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Abstract: Applied Arts

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Promoting Memory Health through art and culture

Art and culture –based memory and brain health promotion service models are developed and piloted in EAKR funded Pumppu Project, TEHU Turku Region during 2012-2014. The project’s aim is to map out a framework for the visual arts, photography, dance and drama –based service models in cooperation with the third sector. The target group in this project is 65-75 year old third age people. They have the opportunity to create creative senior culture, as well as pave the way for new types of arts and culture-based health and well-being service models especially in promoting memory function and brain health.

In the first phase of this practical and emancipatory action research and development project the focus is on designing the framework, piloting the service models, evaluating, analyzing the results and constructing the first models for marketing.

The future follow-up project’s goal is to expand the framework to multidiscipline and multi-professional cooperation within the Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences (Carpe) together with the third sector. The aim is to find ways to implement the idea “Art and Culture in promoting Brain health both in education, continuing education and training practitioners in health, well-being and arts.

Keywords: memory health, brain health, art, culture, third age people, service model
Conference Paper

Art and Culture – Keys for promoting Brain Health and Memory function

Many adults living their third age may have father, mother, aunt or some neighbor who is living with Dementia. They are sometimes worried about their future and maybe having dementia. This worry needs to be noticed. (Halpern 2008; Immonen 2012.)

After the evaluation of Alzheimer’s Disease International, there has been about 35,6 million people living with dementia in year 2010, and in year 2030 the amount could rise up to 65,7 million. In 2010 there will be people living with dementia approximately 7,3 million in Europe, the prognosis is that the amount is growing in near future. The constant growth of memory illness is a big concern and challenge for social and health organizations in whole Europe. (Gränö 2010.) There is a special need to develop preventive brain health service models that promote holistic health and well-being and which can support the citizens to live active and independent life and even get resistance against dementia. It is possible to influence the self-care and health behavior of the third age people with new kind of culture-based service models.

Recent studies and the results of several development projects combining art, culture health and well-being has shown the power of art and culture when looking at the effects of human behavior of the elderly (Lehikoinen & Heinsius 2013; Franklin Gould 2013). It has been shown that art and culture activities have great influence with elderly people living with Dementia. There have been remarkable changes in posture, in ability to speak, in finding forgotten words, in recovering social interaction, in being present more actively and in being happy and experienced health and being meaningful person of the society. In several research and studies it has been proved that our brain needs good and suitable nutrition, physical exercise and also cognitive challenged intellectual activities so that the brain can continue creating new cells at any age. (Kramer & al. 2004.).

Understanding Human being

By understanding also third age people as psycho-, physic-, social and cultural human being we can provide a framework for new kind of working methods with which we can enhance the activity of the brain and memory function. The frame of this project is a construction of the research of art, education, art education, behavioral sciences and cultural history for to create the model: Art and Culture – keys for promoting Brain Health and Memory function, in cooperation with the third sector actors (visual artist, dancer, actor and occupation therapist). On this base the task was to
create group activities where the aim is to provide cognitive ability especially visual perception, visual thinking, reflective thinking and social interaction and also interactions that awake personal memories and life stories (Arnheim 1974; Dewey 1934/1980; 1997; 2010; Malmivirta 2011).

Understanding of third age people as learners

The base of planning the art activities interventions of this project was to understand the meaning of earlier human experiences as knowledge (Dewey 1916/1966; Jarvis 1992; 1999; Usher & al. 1997). This implies commitment to pragmatist aesthetics and Dewey’s theory of pragmatist arts education with special reference to the principles of means-ends action and sociocultural practice (Dewey 1934/1980; 2010; Malmivirta 2011). During the art activities one is reflecting his/her earlier experiences and one’s memory is moving in past-present-future time continuum, where present experiences are reflected very carefully with the past experiences and also with the expectations, hopes and fears of the future. The expectation of one’s future is constructed in interaction with the past (Immonen 2013).

Every new experience evolves in the recollection of the past. The past experiences serve the present activity. By bringing up into the mind the connections of the past situations, one’s memory helps to act in new situations in guidance with these past experiences (Dewey LW 10; Malmivirta 2011). In our development- and research project we use old historical paintings, participant’s paintings, photos of childhood, memories of childhood surroundings and architecture and also personal stories for to wake up the past experiences. This kind of memory impulses function as a link between present and future. They help to open new angles to past experiences and to see new kind of possibilities. By understanding that the function of art and the function of the visual brain are one and the same or at least that the aims of art constitute an extension of the functions of the brain. All visual art is expressed through the brain and must therefore obey the laws of the brain, whether in conception, execution or appreciation and no theory of aesthetics that is not substantially based on the activity of the brain is ever likely to be complete. (Zeki 1999; Malmivirta 2013.). Understanding also the biological basis of aesthetic experience (Zeki 1999) we claim that this kind of model and including activities promote brain health and memory function and also improves one’s ability to keep active. By experiencing art – making art or receiving art – has shown to have straight influences to health and well-being. Art and culture seems to be a special medicine for empowermental work when fighting against dementia.

Artists for innovation – artists in new context
It is argued that training artists for innovation is a contribution to the societal and business challenges of today (Heinsius & Lehikoinen 2013). The world economy challenges the structures and the conventions of our society and compels them to change. In order to succeed, organizations need to invest in creative innovation, cultural competencies, emotive knowledge and collaboration as well as in the well-being and the skills improvement of the skilled labor. Artistic and cultural competencies have a significant role in meeting these challenges (Kaunisharju & Niemi 2013, 6).

