and interact. The element of simply meeting with others represents a very real need for many older adults, particularly if they live alone and feel isolated. “Having someone with whom they can converse is a need for many older adults. The spouse may have died; children may have moved away; old friends and familiar faces in the neighborhood may have been replaced with strangers”
(Taylor, 1987, p. 13). The art room provides a site for older adults to congregate and to bring about “the end of long hours of isolation” (Toole, 1977, p. 22). Jefferson (1987) posits that “Art brings individuals together” (p. 41), but how does this happen in the older adult art classroom? The class physically brings older learners together who share a common interest in art. Students have the opportunity to interact with each other, to develop friendships, and to work towards common goals. An art student shares the social strengths of her art class, “I feel it also helps to be with other people involved with the same projects, who share similar interests, but also with a very different approach to things” (Ball-Gisch, 1998, p. 56). While art classes allow relationships to form among older students, it is also important to note the social relationships that are formed through intergenerational art programs, promoting interaction between older adults and younger generations (La Porte, 2002). With the potential for social benefits, art educators must not underestimate the social motivations of their older students.

A major reason for classroom attendance by the elderly is the opportunity such activity offers to break the despair of forced isolation. Practitioners must realize that attendance is for knowledge learned but also for socialization. Contact with other persons in the class, a chance to converse about a variety of subjects in a relaxed manner is important to an elderly student. (Hoffman, 1977, p. 6)

Beyond simply understanding social motivations, art educators can work to ensure that older students’ social needs are met by creating a welcoming atmosphere and encouraging interaction. “Opportunities for older adults to react to the arts in social settings encourage personal interactions and idea sharing” (Hoffman, 1992, p. 80-81). Art educators should design activities that allow for maximal student interaction. In addition to the actual art-based activities, teachers can also promote sociability through informal coffee breaks. “A tea or coffee break can also promote opportunity for further
social interaction between participants, as well as a mental break from work” (Gibbs & Boughton, 1998, p. 41). Promoting informality and a “club-like atmosphere” provides older students with a space where they can feel comfortable and free to meet their social needs (Timmermann, 1977).

Although social needs and motivations are important to older adults, we must remember that our art classes are indeed classes, not social clubs. We must recognize social needs, but our primary goal must remain to provide quality art instruction and programming. Older adults also have goals and needs that extend well beyond socializing. “Socializing is seldom the sole motivator for participation in education; it functions in conjunction with other equally important motives” (Durr, Fortin, & Leptak, 1992, p. 150). A number of studies have found that educational needs are actually stronger motivational influences than social needs. Davisson, Rush, and Fitzner (1982) found that “married couples who attended art classes together seemed to prefer the social benefits of this activity, but the majority of adults attended singly and, whether married or not, apparently had a serious educational purpose” (p. 136). Jones (1980a) reports similar findings. “Reporting on their own motivations and benefits from being in art classes, the elderly from one community responded that ‘to learn’ was their main objective, over social contact or tension release” (p. 19). If older students value art learning over socializing, then as art educators we must work to meet their needs by creating a classroom environment that is conducive to serious art involvement. “Coffee cups and ash trays as well as books and magazines must be cleared” (Greenberg, 1980a, p. 47). The art room must be a site where older learners can seriously engage in art making and pursue their educational and artistic goals. The need for social interaction may have been
an initial motivation, but this will evolve as older students become motivated by learning and the artistic experience itself. Greenberg (1987a) explains:

Others have social needs which will be met; don’t overlook this as an important reason for the majority who attend. While these may be initial reasons, with time many will come to learn, because what is being offered is of real value to them. (p. 79)

If we want to move students beyond sociability and into realms of expressive art experiences, we must not deny social concerns, but work within them, slowly moving students to recognize the value of their art learning. A good question to ask when planning a program and developing its curriculum is: “Do lessons allow for group interaction as well as opportunities for individual expression?” (Barret, 1998, p. 122). Keeping this in mind will lead to activities that include social aspects while focusing on personal expression.

Once students are motivated by the desire to continue learning, we can shift from social needs to individual needs and motivations. One way to make this transition is to design individual learning activities. “Perhaps the emphasis of art education for the older learner should not be art as a group activity, but rather, art as enjoyment of relaxed solitude” (Taylor, 1987, p. 10). Individually engaging in art can provide older learners the opportunity to pursue new interests and to resume latent ones (Hart, 1998). Following their own paths can lead older adults to a journey of seeking out personal meaning and identity.

Personal growth and the search for one’s identity can become a motivation for many older art students. “Programs should be structured to assist elders toward new self understandings and attitudes” (Hoffman, 1975a, p. 59). As students become more confident in their art making abilities, they should be encouraged to personalize their
subject matter. They should be led to ways of working which will increase their selfknowledge and self-understandings. They can learn to express their own individual ideas and feelings in a creative way. With the opportunities available through serious art learning and involvement, “it is not surprising that older adults find identity in meaningful art work” (Taylor, 1987, p. 9). Motivated by exploring personal meanings, older students can reap the ultimate benefit of finding their identities—finding their true selves. “Artistic activities open the door to the real self of an older person and lead him/her to find the logos, the true meaning of self” (Kim, 1980, p. 15).

Working from and exploring one’s feelings and doing identity work has many psychological benefits as one becomes more in touch with him/herself. In this sense, self-fulfillment can become both a major motivation and a highly significant benefit. “For when lack of time is no longer a deterrent or excuse, self fulfillment may become again, as it was in childhood, the most important of an individual’s concerns” (Jennings, 1980, p. 19). Creative endeavors have the potential to provide personal fulfillment to older adults (Jennings, 1977), and also to increase self-confidence and positive self-concept (Davisson & Rush, 1981). This is highly important, particularly for those older adults who suffer from a loss of self-esteem due to the loss of their work role. Serious work in the visual arts replaces a lifetime of paid work as older adults come to understand the significance and meaning of their involvement. Gibbs and Boughton (1998) found that older students increased their self-concept through their involvement in art activities. “Participants appeared to grow in confidence and self-esteem as they attended successive programs, and art work appeared to become a meaningful activity for participants” (p. 41). Older adults can experience numerous psychological benefits from meaningful art
studies including a better understanding of oneself, improved self-confidence, a positive self-concept, and a sense of self-fulfillment. It is through creativity and expression that these benefits are realized.

Self-expression should be the ultimate aim in the older adult classroom, as it is the vehicle though which older students will achieve the most growth and experience the most beneficial results. Sunderland (1977) explains:

Participation in the arts can provide older persons with opportunities for self expression which can open up new avenues of achievement, new roles, and new interests to compensate for some of the social, physical, and economic losses which all too frequently accompany growing older. (p. 7)

Since expression is such a powerful element, art educators must design activities that allow for maximal freedom and choice. Teachers must encourage students to make their artworks personalized, expressing their interests and personal aesthetic tastes. Clements (1980) states, “Each senior citizen had a lifetime of experiences to draw from along with individual preferences for design. Each design, no matter what the intended medium, should be an expression of an individual’s way of perceiving and depicting his [sic] world” (p. 65). One way of ensuring individualized expression is to encourage older students “to express feelings, reminiscences, and wisdom based on life experience” (Barret, 1998, p. 123). Drawing from their ideas and remembrances, older adults learn to fully express themselves. Exploring past, present, and future selves and experiences adds layers of meaning to life and identity. Art provides an ideal vehicle for this type of work. “Art has personal meaning to each individual who creates it. Art can fulfill a need in the older adult in a way that no other medium of self-expression can” (Taylor, 1987, p. 11).

In closing, although many older adults initially come to the art classroom with social motivations, they will learn to place more value on learning and expression as they
start to recognize the personal benefits that can be had. Self-expression is the key to unlocking these benefits. Art, pursued in an expressive and meaningful way, leads to fulfillment, personal growth, and an understanding of one’s real identity.

_Social vs. Individual Concerns in the U3A._ U3A members are motivated by both individual and social reasons. On the individual level, members are motivated by and benefit from a number of aspects of their U3A membership and involvement. For some, this simply equates to staying active. “And of course, it is useful to keep your mind and your fingers active as long as possible.” “I think it’s very good at keeping you involved and active. It’d be all too easy to sink into apathy really, if you didn’t have any stimulation. I think it keeps you in contact with what’s going on.” For others, being exposed to new activities, interests, and opportunities is an important facet of U3A membership. “Broadens your outlook on life.” “Well, it has widened my horizons, shall we say that? It has widened my horizons.” “It widened my horizons, and widened my social groups.” Some members, particularly leaders, find a little boost in their self-confidence. “And I think if you take on a role as leader, you get more confidence as well.” “It’s given me a certain amount of confidence. And you feel as if you’re doing something very useful.” One art member described the enjoyment of expression as a major benefit:

It’s a peaceful time. It makes me sit down for an hour and a half, whatever time it is, and I’m actually producing something that is my work. It’s me on the paper, expressing myself. It’s a way of doing that peacefully, quietly, and getting pleasure from it.

Finally, some art members have found fulfillment and satisfaction through the U3A. “Having retired and your children have gone from home, you feel as if you’re kind of a bit of a loose end. And I think the U3A’s filled that.” As one member simply stated,
“It’s filled that gap in me.” Although members benefit individually from the U3A with a broadened outlook, more confidence, and a sense of fulfillment, most members initially join for social reasons.

Laslett (1989) states, “All the adaptation that is ever likely to take place because of our altered situation as to age will inevitably be social” (p. 70). A survey of U3A membership nationwide found that “social contact, to meet people” was the most common motivation for joining the U3A (29%), followed by “to follow a specific interest” (18%), “to learn, gain more knowledge” (14%), “to learn new skills” (12%), “to meet people with similar interests” (10%), and “to keep the mind active” (10%) (Third Age Trust, 2001). Since more U3Aers join for social reasons over any other reason and the activities of each local U3A are tailored to members needs and interests, Stamford U3A should be a site where members can act on their social motivations. Indeed, it is!

In a document for group leaders, some sample goals for groups were suggested. Within these, a number are inherently social:

You may, for example, produce a list like the following:
We would like to:
- share and exchange ideas in a friendly and tolerant setting
- try out new activities
- become more confident
- participate fully in deciding what to include in a programme
- participate fully in group sessions
- become more supportive of each other
- have fun
- make new friends

Whether or not the art and craft groups have formally written up goals, each group does have its own social flavor, where members are “friendly and supportive” and where they “have fun” and “make new friends.” In what ways are the groups social?
In each group, members talk to each other. They discuss just about everything, and they talk a lot! Some discussions are art and craft related, while others are not: craft supplies and where to get them, variety in watercolor papers, technical advice and encouragement, upcoming art exhibits and craft shows, television programs, computer classes, children and grandchildren, recent travels, the weather, gardening, cell phones and text messaging, current events, and local community issues. More often than not, conversations start with art and craft topics, then move on to other subjects. In Art I, Paige talks to another member about her painting, noting that she’s “continuing with the flowers.” Discussing the painting for a few minutes, they end up talking about the weather, house sitting, pets, and so on. In the Art Workshop, during their tea and coffee break, members look around to see what others are working on. They talk about techniques, pointing out areas that they particularly like, and they offer advice and little tips where they see necessary. Discussions often move to the subject matter of paintings and drawings. Where did you find that picture? Have you been there before? What kind of flowers are those? Did you take this photograph yourself? Soon, the room is abuzz with talk of flowers, gardening, travels, and photography. Since members bring in images that are interesting or relevant to them for some reason or another, this gives them a chance to share their chosen subjects and their interests with others. Opening up avenues for socialization, they discuss common interests and learn more about each other. Sometimes conversations go beyond small talk and interest sharing.

In Art I, Janice, a newer member, arrives a minute or two after everybody else.

As the other members are already situated, she takes the only seat left in the room.

Janice is a young retiree, possibly the youngest Art I member. With a bubbling
personality and a talkative nature, she finds herself seated next to Alfred, the detailed painter. Alfred normally finds himself completely absorbed in his meticulous paintings, silently working, and oblivious to the rest of the group. Ruby explains, “He’s always in his own world!” Janice and Alfred sitting next to each other seems to be a poor match; however, they both get right to work. Before long, Janice and Alfred are talking. Alfred, a founding Stamford U3A member, is telling Janice, a newly joined U3Aer, about the very beginnings of Stamford U3A. Soon, the entire room hushes, as they all want to hear what Alfred is saying. He talks about the inaugural meeting. At the beginning, they used to meet at the Stamford Museum, then the Stamford Library, then finally, Barn Hill. With everyone listening, he tells how one of the earliest meetings in the Museum was moved to the Museum’s storeroom, so they were able to see all of the items that the museum didn’t have on display. After finishing up his story, the other members return to their own work and resume their conversations. Janice continues talking to Alfred about the early U3A, asking him a wealth of questions.

While members discuss just about everything, from art and artists to the weather to the history of Stamford U3A, the social nature of the groups does not go unacknowledged. “Sometimes we have a very, how would you say, more talking than painting shop.” “And also have a chat, as you gather, we do quite a lot of that.” In Handicrafts I, the members laugh that sometimes they’re much more of a social group than a craft group, adding that they truly do enjoy getting together and talking as they work on their craft projects.

As they chat away about how they love chatting, Elisabeth turns to me and asks how they compare to the other groups. Are we chattery? Are we less serious than the
other groups? I reassured her that all of the groups have lively discussions, and that’s what makes them all so interesting. She finished up my thought. We can all sit and do crafts at home alone! Another woman jumps into the conversation. We have a lot to talk about, a lot to catch up on. After all, we do only see each other once a month! They then slightly change the subject when Doreen notes that Bourne U3A is considering starting a “Chat” or “Discussion” group. Everyone has another laugh. All of our groups are chat and discussion groups!

Each art and craft group is highly social in nature. Beyond the informality of sessions, there is an element of the U3A that facilitates the sociability of groups: refreshments. “Tea and coffee are the backbone of the U3A! You have realized this? Good, good. You cannot stress [enough] the importance of the tea and coffee!” Tea and coffee are, indeed, a central feature of the U3A. In the five months that I spent at Stamford U3A, attending every art and craft group session and each monthly General Meeting, I never left a session without having a cup of coffee and sometimes a little sweet treat. Some groups have their coffee and tea at the beginning, like at Art History and the General Meetings. Others take a break halfway through and others sometimes have them towards the end. Regardless of when, there is always a time for refreshments. In Art I, all of the members are absorbed in their work when someone pierces the silence, asking what time it is. “Coffee time” is the reply as they get up and go to the kitchen. Sometimes, as in Handicrafts I, the refreshment break is very elegant. When the group met at Elisabeth’s house, we drank our coffee and tea from little pink and white china teacups with matching saucers. Accompanying the beverages were four sweet treats: a Northern English pastry, a fruit and coconut tart, little chocolates, and round biscuits.
Everything about it was lovely, welcoming, and so conducive to a pleasant discussion.

While these refreshment breaks are a central feature of U3A activities, members are shocked that some interpretations of the U3A idea leave out refreshments and social time.

Penny, upon her return from several weeks in New Zealand, shares what she learned about the U3A there:

Another very interesting aspect of my New Zealand trip was that one of my brother and sister-in-law’s friends was the Chairman of the [Southern New Zealand] U3A. Their concept of how to run a U3A is totally different from ours. Instead of having interest groups run by volunteers from among the members, they run a series of weekly seminar, taken by paid experts. For example, their Art History consisted of a series of six weekly lectures on various aspects of Art History each taken by an “expert” in each aspect. So once your series of lectures is over—that’s it. There is a deliberate policy to discourage a “coffee culture.” That is—they don’t really want to have a social aspect at all. We did have quite a lively discussion where we each thought that the other was not really fulfilling the aims of the U3A.

Noting the lack of social interaction, she tells me, “The idea of having tea or coffee was just horrendous. You might have been doing drugs or something [laugh]! There was no social element to it whatsoever. It was just being lectured at by people every week.”

Why is it so hard for Stamford U3A members to imagine the U3A without its sociability? For many, this is the best aspect of membership; it is where they feel the most benefit. The national U3A survey found that over half of members perceive the social aspect to be the most pleasurable element of membership. In response to the question “What is it that you most enjoy about U3A,” 53% responded “companionship/social contact/meeting people,” followed by “keeping mind alert/mental stimulation” (19%), “meeting like minded people” (17%), and “interesting talks” (10%) (Third Age Trust, 2001). Stamford members are no different. In each of the interviews I conducted, members were asked, “What do you think are the benefits of being a U3A
member,” “What do you think are the benefits of [this group],” and “What do you think is the best aspect of [this group].” Every response related to social benefits! Members commented on the friendliness of their art and craft groups. “I think the best aspect is its friendliness and its flexibility …. But I think it’s its friendliness that is the most important.” “I think it’s the atmosphere and the interaction between the people actually.” “I think it’s just comradeship and friendship, really. I think that is the most important thing.” “On the whole, I do try to encourage friendliness. I think that’s very important that people don’t feel alone.”

Some members commented on the closeness of the groups. “But we’re all, we get to know each other, so it becomes a strong social group as well.” “Yeah, it’s a very close-knit group and I think that all the groups are the same, in fact.” “It brings everybody together.” “Although you’re going to learn more, possibly about, as we’ve been talking about craft and talking about art, I still feel that the companionship with other people is a very important part.”

U3A membership also helps many members to make friends and form social relationships. “Well, I think there’s a lot of benefit in being able to meet lots of new people.” “Oh, you make so many more friends!” “Oh, certainly improved things. I mean we wouldn’t have made so many friends in Stamford. Definitely not!” The benefits related to meeting people and making friends are especially important for members who live alone. “Some people who may be on their own a lot, it means they get to go out and see people.” “Particular people who have been recently widowed, or widowered (we’ve had both) who have—it’s been their lifeline.” “And we had a lady
come to a monthly meeting quite recently who had hardly come out of her house for two years. And this was the first time she’d come out. I mean that’s quite incredible!”

Oh well. If you’re on your own … if you join a group, you’ve immediately got six or seven or eight people you know. If you join more groups, you know. And it’s companionship and you’ve got to get out of the house and do things and you do group activities and it’s thoroughly good for you.

It’s so important, especially if you’re new in the area. As you’re older, you don’t make friends very easy. When you’re young and you have a young family, it’s quite easy to meet other parents, etcetera, but as you’re retired and you think that you don’t have any particular interest, you know, U3A is wonderful. Friendly, you know. All in the same situation.

Finally, in terms of friendships, members feel as though they know people.

Walking in town on the High Street, they run into people that they know from the U3A. Just knowing people and having the chance to talk to them is important.

You meet a lot of people on the meetings. I mean, I’ve actually met some people that I just meet once in the month and it’s amazing. You know, you just get talking to different people …. But at least it’s, you’re meeting other people. When you live on your own, you tend to lose the art of conversation, I think. You know, I talk to myself half the time….

On a whole, all the people in U3A, you know at the meetings, are friendly. They really are. And you meet them out and you don’t know their names sometimes, but you meet them out and you know you’ve seen them there.

But it does fill a hole. It’s always there. There’s always something there when you need it. And the friendships you make, even if they’re not deep friendships, you know, you meet people in the town and you feel, you feel as if you know a lot of people. Even if it’s not deeply, you do know a lot of people.

The notion of feeling that you know people resonates strongly within me. Beyond my email contact with Penny, I arrived in Stamford not knowing a soul. I met a number of people through the art, craft, and art history groups and the monthly meetings, and I did feel that I got to know a lot of people. And I did run into them in town: at Stamford’s Friday Markets, on the High Street, at coffee shops and cafés in town, at the Midlent Fair,
at Morrisons (the supermarket), and at the Good Friday Procession of Witness. When my mother and aunt came to Stamford to visit, my husband and I took them to a local estate for a tour. While at Grimsthorpe Castle, I had a chance meeting with a U3Aer who is a docent there. Everywhere I went, I saw familiar faces. Some I knew personally from groups. Others, I only recognized from seeing at meetings and activities. Nonetheless, after arriving in England as a complete stranger, in a short period of time, I came to feel that I did, indeed, know a lot of people in Stamford.

Beyond simply knowing people and making friends; however, U3A members are important providers of social support. They pull together and help each other out whenever necessary. As Holly explains:

> We keep our eye on each other. If people don’t turn up, we ring up and find out why and if they’re alright and if there’s anything we can do to help …. We know each other’s problems. We know about their families, where they’re going on holiday, and, you know, if anybody ails, we can hopefully do something about it.

They help each other in little ways. If members know that someone has difficulty hearing, they speak a little louder. If some have trouble with their eyesight, others help out, by perhaps doing small, intricate techniques for them or threading tiny needles. In groups where members meet in each others’ homes, those who drive pick up those who do not. Sometimes they provide emotional support in times of illness and loss.

In the Art Workshop, William had to put aside his position as group leader when his wife Suellen fell ill. As Suellen’s illness was very serious, William needed to be with her and to care for her around the clock. Holly immediately stepped in to temporarily take over the group to help him out. The group carried on with its regular meetings, and when William could, he stopped in, updating the group on his wife’s condition—her progress, her illness, and her treatments. If he didn’t need to return immediately home,
he took another five minutes or so to quickly go around the room and see what everyone is working on, adding comments and words of encouragement. When her illness advanced, William had to bypass his short visits to the meetings. The members however, kept them in their thoughts, often asking about Suellen. At one meeting, the group started talking about crossword puzzles and sudokus. Someone mentioned a recent article in The Guardian\textsuperscript{42} that lists different ways of keeping the mind active and how to exercise different parts of the brain. She gave the example of counting backwards from 100 by certain numbers, by fives, by sevens, and so on. This reminds Holly of Suellen who loved different puzzles and brain teasers. Someone must try to bring it in to the next session so that they can get it to her. At another meeting, Holly began by relaying an update on Suellen. She informed the group that her health was failing. She brought a small spray of freesia to bring over after the meeting. She then passed around small squares of white paper, saying that she thought it would be a nice idea if everyone drew a small flower and added their names. As they finished their flowers, they brought them over to Holly. A small hole was punched in the corner of each and they were strung together with a sparkling gold ribbon. Holly said it would be nice as it was a “bouquet” that would last much longer than the actual flowers themselves. Each member put a good deal of care into his and her flower. Some were bright and cheery, others were done in muted, pastel colors. Some were in watercolor, colored pencil, and pencil sketch. They were all different, but united by the ribbon. After the meeting, Holly paid a visit to Suellen and William and delivered the bouquets on behalf of the group. Within a short time, Suellen sadly passed away. At the next session, Holly brought in a calligraphy book and set, asking if anyone was interested in trying it out. This led into a discussion of how the

\textsuperscript{42} The Guardian is a major British newspaper that has national (and international) circulation.
group had intended to have someone in to teach them calligraphy, but who was it?

Remembering that it was Suellen, someone suggested that they should still have a

calligraphy workshop day—as a way of remembering Suellen, doing it in her memory.

On my last day in Stamford, I saw William at the Annual General Meeting. He was there
to help set up for the art exhibition. He told me that he brought two pictures along. One
was a painting that he had done recently and the other was the last drawing that Suellen
had done before she died. He had them framed and set them up next to each other with
their names attached to the front. This was her last sketch and he wanted to share it with
the other members. After the exhibition, during the meeting itself, the Drama Group put
on a presentation of a series of small skits to entertain the other members. As Suellen
was “the founding, leading light of our Drama Group,” before the group began their
performance, William took the floor. Addressing Stamford U3A, he announced that he
usually isn’t in the Drama Group, but that his wife had been a founding member. One of
the other Drama members was ill and in hospital, so he was filling in for him, noting that
“Suellen would want me to do it.” In the following month, William writes to the U3A,
thanking them for all of the support that they freely offered:

**Thank you Stamford U3A**

Suellen and I found that our U3A, with its many varied group activities, gave
meaning and purpose to our life in retirement, and kept us “relatively” young.
Learning and doing, at our age, proved interesting, stimulating and enjoyable. It
also greatly increased our circle of friends. So we were already indebted to you.
However, it was not until Suellen became ill that we realised how much we valued
that friendship. Your help and support, thoughts and prayers, gave us strength
when we most needed it. It was most appreciated. Thank you.
Since her death, I have been overwhelmed by the sympathy and kindness shown me. On the day of Suellen’s funeral, you helped to make, what could have been a very sad occasion, a happy, indeed a joyful celebration of and thanksgiving for her life.

Please accept my sincere and grateful thanks.

Rethinking Social vs. Individual Concerns. The older adult art education literature is inconsistent regarding social concerns. On one hand, they are important and should be recognized and encouraged. On the other hand, they are seen as less important and less serious, but a potentially good starting point—a starting point to move beyond. One should encourage a “club-like atmosphere” and tea and coffee breaks. One should also clear away the coffee cups to provide a serious atmosphere. While the positions on social motivations and benefits are inconsistent and incohesive, if not messy, what is certain is that individual concerns are primary. The language used is one of “self”—self-expression, self-understanding, self-confidence, self-concept, self-awareness, and

Figure 11. Display of William and Suellen’s artwork at the Annual General Meeting.
finding one’s true self. Self, personal, and individual. Although the literature sees individual concerns as the most important element, the exact opposite is true in the U3A, where social concerns are primary. Sociability is present, to varying degrees, in every single U3A event, meeting, and activity, facilitated by their refreshment breaks. There is an interesting contrast between the literature’s *clear away the coffee cups* and the U3A’s *tea and coffee are the backbone of the U3A*. While this stark contrast may partly stem from cultural differences and the American (and modernist) focus on individualism, this doesn’t seem to explain everything. Older adults in the U.S. must come to art classes with social needs and motivations—otherwise, why would the literature first acknowledge these phenomena and then downplay and downgrade them? In the literature, social motivations are a starting point to move past, getting to the real work of expression and finding oneself. This focus on individualism, however, is not maintained in other areas of older adult education. In educational gerontology, older adults’ social needs are validated. Wolf (1998) asserts, “Older adults connect with others to affirm themselves … The need to connect, to be part of a human universe, and to grow characterizes older learners” (p. 16). Mehrotra (2003) states:

> For many participants, educational programs serve as a means of escaping the potential loneliness and isolation of old age. They provide participants with new opportunities to develop friendships, to discuss topics of common interest, and to both give and receive emotional and instrumental support. (p. 652)

While art educators may see these motivations as less “serious” than self-expression, social gerontologists have found important links between social involvement, social support, health, and longevity.

Scholars agree that social support, however operationalized, is definitely important to health and well-being (Berkman & Syme, 1979; Jackson & Antonucci, 1992), particularly for aging adults (Minkler & Langhauser, 1988).
Older adults with few social ties have increased risk of dying earlier (Berkman & Syme), whereas those with social support have a survival advantage (Forster & Stoller, 1992). Older adults who see themselves as socially engaged and supported are in better mental and physical health than those socially isolated (Carstensen, 1991). (Siebert, Mutran, & Reitzes, 1999, p. 523)

The social aspects of education can be very important motivators for older adults—motivations which lead to significant benefits on many levels. In the U3A, members act on these needs, creating socially supportive learning communities; following their motivations and meeting their needs. They are asserting their agency to take control of their needs—both educational and social.

Such coherence is often hard-won, a fabric painstakingly woven out of the resources at hand when the customary resources disappear. “I only have one blood relative,” said Rosina Tucker, at the age of 103. “Do you think I’d be lonely? No! I’ve built myself a community....” (Smithsonian Institution, 1984). (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Hufford, Hunt, & Zeitlin, 2006, p. 35)

Just like Rosina Tucker created her community, U3A members have created their own: a community that engages in shared learning, but that also pulls together and provides support to each other. The fact that they congregate to do art and craft activities that they could do at home is telling. The literature on leisure comments on this, reversing the position of art education. “Through voluntary associations people are able to participate in focal practices, and move beyond individual benefits and experience [italics added], to form collective networks” (Arai & Pedlar, 2003, p. 197).

As educators, we must begin to move away from a total emphasis on individual concerns. Is creating social bonds and meeting those needs less important than creative self-expression? Even for older adults that live alone and have a real social need? Should we only address the needs that we find to be educationally and artistically “serious”? And if so, are we denying very real social concerns? If social needs are
important to older learners, then we must validate them, not try to change them. We need to question the disconnects between what older adults feel is important and what we feel is important.

The Importance of the U3A

U3A members take pride in and value their local U3As. As it comes to be a major activity for most, the importance of the U3A is greatly felt by its members. When nationally surveyed and asked “how much would you miss U3A,” 92% responded that they would miss it, with 29% responding “very much indeed” and 40% responding “very much” (Third Age Trust, 2001). Stamford’s membership feels the same. When I accompanied the Art History group on their trip to London to the Dulwich Picture Gallery, two women approached me as we were waiting to enter the Canaletto exhibition. They asked how I was enjoying England and how I was getting on with my research. They were amazed to hear that there is no U3A in the U.S. One added, and the other agreed, that they don’t know what they would do with out it. In an art group, a member stressed, “Oh, I don’t know what we’d do without it! It’s wonderful! It really is.” Another stated, “I think it’s a big thing in my life.” Through my time spent with Stamford U3A, I came to share the feeling, writing, “After the time I’ve spent here it seems strange that there will be no U3A when I return home.” Early on in my observations at February’s Handicrafts II meeting, I became aware of the importance of the U3A to its members.

We all arrive at Emily’s home for another beading activity led by Ivy. Ivy, however, isn’t feeling well today. She fell down the stairs this morning and badly injured her shoulder. After spending hours in the hospital, she was now on a sizeable dose of
pain medication. Her doctors advised her not to do anything with her arm and to rest up as much as possible. But at two in the afternoon, she is now with the rest of the craft members at their meeting. With her arm bandaged and in a sling, she leads us in the activity: a beaded bracelet using a spiral technique.

At this meeting, I first recognized the significance of the U3A. I remember wondering, under similar circumstances, how many people would have gone anywhere that day? To school? To work? Anywhere? Ivy came to the meeting because it is important to her. While members value the U3A in their own lives, one member told me how she wished others close to her had been given the same opportunities:

But even so, there are times I think of my mother who followed me here from London, because I am a Londoner. Mum and Dad followed me. I think of them, and apart from me going around, they often, I feel, were at a loose end. Just sitting in their home. And U3A, I know, would have satisfied my father. It would have given him a new lease of life. And I think that is what happens when you retire. A new lease of life can be had from joining an organization such as the U3A.

Another member, after speaking of the importance of the U3A in her own life, went on to express how she doesn’t understand how anyone could forgo membership:

And I think it’s a very, very good organization, actually. Very good. I mean, you have to be a peculiar kind of person who wants to sit at home and not see anybody. And as soon as you join something in the U3A, you’re seeing somebody. Even if people are very shy or not particularly friendly, I think it’s a very good thing to actually go and do. And I think you’re very odd if you’ve got all this opportunity to do this and you don’t. I mean, there’s got to be something really wrong with you, quite honestly!

A final and delightful illustration of the importance of the U3A was inspired by an announcement in March’s Stamford U3A newsletter. The notice read:

**Limerick Competition**
The U3A Creative Writing Group will be publishing the 2007 edition of their magazine in Spring/Early Summer. If you have a way with words, particularly Limericks, why not try your hand at one?
During my interview with Ruby from Art I, she told me that she had written several.

There was one of these which she committed to memory. She proceeded to recite it to me:

A lady so lonely and shy  
Joined U3A in order to try  
To find interests anew  
She found more than a few  
Now she’s radiant, happy and spry

**Motivations and Benefits Summary**

It is important that we do not ignore the social aspects of education that are so important to older adults by focusing too heavily on the individual aspects. The strong social community found in Stamford U3A provides a powerful contrast to the older adult art education literature. It must, however, be understood that their organization is a response to their needs. The importance given to social concerns will necessarily vary based on each and every setting and population. The previous sections have focused on the social, but this is not to be taken as a denial of the individual. Rather than thinking of these elements as diametrically opposed (individual vs. social), we should think of them as interrelated (individual and social). It is individual interests in art and craft that bring learners together. Together, they can create an interactive social atmosphere; one that each student feels and benefits from individually—educationally, artistically, creatively, and socially.

**Summary**

In the previous three chapters, I presented the data from the fieldwork and the literature, highlighting the disconnects that I found between the two sets of data.
Although I have discussed a number of these disconnects, it is important to remember the time period in which most of the literature was published. Many of these writings are outdated and are reflective of the times in which they were written. The problem with this is that the assumptions that these writings have been based upon have not been questioned. A major purpose of these three chapters was to question and challenge these assumptions. I chose the topics to explore based on their potential to highlight the disconnects between the literature and the U3A. The identified rifts between theory and practice cause us to question and rethink some of our assumptions and foundations. But discussing these disconnects are only the beginning of many more topics, themes, and assumptions that have yet to be explored and examined.

To summarize the disconnects that I have presented and discussed, in terms of life experiences and expertise, educators must begin to think about expanding the conceptualization of experiences and who can be an expert. In terms of approaches and methods, educators can consider what it means to shift from teaching to sharing and ways of promote sharing and shared learning. Considering the art education “no-nos,” as educators, we can begin to examine our underlying assumptions of what is “quality.” We must ask how many of these no-nos are rooted in modernism. We must question whether we are clinging to ideals that actually serve to marginalize older art learners. Finally, in terms of motivations and benefits, we must begin to focus on both individual and social issues.

43 The lack of recent publications and the time period of the publications offer only a partial explanation for the failure to question assumptions. In a number of cases, the more recent literature pertaining to older adults has maintained or reinforced assumptions that had been questioned decades before by art educators. As an example, in 1992, Hoffman wrote about the importance of emphasizing process over product despite Eisner’s questioning of this dichotomy in 1973.
Each of these areas signifies a need to become more open, to expand our understandings to be more inclusive. “There is very little research that describes what older people themselves want and need to learn. There are statements about what others believe [italics added] is necessary” (Boulton-Lewis, Buys, & Lovie-Kitchin, 2006, p. 273). Understanding, accepting, and validating older learners’ views, preferences, motivations, and needs is paramount in creating, supporting, and better understanding responsive and accessible programming. While these chapters focused on the disconnects from the two data sources, the next chapter considers these findings in relation to the field of older adult art education.
CHAPTER 7:
DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS—RETHINKING OLDER ADULT ART EDUCATION
This chapter will extend and analyze the comparisons from the data. Three major themes from the data will be discussed—the social aspects of education and learning, shared learning, and the agency of older adults. Outside concepts and theories will be included in order to provide potential new directions. Three major aspects of the field will also be explored and rethought, including the language we use, the imperative of teacher training, and the roles available in older adult art education. Finally, some broad-based recommendations for future thinking and research will be outlined. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a more in-depth and theoretical interpretation of the data.

**Discussion: Three Central Themes and Disconnects**

The following sections identify and describe three central themes that emerged from the fieldwork and data analysis: the social aspects of education and learning, shared learning, and the agency of older adults. While a wealth of themes and connections have been and can continue to be made through comparing the existing literature on older adult art education (Appendix G) to the U3A, these three topics emerged early on in the fieldwork and provided the focus for subsequent observations and interviews. Since they have been so influential to this study, I will investigate them further here. Although the majority of my discussions will be directed towards what these topics mean to older adult art education, they are also relevant to many other areas of education. I invite readers to make their own connections to their interests and to other areas of education, thus adding to and enriching the dialogue.
Social Aspects of Education and Learning

A major disconnect between the U3A and the literature stems from the former’s social emphasis and the latter’s individualistic emphasis. While this could potentially be dismissed as a result of cultural differences between the U.S. and Britain, it must be remembered that social elements are central in both American gerontology and educational gerontology. Although not discounting individual concerns, I am pointing out that the older adult art education literature has either ignored or devalued the social components of education and learning. Educational theories, on the other hand, have begun to recognize the importance of social factors. Looking to concepts that explore social factors, such as situated cognition (e.g., Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Lave, 1988; Lave & Wenger, 1991), can help the field move away from a fixation only on the individual. In situated cognition, learning is social.

The core idea in situated cognition is that learning is inherently social in nature. The nature of the interactions among learners, the tools they use within these interactions, the activity itself, and the social context in which the activity takes place shape learning. (Hansman, 2001, p. 45)

Situated cognition looks at the ways in which individuals interact with each other and the learning environment, stressing that learning always takes place within a social context. Heavily focusing on the social nature of learning, “situated cognition theory conceives of learning as a sociocultural phenomenon rather than the action of an individual acquiring general information from a decontextualized body of knowledge” (Stein, 1998, p. 1). Learning from socially-grounded theories and concepts can help older adult art education to acknowledge the importance of context: the way it influences learning and the differences found from one site to the next. Recognizing the importance of context in shaping learning, we can begin to understand the diversity of educational and learning
sites, as well as their corresponding effects on learners, motivations, teaching and learning styles, and other elements of the learning experience. This can help us in moving away from one idealization of an art program to the exploration of the diversity inherent in older adult art learning.

Although there are benefits to adopting an approach that prompts an awareness of the social components of learning and education, it must be recognized that situated cognition has not gone without criticism (e.g., Anderson, Reder, & Simon, 1996). The majority of criticisms stem from an overemphasis on the social at the expense of the individual. While situated cognition moves away from wholly individual concerns, it devotes the bulk of attention to contextual and social concerns, thus creating an individual/social dichotomy. Rather than reinforcing this dualism, we need to begin to acknowledge the interplay between individual and social elements. “More than ever before, there is a need for an approach that can dialectically link the individual and the social structure” (Engeström, 1999, p. 19). We do not need to ignore one or the other or to view them as polar opposites, but to address both. “It would seem that a complete theory of adult learning must take into consideration the learner, the learning process, and the context” (Merriam, 1993, p. 108). Including the context as an important component of learning highlights the social nature of education as well as the corresponding social motivations and benefits that may stem from older adult art education. Understanding these elements is paramount as they can help to explain why older adults pursue art learning and the benefits that can be realized.

Again, a major disconnect is found between the older adult art education literature and the U3A. While U3A members on a whole are motivated to join and participate for
social reasons (Third Age Trust, 2001), the literature cites this as a lesser motivation to move beyond. In terms of benefits, Stamford U3A members are not shy in enumerating the positive social benefits of membership, but the literature rarely acknowledges these outcomes at all. The language of self- (e.g., self-expression, self-awareness, and self-exploration) prevails at the expense of social and group outcomes. We need to recognize both in order to understand the full impact of arts programming. Another concept that can help reframe older adult art learning to include social motivations and outcomes is social capital.44

To define a complex concept in simplistic terms, social capital can be described as resources and norms that are created and built upon through groups and networks of people. Although there are many ways of defining social capital (e.g., Portes, 2000) and “at this time, no single definition of the term social capital has won consensus” (Balatti & Falk, 2000, p. 283), every description includes notions of people coming together and bringing resources with them that add to the collective and to society. These resources enable people to do things together that they could not easily do on their own. In this sense, collectivity itself is seen as a resource. “Fundamental to social capital theory is the proposition that networks of relationships are a resource that can facilitate access to other resources of value to individuals or groups for a specific purpose” (p. 282). Rather than recognizing the potentials of individuals, social capital relates to the potentials of individuals working together. The importance lies in relationships and connections.

44 There have been no direct connections between the literature on the U3A and social capital, however, I feel that this concept is helpful in highlighting the importance of the social implications, benefits, and potential outcomes of learning and education. Although the term “social capital” can be criticized for having economic connotations, I am raising the possibility that social capital may have different connotations in the third age (as opposed to the second age). In this sense, it is important to remember that I am putting social capital forward as a concept that emphasizes the social relationships of older adults for their own benefit (as opposed to the benefit of others).
“The core idea of social capital is the suggestion that people’s connections have value because they allow people to cooperate for mutual benefit, and gain access to resources that they can then use” (Field, 2005, p. 81). Since social capital moves away from focusing solely on the individual and it “places an emphasis on cooperation and mutuality [and] on participation in civil society” (Arai & Pedlar, 2003, p. 192), it can help to better understand educational participation in social terms.

Although introduced earlier, the notion of social capital was popularized by Putnam (2000) in his book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. The reason that Putnam’s ideas have received so much attention is that he paints a bleak picture of civic participation by demonstrating sharp declines across a range of measures. He states:

> Nevertheless, the downward trend … has been more or less uninterrupted for more than a quarter century, and if the current rate of decline were to continue, clubs would become extinct in America within less than twenty years. Considering that such local associations have been a feature of American community life for several hundred years, it is remarkable to see them so high on the endangered species list. (pp. 62-63)

The use of such alarmist language as extinction and endangerment has led to critiques of Putnam’s central thesis. Questions of the measures that were used have been raised (e.g., Levi, 1996; Schudson, 1996). Scholars in other countries have examined their nations’ levels of social capital (e.g., Hall, 1999), and terms such as “Putnamesque” have entered into the social capital literature (Warde & Tampubolon, 2002). The reason that Putnam’s forecast of decline is so unnerving is that civic engagement and social communities are considered to be an essential ingredient in the fabric of American social life. If this is on the decline, then all of the benefits associated with social capital should also decline. These benefits are far-ranging, including those in psychological, economic, social, and
health-related arenas. Remembering the importance of social networks and social support to older adults (e.g., Morgan & Kunkel, 2001; Schaie & Willis, 2002; Siebert, Mutran, & Reitzes, 1999), we can see the relevance of social capital to older adult art learning. The benefits of social capital also tend to “flow not only to the individual but also to the group and to the community as a whole” (Balatti & Falk, 2002, p. 292). To illustrate this, we can think of the benefits that are realized through U3A involvement. Members, individually and as a group, feel the benefits of social relationships and social support, but benefits also carry into the community through voluntarism and charity projects (local, national, and worldwide).

Indeed, being involved in a social capital-building organization such as the U3A actually leads to more social capital. Social capital is built through organizational membership (Putnam, 2000), through leisure pursuits (Warde & Tampubolon, 2002), through voluntarism (Roberts & Devine, 2004), and through learning and education (Field & Spence, 2000; Preston, 2003). Social capital is increased through these types of participation, and participation leads to further participation. Volunteering leads to more volunteering, education leads to more education, and so on. In this sense, the more that social capital is used, the more it is created. “It is a valuable capital asset indeed, the stock of which ‘actually accumulates with use’ and which ‘does not necessarily require expenditure of scarce resources in its creation’ (Evans, 1996, p. 1034)” (McClenaghan, 2000, p. 570). Even more interesting is that an increase in one type of activity can actually lead to increases in other types of activities. Warde and Tampubolon (2002) state:

… increases in social capital, as measured by volume of associational membership, are indeed related to more extensive and more frequent involvement
in the whole range of leisure, cultural, public and even domestic activities. *Those with more associational memberships are also more active in every other sphere of social life* [italics added]. (p. 166)

In sum, involvement in one arena leads to involvement in other arenas. So what does this have to do with art education?

Putnam (2000) notes the potential of art in creating social capital.

… social capital is often a valuable by-product of cultural activities whose main purpose is purely artistic …. Many of these activities produce great art, but all of them produce great bridging social capital—in some respects an even more impressive achievement. (pp. 411-412)

Art activities which bring people together, such as older adult art programming, work to create and sustain social capital. A recent study by the National Endowment for the Arts (2006), titled *The Arts and Civic Engagement: Involved in Arts, Involved in Life*, found that individuals active in the arts are more likely to be active in a wide range of other cultural, civic, and social realms. So, whether we choose to acknowledge it or not, social forces are at work in older adult art education—social forces which can lead to the building of social capital and to vitally important social outcomes. If we choose to acknowledge this, we may be far better able to recognize social implications and to facilitate the building of social capital to the benefit of both individuals and society. Even more interesting is that individuals want to contribute to society (Tanz & Spencer, 2000), they want to make a difference (Bradley, 1999/2000), and they want to feel connected with others. “Active participation in virtually any kind of organization involves our need for human connectedness” (Heuser, 2005, p. 18). Are there ways in which art education can provide spaces for some of these desires and needs to be met? Putnam (2000) calls for the creation of spaces where social capital can once again flourish. “Just as did our predecessors in the Progressive Era, we need to create new
structures and policies (public and private) to facilitate renewed civic engagement” (p. 403). Are there ways in which older adult art learning structures can forge connections in communities and add to social capital?

Although the older adult art education literature has tended to attach minor importance to social concerns, devaluing them leads to ignoring the social implications of art, education, and art education—ignoring the social to focus solely on the individual. This emphasis on the individual has strong historical roots in art education. Stemming from modernist notions of art and artists, the artist is hailed as a “solitary maverick or hero” (Milbrandt, 1998). Those who view the artist as solitary and isolated believe that social forces have little effect on the artist and his or her artwork. The artist, then, is able to freely express him or herself, since “artists are thought to be innate ‘geniuses,’ who are untouched by social, political, and economic interests and who are thus able to represent that which is true, universal, and eternal, while showing what is personal” (Efland, Freedman, & Stuhr, 1996, p. 19).

The solitary artist is not the only modernist ideal that is maintained by focusing on the individual. Another tenet that leads to overlooking social concerns is a socially detached view of art. Just as artists are seen as isolated, so is art itself. In modernism, art in everyday life is devalued—only fine art made by artists is valued. Crafts and popular art forms are disdained (Clark, 1998), so the art forms that members of society are most familiar with go largely unrecognized. This elitist view divorces art from society, removing its social connections even further. These modernist positions have had a great effect on art education—effects which have been documented and examined by art
education historians (e.g., Efland, 1990; Stankiewicz, 2001) and called into question (e.g., Freedman, 2003; Kindler, 1996).

Discourses pertaining to older adults, however, have not acknowledged these insights and continue to maintain an individualistic stance. But by ignoring social concerns, we are unknowingly ignoring the individual benefits that stem from social engagement and social capital. To truly focus on all aspects of the individual, we still need to recognize social elements and the ways individuals interact with each other. Paying attention to social matters doesn’t imply a devaluation of the individual or the artistic experience. To the contrary, it can enhance our understandings of these elements and lead to a more holistic view of older adult art education. What we need most in older adult art education is a view that reconnects art with society and recognizes the value of art in everyday life and for everyday purposes. If we wish to make art relevant to older learners, we must take it off of its pedestal. If older adults come to art programs for social reasons or if art learners cite social relationships as a benefit of participation, we should learn to view this as a good thing—not as something less “serious” or as something to change. This highlights the importance of art in society and reaffirms art as a mechanism for bringing people together. It reaffirms art’s place in communities and in society.

Shared Learning

Stemming from the social aspects of education is the notion of shared learning. While the individually-focused literature speaks of teaching, the socially-focused U3A speaks of sharing. The individual focus stems from modernist conceptions of the artist as an isolated genius, but “as the individual becomes decentered in discussions of art and
artists, such qualities as individual genius, originality, and the uniqueness of individual expression may become less significant in the future” (Efland, Freedman, & Stuhr, 1996, p. 56). Moving away from the individual and acknowledging social elements, we can begin to understand how individuals interact with each other. What does this mean to older adult art education? First, we can recognize that adult learners often want to interact with each other. “It is human nature for individuals to interact, discuss, share information or ‘meaning’ and learn from each other” (Moore & Brooks, 2000, p. 1). In informal learning situations that are noncompulsory and non-qualification granting, why do adults come to educational settings when they could pursue their interests on their own? There must be some reason why people undertake to learn together with others in educational settings. With others, students have the opportunity to learn together, as well as from each other. This may be even more poignant for older adults. “Older learners do have a lot of experience and knowledge; many of them also like to share their experience in a variety of ways” (Jarvis, 2001, p. 57). “Older adults want to participate in the learning experience, they want to share their ideas with others, and they want to find out what others think” (Duay & Bryan, 2006, p. 437). Simply put, older adults may have a desire to engage in shared learning—to see their education and learning as a shared endeavor. In this way, they can contribute what they know, while also benefiting from others’ contributions. Rather than learning only from a teacher, students can have the opportunity to learn from everyone in the class. This necessarily leads to a change in the traditional student-teacher relationship and alters traditional notions of education. When the focus shifts from teaching to sharing, the learning environment becomes collaborative and the responsibility for learning is shared (Spigner-Littles & Anderson, 1999).
Approaches shift from delivering instruction to “mutual inquiry” (Shor & Freire, 1987), and learning sites transform into “spaces for experience sharing and knowledge expansion” (Schugurensky, 1998, para. 29). While these notions of shared learning may not be applicable to all educational settings, they do seem to be particularly suited to older adult learning. Older learners’ experiences and knowledge are validated and older adults themselves are seen as owning something important to contribute to their learning (and to the learning of others). In terms of art education, if we wish to begin to examine art from multiple viewpoints, this seems to be an approach that invites and honors new voices. Although the older adult art education literature calls for approaches that are more student-centered and that encourage students to become self-directed, the language used doesn’t seem to reflect this. It still implies notions of teacher-directedness—not student-centeredness. A concept that can provide us with a new vocabulary for talking about shared learning is communities of practice.

The concept of communities of practice was first described by Lave and Wenger (1991). Deeply rooted in situated learning theories, communities of practice refer to small, informal learning groups and are defined as “groups of people informally bound by their shared competence and mutual interest in a given practice, which makes it natural for them to share their individual experiences and knowledge in an informal and creative way” (Choi, 2006, p. 143). These interest communities have three essential characteristics as defined by Wenger (n.d.):

1. The domain: A community of practice is not merely a club of friends or a network of connections between people. It has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest. Membership therefore implies a commitment to the domain, and therefore a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people …. They value their collective competence and learn from each
other, even though few people outside the group may value or even recognize their expertise.

2. The community: In pursuing their interest in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other.

3. The practice: …. Members of a community of practice are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short a shared practice…. (pp. 1-2)

In essence, communities of practice take learning out of “classrooms,” viewing it as situated within groups of people who share what they know. Within these learning communities, an additional concept—legitimate peripheral participation—describes levels of involvement.

… the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the socio-cultural practices of the community. “Legitimate peripheral participation” provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artifacts, and communities of knowledge and practice. A person’s intentions to learn are engaged and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a socio-cultural practice. (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29)

Legitimate peripheral participation describes how members join communities of practice, beginning on the periphery and moving toward the center. This process is not just seen as the means of gaining access to full participation and learning, but as learning in and of itself. Simply put, membership and participation in a community of practice is learning.

Central importance is placed upon members learning from each other. This has everything to do with shared learning. In communities of practice, “everybody has a role in the learning and wisdom generating process” and members “recognise everyone for their contribution” (Moore & Brooks, 2000, p. 11). Adopting a community of practice perspective in older adult art education could lead to acknowledging older learners’ experiences, knowledge, and potential to be instrumental in their own learning endeavors.
When everyone contributes, the focus shifts from education to learning, from teaching to sharing. Sharing with and learning from each other become primary, and communities of practice “facilitate opportunities for sharing knowledge as they arise” (O’Donnell et al., 2003, p. 82). While writings on communities of practice can inform our thinking about the nature and potential for a more interactive older adult education, the U3A provides examples of what this type of learning actually looks like in action.

In essence, the U3A and its interest groups are exemplars of communities of practice. Definitions of communities of practice are easily applied to the U3A. Consider, for instance, the following statement: “The power in communities of practice is that they organize themselves, set their own agendas, and establish their own leadership” (Hansman, 2001, p. 48). This is also applicable to the U3A, its interest groups, and the majority of its endeavors. Just like in a community of practice, each U3A group is brought together by a shared interest and each group establishes its own norms and ways of working. Members share what they know as they learn together. Less experienced members learn from those with more experience. The notion of legitimate peripheral participation is clearly evident in Stamford U3A’s Quilting and Embroidery group, where those who have been in the group the longest (the “old-timers”) are sharing what they know with their two new members, Trisha and Connie (the “newcomers”). The idea of members of communities of practice learning from each other is akin to the ways in which U3A members learn from each other. It is also strikingly similar to the U3A maxim “those who teach shall also learn and those who learn shall also teach” (Laslett, 45

The foundations of communities of practice and the U3A are quite similar; however, I have found no evidence that one area has informed the other. Instead, the U3A seems to have its roots in British adult education and workers’ education. Although no direct intersections are evident between communities of practice and the U3A, there are many parallels that can be drawn.
1989, p. 178). The emphasis on sharing one’s experience and knowledge is also not bound to the past—but is brought into the present and the future. Members are constantly sharing past experiences, but this is not all that they do. It is common to find U3A members sharing what they learned just last week or just yesterday. Sometimes insights are shared in “real-time” as they emerge. Other times, members plan to share what they will be learning or they undertake to learn something with the purpose of sharing it. In this sense, what is shared is not contained in a reservoir that can run dry—it is constantly and continually replenished. Sharing, then, is not only an approach to learning that is adopted. In many cases, sharing also provides a motivation for learning—sharing is what members do, but it sometimes also accounts for why they do it. The U3A provides a multidimensional view of communities of practice and shared learning. Are there implications here for older adult art education? Can examining these concepts and structures inform our current thinking?

“As Lave and Wenger note, a community of practice often needs a catalyst, be it from outside the community or one imposed on it” (Kelly, Cook, & Gordon, 2006, p. 222). In the British U3A, the catalyst was the lack of available older adult educational offerings, which prompted U3A founders and members to set out to create their own learning opportunities. Is there a catalyst for older adult art education in the U.S.? As educators, is there something that can prompt us to consider and promote shared learning? Can we envision older adult art learners forming communities of practice, sharing what they know, and being in control of their own learning?

Communities of practice (and the U3A) by definition are self-supporting and self-sufficient. Members are in control of their learning. “It is their response to their
conditions, and therefore their enterprise” (Wenger, 1998, p. 79). If we want to promote art learning situations that are designed in response to older learners’ needs and that foster self-direction, a community of practice or U3A-like approach could provide insight. These approaches also change the dynamics (as well as the language) of the student-teacher relationship. Teachers no longer deliver instruction that is received by passive learners. The learners themselves become active creators (not recipients) of knowledge. “Engagement in communities of practice provide the circumstances for individuals to construct knowledge” (Billett, 1998, para. 18). In older adult art education are we promoting the passive consuming of knowledge or the active making of it? This question leads us to the final theme: agency.

Agency of Older Adults

Does the older adult art education literature take a stance where older students are given opportunities for creating knowledge? “The issue of who constructs knowledge, and who does not, is an issue of power and politics” (Deshler & Grudens-Schuck, 2000, p. 600-601). It is also an issue of agency. Taking an approach where older adults generate their own knowledge and meanings implies that older learners have the agency to do so. This is another major disconnect between the literature and the U3A. The literature paints a picture of passive and unable older learners who rely on their art teachers for everything, even for learning how to learn. This view removes agency from older adults, but the U3A provides a vision of self-reliant and active learners. Their members have agency that is exercised through each and every endeavor. We need to rethink the agency of older adults.
Learning and social involvement can lead to agency. “Lifelong learning and civic engagement are important sources of agency, both in themselves and in the capabilities that they help people to realise” (Field, 2005, p. 100). But the outcome of agency can only be realized if learners are in control of their learning. An overly restrictive approach perpetuates passivity and a reliance on the teacher, but a more interactive approach can promote agency. Activities must be challenging (Mehrotra, 2003), choice of topics must be available (Preston, 2003), and learners must have opportunities to contribute to discussions (Clark et al., 1997). While these elements allow for more choice and control, the student-teacher relationship must also change. “Older learners respond best when students and teachers share equal responsibility in the learning process and share equal respect for one another” (Spigner-Littles & Anderson, 1999, p. 205). The teacher’s role shifts from one who has all the answers which are bestowed upon students to one who recognizes the abilities of students and encourages them to become active learners. As older learners take more control over their learning, they move from a position of passivity to one of agency. Thinking back to earlier discussions of learned dependency and learned helplessness, notions of agency seem to be highly relevant to older adults.

Moore, Metcalf, & Schow (2006) state:

This strength and confidence in oneself is an important part of aging and of an older persons’ sense of having some control over his or her environment. So often, one’s greatest fear of the aging process is a fear of losing one’s independence. To have or take back control is a strong factor in helping older persons find or maintain meaning in their lives. (p. 295)

In a society where stereotypes of dependence in old age prevail, educational programming must work to diminish these stereotypes—not reinforce them. Designing educational approaches that assume dependency leads to teacher-dependent methods,
which in turn, leads to dependent learners—it becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy.

However, on the other hand, if an approach that assumes agency and self-efficacy is adopted, learners are required to rely on their own strengths, thus leading to students who are active and in control of their learning. Assuming their dependence can be disempowering to older learners, but assuming their agency can be empowering. Noting that “those who work with seniors generally intend to empower them,” Cusack (1995, p. 306) calls attention to the need to examine what we mean by empowerment.

… programmes and services designed to empower can and must address the following questions:
- What is it that is “disempowering” to seniors in this context?
- Who has the power (individuals, agencies)? What do we mean by “empowerment?”
- What are people being “empowered” to do?
- How are people being empowered? Process, techniques, principles?
- How do we know it’s working? What evidence do we have of individual and collective empowerment? (Cusack, 1999, p. 24)

As educators, are our current assumptions of older adult learners empowering or disempowering? Rethinking the potentials of older adults can lead us to new conceptions of older adult art education—ones that recognize learners’ agency and promote empowerment. Although rarely addressed in the literature, these concepts have been explored in other areas of education through discussions of radical pedagogies.

Radical Pedagogies. Radical pedagogies encompass a range of approaches which challenge traditional approaches to education (e.g., critical pedagogy, liberatory pedagogy, emancipatory pedagogy, feminist pedagogy).

Radical education is a fundamental departure from dominant practice or experience at one or more of the following levels: content, process, outcome, the relationship of education to other social processes. The word “dominant” directs our attention to the relative nature of radicalism. One’s learning, or educational experience, is radical in relation to the way things are. (Foley, 2001, p. 72)
The first element of radical pedagogies that can inform art education is the examination of the power inherent in the traditional student-teacher relationship. By challenging this norm, the teacher’s role shifts from knower to co-learner. Teachers recognize the potential and knowledge of students and they begin to view learning as a collaborative endeavor. “If teaching is to be emancipatory, it must be democratic, it must entail a genuine sharing of power among learners and teachers” (p. 74). Although power is shared, the teacher does not completely resign his or her authority. “Freire argues that the teacher has to assume authority, but must do so without becoming authoritarian” (Weiler, 1991, p. 454). In this sense, students are given more control and their voices are heard, but the teacher uses his or her power in a way which facilitates and guides learning. With a change in power relations also comes a fundamental change in goals. Teachers aim to foster criticality in students. No longer passively receiving information, students learn how to think critically, how to examine their assumptions, and how to democratically construct knowledge. Similarly, when students begin to think critically, they begin to recognize their own potential to generate knowledge. “Along with the realization that knowledge is created to serve the interests of certain individuals and groups … comes an awareness of one’s own ability to participate in the creation of knowledge that serves interests more democratically” (Kilgore, 2001, p. 57). It is the teacher’s job to lead students to this awareness. “Empowerment means not giving power to people, but enabling them to exercise their power” (Cusack, 1995, p. 307). The teacher’s goal is “the exercising of power to help others exercise power” (p. 307). While passively receiving information can be disempowering, teachers need to work to empower students to agency. This signals a shift in teaching methods as well—
lecturing and “teaching” to dialogue. Through “genuine dialogue, in which each party listens to and learns from the other” (Foley, 2001, p. 75), each student has the opportunity to have his or her voice heard. Freire (Shor & Freire, 1987) explains:

Yes, dialogue is a challenge to existing domination. Also, with such a way of understanding dialogue, the object to be known is not an exclusive possession of one of the subjects doing the knowing, one of the people in the dialogue. In our case of education, knowledge of the object to be known is not the sole possession of the teacher, who gives knowledge to the students in a gracious gesture. Instead of this cordial gift of information to students, the object to be known mediates the two cognitive subjects. In other words, the object to be known is put on the table between the two subjects of knowing. They meet around it and through it for mutual inquiry [italics added]. (p. 14)

Teachers, then, facilitate democratic dialogue with students. Students and teachers engage in “mutual inquiry,” but to do this, teachers must first empower students and provide critical thinking tools and skills. While a major goal of radical pedagogies is fostering an ability to have control over one’s own learning, U3A members already have this control.

U3A members are already empowered. They are already exercising their agency. “People who are empowered have the awareness that they have life experience, skills, and talents to offer and the self-confidence to speak up and contribute their thoughts and suggestions” (Cusack, 1995, p. 309). This awareness is built into the underpinnings of the U3A which “capitalises on the accumulated knowledge, skills and interests of its own members” (Pile, 2006, p. 2). Erasing the student-teacher distinction and taking total control of their learning, U3A members seem to have realized some of the outcomes of radical pedagogies. As members carry out their own learning projects completely independent of formal educational structures, they shatter stereotypes of widespread dependence in later life.
Although radical pedagogies call for critical thinking, “critical social theorists do not stop at a language of critique. In order to provide students with a sustainable education, educators are encouraged to forge a language of transcendence, or what Giroux (1983) calls a ‘language of hope’” (Leonardo, 2004, p. 15). Once students are able to view their world with a critical eye, they should be encouraged to think about positive changes that they can make. Thinking critically about older adult education, we can see that education’s emphasis on childhood and young adulthood places adults in a disadvantaged position in educational discussions. Similarly, the emphasis on work-related education and training leaves older adults highly displaced in adult education. Critiquing it in this way shows older adults as virtually invisible in education—even in adult education. But thinking about a language of transcendence and hope, we can turn to the U3A, which not only provides us with a language of possibility (McDowell, 1996), but also provides us with an example of possibility.

Although radical pedagogies offer a more democratic way of thinking about older adult art education, does the U3A challenge these notions even further? Radical pedagogies speak of empowerment, but they still assume that students come to educational settings in a lower position than their teachers. They are not critical thinkers, they hold unexamined assumptions, and they don’t have the self-efficacy to take control of their learning. The critically-aware teacher must lead students to new understandings; opening their eyes and lifting them up to a state of awareness. There is still a teacher who is “better,” or at least more aware, than the students. So how different is the student-teacher relationship compared to traditional pedagogies? How radical are radical pedagogies? And most importantly to our discussion, how applicable are these notions to
older adult education and the agency of older adults? Is there a more appropriate framework that can shape our thinking?

**Critical Gerogogy.** Radical pedagogies on a whole have been developed based on assumptions of the learning and development of children and young adults. It may be possible that these assumptions should not be generalized to the education and learning of older adults. Looking to educational gerontology can provide new directions for older adult art education—directions which acknowledge agency.\(^\text{46}\) Here, the focus is on creating educational structures which provide “a more liberating and empowering form of education than that which is currently available for many older adults” (Battersby & Glendenning, 1992, p. 119). Critical educational gerontology, also called critical gerogogy, recognizes the agency of older learners and promotes their active involvement in all matters of their education. Formosa (2002) explains:

Critical gerogogy embraces a self-help culture towards a more decentralised and autonomous older adult education as power is shifted to older learners. Critical gerogogy is ultimately education for older persons by older persons [italics added]. Liberating education is only possible if the older adult educational movement organises itself, producing its tutors from its own ranks and developing educational concerns related to their own circumstances. Hence, older persons must become involved and control the coordination of older adult education. (p. 82)

So while radical pedagogies speak of giving some control to students, critical educational gerontology aims to put older adults in complete control over their learning. This undeniably describes the underlying philosophy of the U3A, which calls for education for and by its older members. When older adults are involved in educational discussions and policymaking, when they have control over what they learn and how to learn it, and when

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\(^\text{46}\) The U3A has not been informed by critical gerogogy. On the contrary, the U3A has informed critical gerogogy, and it is often cited as an example of older adults taking control of their learning (e.g., Formosa, 2002).
they are no longer judged by second age standards, older learners can be truly empowered. This is not just a lofty, unattainable ideal to strive for. The U3A provides evidence that it is possible. Can third age learning structures such as the U3A serve as models for older adult art education? What do critical educational gerontology and the U3A have to offer?

If, as art educators, we want to listen to the voices of older art learners and to include empowerment and agency in our discussions, these frameworks have much to offer. Currently, the literature rests on the idea that educational standards and the quality of art learning will suffer unless specially trained art educators are at the front of the classroom. The U3A and educational gerontology, on the other hand, rest on the ideas that older adults have experience and knowledge worth sharing and that they are capable of organizing their own education and learning. We must begin examining our assumptions of older adults. In the future, will we continue to perpetuate the myth of dependency or will we begin to recognize the agency of older adults?

Summary of Themes

The social aspects of education and learning, the notion of shared learning, and the agency of older adults represent major disconnects between the U3A and the literature. As educators, can we envision an empowering and social older adult art education that promotes sharing and recognizes the agency of older adults? Regardless of the answer, each disconnect does prompt us to critically examine our own assumptions and our current discourses. Many issues have been raised, yet none can be easily

47 While we need to examine our assumptions about the agency of older adults, future research could also investigate the assumptions held by older adults themselves. Stereotypes of older adults are held not only by younger generations, but by older ones as well. Do older adults feel that they and their peers are capable of directing their learning? Do they feel that they have agency? Are there ageist attitudes held by older adults that could hinder peer learning?
resolved. Multiple theories and viewpoints have been included, yet none are entirely appropriate to all of the diverse contexts in which older adult art learning occurs.

Borrowing from other fields can be beneficial, but we must examine the assumptions that they imply. Are there assumptions that do not apply to older learners? Fisher and Wolf (2000) address this concern:

The adult education component of educational gerontology brings with it different theory-practice uncertainties: Are assumptions about the adult learner sufficiently elastic to include older adults? Are adult education learning and program development models appropriate for older adults? How should these models be revised for use with a population that includes persons from all socioeconomic, educational, and personality backgrounds, to say nothing of a forty-plus-year age span? (p. 490)

The following sections explore and call for a rethinking of the assumptions that are embedded in our current discourses by examining the language of the literature, the emphasis on teacher training, and the roles available in older adult art education.

**Implications: Rethinking Older Adult Art Education**

Rethinking the Language We Use

Up to this point, I have focused mostly on what the literature says. In this section, I will explore how it is said. The five terms explored here are those that occur frequently within the literature and their frequency was discovered through the open coding of the literature. The language that is used stems from assumptions about older adults and about the goals of art education. Rethinking the language can help to expose some of these assumption and raise important questions about the purposes of older adult art education.

“Serious” Art Students. In the literature, various levels of art involvement are recognized, but it is the “serious” student that is elevated. A distinction is made between
those who pursue art as leisure and those who are serious. “A clear difference soon appears as to whether people are to remain hobbyists or attempt to function as artists” (Greenberg, 1987a, p. 5). Here, functioning as an artist is the goal. Being a hobbyist is something to move beyond. “Given the right circumstances, we might even find some who move beyond experiencing art as a hobby, making art a creative endeavor that fills their lives” (Greenberg, 1987b, p. 7). So who is a “serious” older art student? The literature provides some hints. First, it is someone who devotes substantial amounts of time to art making, “working the way adult artists to” (Greenberg, 1980a, p. 47). Second, it is someone who has clear educational goals and purposes (Davisson, Rush, & Fitzner, 1982). Finally, it is someone who sees him or herself as a serious student and is “motivated to pursue art in a professional manner” (p. 139). While a serious student is one who becomes highly involved in art and works like an artist, there has also been an attempt to categorize older art students based on their levels of seriousness. Models have been created which distinguish the most serious (creative) students from the least serious (cautious and unconfident) students (Bloom, 1980; Lokken, 1980). Another typology relates seriousness to context, with serious students studying art in formal contexts. With descending levels of formality comes a decrease in seriousness (Bloom, 1982). An attitude of seriousness should also be instilled in children and young adults, facilitating their transition to serious art involvement in older adulthood. Hoffman and Greenberg (1993) ask us to consider the following question: “Are we transmitting, to the young, healthy attitudes about aging and art which will motivate them in a desire to approach arts study as a serious, professional pursuit [italics added] during the adult years?” (p. 131).
Although the literature sees developing serious students as a goal, within the U3A, all levels of involvement are respected. Accordingly, much variation is evident among art and craft members, from those who work only at group meetings to those who are highly involved in between sessions. As U3A members “do their own thing,” they are free to follow their interests to whatever level they choose. Learning together “without the stress of academic rivalry” and meeting in “uninhibiting and unostentatious places” (Midwinter, 1987, p. 16), the emphasis is on creating an informal environment where members support themselves in their endeavors, regardless of seriousness. Here, informality is not equated to “less serious.” There are, indeed, members who approach their subjects very seriously, devoting large amounts of time. For others, involvement in their subjects occurs only at U3A meetings. All levels of interaction are respected equally. In some groups, such as Quilting and Embroidery, emphasis is placed on all members contributing. This is something that they take very seriously (“Well, haven’t you brought anything to show us?”). In Handicrafts I, involvement in charity projects in serious business. For some, the seriousness of social involvement and companionship is paramount. In the U3A, all art and craft members joined their art or craft groups for some reason or another. Distinguishing between pursuing art and craft “seriously” or as one activity among many is irrelevant. Those pursuing their involvements more intensely are not seen as better than those pursuing it more leisurely.

Art education needs to rethink the elevation of the serious student. Is one better than the other? Should we value seriousness more? Perhaps we can look to the field of leisure studies, which distinguishes casual leisure (which is passive, such as taking a nap or watching television) from serious leisure (which is active, such as volunteering or
pursuing an interest) (e.g., Stebbins, 2001). In this context, both lifelong learning (Jones & Symon, 2001) and voluntarism (Parker, 1992) are seen as serious leisure pursuits. Thinking about it in this way, nearly all older adult students are “serious.” Rather than making a distinction between serious and non-serious art students, it may be a better policy to think of all students as serious. By doing this, we can value all students’ efforts. All motivations—whether artistic, leisure, personal, or social—become valid. We should rethink the hierarchy of serious students as “better” than those with different goals and motivations, and move to a stance that includes all older art students.

“Opportunity.” “Opportunity” is a catch-word that is frequently used in the literature. We call for “quality program opportunities” (Beck, 1975, p. 43) and for “the opportunity to benefit from the expertise of trained professionals” (Barret, 1993, p. 139). We stress the need for opportunities to explore art in various ways; through discussing art, art history, and aesthetics as well as art making (Barret, 1998; Greenberg, 1985a; Jefferson, 1987). We advocate for the opportunity for intellectual stimulation (Barret, 1993) and “an opportunity to develop skills and interests, as well as self concept” (Hoffman, 1975a, p. 62). While the term “opportunity” is sprinkled throughout the literature and is applied to numerous facets of art education, it is most often found in relation to creativity and expression. It is common to read art educators advocating for “opportunities to transmit ideas and emotions” (Hoffman, 1992, p. 112) and “opportunities for many elders to express feelings, reminiscences, and wisdom based on life experience” (Barret, 1998, p. 123). We must offer “creative opportunities” (Greenberg, 1987a, p. 100) and “wonderful opportunities to be creative” (p. 5). “Those

48 Future research can also explore whether older adults make the distinction between “serious” and “non-serious” students. Are older art learners interested in “serious” study in the way that it is defined in the literature, or are they more interested in art and craft learning as a hobby or leisure activity?
who are exploring visual arts want skills and opportunities to express themselves, not simply for leisure but for aesthetic experiences which can be part of their lives” (Greenberg, 1985b, p. 213). “People need many opportunities for creativity” (Greenberg, 1980a, p. 42). “Opportunities to be creative” (Barret, 1993, p. 134) are put forth as the most important opportunities we can offer as art educators. Although the word “opportunity” is used extensively, the opportunities implied are limited. We offer opportunities to participate in our notions of quality programming; opportunities for the types of experiences we feel are worthy (e.g., serious art study, a discipline-based approach, creative self-expression). Nowhere in the reviewed literature is “opportunity” used in relation to craft learning or social needs and motivations.

In the U3A, opportunity is interpreted a bit differently. Since all available opportunities are created and maintained by members, they see “options” as invaluable. The past Stamford U3A Chairman states, “It is very important for all U3A[s] to maximise the choice of activities available to their members.” A craft leader notes the importance of “the opportunity actually to do things that you haven’t been doing, but are interested in.” Seeing the third age as a “time of opportunity,” members are attracted to the opportunities and options available through the U3A. They have the opportunity to make the U3A suitable to their needs. They are not limited to a narrow view (or someone else’s view) of what their U3A can offer.

In art education, we need to rethink this rhetoric. Perhaps a terminology shift from “opportunity” to “options” will highlight the need to expand what is currently available. While we may see bestowing the gift of expression on older students as the best opportunity that we have to offer, some older adults are simply not interested in
pursuing their art studies in a “serious” manner or “expressing themselves.” Rather than providing opportunities to engage only in what we think is important, we need to provide options for older adults to engage in what they think is important.\footnote{Future research should investigate what types of opportunities and options older adults are interested in.}

*Older Adults as “Resources.”* Older adults, with their vast and diverse life experiences, are portrayed in the literature as having the potential to serve as resources to art education. It is stressed that programs will benefit and “generally gain from older people’s wealth of experience” (Terry, 1987, p. vii). Older students’ experiences can be shared with other classmates and older adults should be seen as advisors for planning programs (Greenberg, 1987a). Older adults themselves are important resources within the classroom, but the literature also illustrates many ways in which they can be important resources to younger generations. Intergenerational art programs capitalize on this notion (Alexenberg & Benjamin, 2004; Hausman, 1998; La Porte, 2000, 2002). Through these programs, members of different generational cohorts (typically, but not exclusively, older adults with young children or teenagers) come together to work on a specific art project or activity. In these contexts, older generations share their life experiences with younger generations. Sometimes their past experiences and cultural understandings become the subjects for artworks. Other times, they are a resource for discussing art and sharing their personal histories. In these contexts, older adults serve as resources for subject matter, art interpretation, and the transmission of historical and cultural values and understandings. La Porte (2000) describes how “the oral histories of … older adults, elicited from interviews, storytelling, and discussions about art, can become a valuable asset to art education” (p. 40). She (2002) notes how “the elders were primary sources for oral histories” and that “Kauppinen (1988) supported this concept,
that older adults can serve as resources for understanding art through their familiarity with events from history” (pp. 64-65). While intergenerational programs provide a unique space for generations to come together and interact, the notion of older adults as “resources” is narrowly defined, focusing on the past: they are historical resources. I am certainly not invalidating the intergenerational transmission of cultural and historical understandings; however, I am suggesting that the “resources” of older adults are not only situated in the past.

… many people tend to assume that elders, having accumulated so much experience and wisdom over many years, are more connected to the past than the present. To the contrary, Rosina Tucker, a 104-year old civil rights activist who appears in The Grand Generation (Wagner, Zeitlin, & Hunt, 1990), … is fond of telling about the time a young man asked her what the world was like in her day, to which she replied: “My day? This is my day!” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett et al., 2006, p. 33)

In the U3A, members serve as resources for every aspect of each U3A undertaking. Penny explains, “500 members, 60 groups, at least 10-15 outings a year, two annual trips to foreign parts. Not bad for a bunch of senior volunteers.” At meetings, events, and luncheons, members plan everything, as well as provide the entertainment. The speakers for the lectures at the monthly General Meetings occasionally come from within the membership. The woman who delivered the Shakespeare talk is from Oakham U3A, and in March, when the planned speaker on Bomb Disposal had to postpone at the last minute, a Stamford U3A member delivered a lecture. As the former Director of Education in the Falkland Islands, he showed slides from his time there, covering everything from small villages to the birds and wildlife to interesting facts about the schools. Beyond Stamford U3A and into larger organizational structures, the Harlaxton U3A Summer School is organized and led by U3A members,
and their resources are carried into the community through volunteering for the Day Centre for older adults and the Books on Wheels program. Some members also help in the schools, listening to children read and helping with other projects. In the U3A, members are resources for all of their activities and endeavors, and their roles are located in the present, not in the past.

The notion of older adults as resources is deeply rooted in literature from the voluntary sector, where older adults are considered a “valuable resource” (Chambré, 1987, p. 2), a “vast resource,” and an “untapped resource” (Cnaan & Cwikel, 1992, pp. 125-126). They are a “rich resource” since “there are obvious benefits to society in capitalizing on the skills and talents of retired people” (Battaglia & Metzer, 2000, p. 6). While extolling older adults as potential resources, the voluntary literature also questions this rhetoric, asking whether seeing older adults as “resources” could lead to an exploitation of older volunteers and their unpaid services (Cnaan & Cwikel, 1992).

Similarly, in educational gerontology, the notion of older adults as resources has been retrenched and transformed into advocacy for a participant-led, self-help model of education (like the U3A). Recognizing older adults’ resources and their agency leads to the acknowledgement that these resources can be effectively used amongst themselves to their own benefit (e.g., Formosa, 2002; Withnall, 1994).

In art education, we should rethink older adults as resources and expand the dialogue beyond younger generations. Although legitimizing older adults’ importance to art education’s childhood focus, it denies other potentials. In the U3A, resources are shared among members and within the local community. Their pooled resources allow for all of their endeavors. In the art education literature, older adults can be invaluable
resources in terms of children and the past, but amongst themselves, the guidance of a trained art educator is necessary. Rethinking this disconnect can allow us to expand our notions of older adults as “resources.” Are they valuable only to younger generations? Are their potentials only situated in contexts of history and in the past?

“Creativity.” The literature repeatedly states that art educators need to ensure that creative experiences are available to the older population since there are many benefits associated with creativity in old age (e.g., Dawson & Baller, 1980; Greenberg, 1985b). Opportunities must be made available for older adults to unlock their creative potential (Kim, 1980), and we must work to “reactivate the dormant creativity possessed by the elderly population” (Hoffman, 1975a, p. 62). For some, creative activities were put on hold during their years in employment. For others, art study in older adulthood represents the first opportunity for creativity. Hoffman (1975b) states, “For many it is their first truly creative experience” (p. 22). While art educators generally agree that creativity is an essential ingredient of art studies, how do they conceptualize “creativity?”

Davisson and Rush (1981) define creativity as “a conceptual ability to be original by forming new combinations of concepts” (p. 21). Greenberg (1987a) offers a similar definition:

Creativity can be said to involve the shifting around of elements in new ways to enhance their relationship to one another. Divergent thinking allows people to recombine their visual ideas as they learn new skills and different ways of working. (p. 80)

Both of these definitions refer to thinking in novel and original ways. The products of this type of creative activity include “unique forms” (Greenberg, 1985b, p. 221) and “authentic works of art” (Barret, 1998, p. 122). Few art educators have offered definitions of creativity, but those that have tend to exemplify novelty and uniqueness.
Jones (1980a) warns that the emphasis on “new” should be context-bound and interpreted differently in relation to older art students. She explains:

Creativity, or the production of the new and the significant, is not an either/or proposition, but depends on the context …. In the elderly educational context, and probably in any educational context, creativity should also include production of ideas and art products that are new and significant to the individual [italics added]. (p. 25)

Here, generating original ideas does not mean that older adults should be expected to develop ideas, concepts, and ways of working of monumental significance to the art world. They should, however, be expected and encouraged to work in ways that are new to them. This more open definition of creativity resonates with notions of self-expressionism in art education. Art educators who focus on self-expression tend to see creativity as a trait that all children possess. The teacher’s main task, then, is to provide environments where students can freely express themselves and realize their full creative potential. Siegesmund (1998) states, “Expressionists contend that the primary mandate of art education is to protect and nurture the autonomous, imaginative life of the child. Free expression is the desired outcome of art instruction” (p. 200). Viewing creativity as an internal trait and judging creativity on a personal level expands notions of who can be creative. Applied to adults, these factors also aid in recognizing creativity in those who are not professional artists. Overall, however, few definitions of creativity have been put forth in relation to older adults. Although little has been written in the older adult art education literature about what creativity actually is, what doesn’t count as creativity has been described.

Creativity cannot be realized through “busy work.”

One-shot “busy work” experiences may suit a small percentage of people, but even this group, given the opportunity to set higher sights, will realize they are
capable of more than they have been offered in the way of creative opportunities. (Greenberg, 1987a, p. 53)

Creativity cannot come from copying.

There are a variety of traditional drawing and painting techniques which could be used to encourage creative experimentation, but because of their ready availability are often utilized only to copy photographs, postcards, ready-made stencils … stifling the urge to be creative. (Hoffman, 1992, pp. 112-113)

Crafts are not creative. “Widely practiced in many ways, crafts in its broadest definition encompasses many traditional areas which limit creativity” (p. 121). Included in this are projects that rely on “previously designed patterns” (p. 121) and craft forms that “allow for little variance” and utilize “preconceived plans” or a “traditional pattern” (p. 122). Mold poured ceramics and patterns limit creativity since the emphasis is placed entirely on the product, removing a focus on creative processes. Clements (1980) explains:

The most disruptive competition the creative art teacher has to deal with are ceramic molds and patterns of any sort. The more they are available, the less the seniors will appreciate creative art. In every center where there was an active mold program, the fewest people were interested in being creative. These people valued only the machine-made look that molds give; they could not see value in the creative process, in what was new to be learned. (pp. 65-66)

Here, the creative art teacher needs to guide students to creative activities, and to lead them away from the uncreative projects (such as ceramic molds) that they choose on their own. Like ceramic molds, craft kits also focus on the product, leaving no room for creativity (Barret, 1993; Greenberg, 1987a). Finally, a distinction should be made between art education and art therapy, since the former has creativity as a goal, while the latter does not (Greenberg, 1987a). Hoffman (1980b) explains, “The therapeutic rationale, however, over-powers the intellectually creative act” (p. 7).

Although the development and potential for creativity is lauded as an important rationale for offering art programs for older adults, coherence in what we mean by
“creativity” is lacking. Jennings (1977) calls for us to consider our definition of creativity. “Initially the means must be devised of defining creative skills … in the lives of those who are not professional artists” (p. 10). While we need to consider what creativity means in older adult art education, we should begin by asking what it means to older adults.

During the interviews with U3A art and craft members, I asked the question: “How would you define creativity?” Some responses were similar to art education’s focus on novelty and originality, but they tended to go beyond this, personalizing their definitions to their endeavors. A craft group member who is active in quilting and patchwork explains, “I suppose it’s taking something quite ordinary and making it into something that is unique—and different—or expressing your own feelings about things. It’s sort of, you’re creating something out of other things.” Another craft member who is highly involved in knitting and paper crafts described creativity as, “I suppose it’s just making something—making something beautiful out of a small amount of materials, really.” An art group member who paints flowers and birds from looking at paintings and photographs describes, “Even if it’s only deepening up a color that you see and you’re putting a deeper color because you like it better. You are actually—you’re expressing yourself more with art.” Members also note that creativity is something that is personal; everyone has the potential to be creative. “Well, it’s just something that comes from yourself.” “So creativity is something that comes from inside people.” “Well, I think everybody’s got a creative streak in them.” Just like in the literature, some members, in defining creativity, also defined what isn’t creative. An art member who typically paints
small watercolor landscapes from her imagination feels that copying is not creative. She explains:

Something that is from within you. It has got to be from within you. To create something—it can’t just be copying to me. It has really got to be you doing this, whatever it is, a skill with your hands. Not copying a picture—creating it … So I think in just a few words, it’s something that comes from within you, not involving anyone else.

While this member works from her imagination, another member who frequently copies from other paintings includes copying in his definition of creativity. He states, “Creativity? Well, it can produce your own format and you’re creating something which is yours and not other people’s. Maybe a copy of somebody else’s, but you’re still creating that painting or drawing yourself.” While the two previous definitions seem contradictory, an important similarity can be found among all definitions. All of the members’ understandings of creativity include their ways of working. The quilter speaks of “creating something out of other things.” The paper crafter describes making something beautiful from few materials. The “copying” painters include just changing a color or just creating something oneself. Jones (1980b) addresses these inclusive notions of creativity in a section entitled “How creative are they?:”

Older adult students consider themselves creative in art, however. They simply measure their achievement against themselves or their immediate environment rather than against larger exterior standards. Talking with the elderly about their art will reveal that what appear to be very ordinary objects and images often embody very special meanings to them. (p. 18)

We need to rethink what we mean by “creativity,” starting by understanding what older learners believe it to be. While a number of researchers have attempted to define creativity (e.g., Beghetto & Kaufman, 2007; Gibson, 2005; Götz, 1981), we need to ensure that “official” and academic definitions are not too narrow to include the ways in
which older adults on a whole prefer to work. Agostinone-Wilson (2001) stresses that “art educators should examine many long-held assumptions about art, creativity, and originality as they relate to older women, especially those who practice crafting” (p. 28). Through this, we may find that many of the activities that we previous felt were uncreative are actually perceived as creative by older art learners. This potential for mismatched definitions is explained by Jones (1980b):

Creative behavior will be evident, but the university-trained teacher will have to be open to and be able to foster many more conceptions of creativity than those encountered in his or her own training. When the elderly student insists on using traditional subject matter, and the teacher feels that such behavior is “uncreative,” the problem may lie with the teacher. (p. 18)

Learning to expand our notions of creativity and to understand what it means to older adults is an important step in rethinking what creativity means in older adult art education. In the U3A, creativity is defined in simple terms. Creativity—to them—is not something lofty and ethereal. It is not beyond their reach, but is conceived of in realistic terms, encompassing their own activities and interests. Listening to the voices of older art learners is the first step in rethinking and expanding our conceptions of what is and what isn’t creative.

“Quality.” The term “quality” is ever present throughout the literature. First, we stress the need for quality art programming based on the growth of the older population. “As the relative size of the elderly population in our society expands, the demand for quality art education and supporting research data could increase proportionately” (Fitzner, 1980b, p. 74). “As the number of older adults continues to mushroom, the need for quality art programs will also increase” (Barret, 1998, p. 125). Overall, older adults are looking for high quality programs to become involved in (Davisson & Rush, 1981;
Fitzner, 1980a). Along with the growth of the older population, there will also be an accompanying increase in the educational levels of older adults. These more educated older adults will demand programming of the highest quality (Greenberg, 1987b; Lewis, 1987b). It is art education’s responsibility to develop and provide such opportunities as we are best equipped to do so. Jones (1980c) states, “Art educators, with their considerable experience in research and program planning, could do much to foster the quality and growth of art programs for older adults” (p. 153). While we are best suited to improve the quality of programs, the reality is that there are many programs in existence that are in serious need of improvement. In 1982, Davisson, Rush, and Fitzner lamented the “dearth of quality art education programs nationwide” (p. 129). Ten years later, in 1992, Hoffman raised similar concerns. “Unfortunately, at this time, there seem to be a large number of such poor-quality offerings infringing on the creativity of participating older adults” (p. 3). The only way that these programs can rise from their current condition to become high quality is through art education’s involvement.

Since most programs suffer from the lack of a qualified teacher, art educators need to step in and occupy new roles. A qualified art teacher is a prerequisite for a quality art program (Greenberg, 1980b, 1985a, 1985b; Hoffman & Greenberg, 1993; Jefferson, 1987). “Qualified professional people will need to be hired to offer quality programs” (Greenberg, 1980a, p. 42). Although it is stressed that a qualified teacher is key, what other elements are necessary for a quality program? While never explicitly stated, the literature offers some suggestions.

First, a quality art program must account for the needs and interests of its older students (Hoffman, 1975a). Second, a quality program must have a decent budget; large
enough to support the hire of a qualified teacher and to provide quality art materials and supplies (Barret, 1998). Third, a quality program should offer a variety of avenues for exploring the arts—not only through art making, but also through discussing art and learning about art history (Barret, 1993; Jefferson, 1987). Outlining two “goals for quality art programs,” Jefferson (1987) calls for both a varied approach and a qualified teacher:

1. Art education programs in the visual arts should provide programs of art experiences that are balanced to include the study of aesthetics, art criticism, art history, and art production.
2. Program planning and art instruction shall be conducted by qualified teachers of art. (p. 34)

Finally, a quality program should be meaningful to its older students. Greenberg (1987a) explains, “Quality programs enhance the lives of the participants; they may feel better … they may get a new lease on life” (p. 53). While the literature provides some suggestions for what a quality program is, it also discusses what a quality program is not.

First, a quality program should be approached as education, not recreation (Hoffman, 1975b). Learning should be primary, and art should not be seen as a means of simply filling the time. Second, a quality program should never reinforce ageist stereotypes (Greenberg, 1987a). Finally, a quality program should never adopt a “production-line approach” where the emphasis is on the product instead of the process (Bloom, 1980, 1982). Craft kits and copying images should never appear in a quality art program (Barret, 1993; Greenberg, 1985b, 1987a; Hoffman, 1980b, 1992; Lewis, 1987b). Anything that limits creativity should be avoided in order to ensure the highest standard of quality.
Despite the lack of a clear definition of “quality,” it is possibly the most commonly used word in the older adult art education literature. We promote the “development of quality art education opportunities for older Americans” (Fitzner, 1980b, p. 77), “high-quality arts education” (Thursz, 1992, p. xii), and “quality interaction through the arts” (Hoffman, 1992, p. xiii). We speak of “quality visual arts programs” (Hubalek, 1998, p. 83), “the highest possible degree of quality instruction in visual arts programs” (Jefferson, 1987, p. 33), and “developing quality programs” (Barret, 1998, p. 117).

… It is just NOT possible to offer a quality art program without adequate funds for good materials as well as for hiring qualified teachers. I cannot emphasize enough the value of a qualified person to do the job of teaching, and would equate a quality program with a quality teacher. (Greenberg, 1987a, p. 13)

In short, the word is used repeatedly with little definition or clarification. It is time to rethink our goal of “quality art education.”

“The term quality education is by no means unproblematic,” states González (2004), who prompts us to question “quality.” “We might begin by asking ‘What is quality education, for whom is it ‘quality,’ and, more important, quality education for what purpose?’” (p. 17). To begin questioning “quality” in older adult art education, we can turn to early childhood education (e.g., Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2002; Tobin, 2005). Due to this field’s marginal status in relation to education’s K-12 focus, scholars in early childhood education have lamented the quality of current programs and have advocated for the offering of high-quality programs. Beyond the obvious age difference, these assertions should seem strangely familiar. The main difference, however, is that early childhood educators have begun to question what they mean by “quality,” while older adult art educators have not. “Quality is difficult to argue against—who would
resist the idea that all children deserve high quality early childhood experiences and, more importantly, that we could, with sufficient will and discipline, provide them?” (Graue, 2005, p. 521). Acknowledging that “the construct of quality, while accepted popularly, is not fully defined conceptually or empirically” (p. 521), questions have been raised. “What is quality? …. Whose definitions of quality in early childhood programs are most important?” (Lee & Walsh, 2005, p. 403). Addressing the “problem with quality,” Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (2002) note that early childhood educators have:

- identified the importance of the process of defining quality—who is involved and how it is done—and questioned how that process has operated in the past, arguing that it has been dominated by a small group of experts, to the exclusion of a wide range of other stakeholders with an interest in early childhood institutions;
- understood quality to be a subjective, value-based, relative and dynamic concept, with the possibility of multiple perspectives or understandings of what quality is;
- argued that work with quality needs to be contextualized, spatially and temporally, and to recognize cultural and other significant forms of diversity. (p. 5-6)

Looking to this field, to see how quality has been understood, deconstructed, and questioned, can guide older adult art education. What issues have been raised? What do we need to rethink?

Turning back to the U3A, is its art and craft program quality? Not by art education’s standards! The groups engage in nearly all activities and approaches that should never appear in a quality program (e.g., copying, craft kits, focusing on the product). What is interesting about this, however, is that during their day-to-day activities and in the interviews, everyone praised their U3A and their art or craft group. Considering that in the national U3A survey, 92% of members replied that they would miss the U3A if it ceased to exist (Third Age Trust, 2001), it seems that members must be
satisfied with the “quality” of their U3A experiences. Remember the Stamford member who wished that the U3A had been available to her parents? I strongly doubt that she would feel this way if she judged the U3A to be of poor quality. The disconnect here is our notions of quality imposed on theirs; our second age standards imposed on theirs of the third age. Whose notions of “quality” are most important?

A recent study of the U3A’s relationship with “established” universities and local governments (Huang, 2006) suggested that:

It is doubtful that all voluntary group leaders in British U3As can lead their groups to achieve the basic purpose professor Laslett advocated. For example, Van der Veen (1990, p. 101) criticizes the quality of teaching and learning in U3As as follows: “… the difficulty is to control both the quality of the educational experience provided and also the quality of the course itself ….” (p. 837)

The author recommends teacher training and the use of university professors “with a view to providing a higher standard and quality of education for older people” (p. 841). The problem here is that in the U3A national survey, only 2% of members felt that the U3A needed improvement through a “higher standard of tuition” (Third Age Trust, 2001). Because “Second Age principles cannot be sufficient for Third Age purposes” (Laslett, 1989, p. 139), second age notions of “quality” cannot be forced upon third age programs. What does this mean in terms of quality? If it is second age educators that define quality education, how can third age purposes be represented? Is it possible that they can’t? Early childhood educators Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (2002) state, “Quality cannot be reconceptualized to accommodate complexity, values, diversity, subjectivity, multiple perspectives, and other features of a world understood to be both uncertain and diverse” (p. 105). If quality cannot account for context and for difference, should we continue advocating and striving for it?
Working with complexity, values, diversity, subjectivity, multiple perspectives and temporal and spatial context means taking another position which understands the world in a different postmodern way and which will be productive of new discourses, concepts and questions—not struggling to reconstruct quality. The problem with quality is not really a problem once we recognize that it is not a neutral concept, but that *it is a concept which we can choose to take or leave* [italics added]. (p. 105)

In older adult art education, should we take it or leave it? If we choose to take it, we must question it. We must ask what quality means to older art learners. Could a quality program be one that is tailored to students’ notions of quality?

If we choose to leave it, rather than focusing on standards of quality, we could shift to discourses that emphasize “accessible” and “participatory” programming. A push for accessibility would advocate for more options for older adults—not just to participate in what we deem a “quality program,” but to have a range of choices. In some locales, particularly urban areas and college towns, a wide array of program options are available. In other locations, virtually no options exist. Insisting on a “quality” program, with a sufficient budget and a highly qualified, university-trained teacher, will not be feasible in many locations. It only serves to limit options. Similarly, by advocating for more participatory programs, we can move to a view that allows students to take responsibility of their own art learning. Older learners can become more instrumental in their endeavors, ensuring that their third age voices are not overshadowed by second age “quality control.” Rather than asking “is this quality,” we can ask if older adult art education is accessible and if older students’ voices are represented. We can begin to move away from universal standards and towards a view that allows for local and contextual factors to play an important part. With the diversity of the older population, it is unlikely that comprehensive and generalized standards will be sufficient. We need
discourses that expand—not limit—what older adult art education can be. It is time that we rethink “quality.”

Discussion: Rethinking Language. With all of the previous terms that were discussed, the language of the literature alludes to starting where students are and lifting them up to our levels and our standards. They may come to art class casually, but we should strive to turn them into “serious” art students. They may attend a craft class led by an unqualified volunteer, but once they see our “quality” creative art program and all that it has to offer them, they’ll never look back. The problem here is that we’re imposing our second age definitions and terminology onto their third age learning.

“Younger people, however kind and caring, cannot get into the minds of older people and truly know what they want and need” (Bentley, 1988, p. 51). “More than ever, therefore, do educators need to lose their ageist ideas about what kind of things older learners need or would like” (Rennie & Young, 1984, p. 93). Questions of whose knowledge counts must be asked. We need to seek out older learners’ views on their learning and education. When our views differ, we need to aim to understand older students, not change them or “better” them. Ball-Gisch (1998) states:

> Arts educators must begin to accept a broader definition of what art [and creativity, seriousness, and quality] is in order to meet these students where they are with their beliefs about art. I long ago realized that I had to lose my university “elitist” position on what art is and what art isn’t in order to communicate with my students. (p. 62)

 Rather than continuing to maintain narrow and “elitist” ideals, definitions, and conceptions of older adult art programming, we need to broaden them. A study on public participation in arts and cultural events (Walker, Scott-Melnyk, & Sherwood, 2002) found that defining arts and culture traditionally (e.g., the fine arts—ballet, opera,
classical music, and art museum attendance) led to the usual results—participation in the arts is on the decline. But they also examined participation using a broader definition, which encompassed more popular arts and cultural events (e.g., rock concerts, arts festivals, and craft shows). Using the broader definition led to a much less bleak picture. “People participate in arts and culture at much higher rates than have been previously measured when a new, broader definition of participation is used” (p. 23). People are participating no more or less. The difference simply lies in the definitions used. We should begin to acknowledge, understand, and respect the levels and patterns of art participation of all older adults, not just attend to those students and programs that fit our limited definitions. This has enormous implications for older adult art education and the definitions and language we use. Beyond questioning whether our language is limiting or exclusive, it is also important to question whether we are reinforcing or challenging ageist attitudes and stereotypes through the language we use. Turning to language studies and the philosophy of language (specifically through the Whorfian hypothesis) we can begin to see how our language affects our thinking and shapes the field. “The essence of the Whorfian hypothesis is that the structure of the language one speaks serves to condition particular ways of thinking; in effect, language conditions thought” (Holtgraves & Kashima, 2008, pp. 83-84). If language conditions thought, what kind of thinking are we fostering? Can we begin to alter our current thinking simply by examining and altering the language we use? For decades, feminist scholars have

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50 Similar to sexism and racism, ageism is discrimination based on age. Butler (1989) defines ageism as “negative attitudes and practices that lead to discrimination against the aged” (p. 139). See Nelson (2005) for an introduction to ageism. See Nussbaum et al. (2005) for an overview of ageist language, and take a look at the Facts on Aging Quizzes (n.d.) to test your knowledge of aging and ageist stereotypes.

51 The Whorfian hypothesis is also called the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis or the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.
contended that altering sexist language is a fundamental step in working towards equality\textsuperscript{52} (e.g., Bing, 1992; Khosroshahi, 1989; Kramer, Thorne, & Henley, 1978).

… the words we use can also reinforce current realities when they are sexist (or racist or heterosexist). Words are the tools of thought. We can use words to maintain the status quo or to think in new ways—which in turn creates the possibility of a new reality. (Kleinman, 2002, p. 300)

Are there ageist attitudes that are maintained and reinforced in older adult art education writings? Critically examining (and then possibly changing) how we characterize and talk about older adults can help to challenge the status quo. Expanding our definitions and critically examining the language we use is the first step to creating a more inclusive, accessible, and reflective art education as well as one that is less ageist.\textsuperscript{53}

Rethinking Teachers: Qualifications, Training, and Retiring

Advocacy for teacher training and discussions of who is qualified to teach are prevalent within the literature. This section will describe what the literature says and raise questions stemming from the U3A and the literature of other fields.

Qualified Teachers. Equating a quality program to a qualified teacher is a persistent theme in the literature (e.g., Greenberg, 1980a; Michael, 1998). It is

\textsuperscript{52} A major theme in these writings is the use of the “androgy nous” language (which is actually masculine) to refer to both men and women (e.g., “the common man” and “mankind” are meant to include women within masculine terms). The problem that is raised is that through this type of language, women become marginalized. They are located on the margins of the “person” category, while men are central (Khosroshahi, 1989). When the word “he” is used to imply either a man or a woman, the mental image that most often comes to mind is actually of a man. Are there parallels to older adult education here? What about the terms learner and student? Are older adults marginal in these categories?

\textsuperscript{53} Examining ageism in the older adult art education literature is an important direction for future research. Whitbourne & Hulicka (1990) provide an excellent model. Documenting ageist language in psychology textbooks over a 40 year period, they present not only examples of ageism, but also how it has changed over time. Adopting a similar framework in art education could help to document changes and suggest possibilities for the future. If our literature is found to have ageist undertones, proposing non-ageist alternatives can have a profound effect on how we write about, talk about, and think about art and older populations.
impossible to have a quality program without a qualified art educator. But who is a qualified teacher?

According to the literature, a qualified art educator is one who takes older students seriously (Greenberg, 1980a), promotes meaningful artistic endeavors (Greenberg, 1985a), and encourages learning (Durr, Fortin, & Leptak, 1992). A qualified teacher inspires students (Greenberg, 1987a), instills in them a desire to think and work creatively (Hausman, 1998), and is knowledgeable in a wide range of media (Greenberg, 1985b). While all of these attributes of a qualified teacher are helpful in creating a quality program, what makes an art educator qualified to teach older adults?

Jefferson (1987) has outlined four elements of a quality instructor:

1. The adult educator should possess a thorough knowledge of art and art history. Adults need the opportunity to look at works of art of quality, the chance to talk about such works, and the opportunity to create work of their own.
2. The adult educator should possess the skills necessary to develop and implement a curriculum for the visual arts with suitable instructional strategies and a meaningful program for adult learners.
3. The adult educator should possess experience and/or have completed course work in general psychology, as well as educational psychology and gerontology. The instructor needs an understanding of the nature of older learners, their capabilities and their limitations; and be able to plan a program that will meet their individual psychological and social needs.
4. The adult educator should possess a working knowledge of the nature of varied instructional sites. Adult education programs are offered in a multitude of settings, from fully equipped art studio spaces to multi-purpose activity rooms; and through a wide range of educational and community sponsorship. (p. 34)

Beyond an understanding of art and how to teach art, a qualified teacher must also have a solid understanding of art in community settings, program planning, and gerontology (e.g., Greenberg, 1985b, 1987a; Hubalek, 1998). This notion of a qualified teacher with
an academic background in art, education, and aging stands in direct contrast to the “qualifications” necessary to lead a group in the U3A.

Rather than being academically trained, the only requirement for leading a U3A art or craft group (or any U3A group) is an interest. “No special qualities are required apart from a personal interest in the subject.” “You don’t need to be an expert to lead a group either. Again an interest in the subject and the willingness to do some work is all that is needed.” “I think that having a qualification in something doesn’t make you necessarily good at that thing …. But somebody with an enthusiasm for their subject, you know, is much better than long qualifications.” “A Group Leader is NOT expected to be: necessarily an expert, different from members of the Group, or feel that he/she has to be knowledgeable about something.” Because the leader is not always an expert, the emphasis is not placed on a teacher imparting his or her knowledge to the rest of the members. The emphasis is on an equal sharing of what one knows. “The group is just—whoever’s done it teaches the rest of the group.” “Really, the U3A groups are self-help groups, and everybody who’s got a good idea contributes it to the group.” “There’s an input—people want to share their ideas.” Although this approach of “casual sharing of information” works to put older adults in control of their own learning, it has not gone without criticism. Huang (2006) equates the lack of “qualified” teachers to lower quality educational environments. “[T]he British [U3A] does not attempt to achieve high academic standards by recruiting university staff. This lack of effort may have an adverse effect upon the quality of teaching and learning for older people in the British U3A” (p. 834). “It is really possible that the group leaders who voluntarily come from the membership without any qualification do not have the ability to lead the groups or to
communicate with their group members” (p. 835). The disconnect here lies in foisting second age notions of qualifications for teaching upon third age notions of learning. Laslett (1989) warns against this, raising concerns about the “tendency for those in the Second Age to assume that persons in their positions should control every aspect of educational activity, even those set up for themselves by those who have retired” (italics added)” (p. 172). Some important questions should be asked here. Is having a “qualified” second age teacher necessary in all situations? Should the standards of qualification be different in third age structures?

Ruby, the Art I member that offers advice during group meetings, approached me at the end of one of my observations of the group. A bit concerned, she asked me how Art I compares to the other art groups. Is there something that she could do differently? Is there anything that is done in the other groups that she should be doing? Is there anything that she could do to improve? What is most interesting about this is that she didn’t ask me these questions in relation to my second age educational and academic background. She didn’t want to know how the group measured up to second age standards; this was irrelevant. She asked these questions in relation to the other third age groups. Is it possible that in some older adult educational situations, second age qualifications and standards are inappropriate? Whose interests are served in setting the criteria for a qualified teacher? And most importantly, when the criteria for who is qualified to teach are met only through academic studies and teacher training, what implications does this have for who holds knowledge and who has the ability to share and create knowledge? I am not suggesting that training is useless or irrelevant, but I am urging a rethinking of who can teach, who can lead, and what qualities are necessary in
older adult art education contexts. We must recognize that these qualities and “qualifications” must differ depending on the setting and the context. Are the qualifications the same in both highly formal educational settings and informal learning situations? Can an art program be “quality” without a “qualified” teacher? Is one only qualified through proper and systematic training administered by art education departments?

The Emphasis on Teacher Training. Along with the literature’s assertion that a quality program can only be realized through a qualified teacher comes a strong emphasis on teacher training—preparing students to teach art to older adults, to be qualified teachers. It is stressed that this is a responsibility that art education needs to assume (e.g., Hoffman, 1975a; Michael, 1998). The reason why this is seen as paramount is that we need to ensure that programming is of the highest quality and that standards of effective art education are upheld. One means of setting and maintaining standards is instituting a certification process (Michael, 1998). “To establish and effective delivery system our profession has to train and certify qualified art educators….” (Fitzner, 1998, p. vi). “We must develop a certification process to ensure that all future art teachers of the elderly have qualifications as artists or art educators” (Greenberg, 1985a, p. 38). Although certification has been put forward as a means of regulating the quality of teachers, the development of coursework for teacher preparation has been the primary focus. But for whom is this coursework intended? Who is cited as needing teacher training?

The most important population that needs adequate preparation is art education students—specifically those who want to teach older adults (Hoffman, 1992; Jones, 1980a). Besides future teachers, those who are currently K-12 teachers but plan to teach
older adults could benefit from additional training. Although already qualified in teaching art, information specific to community programming and older adult education is necessary (Greenberg, 1985a, 1985b). Within the community, those who are responsible for developing and overseeing programs as well as those who are currently teaching need to learn the basics of quality programming. This includes recreation directors, activity directors, program administrators, and volunteers (Greenberg, 1980b, 1985a, 1987a; Hoffman, 1992; Jones, 1982). Hoffman (1980c) explains:

Art educators and artists, however, are only some of the personnel that now develop organized art experiences for older persons. Aging practitioners, those who work in institutions, nursing homes, senior centers, nutrition sites, high-rise housing complexes for older citizens, and recreation workers specializing in therapeutic recreation delivery also need opportunities to increase their art skills. (p. 55)

Attention must also be given to those who work with older adults in institution-based settings, including nursing home staff and medical professionals (Greenberg, 1980b, 1985a, 1985b; Hoffman, 1992). “Studio arts courses … must become a requirement of advanced study within the medical profession” (Hoffman, 1992, p. 173). “By teaching them what an art program ought to offer to their clients/patients, they will know better who to seek out to teach at their centers” (Greenberg, 1985a, p. 38). Other populations that could benefit from training courses and programs are college students majoring in gerontology, recreation, and leisure studies (Greenberg, 1985b), gerontologists (Greenberg, 1985a), and university professors who teach university extension programs (Hoffman, 1977). “We must begin to work with all of these people to move toward expanding the horizons of all involved, in order to avoid further inhibiting the creative potential of the elderly population interested in the arts” (Greenberg, 1980b, p. 39).
Essentially, everyone who is involved in services and programming for older adults is expected to become aware of the potentials of quality art education.

While the literature indicates who could benefit from teacher training, it also provides suggestions for what should be included in these training programs. Because older adult art education involves several fields of study, an interdisciplinary approach must be taken. A thorough understanding of art and the creative process—including art making, art history, art criticism, and aesthetics—is paramount (Greenberg, 1987a; Hoffman, 1992; Hubalek, 1998). A strong background in art education methods as well as adult learning theories and adult education methods is necessary (Barret, 1998; Greenberg, 1985a; Hoffman, 1980c, 1992). Finally, a comprehensive grounding in gerontology is essential. This should include the biology, psychology, and sociology of aging (Greenberg, 1985a, 1987a; Hoffman, 1977, 1980c, 1992; Hubalek, 1998). Beyond academic coursework, those preparing to work with older adults could also benefit from practical fieldwork experiences. These opportunities need to be coordinated and made available to those who are interested (Greenberg, 1987a; Hubalek, 1998). Although these requirements seem to be vague, Hoffman (1980c) has organized the necessary information into a “study unit … that can be inserted within the methodology of art education” (p. 59).

Along with outlining what needs to be taught, there have been numerous calls for higher education art education departments to begin addressing these areas within their programs. “It seems almost certain that in the very near future, most college and university campuses will find it necessary to confront the needs of the elder citizen within their arts curriculum” (Hoffman, 1980c, p. 56). “College and university art education

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54 See Appendix P for Hoffman’s proposed unit of study.
programs must develop courses for experienced art teachers who want to learn to work
with the older segment of our society” (Greenberg, 1985a, p. 40).

With the growth of special programs for older adults, it is imperative that colleges
and universities incorporate material on the arts and the elderly in methodology
courses which future art teachers take. New courses in the visual arts are needed,
geared to those who are teaching or will teach arts to older adults. (Greenberg,
1985b, pp. 214-215)

With an understanding of what needs to be taught and a continual push for organizing
and implementing teacher training, how has higher education dealt with this
responsibility?

In the United States, four higher education art education programs have offered
courses that specifically trained art teachers to work with older adults: Art, Artists, Aging,
and Enjoyment; Art Education for Older Adults; Art Media in Gerontology; and The
Elderly and the Arts. The key word here is “offered,” since all four courses have been
discontinued due to the retirement of the instructors who were responsible for teaching
them (Scott, 2004). Despite all of the advocacy for teacher training and preparing
qualified teachers, very little is actually being done. We need to come to terms with this
reality. Is it possible that our efforts and energies should be redirected towards
something more realistic and more attainable?

Since art education programs typically focus on preparing students to teach in the
public school system and the older population continues to grow, looking to the U3A
may be beneficial. With their focus on supporting learning, they have removed the need
for teacher training. In this sense, they do not train and prepare group leaders at all, but
there is help and support available if it is requested. Can this have implications for older
adult art education? Could a shift to aiding and supporting older adult learning endeavors
be a new role and a new focus for art educators? Perhaps there is another population that could be instrumental in supporting and advocating for older adult art education: retired art teachers.

*Retired Art Teachers.* It has been repeatedly stressed that current and projected demographic changes are leading to an immense growth of the retired population, but along with this, we need to acknowledge that teachers are among those who are retired and retiring (e.g., Auriemma, Cooper, & Smith, 1992; Hodgkinson, 2004). “America’s teaching force has aged steadily. Only 16 percent of teachers were 50 or older in 1976. In 2001, 37 percent were over 50, foreshadowing a coming wave of retirements. Teachers’ average age in 2001 was 43” (National Education Association, 2003, p. 1). The aging of the teaching force and the future retirements of teachers undoubtedly include art teachers. This is not often mentioned in the art education literature, but when it is, it is met with a mixed review. Sometimes retired art educators are seen as “another important resource” (Thursz, 1992, p. xii). Sometimes it is questioned why we don’t pay more attention to the potential of retired teachers. “Although there are many retired certified art teachers in the country, seldom are they sought out to serve as art instructors for the lifelong learning classes” (Michael, 1998, p. 155). And sometimes, they are even viewed as “difficult.” Ball-Gisch (1998) explains, “I encounter retired art teachers who want to take classes because it gives them access to studio space. They are not usually interested in learning from me; often they are the most difficult students to deal with” (p. 59). Regardless of how art educators choose to portray their retired colleagues, it must be
recognized that the expertise of retired art educators can continue to be of value throughout their retirement.  

The special qualities and talents of teachers have been recognized beyond art education as well. An article titled, “Career Options for Retired Teachers” (Botwinik & Press, 2006), outlines “some suggestions for teachers who would like to remain active in the field of education but not on a full-time basis” (para. 5). One of the recommended possibilities is teaching in adult education. The authors note the perks of teaching in more informal situations. “Retired teachers can set their own schedules, pick their own students, determine what materials and methods to use, and enjoy the best parts of their chosen profession” (para. 12). Another plus side to teaching older adults is students’ motivation. They are there by choice and are intrinsically motivated. “There are retired teachers who find real satisfaction in teaching older folks who really want to learn” (Bentley, 1988, p. 52). While there are benefits to retired teachers bringing their experience to community programs, this also applies to retired higher education professors. A study of retired professors (Dorfman & Kolarik, 2005) found that “nearly a third of the retirees [studied] were engaged in teaching activities” (p. 359). These retired academics continue to teach; however, their venues have changed—in many cases from the lecture hall to the community hall. Another study found a high level of interest in teaching among pre-retirees, most of whom are not teachers. This survey conducted by AARP asked pre-retirees what they wanted to do in their retirement to continue “working.” “The most popular single job choice was teaching. Twice as many people

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55 The National Art Education Association (NAEA) contains a Retired Art Educators Association (RAEA) issues group. All NAEA members who have retired status are automatically members of RAEA. This group currently has over 500 members—a number which will surely rise as the Baby Boomers enter retirement. For more information on RAEA, see De Jong (2007). For a brief history of RAEA, see De Jong (2008).
were interested in [teaching] as in consulting, the stereotypical retiree job” (Freedman & Moen, 2005, para. 17). Retirees obviously want to share what they know, whether they were previously employed as public school teachers, university professors, or “non-teachers.” With retirees’ interests in teaching, retired art teachers and art education professors, as well as those with a lifelong interest in art and craft, seem to be an obvious pool from which teachers for older adult programming can be found. The literature, however, notes that even former teachers still need training to teach older populations. Greenberg (1987a) suggests that a “retooling” of methods is necessary (p. 100), and Thursz (1992) asserts that “retiring teachers of … the visual arts should be retrained to work with older learners” (p. xii). Regardless of whether “retraining” is needed, it should be recognized that retired teachers have much to contribute to older adult art education.

Looking to the U3A, those who have had teaching careers are found within the membership. This is true in Stamford U3A, where some members have retired from teaching in the schools, adult education, and universities, while others have held positions in educational administration. Overall in the U3A, a national survey found that 22% of members hold teaching qualifications (Third Age Trust, 2001). An interview with a Stamford U3A member reveals how important the U3A can be for retired teachers.

I was a teacher, and when I retired from teaching I had nothing to do .... Life can be lonely and when you get older you can—if you’ve had a very important job or if you’ve had responsibility in your job, when you retire, it’s good to be able to still carry on doing things as it were, and not just sitting at home ... you know, it’s organized. And to me, and as I said, I was in teaching and had a quite responsible position, and when I retired, I was lost. There wasn’t U3A. I was really lost.

Joining the U3A changed this retired teacher’s outlook. In art education, what options are available to retired and soon-to-be retired art educators? If they choose, do they have
options to remain professionally active and to continue sharing their knowledge, skills, and talents with others?\footnote{An avenue for future research could be examining what options are currently available to retired art educators, perhaps by conducting a survey of RAEA members. These retired art teachers could be asked if they know what options are available to them, if they have taught any adult or older adult art classes, and if they would be interested in teaching older populations if the opportunities were available.}

Could an organization such as the U3A open up new avenues to retired art teachers? Advocating for older adult art learning structures that recognize and capitalize on the strengths of retired teachers might seem to contradict most of what I’ve said thus far. Isn’t it possible that retired teachers would continue to reinforce the many issues that I’ve raised and urged a rethinking of (e.g., ignoring social factors, teacher-centeredness, and elitist definitions of art, craft, and creativity)? If these elements are maintained and upheld, wouldn’t this undermine the very nature of the self-help and learner-centered principles that I have been promoting? While this is a major conundrum to consider, is it also possible that the opposite could occur? Could participation in a U3A-like program, by its very nature, challenge teachers to rethink their assumptions and to find new ways of sharing their knowledge? Considering that the British U3A remains learner-centered and focused upon shared learning despite the fact that more than one in every five members holds teaching qualifications offers some hopeful evidence. Also, viewing retired teachers as unable to change may be reflective of ageist attitudes. In a study of stereotypes of older adults, Hummert (1990) identified seven negative stereotypes. One of these is the “inflexible senior citizen,” who is characterized as set in his or her ways, as old-fashioned, and as finding it difficult to change (p. 184). Whitbourne and Hulicka (1990), in their study of ageism in psychology textbooks, found a similar stereotype, which they name “rigidity.” “The idea that older people become set in their ways and
unable to change is one of the hallmarks of psychological ageism …. Older adults continue to be presented as unable or unwilling to change…” (p. 1132). So the notion that retired teachers would perpetuate second age thinking into third age learning structures may be a reflection of ageist thinking. However, it also may be a valid concern, so this is an important issue to consider in the future.  

Discussion: Rethinking Teaching. The literature places a great emphasis on the necessity of a qualified teacher. The way that one achieves qualification is through teacher training which entails coursework in art, art education, adult education, and gerontology. A rationale for this mindset may be due not only to the growth of the older population, but also to the decline of school age populations (in relation to the total population). If this decline leads to a decline of art teachers in the schools, art education students could be encouraged to seek employment beyond the public schools. Greenberg (1985a) explains, “Cutbacks in public school budgets have forced art teachers with years of experience with schoolchildren to look for other employment” (p. 40). This notion of “alternative” employment opportunities is met with an optimism that such positions will become available in the future. Greenberg continues, “Once administrators see quality people getting involved, the quality of programs will improve, and so will the salaries!” (p. 40). Much more recently, La Porte (2007) continues this spirit of optimism.

I believe that in years to come there will be more funding available for art programs with this age group [older adults]. I envision a day when an art educator who enjoys working with older adults will be able to find a job that pays well. (p. 16)

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57 This signals a major implication for future research. Future studies should investigate whether retired and retiring art teachers would be interested in becoming involved in shared learning endeavors with their peers. Are they interested in these types of activities? Would this be seen as entirely different from traditional school-based art learning? Pilot studies involving retired teachers in peer learning structures could investigate to what extent second age thinking affects third age structures and if there are any interventions (e.g., discussions about peer learning and shared learning) that could lessen these effects?
There are two potential problems with this. First, I question whether this stance is overly optimistic. If art teaching jobs do decline in the schools, there is no guarantee that there will be a proportional increase in art teaching jobs in the community. The second problem lies in the fact that the preparation of art teachers for older populations is not happening. Should we continue pushing for teacher training? Perhaps we should reassess our goals. Who can be a teacher, what makes someone qualified, and are these “qualifications” context-bound? And what do our answers imply in terms of whose knowledge matters?

Reflecting on the U3A can help us think of alternatives, since in the U3A all retirees are conceived of as potential teachers—as having and knowing something valuable to be shared. We need to begin to recognize the potential of the older population, and we must not forget that amongst retirees there are experienced, qualified art teachers in the form of retired art teachers. A shift from the requirement of preparing qualified teachers to one that creates roles for retired teachers to continue their roles as art educators (if, of course, they choose to do so) could prove to be highly beneficial. But we need to rethink the notion that these experienced teachers are still in need of training.

Do we really believe that retired teachers aren’t equipped to teach older students? Is someone who spent his or her entire working life teaching art really less qualified than someone with a gerontology course on his or her transcript? Rather than continuing to advocate for the unmet need of teacher training, perhaps we could advocate for notions of older adult art education that open up new roles for retired art teachers and for all older learners.

Future studies should investigate what job opportunities are currently available. Are there viable employment options for future teachers?
Rethinking Roles

Rethinking who has experience, expertise, and knowledge to share can lead to a reassessment of the roles available in older adult art education. This section explores the roles that are implied through the literature and raises questions that consider the possibilities of creating new roles.

Retired Art Educators. If we recognize the strengths of retired teachers and their capacity to continue sharing their knowledge, we must begin to include them in discussions of older adult art education. Are there new roles that could be opened up to retired teachers if they wish to stay involved in art education? Kellman (1999) suggests that retired teachers can pass on their knowledge to beginning teachers, sharing “valuable knowledge regarding art teaching borne from a lifetime’s experiences as an artist/teacher” (p. 42). Greenberg (1987a) suggests that retired art teachers can assume roles in older adult art learning: leading in-service sessions for those currently delivering art programming and providing assistance to volunteers. Retired art educators can also share their experiences through reflecting on what it means to retire from art teaching. Greenberg (2001) poses the question: “Has your role as an art educator and artist been affected by life changes related to age?” (p. 8), and Barret (2001) describes her continued work with older adults during her retirement in an article titled “Happy to Be Here: Reflections of an Aging Woman.” These notions of sharing knowledge, experience, and expertise echo what is being done in the U3A. Here, the value of a U3A-like model could provide a space for retired teachers to continue sharing their art knowledge. An

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59 This is currently being addressed in the National Art Education Association by a mentoring program between the Retired Art Educators Association and the Student Chapter. Through this program, retired art teachers are involved in sharing their expertise with art education students, future teachers, and new teachers.
added benefit would be the option of pursuing other interests—learning from and with other retirees who are sharing their expertise. Rather than insisting that retired teachers need additional training to teach older adults, we could work towards creating possibilities for retiring and retired teachers to continue sharing their passions, to pursue other interests, and to continue learning.

*Art Education.* By moving away from the unmet calls for teacher training, we can refocus our energies towards supporting what already exists, improving choices and accessibility, and creating resources to assist new and continuing programming. Programs which are accessible and which put older adults in control of their learning need to become more readily available. Moving into the community and becoming aware of what older people are actually looking for is a crucial first step. We need to ask what they want instead of deciding what they need. Rather than putting down teachers without qualifications, we could enter into dialogue with them. What challenges are they facing? Are there ways in which art educators can make their services available if requested? A number of art educators have spoken of the need for narrative research. This undoubtedly can offer a better picture of who older learners are (Ball-Gisch, 1998; Hausman, 1998) and who are currently teaching them (Michael, 1998). Ball-Gisch (1998) states:

> Through narrative description of a cross section of actual lifelong learners we can come to understand who these students are and what motivates them to seek art during adulthood. Personal interviews can also provide us with clues to their expectations and their needs. (p. 53)

This will surely lead to more holistic and realistic understandings of who is actually involved in older adult art learning, what is taking place, and its impact on those involved. Visiting a variety of older adult art settings can also add to the complexity of
how we currently view the field, where art learning takes place, and how approaches
differ by setting.

Beyond broadening our understandings through research we can also share what
we know with those who are interested, with the goal of “act[ing] as a clearinghouse for
updated information and resources in the field” (Beck, 1975, p. 43). While this is
something that can be done by those active in older adult art education, Jennings (1980)
offers a suggestion that includes all art educators in assisting lifelong learners in their
communities. She notes that as an art educator people often ask her where and how they
can go about taking up art studies or joining a craft class. In relation to this, she asks:

But if such a request should come to us, what answers do we have? What do we
say to a 55-year-old man who seeks our opinion on taking up jewelry-making, the
first arts-related activity he has ever wanted to try? What suggestion do we make
to an energetic 50-year-old woman whose hours are suddenly free and frightening
after her children have left home, and whose talent with needlework has been
largely unexercised? (p. 19)

Jennings urges art educators everywhere to have an understanding of art and craft options
within their local community. In this way, if and when someone asks about their options,
we are able to provide suggestions. With the small amount of effort required to compile
a list of offerings, classes, and resources, we can not only become more knowledgeable
about local art efforts, but we can also make a huge impact on those who are looking to
become involved. Whether highly devoted to research and program design or engaged
simply by being aware of community resources, all art educations can have a part to play
in enhancing and facilitating lifelong art learning.

*Older Adults.* If we recognize the vast amounts of experience and expertise
located within the older population, we surely must begin to open up new roles to older
learners. Moving past the narrow view of the older learner as a student who receives
knowledge and guidance from a highly knowledgeable art teacher, older learners must begin to have more control. Methods and programs must become more interactive. Options must become available for those older adults who want to share what they know. The creation of self-help learning structures such as the U3A could encourage this type of sharing, opening up new roles for older learners. In an article titled “Candy Striper, My Ass!,” Tanz and Spencer (2000) describe the lack of suitable volunteer positions for retired executives and businessmen/women. They provide stories of retirees who looked for positions in the voluntary sector, to offer their expertise free of charge to nonprofit organizations. They wanted to use their experience and expertise in a positive way—one that would make a difference. However, in each vignette, the retirees came up empty-handed. They received no replies, they were turned down, or they were set to work doing tasks that ignored their skills including “stuff[ing] envelopes or hand[ing] out juice and cookies at the local hospital” (para. 1). How can retirees’ experiences be utilized in a way that is fulfilling to them and also beneficial to the community? There seems to be a problem when people want to contribute to society for free and they are turned down; when there are no outlets to use their expertise and knowledge for a good cause. Is it possible that something like the U3A could be a good fit for these retirees? Beyond “teaching” and learning, there are a variety of other roles open to retirees, including administrative positions, clerical positions, and financial positions, not to mention the voluntary work that is carried out into the community and the outside world.

We need to acknowledge that some older adults are highly motivated to contribute to society and to share their knowledge and skills. Although art education is just one small piece of the overall picture, we can open up new roles to older learners, rather than
just seeing them as students that we need to teach. How else can they be instrumental in their learning endeavors and in their education? Formosa (2002) advocates for older adults to take a proactive role in older adult education—engaging in the ongoing discussions of the field, conducting evaluations of programs, and assisting teachers. He even recommends that older adults should be instrumental in the preparation of older adult educators.

Moreover, older adults are surely the best people to coordinate in-service training for those wishing to work as older adult educators, to establish democratic evaluations of the programmes, as well as taking part in the debate between intra- and inter-generational education. (p. 82)

If we want older adults to have more control over their education and learning, we need to provide spaces where their voices about their learning are central in shaping the field. What does this mean to older adult art education? We need to abandon hierarchal notions of practice and shift towards understandings that open new roles that increase (not inhibit) the agency of older learners.

Discussion: Rethinking Roles. If we begin to face the facts that teacher preparation is not taking place, that older adults’ experiences are not only located in the past, and that retired teachers are among the older adult population, then we must begin to adopt a more inclusive and holistic stance of older adult art education. This necessarily implies an opening up and expansion of roles. Recognition of the agency of older adults and a desire to have them control their own learning, should lead to older adults taking a more active stance, thus occupying more roles. Glendenning (1992) calls for education to “attempt to counteract the conviction of many older people that they are powerless and insignificant and do not have a continuing role in society” (p. 17).

Gerontologists Riley and Riley (1989) note the lack of suitable roles currently available
to older adults. While the aging population has been increasing rapidly, the roles open to older adults have not increased proportionately. Describing this as “structural lag,” they explain this problem:

… the problem of the imbalance—or the mismatch—between the strengths and capacities of the mounting numbers of long-lived people and the lack of role opportunities in society to utilize and reward these strengths. This is the problem we call structural lag, because the age structure of social-role opportunities has not kept pace with the rapid changes in the ways people grow old. (p. 15)

They call for new roles to be created. Is it possible that education could provide some of these roles? Looking to the U3A illuminates the numerous roles that older adults can assume in their own education. What roles can be assumed in older adult art education?

**Future Directions for Older Adult Art Education**

The following section describes some future directions for older adult art education that stem from this study. The disconnects found between the literature and the U3A prompt a rethinking of the field that calls for further questioning, reflecting, and expanding.

**Questioning the Foundations of the Field**

A major implication that stems from the disconnects between the literature and the U3A is the need to examine, rethink, and question our assumptions. Comparing the two data sets highlighted some areas that need to be addressed, yet this is just the beginning. Just as virtually all other educational realms have embarked on the journey of critically examining their foundations, older adult art education must start its own journey. The benefit of a late departure is that we can follow examples that have gone before us. We can look to the field of education which asks “what counts as knowledge in educational settings” (Kelly, Luke, & Green, 2008). We can look to the ways in which
criticality has been addressed in art education and learn from art educators Gaudelius and Speirs (2002) who state, “Critical questions such as ‘Whose interests does this form of education serve and why?’ become the basis for critical teaching in order to reveal power structures and consider other possibilities” (p. 14). We can look to adult education, which has recently adopted a strong critical stance (e.g., Brookfield, 2000, 2005). Adult educators prompt us to ask the following questions: “For whom is knowledge constructed,” “Whose knowledge construction counts,” and “Who should construct knowledge?” (Deshler & Grudens-Schuck, 2000, p. 593). Finally, we can look to educational gerontology which recognizes that the “question of whose real interests are being served is one which is crucial to the debate about educational provision for older people” (Glendenning & Battersby, 1990, p. 42). This field also asks questions that are specific to older adults and older adult education. Glendenning (1992) raises the following questions:

- Where do the ideas that I embody in my work with older people come from historically?
- How did I come to adopt them? And why do I continue to endorse these ideas in my work?
- Whose interests do these ideas serve?
- What are the power relationships involved in my work with older people?
- How do these ideas influence my relationships with older people? (p. 17)

Since older adult art education is a highly interdisciplinary area, we have many fields to draw from, thus granting us access to the examples that they have set—examples that can guide our journey. One of the most important lessons that we can learn from the U3A is that there are other ways of doing things. This necessarily should cause us to ask why the U3A falls short of the standards upheld by the literature, even when it exemplifies some of the elements that are promoted. We praise student-centered approaches, self-
directedness, and programming based on students’ interests. The U3A internalizes these principles, yet they still fall short on a number of standards of “quality.” Adopting a more inclusive approach which recognizes the diversity in older adult art learning and listens to older learners begins with a serious examination of our unquestioned foundations.

Reflecting and Reflections on/from the Field

Another implication for the field comes in the form of reflecting—not only reflecting on our practice and assumptions, but also inviting the reflections of others involved in older adult art education. Greenberg (2001) and Barret (2001) provide valuable examples of art educators reflecting on the field, the significance that it has assumed during their retirement, and what aging means to them as retired art educators. More writings like these can be beneficial in illuminating the more personal implications of the field from the perspectives of art educators, but we can also benefit from listening to the perspectives of others. The field is extremely multi-voiced. Our future literature could strive to reflect this. Seeking out the views of practitioners from trained teachers to unpaid volunteers can provide us with a more grounded view of the current state of the field as well as a more detailed picture of who is involved. Recognizing program planners, teachers, recreation directors, volunteers, and others involved entails listening to what they have to say. Rather than creating decontextualized standards that are imposed on people and programs, we can shift from telling others what we can do for them to asking others, “What can we do with you?” (Foley, 2001, p. 76). Finally, in discussing voice, we must begin to listen to the most important voices—the voices of older art learners. If we want to create programming and frame the field around older
adults’ interests and needs, we must find out firsthand what these actually are. Instead of relying on our instincts or falling back on our assumptions, including older learners in our discussions will ensure that their voices concerning their education and learning are heard. Londoner (1990) laments the problem of basing educational programming on assumptions. “Worse still is the realization that many professional educational planners believe that they know all too well what [persons of later years] need and therefore will plan programs based on their assumptions rather than verifying with the clients themselves” (p. 101). To avoid falling into this trap, we must begin to truly invite older learners into discussions that concern them. As art educators, our future research projects should aim to be as inclusive and multi-voiced as possible. Thinking about the literature, we can ask who isn’t represented and who has been rendered invisible, and then work to make them visible.

**Expanding the Field…Seeking Out Complexity**

The final implication for future research is closely related to the first two. As we examine how our assumptions have shaped the field, how our notions of quality programming have led to a narrow definition of the field, and how there are many voices that have gone unheard, we begin to realize the true diversity inherent in the field. We shift from a micro-lens, to a wide-angle lens. There is suddenly so much more in our field of view. Future research should aim to seek out the complexity of the field. Studying sites that have previously been dismissed as not “quality” and thus not worthy of study, can add new insights. Those involved in art learning that have been ignored for their lack of “seriousness” or their preference for crafts over art become important. My involvement in and research about the U3A radically altered my view of the field and
caused me to ask previously unasked questions. But this is just one site. The diversity of art learning sites that has gone unacknowledged has the potential to reveal a wealth of other questions and avenues to explore. Once we know what is actually out there, we will be much better situated to see our place. In summary, studies of previously unstudied sites and art learners should demonstrate the complexity of the field and work to further expand our current boundaries. Through this, we can better strive towards more inclusive, accessible, and holistic views of older adult art education.

Future Directions for Art Education: A Lifespan Approach

In this final section, the previous discussions are extended to the field of art education in general. Remembering the nearly invisible status of older adult issues in art education, stronger rationales for a lifespan approach are presented. Older adults are generally presented as a “different” population that needs to be approached differently than school age populations. But focusing on differences has led to overlooking similarities, connections, and parallels. This further reinforces the marginal position of older adults in art education discourses. In the following sections, connections will be made to current thinking in art education, prompting a more holistic and lifelong approach.

Multicultural Art Education

Viewing older populations as “different” than “typical” art learners makes school age populations the norm. Everyone who falls outside of this norm is given minimal attention and thought. There are strong ties here to the multicultural movement in art education.

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60 Refer back to Chapter 1 to the section titled “Older Adult Art Education: The State of the Field” (pp. 13-17) for a refresher.
In art education, discussions of multiculturalism have been based largely on Sleeter and Grant’s (1987) identification of five approaches to multicultural education. The first of these approaches is “Teaching the Exceptional and Culturally Different.” This approach targets students who are “culturally different,” and attempts to minimize their differences. Stuhr (1994) explains, “Teachers using this approach use male, ‘White middle-class students as the standard which the ‘other’ students should be brought up to’ (Grant & Sleeter, 1989, p. 50)” (p. 172). In short, white maleness is the norm and the status quo is reinforced. The second approach is the “Human Relations Approach” which intends to promote cultural harmony by emphasizing similarities across cultures rather than differences. Sleeter (1989) likens this approach to “sensitivity training.” Although students are learning to exist harmoniously within it, the status quo is not challenged. The third approach, “The Single Group Studies Approach,” begins to challenge norms. Focusing on the contributions of one marginalized group, its status is also examined through “an investigation of the oppression that is practiced to keep the group from being incorporated into accepted curricular canons” (Stuhr, 1994, p. 174). Although this approach examines and challenges the status quo, only one group is studied at a time. Sleeter (1989) explains, “Its major limitation is its focus on only one form of oppression and ignoring of others (such as gender and class)” (p. 55). “The Multicultural Approach,” the fourth approach, aims to challenge and change the status quo from within schools. Many cultures are studied, discrimination is examined, and alternatives that foster equity are discussed. This is not only a major component of the curriculum; these equitable principles are also modeled through the restructuring of schools. The final

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61 For additional reading on multicultural art education, see Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr (2001), Stuhr (1994), Stuhr, Petrovich-Mwaniki, & Wasson (1992), and Wasson, Stuhr, & Petrovich-Mwaniki (1990).
62 Think of Women’s Studies or African American Studies programs and courses.
approach, “Education that is Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist,” is similar to the previous approach. It calls for the restructuring of schools, for examinations of discrimination and equity, and for the representation of many cultures. Students are exposed to equitable practices within the school, but they are also equipped with skills to carry out these practices beyond the school. This approach “teaches directly about political and economic oppression and discrimination, and prepares young people in social action skills” (p. 55).

Although all five approaches aim to address culture, they can be thought of in terms of a continuum—from maintaining and reinforcing the status quo to challenging and reconstructing it. But how does learning about cultures in school relate to older adult issues in art education?

A Single Group Studies Approach? Paralleling older adult issues in art education to the five multicultural approaches, where does older adult art education fall on the continuum? Lifelong learning advocates have continually called for art education to adopt a lifespan perspective—specifically in terms of teacher training. Greenberg (1985a) stresses, “First, we must start to take a cradle-to-coffin approach to the content of art methodology courses. To continue with a K-12 orientation is outmoded; art teachers must be prepared to work with people of all ages” (p. 38). The goal in lifelong art education is to fully integrate all ages into art education’s discourses and practices. This “full integration,” however, has taken a form similar to the “Single Group Studies Approach.” A lifespan perspective is advocated, yet this has been realized through distinctly separate courses. Remember the four courses that specifically trained art teachers to work with older populations? Art, Artists, Aging, and Enjoyment; Art
Education for Older Adults; Art Media in Gerontology; and The Elderly and the Arts are examples of addressing older adults through a single group studies approach. Rather than truly taking a lifespan perspective, older adult issues have been added on to the existing curriculum. They are included and tacked on through introducing one class, one unit, or one fieldwork experience. The demise of these four older adult art education courses teach us that something that is added on is just as easily taken away. So the current policy of the mere adding-on of older adult issues seems to be ineffectual. It does little to secure the importance of lifelong learning. We need an approach that views lifespan issues as imbedded in and intertwined with art education.

*Single Group Studies or Reconstruction?* Adopting a reconstructionist approach may be more suited to adopting a lifespan approach. Older adult issues have much in common with multiculturalism. Multicultural and critical theory stances in art education generally focus on discrimination and the “isms”—racism, sexism, and classism. Rarely is ageism included, yet it accounts for a form of discrimination that is deeply embedded in our society and that cuts across all cultures, genders, and classes. If art educators who work with older populations were to join this movement, their insights could enrich and extend current discussions. Beyond making issues of age more central to art education, there is another major reason why those interested in adult populations should consider advocating for and adopting a reconstructionist stance.

Gender, race, class, and educational levels have a profound effect on older adult education, specifically in terms of participation. Those who are White and female have higher participation rates in adult and older adult education than non-Whites and men. Participation also increases incrementally for those with higher incomes and higher
educational levels (e.g., Kim et al., 2004). All of these factors are related to who attends and benefits from adult and older adult education. Thus far, my discussions have admittedly been devoid of these factors. In terms of who typically participates in older adult education, the U3A is no exception, since the majority of members are female, White, and middle-class, and many have obtained additional qualifications upon leaving school (Third Age Trust, 2001). Adult education and educational gerontology, in an attempt to make programming more accessible, have made efforts to lessen these effects by targeting underrepresented and underserved populations (e.g., Curry & Cunningham, 2000; Merrill, 2005). But easing these effects is not the same as challenging and changing them. Because inequality in adulthood and older adulthood is directly related to inequality at every preceding life stage (Pampel, 1998), these issues must be addressed well before older adulthood. Adopting a reconstructionist stance and working towards equity will inevitably have a direct effect on adult and older adulthood. Beyond the obvious importance of a more equitable society, this will also lead to higher and more diverse participation rates in education throughout the lifespan—more participation, more lifelong learning, more involvement, and more support for the arts and for arts education. So although older adults are typically viewed as distinctly separate from “traditional” art education discourses, we can see that they are actually directly related to each other.

Towards a Lifespan Approach

Seeing the direct connections between art education and older populations should help to move us from viewing older adult issues as components to add on to components

63 Since the U3A is an organization that has a primarily female membership, the data presented in the previous chapters may be more applicable to older women than to older men. Future research could investigate differences between older men and women in their arts interests and involvements. Is it possible that a focus on fine art and thinking of crafts only in terms of traditionally female crafts has neglected to recognize the art and craft interests of older men?
that are integral to art education. Joining the multicultural movement can help to make older adult and aging issues more visible, and this can also help to provide another powerful rationale for the importance of adopting a reconstructionist stance.

This brings us to considering the goals of art education. Is it our goal that young students will become lifelong learners—that they maintain interest, involvement, and support for the arts throughout their lives? If so, then lifelong learning and older adult issues have everything to do with art education. Adopting a lifespan approach doesn’t imply less of a focus on school age populations. To the contrary, it concerns them even more as we focus not only on their art involvement now, but their potential for future involvements. We adopt a more far-sighted approach. By seeing art education holistically in terms of age, we begin to see how important school arts are to lifelong art learning. We look not only to fostering lifelong art interests, but also look to how we can better facilitate and enhance future endeavors. We seek to create stronger connections to art in the local community. We seek to prepare students to continue their art involvement. Children and young adults become aware of local arts centers, community programs, museums, and galleries. They learn how to share and pass on their arts knowledge and interests. In essence, they learn how they can continue with art long after they have left the classroom. This is necessarily reconstructionist. Rather than just teaching students about art, they become equipped with the knowledge and tools to continue being involved in art. Rather than just fostering lifelong arts interests, students will leave school with skills to act on and further these interests.

In summary, a lifespan approach focuses not only on students in the “first age,” but also focuses on how art can continue to be enriching to their lives through to the
“third age.” In the future, will we continue to focus only on the first age, or will we begin to envision a lifespan approach to art education that begins in the first age and continues well into the third?

**Summary**

This chapter discussed the major themes and disconnects between the literature and the U3A. An examination of commonly used terms from the literature was presented as well as an investigation of the goals implied within the literature. General recommendations for future directions in older adult art education and art education were also discussed. The final chapter will return to a more personal voice as I take you back to my experiences with the U3A; describing the process of exiting the research site and sharing the continuing impact that remains with me.
CHAPTER 8:
FINAL REFLECTIONS ON THE U3A
This final chapter will bring you back to the research site as I discuss my last days with Stamford U3A. Along with summing up my fieldwork experiences, I will also share my reflections on the U3A and the impact that it has left with me.

**My Last Days at Stamford U3A**

From the beginning of the fieldwork, I quickly fell into a comfortable routine: attending meetings followed by fieldnote writing. At first a bit uneasy about the “quality” of my writing, I soon found my voice—even surprising myself at times with the amount of detail that I was able to recall. The process of writing itself actually became something that I looked forward to, since it afforded the opportunity to relive the experience. Reading through my fieldnotes at the end of each month was also rewarding. Little incidents and interactions that had been pushed to the back of my mind were rediscovered—often bringing a smile to my face and sometimes providing new directions to the course of the study. Time flew by quickly, and soon I realized that my departure date was nearing. I needed to start thinking about my final steps. Once I concluded my observations of each group, I returned to my fieldnotes, rereading each set of notes in entirety. After this, I wrote a little summary for each group, noting important incidents and projects. If somehow the distance of time and location changed my views upon my departure, I wanted to have a record of what was important to me while I was fully immersed in the U3A. Upon finishing these write-ups, it was almost time for me to come home, but I continued my activities up until my departure date. My flight was scheduled for May 15th, and on the 13th, Penny came over to visit for her interview. May 14th was a big day for me, as it was my final day with the U3A, but this was also a big day for Stamford U3A. May 14th was the date of the Annual General Meeting.
The Annual General Meeting

Penny decided months earlier that it would be a nice idea to have the art and craft groups put on a display of their work for the other members. They’ve done exhibitions like this in the past, and my departure seemed like a good excuse to have another. Penny rang up Holly, the acting leader for the Art Workshop, and asked her to coordinate it. At each meeting thereafter, I was able to see how the groups organized what they wanted to display and how they wanted to display it. The art and craft work was to be displayed in various places in the Barn Hill Church, and Holly needed some volunteers to arrive early to help set up. I jumped at this opportunity and she told me to come around 9:00 a.m. that day, about an hour before the other members arrive for the meeting.

I arrive at Barn Hill at 9 a.m. sharp, but I am certainly not the first person here. Nearly all of the art and craft group leaders are already setting up, working to display everything “just so.” Holly has brought extra mounts and frames and she distributes them to the leaders to use on unfinished pieces. She rushes around frantically, making sure that the other leaders know where to display their work. You see, Holly is so hurried because she only has fifteen minutes until she has to leave for an appointment. Even though she’s not able to stay to see the fruits of her efforts, she’s still here to ensure that everything runs smoothly and gets off to a good start. She’s not to worry. More people showed up to help than she originally anticipated—not only the group leaders, but a number of other members as well. Robert, Maggie, and Thomas from the Art Workshop are here, and despite his wife’s recent passing, William is here helping to set up. Chelsea, the Art II leader is here, even though she just left the hospital days ago after undergoing a surgery. Rose and Ruby from Art I are here, and Alicia from Handicrafts I is setting out the group’s craftwork. With the overlap between Handicrafts II and
Quilting and Embroidery, these two groups are putting their work together. Group leaders Emily and Melody are here as well as some other members including Louisa, Ivy, and Robin.

Nearly every inch of Barn Hill is adorned with creations from the art and craft groups. Downstairs, long display tables are covered with their work. When the tables became filled up, paintings and drawings were affixed to the walls and laid on easels around the room. Extra craftwork was draped over chairs. Small placards with the groups’ names are displayed with each group’s work. Upstairs, in the tea and coffee room, pictures are everywhere that there is room for them—on tables, on a long ledge spanning the room, and even in the windowsills. There is something to be seen everywhere you look!

Figure 12. Art I’s display at the Annual General Meeting.
Members start arriving for the meeting. They first go to the sign-in tables, and then begin looking at the art and craft displays. As they look at the art and craft projects, they can be seen talking about and commenting on the pieces. Marsha from the Art Workshop looks carefully over some of the craft items and notes that she’d like to try something like that. Robin is showing one of the committee members how a particular patchwork piece is done. For about a half hour, the membership of Stamford U3A is discussing art and craft, getting new ideas, sharing similar things that they’ve done, and so on. As the time grows nearer to the start of the meeting, the numbers start dwindling as they head to the main meeting space. Maxwell, Penny’s husband and the resident technology expert, finds me and lets me know that it’s picture time. He takes some photographs of me with some of the craft members and the displays. Maxwell and Penny

Figure 13. Annual General Meeting Exhibition.
are planning to write up a small article to send to U3A News, the national U3A magazine.\footnote{Just as I am sharing my experience with you, they want to share their experience with the rest of the U3A!} After the photo session, it is time for the meeting to begin.

The Annual General Meeting starts around 10:30 a.m., and this yearly meeting is essentially like the presidential State of the Union Address: It is the Chairman’s State of the Stamford U3A Address!

*I head up to the balcony to find a seat for the meeting. Mabel from Art I motions for me to come over and sit with her. Just seconds after I sit down, Penny calls the meeting to order. She starts with some general announcements and then jumps right into her talk. She shares statistics on membership. They now have over 600 members, with...*
51 joining over the past year. She reflects on the year, describing the speakers they’ve hosted, changes to the committee, and the new groups that have been formed. She compares Stamford’s statistics to other local U3A groups and describes the activities of the East Midlands regional U3A and the Harlaxton Summer School. Other committee members, including the Groups Coordinator and the Treasurer, give their annual reports. The committee is voted in, and then the Drama Group entertains and delights us with a performance—a series of short skits. Some of the skits feature songs, and all are touched with light-hearted humor. At the end, the group takes their bows and Barn Hill echoes with roaring applause and laughter. The meeting is now over. I say my goodbyes to everyone I know amidst the confusion. On my way out the door, William rushes over to me saying his final goodbyes and wishing me well. After bidding farewell to William, my final U3A encounter, I set off for home. There are many preparations to make.

Tomorrow I leave the country and return home.

Exiting the Research Site

The news of my coming to Stamford was shared with members through the group’s monthly newsletter.

November 2006—One very interesting aspect of our groups has just cropped up. I have been approached by a lady at Pennsylvania State University who is writing a dissertation and wants to come and talk to members of our art and craft groups and how their interests in these subjects has enhanced their lives in retirement …. Even if it comes to nothing, it is nice to be approached.

My arrival was also announced.

January 2007—Nearer home, I would like to welcome Kathy Lynn James and her husband to Stamford. Kathy is based at Penn State University and is doing a PhD on Art and Craft for Retirees. She did a round robin e-mail to many of the British U3As and decided to base herself in Stamford. She will be at the January meeting and it won’t be hard to spot her as she is a bit younger than the rest of us. Please make her feel at home even if you are not a member of an Art and Craft Group.
She is living in Gayle’s house in Carlby for the duration, so if you live out there do let her know. It is her first visit to Britain and I think our winter weather has given her a bit of a shock so please try to make up for it by the warmth of your welcome.

Just as my entry was documented through the newsletters, so was my departure.

May 2007—At this month’s meeting we will also say good bye to Kathy Lynn James. After almost 6 months here it is time for her and her husband and dog to return to the USA. She has been a very active member of the U3A while she has been here …. We are now looking forwards to reading about ourselves in her finished thesis…

June 2007—However, one sad aspect of the AGM was that we had to say goodbye to Kathy Lynn James. After spending nearly six months with us, she has integrated well into the U3A—despite the age difference. I know she thoroughly enjoyed her time here with us…

I felt sad about leaving—leaving behind the wonderful people I had met, the interesting activities I was engaging in, and living the experience of a U3Aer. I felt that I was part of a community. After a cold and damp winter, I was also just beginning to enjoy the weather. Just as the days were growing longer, the temperature was growing warmer, and the skies were becoming bluer, it was time to leave. Stamford and Carlby were picture perfect, and the countryside was covered with a blanket of yellow fields. But it was time to return home. On May 15th, my husband and I said goodbye to England, boarded our plane, and returned to the U.S.
“Revisiting” the U3A Through Writing

Although now physically removed from the U3A, I quickly found that whenever I miss it, I can return to it in an instant through rereading my fieldnotes, interview transcripts, and research journal. The process of writing has made me feel even closer as I attempt to tell their stories. There are elements of my experience with the U3A that continually come to mind. I’ll share them with you—these are the things that have made the most lasting impressions on me.

Impressions Made and Stories that Stick

There was a project that the Quilting and Embroidery group did before my arrival, but Emily shared it with me. This project, called “Pass the Parcel,” has stuck with me.
Originally I was fascinated with the idea of it and the visual results. Later, I’ve come to view the project in a metaphorical sense, thinking about how the results of “Pass the Parcel” are related to the individual/social issues that I have raised. “Pass the Parcel” is an ongoing project that the group occasionally does. A while back, each member wrote an idea, a word, or a theme on a slip of paper. Each entry was placed in a bag, and when the group is in-between projects or looking for something to do, they pass the bag around and pick out an idea. The next project is then designed around this theme. During the last round of “Pass the Parcel,” Emily’s word was picked: butterflies. In between meetings, everyone created something related to butterflies on the same size fabric. The size and the theme were the only “requirements.” Members could use embroidery, patchwork, or both. The colors and designs were entirely up to them. At the next meeting, the members brought in their completed squares, finding that each butterfly square was stunningly different. One is highly stylized and abstracted, another utilizes a hexagonal patchwork technique, and another is almost entirely done in embroidery. All are unique. Emily takes the patches and has the next month to somehow unite them. As she loves bookmaking, she sees this as an opportunity to combine her interests. Using a butterfly-printed material and an accordion design, she unites all of the butterflies into one book. While the resulting book is lovely, to me, it also represents the way that U3A members work together. Each member is unique and has something to contribute to the group as a whole. Everyone is individual, but they are united together by common interests and shared goals. The result is something to marvel at.
Something else that sticks with me is the words of the member who wishes that the U3A had been available earlier so that her parents could have benefited from it. I’ll repeat what she said:

But even so, there are times I think of my mother who followed me here from London, because I am a Londoner. Mum and Dad followed me. I think of them, and apart from me going around, they often, I feel, were at a loose end. Just sitting in their home. And U3A, I know, would have satisfied my father. It would have given him a new lease of life.

I think about this often. With my parents recently entering the ranks of the retired population, it makes me wonder what’s available to them. What will be available to them, and what will be available in the future when I retire? Will there be something like the U3A that has the potential to assume so much importance in later life?
Finally, in relation to the felt-importance of the U3A, it is no wonder that the organization continues to flourish and spread throughout Britain (and throughout the world in its various forms). New local groups are formed and new members join nearly every day. The East Midlands representative notes that “the nature of U3A is changing as we become a mass movement.” With all of the wonderful activities, meaningful relationships, and community connections that I witnessed during my time with the U3A, we must remember that this is only one group—one group responding to its own members, its own needs, and its own interests. Since all of my U3A insights come from one group, this could be perceived as a limitation of the study. How generalizable can my findings be? Over time, however, I have grown to accept this as a strength. After becoming involved in Stamford U3A, experiencing its activities and feeling the warmth of the members, I find it mind-boggling that communities such as this are present throughout Britain. While each of these 600-plus U3As must be different and have its own flavor, there is one major similarity as they are all united by the same principles. All groups have taken control of their own learning, thus creating an educational structure not only for older adults, but by older adults themselves. And while each group may have different approaches or different programs, they all follow their interests in their own ways—regardless of what these interests may be. Stamford U3A is only a small slice of the total U3A “mass movement.” Of course, it cannot represent the diversity inherent throughout the country, but it does provide beautiful examples of the potential of the U3A and the significance that it can assume in members’ lives. This is taking place in various forms all over Britain.
I am left wondering what the U.S. would be like with such an organization. Can we imagine a USA U3A? With small groups of people gathering throughout the country—not only in urban areas, but also in more isolated rural communities? Can we imagine a third age that is characterized by self-help, sharing, shared learning, and agency? Can we imagine informal, friendly spaces where retirees explore their interests with each other? When I left Stamford, it seemed so odd to me that when I returned home, there wouldn’t be a U3A.

*I can imagine USA U3A.*
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A
THEORETICAL MEMO, JANUARY 2007

Art, Craft, and Art Education for Older Adults
The Literature vs. The U3A

A pressing issue that has presented itself so far in the beginning weeks of the fieldwork is the rift between the art education literature concerning older adults and my observations of the Stamford U3A art and craft groups. While the field of art education in general has begun to move past modernism with the introduction of visual and popular culture, the writings pertaining to older adults are still tightly clinging to modern ideals. This is likely due to the fact that the bulk of writings in this area surfaced in the early and mid-1980s and everything that followed was based on these. There has been very little to challenge this, however, my observations of the U3A thus far stand in direct conflict with these ideals in several key areas. I have found several preliminary issues that point to reasons why the field should begin paying attention to crafts.

After my first month of observations, looking at three art groups (Art I, Art II, and Art Workshop), one history group (Art History), and three crafts groups (Handicrafts I, Handicrafts II, and Quilting and Embroidery), I have noticed some major differences between the ways in which these disciplines are handled. In terms of the distinctions between students and teachers, the U3A principles state that “Those who teach shall also learn and those who learn shall also teach” (Laslett, 1989, p. 179). Overall in the organization, this principle is adhered to. The leaders of Handicrafts II and Quilting and Embroidery attend each others groups. They are group leaders at one and members at the other. The leaders of Art I and Handicrafts I are both members of the Art History group. Overall in the U3A, it seems apparent that those who are teachers at one group are learners at the next; however, this principle is also at work within some of the groups as well …. [In the craft groups] there are group leaders, but they serve mostly as organizers rather than “experts” or teachers. In these groups, everyone is seen as an expert with knowledge to share. In Quilting and Embroidery, the members work on projects collaboratively and make decisions regarding the projects together. In the two Handicrafts groups, the members take turns being leader and expert. In this manner, within the group, they are drawing on each others’ expertise. At one meeting, a member who is interested in beading will teach the group a technique and they will work on a project using this technique. At the next meeting, a different member will lead the group in a decoupage project, and so on. This observation seems to have direct implications to the question of whether the U3A reproduces student-teacher distinctions or if it is true to its principle of erasing them. Overall, the organization is true to this principle. A teacher in one group truly is a learner in the next.…..

Another issue that is raised by observations and the differences between the art and crafts groups is the emphasis placed on individual learning in the literature. While the art groups are more individual in their methods illustrated by their assertions that “we do our own thing,” the crafts groups are much more focused on group learning. The art
education literature glorifies this type of individual learning and virtually ignores social and group learning, a mistake that I am also guilty of:

Art education should make it a priority to offer quality programs to those older adults who are interested in pursuing art study. The study of art can open up new doors to this group, as well as promote visual understanding, communication, self-exploration, self-expression, and personal growth [italics added]. (James, 2006, p. 1)

The emphasis on older adults following their own paths and interests, and their self-fulfillment, self-enjoyment, and self-expression is emphasized through the language used and positions the reader to focus on individual learning at the expense of important social and group outcomes and benefits. This focus on individuals seems to better illustrate the art groups, but does little to address what is happening in the crafts groups (and in the U3A as a whole). To state it plainly, this individualistic approach is inadequate to explain learning (particularly craft learning) in the U3A. Paying more attention to the way that crafts are taught and learned in the U3A can help to move away from a purely personal conception of learning to one that more fully acknowledges and addresses social implications. In this sense, ignoring crafts in the literature is doing a great disservice to the field, causing it to ignore some potentially important issues.

Although the field can learn a good deal from looking at crafts, there is currently a schism between art and craft. In the art education literature, the focus is almost entirely focused on art. Crafts are often ignored and if they are addressed at all, they are deemed as a good “starting point.” To my knowledge of the literature, crafts are not addressed in their own right as worthy of consideration. Crafts are seen as stunting creativity and it is only the “serious” study of art that warrants any sustained attention. Addressing this issue, Faith Agostinone-Wilson (2001, p. 32) states:

An art class setting where freedom and experimentation are encouraged is wonderful, but what double message do adult students receive when self-selected patterns and kit crafts are condemned with no room for argument? This is a concern I have when we’re talking about working with elderly women, who often bring such projects into the art studio. “Crafts, patterns and kits shut down creativity.” “They dull the mind and spirit,” seem to echo the sentiments of many art education researchers. Popular craft is to be expelled from any valid art program (Bloom, 1980; Clements, 1980; Greenberg, 1980; Hoffman, 1980; Hubalek, 1998; Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987).

Her comments here reflect the literature and the current state of the field and how it is completely tied to modernism and traditional hierarchies, with the high arts being worthy of study and the low arts and crafts being considered lesser and to be avoided at all costs. The myth that is being perpetuated in the literature is that crafts are the antithesis of creativity. My observations of the crafts groups have not supported this assumption.

At my first attendance of the Handicrafts II group, the members had brought in cards that they had received over the holidays. The leader had asked them to bring in cards that were handmade that could inspire new projects. Each of the members brought in a large stack of cards. They went around the table, showing what they had brought. Some of the members also brought ones that were not homemade but that gave them
ideas for something that could be homemade. It seemed that everything they looked at gave them new ideas: the color scheme on this could be used for a project using that … the pattern here could be used there … and so on. They were looking at everything with a creative, artistic eye. In just about anything, they saw something that could provide inspiration for a new project.…

A final art education myth to explore is that kits are the worst thing that can appear in the older adult art class (e.g., Greenberg, 1985a). Agostinone-Wilson (2001, previously quoted) questions this myth, but only treats its surface, suggesting that we should not discourage students from doing what they choose to do. She does not address the fact that kits could actually be helpful, as illustrated by a Handicrafts II meeting. In this group, the member who led the group taught a beading technique and the other members used it to make bracelets. As the “expert” for this meeting, the member brought in a number of examples of beading projects that she has done. She explained where she learned some of the techniques. Her knowledge came from a wide variety of sources: adult education classes, night school, weekend workshops, books, magazines, from other crafters, and from kits. After reading so much about the evils of kits, it took me somewhat by surprise that she had no reservations about “admitting” that she used kits. What is interesting here, is that kits and patterns are not seen as “crutches” or as things to be avoided as the literature portrays them to be. Instead, these members use them as springboards. They take a skill learned from a kit and apply it to something else. They take the kit and modify it, changing it to suit their needs. Sometimes, they follow it exactly, not modifying a thing, following each instruction to the letter. Either way, the kits are used as resources. They learn from books, from patterns, from formal classes, from each other, and from kits. They are constantly learning and improving their skills, aided by a variety of resources. Kits are not “bad” they are just another way of acquiring new knowledge and new technique. Consequently, after learning something from a kit, the technique could be taught to the rest of the group. Surely, learning from someone else’s knowledge is not seen as a problem, but does it make a difference if this knowledge is acquired through an adult education class or a how-to book or a “creativity-stunting kit?”

While originally setting out to show the U3A as a more learner-centered, viable model for older adult art education, I now think that there may be other equally important issues to explore through the course of the study. The benefit of the research now seems as though its not simply about a good educational model for the U.S., but its potential to transform the way the field handles arts and crafts, education for older adults, and art education in general. The apparent rifts between the literature and my U3A observations need to be addressed and at this point, this seems a bit more important than pointing out what is “useful” in the creation of a new model.
APPENDIX B
RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear ___________ U3A,

I am writing to request your permission to observe your art and crafts programme. My name is Kathy Lynn James and I am an art education graduate student at the Pennsylvania State University in the U.S. As my interests in research are centred around art programming for older adults, I am fascinated by the organisation and principles of the U3A. I have read extensively about art for adults and am truly interested in learning more about art in the U3A. I am committed to advocating for older adult education in my writings and professional undertakings and plan on creating and promoting accessible programs in the U.S. at the completion of my academic degree.

For my dissertation research, I will be attending art groups at several local U3As. The research would involve attending and observing one or two of your art or craft groups and interviewing members. I am most interested in members’ perspectives on the groups and what they perceive as benefits of participation. Ultimately, it is my hope that what I learn can inform future programming and increase awareness of the U3A and U3A principles in the U.S. I am proposing to attend three or four art groups from two or three local U3As during the Spring Term, and if your permission is granted and scheduling allows it, I am interested in attending one or two of your groups. In exchange, I will volunteer and contribute to the organisation in any way I can.

There is no risk to participants and the research will be approved and monitored by the Office for Research Protections at the Pennsylvania State University to ensure this. Participation will not be required and observations will only be conducted if groups and members consent. The rights of U3A members will be respected and will at all times take precedence over the research study. Members and groups may also choose to withdraw from participation at any time without consequence. Please write back and let me know if you are willing to participate, if there is any additional information that I can provide you with, and if you have any questions.

I look forward to your response.

Best wishes,

Kathy Lynn James
Ph.D. Candidate, Art Education
The Pennsylvania State University
APPENDIX C
OPEN CODES, JANUARY 2007

The codes are presented in the order in which they were found within the fieldnotes.

Setting
Member description
Connections
Adult education
Technology
U3A
Learning in retirement
Memories of education; past education
Teaching: Methods, attitudes, approaches
Travel
Discussion
Museums, galleries, historic homes…
U3A activities
Resources
Issues, problems
Age differences
Harlaxton Summer School
Joint U3A group membership
Procedures
Accessibility issues
Social interaction, social capital
Finances
Refreshments
Quotations
Volunteering
Insider information, member knowledge
My role, my place in the research
U3A pride
Expertise, credentials
Content, projects

Membership characteristics
Gender
Interests, combining interests
Group leader
Home decoration
Gift giving
Generational exchange
Benefits
Creativity, ideas
Terminology, language
Decision making
Supplies
Sharing knowledge, ideas, expertise…
New members
My questions
Third Age Trust
Techniques
Schedule
Exhibiting work
Student-teacher distinction
Charity projects
Community involvement
Group work/projects
Individual work/projects
Background information
Unforeseen circumstances, illness
Art education literature
Communities of practice
Free choice learning
Traditions, hierarchies
APPENDIX D
CATEGORIES AND DESCRIPTIONS FROM OPEN CODING,
JANUARY 2007

This is a list of the categories created from open coding with the codes they contain and a brief description of the categories.

**Members and Roles**

*Description:* The “who.” This category describes who the members are. It describes the members and the leaders and the roles that they assume. General membership characteristics are documented here, including age, gender, and educational experiences.

*Codes:*
- Member descriptions
- Group leader
- New members
- Membership characteristics
  - Age differences
  - Gender
  - Memories of education, past education
  - Expertise, credentials

**Group Practices**

*Description:* The “what.” This category describes what the members do. Here the focus is on what the members are learning, how they are learning it, and the procedures and approaches that they engage in. Included in this are the tools that members use to carry out these practices: supplies, resources, technology.

*Codes:*
- Teaching: methods and approaches
- Student-teacher distinctions
- Group work/projects
- Individual work/projects
- Sharing knowledge, ideas
- Decision making
- Discussion
- Refreshments
  - Procedures
  - Insider information, member knowledge
  - Creativity, ideas
  - Content, projects, subject matter
  - Techniques
  - Supplies
  - Resources
  - Technology

**Context—The Research Site**

*Description:* The “where.” This provides the context for where the groups are physically as well as historically located. Background information tells about the group, how it was formed, and the path it has followed leading it to where it is currently situated. The setting tells about the physical meeting space of the group.

*Codes:*
- Background information
- Setting

**Issues and Realities**

*Description:* This is part of the “what.” In this category, the focus is more on the practicalities. They are more mundane issues and realities that underlie the groups’ practices. Scheduling, finances, illnesses, problems, and accessibility are issues that are addressed within all of the groups.
Codes:
Schedule
Accessibility issues
Finances

Motivations
Description: The “why.” This category deals with the motivations that members have for participating in the U3A and in the specific interest groups.

Codes:
Benefits
Gift giving
Home decoration

Social Capital and Community Involvement
Description:
Within the U3A – Looking at what interactions are present in Stamford U3A. How do the art and craft groups interact with each other? How do they interact with other interest groups? How do they interact with the overall organization? Beyond the local level, how do they interact with other local U3A groups, with the East Midlands Regional Association, with the Third Age Trust?
Beyond the U3A – How do interest groups interact with the local community and the outside world? Are there differences between the art and craft groups and how they interact? How does the U3A fit into participants overall learning in retirement scheme?

Codes:
Social interaction, social capital
Community involvement
Connections
Volunteering
Charity projects
Museums, galleries, historic homes…
Travel
Adult education

Research—Methods
Description: Pertaining directly to the research process. These are codes primarily for my benefit. They point out my role in the research and my participation on the participant/observer continuum. Helps to position myself and make myself visible as the data collector and constructor. Also points out questions that arise while constructing the fieldnotes and areas I need to look into further. Quotations and terms are noted as a location tool for future writing.

Codes:
My role, my place in the research
My questions

Theories
Description: Possibly to help in uniting categories. Art education literature and modernism to show the connections between the literature and the fieldnotes… To highlight the disconnects between theory and practice?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes:</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art education literature</td>
<td>Free choice learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communities of practice</td>
<td>Traditions, hierarchies, modernism</td>
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APPENDIX E
GUIDING QUESTIONS STEMMING FROM OPEN CODING,
JANUARY 2007

Questions for Observations
The initial observations were focused mainly on describing the setting and the basic procedures and workings of the groups. Now that this sense of the groups has been recorded ... what am I missing and what questions are best answered through more focused observations?

Student/Teacher Distinctions – Are they upheld or erased? By what means is this done and why? Are there differences between groups, and if so, what are possible explanations for this?

Individual vs. Group Projects – What groups engage in each kind of work? Are there some that undertake both? What are differences between the groups and does this have an effect on the types of methods used in the groups. If so, how?

Sharing of Knowledge, Ideas, and Expertise – How is this done and who are the key players? Does this vary from group to group? Are there variations in the types and amounts of sharing?

Resources – What resources are used? Who uses them, how are they used, and where do they come from? What effects do these resources have on the group? Are there differences between groups?

Teaching Methods, Attitudes, and Approaches – What methods are used? What differences are apparent between groups? Pay attention to methods that may be more transparent. Just because some groups do not use directive styles, does not mean that there are not any methods. They may just be more subtle and more difficult to detect.

Decision Making Processes – Who makes decisions that affect the group? How are they made? Are different types of decisions handled differently? How are issues dealt with? Are processes different in various groups?

Social Interactions – Are there differences in the types and frequencies of interactions in the groups? Pay more attention to who, what, how, and when these interactions occur ... what is their context?

Questions for Interviews
While some areas can be investigated through focused observations, others require insights from participants through interviews. The following areas can help in formulating the direction and focus of interviews and the creation of the interview questions.
**Background Information** – Asking about the histories of the groups can help to place them in context. This is information that can’t easily be acquired through observations alone.

**Roles** – How did leaders become group leaders? Do new members assume different roles? Do these roles affect experiences and/or perspectives? Do new members have different perspectives?

**Members** – What are their past educational and art experiences? What attracted them to the U3A and to the interest group?

**Involvement** – What other U3A groups are art group members attending? What community groups and activities are they involved in? What about volunteering? How does the U3A fit into members’ learning in retirement schemes?

**Motivations** – Why was the U3A chosen? What are the benefits? Why are roles assumed?

**Group Leaders** – Where did they gain their expertise? How do other members identify the leaders as the “experts?” Do they attempt to connect the group to the community?

**Methods** – What teaching approach is used and why? What is preferred by members? Do they agree?

**Resources** – What resources are used? Are there problems in gaining access to these resources?

**Limitations** – What are the major limitations or issues identified by members and leaders? At what level are they located (individual, interest group, local U3A, national U3A, community, etc.)?
### APPENDIX F

**FINAL OPEN CODES FROM THE FIELDNOTES AND TRANSCRIPTS, AUGUST 2007**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Sharing within U3A</th>
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<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scheduling</td>
<td>Ways of working</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-teaching</td>
<td>Advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past teaching</td>
<td>Give it a go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past art experiences</td>
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<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Exhibition</td>
</tr>
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<td>Student-teacher relationship</td>
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<td>Refreshments</td>
<td>Relaxation</td>
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<td>Social</td>
<td>Breaking U3A conventions</td>
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<td>Social support</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Time</td>
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<td>Neighbourhood groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td>U3A groups</td>
<td>Cancellations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Retirement</td>
<td>Joining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home décor</td>
<td>Self-doubt</td>
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<td>Ideas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gifts</td>
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<td>Generational exchange</td>
<td>Summer meetings</td>
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<td>Decision making</td>
<td>Motivations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roles</td>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
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<td>Sharing inside</td>
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New Codes not Represented in In-Site Open Coding

Scheduling
Learning
Self-teaching
Past teaching
Art talk
Arts talk
Guests
Sharing inside
Sharing outside
Sharing within U3A
Kits
Ways of working
Advice
Give it a go
Instructional books
Goals
Show-and-tell

Demonstration
Art/craft relationship
Relaxation
Breaking U3A conventions
Social support
Time
East Midlands Association
Shared learning projects
25th U3A anniversary
Neighbourhood groups
Autonomy
Cancellations
Joining
Self-doubt
Diversity
Summer meetings
Enjoyment
APPENDIX G
OLDER ADULT ART EDUCATION LITERATURE INCLUDED FOR
ANALYSIS, OCTOBER 2007

Writings (arranged earliest to most recent)
Hoffman, D. H. (1975). University extension programming in the arts and humanities
for the elder citizen. Studies in Art Education, 16(2), 58-64.
Hoffman, D. H. (1977). Stimulating the elderly to explore the arts. Art Education,
30(4), 4-6.
30(4), 8-11.
30(4), 12-15.
Art Education, 30(4), 21-22.
Association.
Hoffman (Eds.), Lifelong learning and the visual arts: A book of readings (pp. 9-
Greenberg, & D. Hoffman (Eds.), Lifelong learning and the visual arts: A book of
readings (pp. 18-22). Reston, VA: National Art Education Association.
Hoffman (Eds.), Lifelong learning and the visual arts: A book of readings (pp. 41-
P. Greenberg, & D. Hoffman (Eds.), Lifelong learning and the visual arts: A book
of readings (pp. 54-61). Reston, VA: National Art Education Association.
Hoffman (Eds.), Lifelong learning and the visual arts: A book of readings (pp. 62-
Bloom, L. P. R. (1980). Toward an understanding of lifelong growth, and participation
in visual arts production. In D. Hoffman, P. Greenberg, & D. Hoffman (Eds.),
Lifelong learning and the visual arts: A book of readings (pp. 78-96). Reston,


# APPENDIX H

## SEMI-OPEN CODING OF THE OLDER ADULT ART EDUCATION LITERATURE, OCTOBER 2007

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<td>Opportunity</td>
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# APPENDIX I
CATEGORIES FROM SEMI-OPEN CODING OF THE LITERATURE, OCTOBER 2007

## Older Adult Population
- Older adult statistics
- Older adult roles
- Stereotypes
- Age
- Retirement

## Experiences of Older Adults
- Life experiences
- Past education
- Previous art experiences
- Past teaching

## Motivations and Benefits
- Motivations
- Benefits
- Enjoyment
- Charity
- Interests
- Gifts
- “Give it a go!”
- Time
- Home décor
- Generational exchange
- Learning
- Relaxed atmosphere

## Methods and Approaches
- Methods
- Joining
- Content
- Ideas
- Group projects
- Refreshments
- Student/teacher relationship
- Sharing outside
- Exhibition
- Ways of working
- Guests
- Demonstration

## Things to Avoid
- Art vs. craft
- Instructional books

## Methods and Approaches
- Sharing inside
- Goals
- Advice
- Show and tell
- Decision making
- Process vs. product
- Encouragement
- Skills and techniques
- Options and choices
- Self-direction
- Student-centered

## Motivations and Benefits
- Creativity
- Social
- Selling art/craft work
- Legacy
- Life review
- Leisure
- Art as a distraction
- Communication
- Health benefits
- “Self” and individual concerns
- Expression

## Experiences of Older Adults
- Voluntarism
- Expertise
- Retired teachers
## Practical Issues

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## Programming

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## Art Education’s Place

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## Language of the Literature

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## Theories and Other Areas

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<td>(Post)Modernism</td>
<td>Adult education</td>
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APPENDIX J
OBJECTS AND PRINCIPLES OF THE U3A

The University of the Third Age in Cambridge:
Objects, Principles and Institutional Form

Objects

First, to educate British society at large in the facts of its present constitution and of its permanent situation in respect of ageing. One of the first of the ‘old’ societies, we find ourselves in a position which is bound to be shared by all developed countries, and finally by the whole of the world’s population.

Second, to make those in their later years in Britain aware of their intellectual, cultural and aesthetic potentialities, and of their value to themselves and to their society. To assail the dogma of intellectual decline with age.

Third, to provide from amongst the retired the resources for the development and intensification of their intellectual, cultural and aesthetic lives. In this way to help them to make effective and satisfying use of their freedom from work at the office, shop or factory. To devise methods of doing this which can be afforded in Britain.

Fourth, to create an institution for these purposes where there is no distinction between the class of those people who teach and the class of those who learn, where as much as possible of the activity is voluntary, freely offered by the members of the university to other members and to other people.

Fifth, so to organize this institution that learning in pursued, skills are acquired, interests are developed, for themselves alone with no reference to qualifications, awards or personal advancement.

Sixth, to mobilize members of the University of the Third Age so as to help the very large numbers of elderly persons in Britain standing in need of educational stimulation but who have no wish to engage in university studies.

Seventh, to undertake research on the process of ageing in society, and especially on the position of the elderly in Britain and the means of its improvement.

Eighth, to encourage the establishment of similar institutions in every part of the country where conditions are suitable and to collaborate with them.

Principles

1. The university shall consist of a body of persons who undertake to learn and to help others to learn. Those who teach shall also learn and those who learn shall also teach.

2. Joining the university shall be a question of personal choice. No qualification shall be required, and no judgement made by the university between applicants.

3. Everyone joining the university shall pay for its upkeep and for instruction received. These payments shall be the sustaining revenue of the institution apart from gifts by foundations and other patrons. No support from the funds of local or central government shall be expected or sought.

4. No salary, fee or financial reward shall be paid to any member of the university for teaching other members, counselling them, or helping them in any way.

5. All members of the university shall be expected to offer voluntary service to it and to its activities in relation to society at large, especially to the elderly.
6. Members shall be prepared to help to organize assistance in the way of voluntary manpower for educational, cultural and other institutions which may be able to use such manpower, and which under present conditions are prevented from fulfilling their functions as they would like. Examples are art galleries, museums and libraries.

7. The undertaking of all members to teach as well as to learn may be fulfilled in the following ways other than instruction:
   - Counselling other members;
   - Taking the university’s offerings into the homes of the housebound, the bed-ridden, those in retirement institutions or in hospitals;
   - Helping the effort to provide intellectual stimulus for the mass of the elderly in Britain;
   - Taking part in any other offer of manpower made by the university to educational or cultural institutions which stand in need of it.

8. The University of the Third Age shall not engage itself in the activity of judging between its members. There shall be no examination system; neither degrees, diplomas nor certificates shall be awarded. Nevertheless, classes within the university engaged in any particular intellectual or other exercise may decide on ways of recording an individual’s success in the exercise in question.

9. The curriculum of the university shall be as wide as resources permit, ranging from mathematics and the natural sciences, by way of philosophy, literature, and history, to music and to aesthetic, practical and physical training. Nevertheless, the preference of members will be the only criterion of what is done, and it is recognized that humane subjects are likely to predominate.

10. The standards of the university shall be those set by its individual classes, and ways shall be devised to permit each member to find his or her own level. There shall be no attempts to set a university-wide standard, or any assimilation with university standards elsewhere.

11. Studies related to the specific situation of the elderly—social, psychological, physiological—shall be included as a matter of course. They will be given no particular prominence in teaching, but high priority in research.

12. In pursuance of the aesthetic, art historical and topographical interests known to be popular with the type of student likely to be members of the university, special arrangements shall be sought with national bodies such as the Arts Council, the National Trust, the Department of the Environment, the Nature Conservancy and the Forestry Commission, so as to obtain the facilities required to develop instruction and research in these fields. Regional institutions like the Folk Museum in Cambridge and the Museum of East Anglian Life at Stowmarket will be of particular importance. Voluntary assistance where appropriate (see above Principle 6) shall be offered in return.

13. Strong emphasis will be laid on research in all the university’s activities. Every member will be encouraged to join the widespread accumulation of scattered data required for advancement in knowledge of certain kinds (for example archaeology, natural history, the history of population and social structure, the history of climate and geological events). Every member will be expected where possible to have a
research project of his or her own, and to write up its results. Engaging in research, however, shall not necessarily count as fulfilling the obligation to teach.

14. Insistence on learning as an end in itself shall go along with an emphasis on the value of making things and on acquiring and improving skills of all kinds. The curriculum shall therefore include, if there is a demand, and if facilities can be found, such subjects as computer programming, accountancy, business and managerial studies, spoken languages and handicrafts in textiles, metal work, wood work, bookbinding, printing and so on. Painting, sculpture and music shall be given high priority.

15. Special importance shall be attached to physical training and suitable supporting activities, and negotiations entered into for these purposes with local institutions disposing of the facilities.

16. The closest possible collaboration shall be maintained with the Extramural Board of the University of Cambridge, with the WEA Eastern District and with all providers of adult educational programmes in the area. Ways shall be sought to take advantage of all such teaching and research facilities as may be available in any local institution, especially the University of Cambridge, and to negotiate for the services of any individual willing to assist the University of the Third Age though not himself wishing to become a member.

17. The form taken by each individual pursuit within the University of the Third Age shall be decided on each occasion by members collaborating for the purpose. Though the conventionally taught ‘class’ will often be the form adopted, every encouragement will be given to seminars, with many participants; acting; visits to sites of scientific, archaeological or historical interest; to museums, art collections, houses and so on.

18. Although the University of the Third Age in Cambridge will be the first of its kind in Britain, it is reasonable to expect that others will soon be founded in our country. Every effort shall be made to encourage interchange with these institutions at home and abroad, to exchange teaching with them, to collaborate on research with them, to unite with them in the furtherance of the intellectual interests of the elderly, especially in Britain.

19. Apart from the voluntary research undertakings of its members on every suitable subject, the university shall seek to collaborate with professional research activity on the processes of aging, especially aging as a social phenomenon.

20. ...

Peter Laslett, 16 September 1981

(Laslett, 1989, pp. 177-179)
APPENDIX K
MISSION STATEMENT OF THE THIRD AGE TRUST

The Aims of the Third Age Trust are:

1. To encourage and enable older people no longer in full-time paid employment to help each other to share their knowledge, skills, interests and experience
2. To demonstrate the benefits and enjoyment to be gained and the new horizons to be discovered in learning throughout life
3. To celebrate the capabilities and potential of older people and their value to society
4. To make Universities of the Third Age (U3As) accessible to all older people
5. To encourage the establishment of U3As in every part of the country where conditions are suitable and to support and collaborate with them

The Objectives of the Third Age Trust are to:

1. Provide national support to the Universities of the Third Age in the UK
2. Provide support and advice to potential new member U3As and seek to start new groups in areas where the U3A movement is under represented
3. Raise the profile of the movement both nationally and internationally

May 2007

(Third Age Trust, 2007)
APPENDIX L
ASSOCIATION FOR EAST MIDLANDS U3As LEARNING SUPPORT POLICY

**Learning Support**

*Support for Group Leaders and Coordinators*

The policy agreed at the East Midlands Regional meeting on 21 February 2007 was:

1. **Policy**
   
   It is for individual U3As to make arrangements for the support and development of their group leaders as they see fit to meet their needs.
   
   To foster and enable support and development the Association will:
   
   Make available events and activities which will:
   
   - provide opportunities which U3As can take up.
   - facilitate U3A members meeting with colleagues from other U3As to learn from each other.

   Where appropriate, work through established groupings of U3As, such as Neighbourhood Groups, to provide those activities and events referred to in paragraph 1.2.1 above.

   Provide examples of practice which have proved effective.

   The Area/Region will strive to ensure that its programme of support as a whole will be flexible to accommodate the varied needs and practices of individual U3As.

2. **Plan**

   The Association will over the next 12 months:
   
   Offer a half day workshop for Group Coordinators.
   
   Provide a half day workshop for Group Leaders in a number of ‘subjects.’
   
   Provide a half day workshop for potential group leaders.
   
   Set up a small working group to oversee this programme of work.

(Association of East Midlands U3As, 2007)
### APPENDIX M

**STAMFORD U3A INTEREST GROUPS**

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<td>Music Appreciation III</td>
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<td>Ballroom Dancing</td>
<td>Photography</td>
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<td>Bird Watching</td>
<td>Play Reading Group I</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bridge Club</td>
<td>Poets and their Poetry</td>
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<td>Bridge – Intermediate</td>
<td>Quilting and Embroidery</td>
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<td>Church Visiting Group</td>
<td>Self-Help Health Group</td>
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<td>Country Dancing</td>
<td>Science/Technology</td>
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<td>Creative Writing</td>
<td>Scottish Strathspey Dancing</td>
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<td>Discussion Group</td>
<td>Scrabble</td>
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<td>Singing for Pleasure Group</td>
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<td>Social History</td>
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<td>Financial Discussion</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
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<td>French Conversation</td>
<td>Strollers Group</td>
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<td>Garden Group</td>
<td>Sunday Lunch</td>
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<td>Geology</td>
<td>Swimming</td>
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<td>German I</td>
<td>Travel Group</td>
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<td>Handicrafts I</td>
<td>Understanding Music</td>
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<td>Handicrafts II</td>
<td>Vegetarian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jazz Appreciation</td>
<td>Walking</td>
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<td>Keep Fit Group</td>
<td>Wine Group I</td>
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<td>Literature I</td>
<td>Wine Group II</td>
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<td>Literature II</td>
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<tr>
<td>Literature III</td>
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## APPENDIX N
### HANDICRAFTS I PROJECTS

#### Craft Projects
- Cathedral window patchwork
- Flat decoupage
- Raised decoupage
- Bargello tapestry
- Paper flowers
- Stamping
- Fabric covered boxes
- Ribbon covered polystyrene
- Glass painting on cards
- Glass painting
- Pergamano parchment craft
- Paper quilling
- Smocking
- Weaving
- Origami
- Tapestry
- Cardboard boxes
- Tatting on a needle
- Ribbon embroidery
- Celtic crosses
- Ribbon tree decorations
- Boxes from wallpaper/wrap paper
- Crochet
- Metallic threads on cards
- Tapestry teacup
- Decorated polystyrene ball
- Blackwork
- Temari
- U3A embroidered tablecloth
- Lace
- Teabag folding
- Scoubidou knotting
- Patchwork quilts

#### Outings
- Painting ceramic trinket pots (at Bourne Ceramics)
- Beading pendant (taught by Handicrafts II leader)
- Iris folding (taught to Handicrafts II group)
- Etui square boxes (taught by Bourne U3A)

#### Community Projects
- St. John’s Church Christmas Tree Festival (annually)

#### Charity Projects
- Teddies for Tragedies
- Trauma Teddies
- Linus Project blankets
- Patchwork blankets for Peterborough Hospital’s Special Care Baby Unit
- Baby jackets for Peterborough Hospital’s Special Care Baby Unit
- Baby jackets for hospital in Malawi
- Patchwork blankets for Geriatric Unit at Oakham Hospital
APPENDIX O

FORMAL, INFORMAL, AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

Within the field of adult education, there is a distinction made between formal, informal, and non-formal education. The distinction, as defined by Coombs, Prosser, and Ahmed (1973) is:

*Formal education*: the hierarchically structured, chronologically graded ‘education system,’ running from primary school through the university and including, in addition to general academic studies, a variety of specialised programmes and institutions for full-time technical and professional training.

*Informal education*: the truly lifelong process whereby every individual acquires attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from daily experience and the educative influences and resources in his or her environment—from family and neighbours, from work and play, from the market place, the library and the mass media.

*Non-formal education*: any organised educational activity outside the established formal system—whether operating separately or as an important feature of some broader activity—that is intended to serve identifiable learning clienteles and learning objectives. (cited in Smith, 2005, p. 2-3)

Within these definitions, the British University of the Third Age is categorized as non-formal.
APPENDIX P
HOFFMAN’S PROPOSED STUDY UNIT: PREPARING ART TEACHERS TO WORK WITH OLDER ADULTS

IA. Who are the elderly?
   1. A definition of “old”
      a. Where does old begin?
      b. What is the difference between middle aged and old?
   2. Changing population patterns of the United States
      a. Future projections
      b. Present populations
   3. Demography of the American elderly
      a. Ethnic population patterns
      b. Housing patterns of the elderly
      c. Location of the elderly
      d. Income of the elderly

B. Physical traits held in common by elderly persons
   1. Sense deterioration
   2. Physical disabilities
   3. Terminal and long-term illnesses and their effect on mobility

C. Psychological and sociological aspects held in common by the elderly
   1. Self-concept and changing roles
      a. Loss of job
      b. Loss of family role
      c. Isolation
      d. Loneliness and loss of mate
      e. Increased leisure
   2. Intellectual considerations
      a. Intellectual activity in the later years
      b. Intellectual involvement
      c. Intellectual accessibility
   3. Sociological considerations
      a. A social role for the elderly?
      b. An intergenerational involvement and approach
      c. An improvement in attitudes toward the elderly

II. The role of the arts in the lives of the elderly
   A. Past history of adult arts programs
      1. WPA of the 1930s
      2. Art therapy programs
      3. Recreational programming
      4. Adult education programs
      5. Art education programs
   B. Present programming efforts
      1. National Endowment programs
      2. National Council on the Aging, Center for the Arts and the Aging
3. Arts administration efforts
4. State Arts Commission efforts
5. Local programming efforts
6. University extension efforts
7. Community college efforts
8. Therapeutic and leisure activities
9. Media (radio and TV activity)
10. Individual instruction

III. Needs assessment and identification of the elderly audience
   A. Why survey the elderly
      1. How a survey can supply the basis of knowledge needed by practitioners to institute programs in the arts
   B. What to survey
      1. Leisure patterns
      2. Previous art involvement
      3. Arts preference
      4. Preferred technique for presentation of the arts
      5. Preference of time for arts presentation
      6. Attitudes toward art and education
      7. Accessibility
         a. Transportation
         b. Special problems of rural elderly
         c. Intellectual accessibility
         d. Extension programming

IV. Organizing arts programs for the elderly
   A. Total arts approach
      1. Theater
      2. Dance
      3. Music
      4. Visual arts
      5. Humanities
   B. Administrative organization and delivery of services
      1. Beginning a center for arts programming for elders
      2. Continuing education strategies
      3. Extension programs
      4. Community arts centers and development
      5. Public school and adult education
      6. Museums
      7. Grantsmanship
      8. Public relations strategies
      9. Dissemination
VITA

Kathy Lynn James

Education
2004  The University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ
M.A. Art Education

2002  Douglass College at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick, NJ
B.A. Art History, B.A. Visual Arts

Teaching Experience
2004-2007  Graduate Teaching Assistant—The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

2002-2003  Graduate Teaching Assistant—University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ

Presentations
2006  National Art Education Association National Conference
Title: Types of Art Programming for Adults and Older Adults: National and International Programs

2006  National Art Education Association National Conference
Title: The History of Adult Education in Art in 1930s Delaware: A Look at Participation and Accessibility

2005  National Art Education Association National Conference
Title: Art Education and Older Adults: Research

2005  American Art Therapy Association National Convention
Title: Art Curricula in Nursing Homes: A Postmodern Rationale from Art Education

2004  National Art Education Association National Conference
Title: A Look at Coursework: Art and Older Adults

Awards
2003  Graduate School Fellowship—University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ

1998-2002  Edward J. Blounstein Outstanding New Jersey Scholar

1998-1999  Douglass College Scholars Program Scholarship