In this project different kind of disciplines and also multi-professional team work have met each other in close collaboration; art, behavioral sciences, social sciences education and art education sciences, cultural history sciences - especially seen from the concept of lifelong learning. In planning the curricula for the art activity interventions we have looked for the core competencies which are needed in constructing the framework for the model Art and Culture – keys for promoting Brain Health and Memory function. This competence framework has a special role also as a diagnostic quality assurance mechanism in art interventions processes. The framework can also be used as a systematic scaffold through which work processes in art interventions can be evaluated. It is important to use such diagnostics as a means to keep up the professional standards in art interventions and also to improve different work processes on continuing bases (Lehikoinen 2013).

In designing the curricula and pedagogy for the model of Art and Culture - keys for promoting Brain health and Memory function we have took in to account how to activate cognitive abilities such as visual perception, visual thinking, reflective thinking and social interaction and also interactions that awakens personal memories and life stories.

In human behavior and growth art has a remarkable place (Dewey 1996/1925/LW 1; 1996; Malmivirta 2011). When planning art activities and noticing personal life experiences as knowledge and the base of the art activity, the group members engaged very strongly to the meaning giving processes of the art activities. They gave artistic expression to what they had experienced in their lives. Transcending the traditional boundaries of their world for something new has become possible as they have been engaged in artistic activities which have been research-oriented and which have helped them to analyze, clarify and reshape meanings of the past life experiences to the present and future.

**Description of the pilots Art and Culture–keys for promoting Brain health and Memory function**

In this pilot project we have constructed four different models for to promote brain health and memory function in cooperation with the artists of several third sector representatives; Visual artist
Satu Mäkipuro, Occupational therapist Hanne Suokas, Dancer Jonna Aaltonen and Actor Tiina Puranen. The models are:

1. **What do I want to remember from my life?**
   The meaningful life experiences and memories are visualized through the methods of visual art, childhood photos and personal stories for to activate brain and memory function.

2. **Yellow cottage and patch of potatoes**
   The meaningful places and surroundings – nature, buildings and environments are visualized through visual arts, childhood pictures, maps and architecture and with personal stories for to activate brain and memory function.

3. **The stage of my memories**
   The meaningful memories are visualized through old all kinds of pictures and paper theatre for to activate brain and memory function.

4. **Genius Body**
   Activating brain and memory function through creative moving and dancing.

*The first sight in to the data*

Participants (group of six members) describe their experiences after the artistic intervention of the first model What do I want to remember from my life? Lady 1 and Lady 2 describe their experiences:

“**My memory works now! Before participation in the group I said to my husband that I am worried about my memory, but not anymore. [...] The art is soothing on the other hand, when you have to think over, ponder and strain yourself, and on the other hand when you think about the brain capacity it refreshes. Before I was not interested in my childhood, now I understand that how big role it has... to defragment.**” (Lady 1)

“**I started as a novice, but when we got to experiment with paintbrush to create different colors to clean white canvas, the brush begun to move almost by itself and the excitement was great – almost like a child.** “ (Lady 1)

"**We added photographs and newspaper clippings to our paintings with decubas technology. The work took with it and did not even notice to glance at the clock; I was amazed when the project leader Helena told me that the time is at the end. Image selection, layout and highlighting special sections with some color were fascinating. There was lot of pictures to choose from and I had to weed out some of the good pictures as well, because they didn’t fit into**"
the painting, and it would have been confusing. (Lady 1)

"I'm not just thinking about the past and the reminiscence of childhood. First of all, I do not have any proper highlights, but compared in the present day it was safe and filled with work and playing." (Lady 1)

Lady 2 describes her experiences:

“We were at the Wäinö Aaltonen Museum of Art to see Tuula Lehtinen's exhibition. Distinctive feminine works of art. Stunning colors, daring to try out different. I did not know what to think of those art works. Clear landscapes and the flowers were into my mind, as well as the shoes and the blue stuff on the wall. It has required a lot of the patience and the imagination. Vision of what is the end result.” (Lady 2)

“Above all, the most important thing was our work on display. The result of many weeks of hard work. Was a fun and interesting. “Learning new things making art for the first time– confusing. “A new way to look and to see.” (Lady 2).

The data of the four pilots will be analyzed during October - December 2013 and the results will be ready on January 2014. The piloted services models are ready in April 2014.

Future plan
The future following project Culture as a key for better brain health is based on the results of the piloted four models of the Art and Culture keys for promoting Brain Health and Memory function and will be developed further with the participating organizations.

The aims of the new project Culture as a key for better Brain Health are:

1. To expand the frame of the piloted and modeled Art and Culture - keys for promoting Brain health and Memory function further (strengthen to role of cultural history science, physical science and biological and health science etc.) with the Universities of Applied Sciences (Carpe) and with the Universities of Turku and Helsinki.
2. To construct the frame of the new project: Culture as a key for better Brain Health on the base of the modeled Art and Culture -keys for promoting Brain Health and Memory function.
3. To widen the cooperation with the third sector organizations
4. To find ways to implement the idea of the expanded service model both in education, continuing education and training practitioners in health, well-being and art
5. And further to find something new and yet unknown in coming cooperation
References:


