In What Ways Do Community Center Art Programs Affect Older Adults?

A thesis presented to

the faculty of

the College of Fine Arts of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts

Christina E. Stapleton

August 2009

© 2009 Christina E. Stapleton. All Rights Reserved.
This thesis titled
In What Ways Do Community Center Art Programs Affect Older Adults?

by

CHRISTINA E. STAPLETON

has been approved for
the School of Art
and the College of Fine Arts by

_____________________________________________________

Rosemarie V. Basile
Assistant Professor of Art

_____________________________________________________

Charles A. McWeeny
Dean, College of Fine Arts
ABSTRACT

STAPLETON, CHRISTINA E., M.A., August 2009, Art Education

In What Ways Do Community Center Art Programs Affect Older Adults? (79 pp.)

Director of Thesis: Rosemarie V. Basile

The purpose of this study was to investigate the affects that art programs in community centers can have on older adults. This is a case study that examined the activities and participants of an art program in a community senior center. Another aim was to consider how the program could influence the artwork of the students in the class. Finally, how these programs affected the participants cognitively, socially, and emotionally were examined. Qualitative research methods were utilized to gain insights and understandings of the research topic. The data consisted of observations, field notes, and interviews with the students and the instructor. It was found that this particular art program provides participants with many cognitive, social, and emotional benefits. It was also discovered that the program does have a positive influence on the artwork produced. The research suggests that other programs like this one could provide its participants with a beneficial and meaningful experience.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

Rosemarie V. Basile

Assistant Professor of Art
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One: Introduction</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older Adults</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Long Learners</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Art Program</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delimitations</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two: Literature Review</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development in Older Adults</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifelong Learners</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intergenerational Art Programs</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art Therapy</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporters of Programs</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Three: Methodology ............................................................................................ 31

Purpose and Research Questions .................................................................................. 31
Research Design and Theoretical Stance ...................................................................... 31
Context of the Study ..................................................................................................... 33
Participants and/or Data Sources .................................................................................. 33
Data Collection Methods .............................................................................................. 34
Data Analysis ................................................................................................................ 36
Validity and Trustworthiness ........................................................................................ 37

Chapter Four: Results ....................................................................................................... 39

The Research Setting .................................................................................................... 39
Reflecting on Classroom Observations ......................................................................... 40
The Class Environment ................................................................................................. 40
Class Routine ................................................................................................................ 41
Interview With Student Participants ............................................................................. 42

Why Students Joined the Class .................................................................................. 43
Class Influence on Artwork ...................................................................................... 45
Benefits of Community Center Art Programs .......................................................... 46

Interview With the Instructor ........................................................................................ 46

Instructor Background .............................................................................................. 47
Influence on Students ................................................................................................. 47
Benefits of Community Center Art Programs .......................................................... 48

Summary ....................................................................................................................... 48
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In today’s society many people are found to be living longer and more fulfilling lives. People are living well into their seventies and eighties after retirement. While growing older is a fact of life where the only alternative is death, society appears to have created a negative stigma that surrounds it. We live in a world of teenage role models, plastic surgery, and ‘age defying’ cosmetic treatments. Succumbing to old age seems to be a fate worse than death itself. As a result, many seniors have been pushed aside and instead of these being the ‘golden years’ of their lives they are all too often the forgotten ones.

In my research, I will be looking at the role of art programs and activities in the lives of older adults and will be asking, “In what ways do these programs affect these adults”. My research will look at how these programs impact their social, physical, and cognitive development as they move on into their later years. If the mind is a muscle, is it important to exercise this muscle as we move into old age? Will participating in such activities influence the longevity of a person’s cognitive abilities? In what ways can an educator encourage students to become lifelong learners, especially in the field of art?

I first became interested in this area of research when my grandmother took me to her community center. She had been participating in one of the art classes there and they had put on an art exhibit displaying the students’ work. As we walked through the exhibit she pointed out her favorite pieces and the students that she thought were the most talented. Every one of them had an interesting story and all were on very different skill levels. Some were beginners like her, people who had always had an interest but never
had the time until now. Others had a background in the arts and displayed a lot of talent. The one thing they had in common was that they were all interested in the pursuit of learning about art.

Being the only other art student in the family, my grandmother often pulled me aside to show me the latest piece that she had been working on. She was learning many of the same techniques that I learned in high school and in my early foundation courses in college. Each time she showed me something I could see the time and effort that she was putting into it. I could tell that going to this class and learning a new activity was fulfilling a need that she perhaps had put on hold for most of her life because of other commitments that demanded her time. She has a large and loving family and leads a very active life, but she still had the desire and interest to participate in these art classes.

As an art educator, I am often being made aware of the effects of the arts on students in grades K-12. But what about the students who do not fit into this age group? How can different art programs impact their lives? It is important for art educators to be made aware of the benefits and the need for older adults to experience the world that the arts have to offer.

**Statement of the Problem**

As we grow older, it is important to discover ways to keep our mind and our emotional well being in tact. It is something that almost all of us, no matter how young we feel today, will have to face. In my research, I examined an art program in a local community center. Many senior recreation centers offer art programs. I will point out how these art programs affect the lives of the people who participate in them. I hope to
discover the benefits that art classes can have on older adults. I want to find out if art can help our emotional and physical health in the later years of life. I hope to show that adults should be encouraged to participate in art classes, as they grow older.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research is to find the benefits and possibilities in art education programs in senior centers. The research discovers what kind of people are involved in these programs and how it affects their lives. It examines the instructor of this program to discover their personal and professional opinion of how art and their program affect the lives of older adults.

I will look at the relationship between the students in the class and the instructor. I will observe how they interact with one another and determine weather or not these interactions are meaningful or beneficial to the students. I will also observe the relationships formed between the students themselves to see if these connections prove to be beneficial to them.

The research will also focus on the act of art making while these interactions are taking place. I will examine whether or not the students gain from the artwork that is being created in this environment. I will look at how the class influences the artwork that is being produced. I will determine if the artwork itself helps the student’s cognitive, social, or physical well-being. I will look at the artistic background of each student and determine whether or not their skill level and initial interest in art influences them in anyway.
Research Questions

My principal research question is:

In what ways do community center art programs affect older adults?

My subordinate research questions are:

In what ways does the art program influence the student artwork?

In what ways do these programs affect the students cognitively, socially, and emotionally?

Definition of Terms

Older Adults

Throughout my research I will use the term older adult to describe the participants in my study. I consider an older adult to be an adult above the age of fifty. The focus of this study is on people in this age range and how art programs benefit people in this stage of life.

Life Long Learners

In my literary research, I will explore the idea of a life long learner. A life long learner can be loosely defined as an adult who wishes to continue their education and learn about new concepts and skills. Many are only looking to obtain the knowledge out of the need to continue to learn new things, while others are looking to pursue a degree.

Community Art Program

A community center art program is a series of classes that focus on art that is held regularly at a community center and taught by an instructor that has an art background. I
chose to observe a class at a senior center in order to focus on the age demographic that I have chosen.

**Limitations**

The recreation center I have chosen has one art class with one instructor. I will be limited to conduct my research on the participants who have already chosen to take the class at the recreation center. I will not be recruiting outside of the existing class. I will also be limited to the time frame of the class. I will not have any involvement of the lessons that the students will be taught or how the class is conducted. I will only be able to observe the teaching style of one instructor that is already employed at the recreation center.

**Delimitations**

I will choose to remove myself from the day-to-day routine of the class. As the researcher, I wish to be a non-participant observer. I do not want to disrupt the normal activity of the class in any way. I want to observe the student-to-student interactions and the student and instructor interactions in their own natural environment.

In this study, I will only look at the operations of one recreation center. I want to focus on one class. I feel that this will allow me to examine my results more in depth and will allow me to focus more on the individual students and the instructor. I realize that all classes are run differently based on the participants, resources, and the instructor of the class. I feel for the purposes of this research one class will be sufficient.
Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will provide art educators, community center organizers, and the general population with a better understanding of how art programs in community centers affect older adults. If the affects are positive, it may encourage funding and support for programs like this in community centers. It will also create an awareness that the community needs to start looking at different strategies to ease the transition from young age to old age. Almost everyone in society will become an older adult. It is a well-known fact that with medical advancements, more and more people are living older longer.

It is important to study what will have an influence on the lives of older adults because it will affect all of us as some point in the future. My study will contribute to the programs that encourage older adults to keep making and thinking about art. It will show that art education does not end in high school or college. Art making continues throughout a person’s entire life. My research will also show that it is never too late to start making and learning about art. Art education is a life-long learning process.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is a review of the literature found on the different influences that art programs can have on older adults. Throughout my research I looked at the different phases of human development in the late phases of life. Art therapy, intergenerational, and college level programs are all discussed and research showing how these programs benefit their participants is presented. The findings will show that there is a correlation between art programs and positive influences in development. Teachers are encouraged to discuss the concept of a lifelong learner with their students to promote the idea of always developing new skills and therefore maintaining healthy cognitive abilities later in life.

Introduction

In developing my research, I have looked to a variety of sources. I have chosen books that discuss the technical phases of adult development and aging. I have read about the work of other art educators who have also noticed a need for art education for older adults and what they are doing to contribute to this field. I also looked to research done on the topic of intergenerational art education programs and the benefits that can come from these programs. Another significant area of study is that of art therapy with older adults and the influence that these programs have on this age group and people with Alzheimer’s disease.

First, we will look at the different stages of development that older adults are going through. I will then discuss the different art programs that this age group has access to and how they each affect older adults in different ways. I will define the term art
program as an art-learning environment that is facilitated by an instructor or educator in a classroom or group setting. I will broadly define the term art as any creative activity in any medium that is used to express emotion, aesthetics, or to convey a message to the viewer.

Development in Older Adults

For the purpose of my research, I found that it would be beneficial to me to have a broad understanding of the developmental stages of this age group. The literature I sought out included books that discussed what is currently going on in society pertaining to older adults. I read about the different stages of the aging process and studied how the body is functioning at specific stages in a person’s life. Having a knowledge of this information will be useful throughout my research and will enhance my understanding as to how art may affect older adults.

As discussed above, the aging population of the world we live in is growing considerably. One in eight people are over the age of 65 in the United States. Within the next 50 years it is projected that this nation will mature and that number will increase to one in five people that will be over the age of 65. Among these people above the age of 65, more people are living to the age of 85 (Waite, 2005). This means that the people in our nation are living longer and at a steady rate. Cavanaugh and Blanchard-Fields (2006) note that, “There has never been as many older adults in industrialized countries as there are now” (p.4). This is due to the increase of better health care, and it is pointed out that the lowered rate of mortality of women during childbirth is one of the factors (Cavanaugh & Blanchard-Fields, 2006). One can imagine this increase in the lifespan of older adults
is creating different stresses on health care facilities and other support systems that surround the elderly.

With this knowledge in mind, it is important to plan for and to consider the different outcomes that this issue raises. This is a subject that will theoretically affect all of us in one way or another. Either you are already witnessing the aging process of family members like grandparents or parents, or you will eventually experience it yourself as you move into older adulthood. One way to prepare for the future as educators and human beings is to have a better understanding of the developmental process during this stage in life.

There are three stages of life that contribute to the human aging process according to Bleiberg Seperson & Hegeman (2002). These stages include, maturation, when the body is developing to its highest level. Next, is a level of maturity where the body maintains this level of physical functioning for a period of time. Finally, aging where the body’s level of performance steadily deteriorates.

It is a common misconception that aging and disease are one in the same. This is because the lowering function of the immune system is one of the main characteristics of aging that occurs in all people (Bleiberg Seperson & Hegeman, 2002). When the immune system is compromised a person’s health is at risk and is therefore susceptible to other diseases. As a result the connection between disease and aging are related but not one in the same.

Cavanaugh and Blanchard-Fields (2006) discuss the idea of the life-span perspective where human development is separated into two phases, an early phase and a
later phase. During the early phase, which includes childhood and adolescence, people’s size and abilities develop at a rapid pace. The later phase, which involves young adulthood, middle age and old age, the changes that occur are slow but the abilities always keep on developing (Cavanaugh & Blanchard-Fields, 2006). This perspective allows for the idea that “aging is a lifelong process, meaning that human development never stops” (Cavanaugh & Blanchard-Fields, 2006, p.3).

Many physical changes occur during this stage of development for older adults. Outward appearances are among the first indicators of someone’s age, even though many times looks can be deceiving. One characteristic is the wrinkling of the skin. The outer layer of skin becomes thinner, collagen fibers lose flexibility, and elastin fibers lose the ability to keep the skin stretched which causes sagging (Cavanaugh & Blanchard-Fields, 2006). As people grow older, their hair tends to thin out and start to grey. Interestingly, grey hair is not a result of a change in color of the hair, but rather a loss of pigmentation of the hairs that remain (Whitbourne, 2005).

Throughout development, a person’s size and shape are always changing. In older adults this is no different. A decrease in height occurs as the spine compresses and bone strength is weakened (Cavanaugh & Blanchard-Fields, 2006). Weight changes also occur. During middle age, the metabolic rate decreases and most adults gain weight. Older adults then tend to lose weight due to the body losing both muscle and bone mass. These symptoms can be prevented by regular exercise such as walking and jogging and with resistance training to help reduce bone loss (Whitbourne, 2005).
The information-processing model is a cognitive factor that is influenced by aging. Information-processing explains how the brain sorts and processes ‘data’ that is taken in. It is often compared to the way a computer stores and retrieves information. Throughout aging speed and reaction time tend to slow down. Whitbourne (2005) points out that “older adults do not become disadvantaged or deficient during any particular component of information processing tasks, but that they are simply slower” (p.181). This shows that older adults can still take in new information and learn but would benefit from time and patience from a teacher.

Memory is the attainment, storage, and retrieval of information. There are many different components to memory. Long-term memory is the ability to remember a lot of information from anywhere to a few minutes to many years. Working-memory is the process of holding different information temporarily while using that information for another cognitive task. Cavanaugh and Blanchard-Fields (2006) say that the task of working-memory is an “age-sensitive factor that affects long-term memory processing, such as encoding information into long-term memory” (p.221). The research shows that there is a correlation between the slowing of memory and old age. These changes in memory are a result of encoding and retrieval problems that occur in the brain (Cavanaugh & Blanchard-Fields, 2006).

There are two social theories discussed by Bleiberg Seperson and Hegeman (2002) that I found relevant for my research. The first one is the disengagement theory. It states that it is natural and expected for older people to give up different social roles, interests, and activities as they age (p.65). It also claims that society also participates in
this disengagement, as it needs younger and more energetic people to take over. Although this theory is supported by some research, most of it is not (p. 65). This theory does nothing but support the different stereotypes that are related to ageism in today’s society.

In contrast the authors also present the activity theory. This theory supports that “the continued social interaction and productivity are essential to a sense of well-being and life satisfaction in old age” (Bleiberg Seperson & Hegeman, 2002, p.65). Social interaction is believed to help guide a person through the aging process successfully. Some research may show that this theory is not entirely true, but it is something to consider. One can only imagine that some engagement as we grow older would be more beneficial than none at all.

**Lifelong Learners**

The question is, who is interested in taking art courses and furthering their knowledge of the arts? What is motivating them to continue with classes well into adulthood? When I started my research I kept coming across the term ‘lifelong learners’. At first I was puzzled by the term and whom exactly the authors were referring to. I then decided that it was a nice way for researchers to address students who were older adults or adults not receiving a degree but still taking classes. As I kept reading, I found that my first thoughts as to what a lifelong learner is could not be summed up into one category of people.

In the book, *Crossroads: The Challenge of Lifelong Learners* (Fitzner & Rugh, 1998) the editors address the issue of lifelong learners and the lack of attention that they are receiving in today’s society and from the realm of education. They call for the
development of more adult programs to ensure lifelong learning opportunities for adults. They add “education in general, including art education, has given little serious attention to the concept of lifelong learning and the needs of adult audiences” (Fitzner & Rugh, 1998, p. viii).

More and more adults are enrolling in art programs not only in community centers but also in colleges across the country. There are also many who have become full-time students and are seeking to obtain a degree. According to Grant’s article (2001) “almost half of the students at the nondegree-granting Art Students League of New York in Manhattan are 50 or older.” It has become clear that adults continuing their education in the arts are on the rise. I find it very interesting that there are so many adults who wish to continue their education and their learning experiences as they enter their later years.

There are many different types of lifelong learners and there are a variety of situations that they bring to the table. Many students take these courses on a college level for many reasons. Some of these reasons include: arts are required for another degree, the classes fill idle time, the art classes increase the student’s self-esteem, it is the student’s first opportunity to take an art class, it is a means of personal enjoyment, there is a need for aesthetics in the person’s life and it can be a form of therapy for the student (Fitzner & Rugh, 1998). With all of these examples it is clear that it would be difficult to discover all the different motivations that a student would bring to the classroom. The one underlying reason that most of these lifelong learners have in common is that they all simply want to take these art classes (Fitzner & Rugh, 1998).
It is important for educators to have an understanding of this topic because it requires the educator to be prepared for a variety of different circumstances. These older students take art classes for many different reasons. When the various reasons for taking art classes are combined with the older students’ unique lifestyles and personal situations, compared to the average 18-20 year old students’, it calls for an untraditional approach to art education (Fitzner & Rugh, 1998). Most older students have active careers outside of their classes. The majority of them also have other commitments such as families that prevent them from focusing all of their time on their coursework. Teachers in this field must be flexible and understanding when it comes to interacting with lifelong learners such as these.

Grant (2001) discusses the many different benefits that resulted from students taking college level art courses. In the article there are many quotes from students and the outcomes of their experience. One student expressed that it is nice to have the feedback of the other art students, one described it as a self-discovering experience, and another felt that interacting with the younger students made him feel years younger and gave him a new perspective on life (Grant, 2001). Many lifelong learners may feel the same way or have the same thoughts when it comes to furthering their education in the arts. Grant (2001) also points out that many “psychological studies have shown that pursuing art in one's later years may lead to a longer and healthier life.”

So what is it to be a lifelong learner? Is it someone who continues to take classes even though they are not working towards a college degree? Is it a person who is over a certain age? Is it someone who has chosen a career path but still feels the need to learn
about a different area of study? Houle, (1999) whose father was a professor for older adults, was very impressed by the idea of ‘lifelong learners’ when he was young and says “I wrote my essay about how critical is was for everyone to be a lifelong learner. My teacher's comment? ‘Interesting idea. But not realistic.’ ”(para. 9). Let’s hope this teacher’s perception on lifelong learning has changed.

For me, there are many different definitions of what a lifelong learner is or could be. Someone who is always asking questions, someone who is constantly trying to learn something new, someone who wants to open their mind to new ideas and information. For the most part, I think the concept of being a lifelong learner should be a goal that all people have.

**Intergenerational Art Programs**

The gap between generations is getting wider and wider. Many young people are not interacting with the older adults in their families as much as children in the past did. A household with three generations under the same roof is no longer common. Instead, older adults are living in segregated communities or on their own. Many researchers have been studying the effects this has on the different generations involved. LaPorte (2004) reports that the results indicate that there is “loneliness and a decline in self-esteem among older adults, a decrease in children’s awareness of their cultural and historical background, a fear of aging in the young, and an increase in negative stereotypes of each age group for the other” (p.3). Because of these issues, there have been many steps taken to provide a forum in which young people and older adults can interact.
To help rectify this situation various intergenerational programs have been implemented across the country. Newman says that an intergenerational program is one that provides “activities that increase cooperation and exchange between any two generations. Typically, they involve interactions between the young and the old in which there is a sharing of skills, knowledge and experience” (LaPorte, 2004, p.2). The age groups can vary in age and the programs can take place in a variety of locations such as schools, nursing homes or other community gathering places (LaPorte, 2004). Intergenerational art programs can provide ways for elders and youth to come together to create social change and to have an impact on their community (Perlstein, 1998).

There have been many different intergenerational art programs that have emerged throughout the years. One in particular is Elders Share the Arts (ESTA), in Brooklyn, New York, which has existed for nearly 20 years. The art that is created transforms life histories into works of art. The staff of professionals creates a place where the older adults can share their oral histories with younger community members and then they work together to create a work of art that interprets these histories in the form of theater, murals, or writings. This program has worked to break down the cultural and generational barriers to create a larger sense of community in this area (LaPorte, 2004).

Participants in this program can benefit from the arts though community education and social change can occur. Students learn art-making skills, develop self-expression and make new self-discoveries throughout the program. Perlstein (1998) points out “intergenerational art programs emphasize exploring commonalities and differences and learning respect, tolerance, and appreciation through the art form.”
The communities around New York in which this program takes place are areas where one ethnic group originally lived and then the young people of that group grew up and moved out. This leaves room for another ethnicity to move in, many times leaving the older adults of the previous culture isolated in their neighborhood. In this sense the gaps in the community are both generational and cultural, where young and old both have their own set of negative stereotypes toward the other (Burnham & Perlstein, 2002).

The ESTA program aids in different generations and cultures coming together to learn about each other. In this environment older adults can share their knowledge and their histories of the past with young people. In this sense, the art program creates a world where the two generations can come together to learn from each other and create an understanding of the common bonds that exist between them. These are understandings that might not have otherwise existed.

As a result of many intergenerational programs, seniors are able to feel a sense of belonging in their community and in the lives of young people. They are able to share their knowledge and insights acquired throughout life, they may feel that they have the opportunity to care for the young people they encounter and are able to learn new skills and develop creatively (Burnham & Perlstein, 2002).

Dr. Angela LaPorte did a study similar to this program for her doctoral dissertation from Pennsylvania State University (1998). In her study the teenagers of Hispanic and African American dissent came together with the elders of their community in Harlem, New York. The students interviewed the senior citizens and created oral
histories through these discussions. Together, the two groups worked to create artwork based on these oral histories.

The interactions between these two groups fostered a learning experience for both. A greater sense of community was created and stereotypes on both levels were lessened. Art skills were enhanced on both ends and interesting, contextual art evolved throughout the process. Also, a more productive learning environment was created for the teenagers when the older adults were present. LaPorte’s findings appear to be corresponding to the outcomes established in the ESTA program. Therefore, these two examples of research validate each other.

LaPorte (1998) suggests many different ways that older adults can be integrated into the classroom, art galleries and museums. Simply inviting an older adult into the classroom to share ideas and past histories or having a child look at an object and think about the history behind it can connect them to the past and can benefit the students (LaPorte, 1998). LaPorte also suggests that incorporating older adults into the classroom is a cost-effective way for teachers to create meaningful art lessons. She states, “Understanding these intergenerational interactions will enable art educators to incorporate into the art classroom a rapidly growing population of elders who have long been overlooked as a potential resource” (LaPorte, 1998, iv).

There can be many positive outcomes from incorporating older adults into the art classroom. Many students do not have strong relationships with older adults and this can encourage meaningful relationships between the generations. I found it particularly interesting in LaPorte’s (1998) study that most students were more comfortable when the
elders were in the room and that they provided a “nurturing environment for learning” (p.165). This suggests that the mere presence of the adults in the classroom improved the climate for the students. Many studies have shown that all a student needs is one caring adult in their life to grow and develop successfully. For many students an older adult from an intergenerational program could possibly be that adult. Research such as this can give older adults a new sense of self-worth and belonging.

Many children only see their grandparents annually or semi-annually (LaPorte, 2004). Luckily, I have always had a strong relationship with both sets of my grandparents and have been fortunate to understand first hand the importance of learning from older adults. Simple things such as understanding where they used to live or listening to stories of their experiences growing up can give a person a better sense of the world around them. Many older adults have a lot of history and wisdom to share. With the many negative stereotypes that exist surrounding older adults, this resource of knowledge is going untapped.

**Art Therapy**

If art can have such a positive influence on people that are perfectly healthy, what can it do for people who have been battling disease and sickness? There have been many developments in the field of art therapy that have displayed the many correlations between the use of art and the positive progress displayed by these patients. In addition, much research has been done in the field of Alzheimer’s disease and how art therapy can impact the lives of people living with this disease. Keller (1990) says, “the ‘art as therapy’ approach exploits a healing potential inherent in the creative process” (p.68).
According to the American Art Therapy Association [AATA] art therapy is “an established mental health profession that uses the creative process of art making to improve and enhance the physical, mental and emotional well-being of individuals of all ages.” (“About Art Therapy”, n.d., para. 1) This form of therapy can be used in the treatment of many disorders, illnesses, and addictions. It is the goal of art therapy to help people in areas such as stress relief, resolving conflicts, and achieving a new level of insight and achievement. This field is the combination of human development, the visual arts, and psychotherapy. Art therapy programs can be found in a variety of places such as hospitals, clinics, and wellness centers (“About Art Therapy”, n.d.).

Different strides have been made to research the outcomes of incorporating art therapy programs into nursing homes and other elder care facilities. Ferguson and Goosman (1991) report on a program that was developed to allow for a trial run of an art therapy program in two different nursing homes. The researchers realized the correlation between budget cuts and the lack of art therapy programs in these facilities. Also because there is a lack of these programs in elder care facilities art therapy students interested in geriatrics often have difficulty gaining intern experience. They designed the program so that the facilities could receive the services of the art therapists and students of art therapy for one year at no cost to them. After that point they could evaluate the results and decide for themselves if they choose to continue the program and find alternate funding.

As the program progressed participants interested in the program increased, nearly doubling the size of the group they started out with. Group work promoted a sense
of community among the residents and much discussion took place over each other’s artwork. As a result of this program it was observed, “socialization, self-esteem and memory retrieval were enhanced by the art experience” (Ferguson and Goosman, 1991, para. 16). After the year was completed both facilities chose to keep the program as a result of the positive outcomes. The program gave art therapy students with experience that they needed in the field and the university affiliated with the study provided some financial support to keep the art programs running.

Many art programs suffer due to a lack of priority when budget cuts need to be made. This study is a perfect example as to how the arts were deemed a valuable program after the program was implemented for one year and obvious positive results were observed. Putting the money issues aside, it is important to look at the real issue in all this. The art therapy program provided researchers and other staff observable results that this program and others like it influence positive outcomes in the lives the participants. It also gave students much needed experience.

Within the field of art therapy much advancement in the study of the affects that these programs can have on Alzheimer’s patients and dementia has developed. It has been observed that while participating in creative activities these patients can be brought ‘back’ to who they once were, if for only brief moments in time. The art activities can spark memories and stimulate memory retrieval. Art therapist can report on the many different benefits of incorporating an art therapy program into the routine of these patients. Hanneman (2006) reports “creative activity has been shown to reduce depression and isolation, offering the power of choice and decisions”.

Hoban (2004) describes an art therapy program in New York that is especially for people with Alzheimer’s and other forms of dementia. Some of the remarks that the program director, who is also the practicing art therapist, made were very interesting. The director reports that it is difficult for Alzheimer’s patients to express their emotions to the world around them. The art allows the patients an outlet to release their emotions in a healthy way. The article states that art therapists use different techniques to allow patients to use art to “express emotions when verbal communication becomes too difficult and stressful” (Hoban, 2004, para. 2).

The program is shown to have improved the ability of patients to release their anxieties, increase the moral of the overall staff, creates a sense of community and gives the patients a sense of accomplishment. Besides visual arts, other methods are also incorporated such as movement therapy and even poetry writing. These are all forms of expression that can relieve the patient’s metal stresses. The director also states, "People with Alzheimer's have a sense of failure, of purposelessness that is not their fault. When the left side of the brain, which controls daily living, begins to deteriorate, the creative right brain begins to compensate for that loss and beautiful things can happen" (Hoban, 2004, para.1). With the use of art therapy, the lives of Alzheimer’s patients can be improved and positive outcomes can develop.

**Supporters of Programs**

There have been many support systems and organizations that have been developed to enhance the lives of older adults. The American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging [AAHSA] is one of them. The AAHSA values the art of older
adults so much that when they moved buildings they wanted the new art work on the walls to be the work of seniors. As a result they created the Honored Senior Artist program (Zinn, 2001).

More than 700 works of art were submitted and in the end 200 works were selected adorn the walls of the AAHSA. Morale and excitement were boosted among the senior communities where the chosen artists lived. The permanent art exhibit is a reminder that old age does not have to be an idle time. There is also the hope that directors will see the artwork and will be encouraged to open an art program within their own facility if one does not already exist (Zinn, 2001).

It is always a validating experience for an artist when their artwork is displayed in public. It creates a sense of self worth and accomplishment. This is something that is not to be forgotten among the many artists who are considered older adults.

Another organization that is of some interest is the National Center for Creative Aging [NCCA]. According to their website (www.creatvieaging.org) this organization facilitates different training for people who wish to incorporate creative aging art programs into their elder care facilities. It is a branch-off organization of the ESTA program that was discussed earlier. This program provides people with the knowledge and skills that are needed to provide a successful art program for older adults. Organizations such as these can establish a high level of standards that can encourage quality art programs for older adults.
Summary

In this chapter, I addressed the issue of how art and other creative activities can influence the development and overall quality of life in older adults. I examined the many different programs that could be implemented into the routine of older adults and what the result of these programs can have. The findings of my research show that there is an apparent correlation between art programs and positive developmental effects in older adults. Emotional, cognitive, social and physical improvements are all observable outcomes of integrating an art program or activity into an older person’s regular schedule.

As teachers, it is important to recognize these benefits because it is our job to encourage students, young and old, to continue their education as they develop. Our purpose is to create a level of interest in our students that will make them want to learn new skills long after they have left school. Art is an area that even those who claim they are ‘not good at art’ can participate in and benefit from. The positive results of having an outlet to creatively express oneself are immeasurable.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Purpose and Research Questions

This study will examine the effects that art classes in community centers can potentially have on older adults. As an art educator, I am an advocate for continuing education into older adulthood and the idea of being a life long learner. My research will study benefits of incorporating art making into the life of an older adult. It will also look at the interaction that takes place with others during an art class in a community center. This research will focus on the relationship that the students have with each other and the relationships formed between the student and their instructor.

As stated in a previous chapter, my principal research question is:

In what ways do community center art programs affect older adults?

My subordinate research questions are:

In what ways does the art program influence student artwork?

In what ways do these programs affect the students cognitively, socially and emotionally?

Research Design and Theoretical Stance

This research was conducted within the constructivist paradigm. Constructivism is based on the idea that people build on their knowledge through their past experiences and backgrounds. It assumes that there is not one social reality but multiple realities, a subjectivist epistemology, and a naturalistic set of methodological procedures (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). I believe that a learner constructs their ideas based on past knowledge and experiences. I feel that this fits into my research because I was very interested in the
pervious knowledge of my participants. My own past experiences as well as those of the participants of this study influenced my research and how I analyzed my findings. I observed my participants in their natural setting and gained my knowledge through typical constructivist methodologies such as interviews and observations.

The data collected was obtained in the form of an instrumental case study. This is a common research design within the constructivist paradigm. A case study is the systematic gathering of information about a particular person, social setting, or group to assist the researcher in effectively understanding how the subject operates or functions (Berg, 2004). Case studies utilize a number of data collecting techniques including observations, oral histories, and interviews.

This case study is instrumental because it examines one particular case in order to provide insight into the main topics surrounding this research. While I am interested in this specific community art program and the different complexities that exist within it, I am also interested in how this particular art program can provide me with better understanding of the affects that art programs like it can have on people participating in other art programs outside of this community.

This case study is considered qualitative because I am collecting my research data in its natural environment. I am not interested in influencing the data but allowing the data to influence me and then interpreting that data that I receive. I will collect the data while involved and observing in the routine activities of this community art program. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) say, “qualitative researchers study things in their natural
setting, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p.5).

**Context of the Study**

The research was conducted at The Grandview Recreational Senior Center where a weekly art class for older adults is held on Tuesdays between ten o’clock in the morning until twelve o’clock noon. The room the class takes place in is a multi-purpose room that is also used for exercise classes and various other activities that go on at the recreational center. During the art class, larger tables are set up in the shape of a square for the art students to work on. Grandview Heights is a small suburban city located outside of downtown Columbus, Ohio.

**Participants and/or Data Sources**

The participants for the study were 5 adult females that ranged from the age of 45-75. They were all already students who chose to attend the art class at the Grandview Community Senior Center. Their artistic background and skill levels vary from beginner level with little or no previous experience to very experienced with a college degree in the field of art. Because the classes are held at the Grandview Community center, all of the students are residents of the city of Grandview. I also interviewed and observed the instructor of this class. She is woman in her mid forties who lives in Grandview and has her Bachelor’s degree from the Columbus College of Art and Design. She has never held a teaching certificate.
Data Collection Methods

The data was accumulated using different methods of data collection. This is the use of Triangulation, which is the act of gathering data using multiple methods in order to provide clarity of the data and verifying the observations. Techniques such as non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and discussions with the participants were used to gather data. This research examines the affects that art programs in community centers have on the adults in the classes. It also looks at the teaching methods of the art instructor. The researcher is a non-participating observer in the class that meets weekly.

It was not my original interest to intrude on the normal day-to-day activity that goes on in this class. As my research developed, I found that I was interacting with the students and became a balanced participant, participating the class discussions while maintaining my role of a researcher. Bailey (2007) discussed that if the researcher gets along with its participants in a setting and is able to gain trust, the subject will open up and provide the researcher with a wealth of information that may have otherwise been missed.

I attended four classes over the course of a month. Classes are held once a week for two hours. This is the only art class that is held at this particular community center. I kept a reflection journal and took notes during and after the weekly classes. The interviews conducted were gently guided by questions and remained conversational as well. During these interviews I took notes and then interpreted those notes into my weekly journal. I interviewed both the students and the instructor. During the class
sessions I took field notes to record the events that took place in the class. After each class session, I used the notes to record and reflect on the data in my reflection journal. Using these notes and this journal I was able to form my own interpretations on the events of the day and create a record of my observations.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with the students and the instructor that are involved with the art program at the Grandview Community Center. In the interviews, I wanted to allow my participants the freedom to share their feelings without any restrictions. During my interviews, I took notes as the participants shared their ideas on the discussion questions.

I interviewed the instructor one-on-one on the last day I came to the recreational center. The students were not present to hear her thoughts and ideas. During this interview I asked her personal and professional opinions regarding the research topic. I also asked her about her instructional methods and a series of questions on how she felt community art centers affected her students. I wanted to keep the interview semi-structured and conversational to allow her to share any of her insights that may be relevant to my research. I interviewed her separate from her students so that she would have the freedom to share her thoughts about the students themselves.

I interviewed the students in a group setting on a day that the instructor was not present. I gave them guiding questions and topics to discuss. On the day I interviewed the students there were only three who came to the class. I decided to hold the interview as a semi-structured discussion among the students rather then a one-on-one interview. I asked them questions that gave them a topic for discussion and allowed for them to share
their ideas and elaborate where they thought necessary. I asked them questions about their background in art and why they chose to participate in this class. I also asked them how they felt this class affected their lives. I feel this allowed the students to feed off of each other and allowed them to share ideas with not only me but with each other. During these interviews I took detailed notes. I then later reflected on and recorded their responses and my observations in my journal.

**Data Analysis**

Analysis during a qualitative research project is usually an ongoing process, from the conception of the project to the final stages (Bailey 2007). Being that this was a qualitative study, data analysis and data collection often occurred simultaneously. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003) qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. By using inductive analysis, which means that categories, themes, and patterns come from the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) I was able to form my own interpretations and conclusions from the data I collected. Bailey (2007) says that the qualitative researcher is often referred to as the research instrument, because their central role is to generate and analyze the data.

During my time at the community center I took notes and then later reflected on my experience in my journal. After my fieldwork was complete, I went back through my field notes, interviews, and journal writings to sort through, identify, and interpret important data that was collected. This process is called coding, which assists the researcher in simplifying the information collected to aid in the data analysis process. I searched for meanings in the interactions and interviews that made up my data. I
examined those meanings to gain understanding of the data. I then went through the data to challenge these meanings and searched for negative instances that would prove my interpretations wrong. As I went through this process, different patterns and themes presented themselves and conclusions were formed. As a result, I was able to clarify my thoughts and gain insights that focused on the issues that surrounded my research.

**Validity and Trustworthiness**

Bailey (2007) discusses Lincoln and Guba’s stance on trustworthiness, saying that “trustworthiness requires conducting and presenting the research in such a way that the reader can believe, or trust, the results and be convinced that the research is worthy of his or her attention” (p.181). In my data collection, the use of triangulation ensured that my data was consistent by means of multiple data collecting procedures such as observation, interviews, reflective journaling, and discussions. This allowed me to validate my data and allowed me to compare and to look for similarities and inconsistencies within the data when drawing my conclusions.

During my initial stages of research, I worked with my advisors and other professors to ensure that my research methods were appropriate and rigorous enough for the topic. During my field research I discussed my research with my advisors, fellow teachers, and graduate students to determine that my methods were reliable and practical. At that time it was determined that my methods were appropriate and great care was taken to ensure the integrity of the data that was gathered. This provided me with an “audit trail” that the research decisions I made were informed and valid decisions.
During my interviews and observations I played close attention to the actions and words of the participants of this study. By use of member checking, which is obtaining feedback and validation from the participants of a study; I would ask them specific questions pertaining to my main research questions to determine their own personal thoughts and concerns. To be clear on their responses, I would sometimes repeat their response back to them to verify my understanding. In drawing my conclusions, I took into consideration into these responses and I found that they often coincided with the conclusions that I came to as a researcher. My reflection journal entries elaborating on my observations and interviews can be found in the appendix. Finally, my advisors served as auditors by challenging my findings and examining my research. To further my audit trail, all my field notes and journal entries were made available to the community center and it’s participants. Also, the final copy of this manuscript can be found in the University’s library.

Throughout my research, I have provided a detailed account of the research setting, my methods, observations, and interviews. I have elaborated on my methods of analysis and data collection so that this process could be duplicated in a similar case study to allow another researcher to perform similar methods and come to similar conclusions regarding this research topic. Although, the specifics of this case study are exclusive to that of this particular community center and the participants in it, one might be able to replicate this study to further validate both the findings from my data and theirs.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The data I gathered from interviews, observations, and discussions with the class led to my findings of the benefits that community center art programs have on the students in the class. The following chapter reports the findings most relevant to my study and Chapter 5 will be a more in depth discussion on these findings.

The Research Setting

In November and December of 2008 I attended and observed four art classes at the Grandview Community Senior Center. The classes were held on Tuesday mornings from 10 am until 12pm. I gained access to this class by first contacting the instructor of the class and explaining my research and my purpose in the summer of 2008. After I received approval from Research and Compliance at Ohio University, I contacted the instructor again and we agreed on a date for me to start observing the art class.

The first day of my observation I introduced myself and explained to the students and the instructor who I was and why I was observing their class. I gave each participant a consent form to read and sign. I also gave each student a copy for themselves to keep with them if they had questions at a later date. I explained that if they did not wish to participate that they could choose not to with no penalty to them and I would leave them out of my research. I allowed them to ask me anything about my research before they signed the form. I made it clear that I was there to observe their class and did not wish to interfere with their day-to-day routine. All of the students who attended the class agreed to participate in my study. All signed consent forms can be located in the appendix.
All of the students were older adult females who had a general interest in art. There were a total of five women and the instructor who was also female. The women are all of Caucasian descent and were no longer working. Based on the demographic of the city of Grandview, the women came from upper middle class families. The women all said that they were residents of the City of Grandview and many of them had been for many years.

**Reflecting on Classroom Observations**

During my visits to the Grandview Community Senior Center everyone I met welcomed me. It was an overall friendly environment and most members were interested in me and wanted to ask questions. They also were more then willing to answer any questions I had for them and encouraged it. The employees were also welcoming and appeared to go out of their way to make all members and visitors feel at home.

**The Class Environment**

The room that the art class takes place is a large multi-purpose room that is used for various activities at the community center. There is artwork displayed throughout the perimeter of the room. They range from realistic landscapes to abstract figures. The art has various content and skill levels. Many of the pieces appear to be done by the same artist. The artwork is displayed all around the room mixed in with pictures of smiling seniors in various workout classes. All of the art is framed and matted and is clearly on display with pride. You can see that this room takes on many different roles for the community center based on the stacks of tables and chairs in the corners. There is a closet for athletic equipment and a full kitchen. For the art class, about six long tables are set up
in a square facing each other. The students sit in a square facing each other as they work on their projects.

**Class Routine**

On the first day, I arrived right on schedule when the class was supposed to start. The room was empty. The janitor was just getting started setting up the tables. About twenty minutes later the instructor arrived with another student. She informed me that the class itself was not very structured at all. She normally does not have a lesson to teach them and everyone pretty much works at their own pace. None of the students work on the same project or assignment but come in with their own ideas. This is how the class usually runs every week. The students and the instructor show up at different times. All of the students do not all come each week. The instructor informs me that this is normal, especially with the weather changing, people getting sick, and the holidays coming up.

As the students come in, they set up their art materials at their own table. They rarely get up to see what the others are doing. The instructor tends to read a newspaper or a magazine and stays in the conversation. The students discuss various topics including their children, grandchildren, pets, and where to buy art supplies. Employees of the community center come in and out of the room and admire what the women are working on. The students occasionally talk about their artwork. When someone gets stuck the students tend to ask each other for advice. The instructor usually comes over if asked for her opinion and they all discuss the different options the artist could take and then agree on the best plan of action for that particular artwork.
On the first day I observed, a new student came to the class. She had attended a class once before but had not returned in a couple weeks. She came in with her own project already underway. The usual students continued their conversations about clothing, family and artwork. During these class sessions the students talk freely to each other as they are creating artwork. At one point the new student looked up and said, “Well this is just nice how creating artwork allows the conversation to just flow. Art is to me what alcohol is to others. I just frees up my mind and allows for good conversation.”

My original plan during these class periods was to try to be a non-participant observer and to keep out of the conversation so that I do not disrupt the natural flow of the normal class activity. Eventually, the women start asking me questions and including me in their conversation. They are fascinated to learn about a new person in their class and are a very welcoming group. For most of them, the class is a social activity as well as an art one. They are interested to learn about my research, my studies and my current job position. Being an art student myself, I have much in common with the participants. I feel that as a researcher, involving myself in the conversation has allowed for a better rapport with the students and will benefit my research, as they will be more comfortable to share their thoughts and ideas regarding my research topic.

Interview with Student Participants

I chose to interview the students on a day that the instructor did not attend the class. I felt this would allow the students to answer questions and share ideas freely and honestly about the class. The interview was conducted in a group setting. Three students participated in the interview including one former art teacher, an older woman who had
her BFA in commercial art and a woman who had no previous art experience but was always interested in learning about art. During the entire interview the women continued to work on their art.

I started with some guiding questions that would allow for the discussion on each particular topic that would benefit my research. The following are the main questions that I asked the students:

- Why did you join this class at the community center?
- Do you have any previous art experience?
- How do your classmates/instructor influence your art?
- Do you create art outside of this class?
- In your opinion, what are the benefits of art programs like this one (if any) in community centers? Are there any negatives?
- Do you feel this class influences you socially, cognitively or emotionally?

During the interview, I took notes to keep the conversation open and casual. I did not want to interrupt them while they were expanding on a question. For most of the questions, the women took turns answering and sharing their opinion and ideas. A few of the questions sparked a discussion among them while others they did not really have an opinion about.

**Why Students Joined the Class**

Students in the class joined for different reasons but all had the same underlying theme, that they wanted a place to create artwork with others that shared their interest. The student who had her BFA in art (Student 1) said that a neighbor asked her to join
shortly after her youngest child went off to kindergarten (that was 30 years ago). The community center is close to her home and reasonably priced. She liked seeing people she knew at the community center and meeting new ones. The class fulfills her need to paint and the ‘actual doing of art’ on a regular basis.

The former art teacher (Student 2) says that she doesn’t get started on her artwork very often at home. She does crafts, but saves painting for the class period. The class allows her to get feedback and inspiration from other students. Her fellow students offer her a form of camaraderie that she needs. She said that when she creates artwork on her own she tends to be very critical of herself and her fellow students are very supportive. She discusses how being the only art teacher in a school can be very isolating because your coworkers do not often share your interest and cannot offer feedback for your artwork. This class gives her both a place to create her artwork and get support from other art students.

The student who has no previous art background (Student 3) says that she has always liked to draw and wanted improve her skill level. She had seen the class advertised for years and has always wanted to join, so one day she finally did. She also creates crafts at home and enjoys knitting. She has only been in the class for a few months but already feels that her painting technique has improved.

All of the students agree that they would not make time for art making at home if they did not go to the class each week. Home life and daily tasks would distract them. They say they would not be motivated to work individually and the class allows them
both a place to work and people to work with. They are inspired by each other to create art.

**Class Influence on Artwork**

All of the students reported that fellow students and their instructors have an influence on the artwork they create in the class. In all accounts the influence/experience seems to be a positive one. According to their answers from previous questions and my class observations, the feedback they get from others helps them with decision-making, inspiration, and the art-making process.

Student 1 says that her previous instructor had a great influence on her artwork. She went into the class thinking that she had learned all that she needed to know about composition and balance, but the previous instructor was able to teach her so much more. She said the previous instructor “was able to free everyone up and what she brought out of people was amazing.” She discusses the previous instructor in detail and mentions her often in the classes I have observed. The previous instructor is the mother of one of the administrators and passed away a short time ago. There is a plaque on the wall in the lobby of the community center with her picture on it, memorializing her. It seems that this instructor influenced more then just the art students in the community center. Student 1 also said that she was able to learn from other students in the class throughout the years. She mentions that the current instructor also does a good job, but she does not talk about her in the same way.

Student 2 says that she gets a lot from the other students and tries more new techniques since she joined the class. Other students introduce her to different techniques
that she would not have experimented with otherwise. She says that she started using
techniques like stamps, gesso, and molds that she wouldn’t have tried on her own. In
observing the work that she has created just in the classes I have attended, all of these
materials have been incorporated into her current work.

**Benefits of Community Center Art Programs**

The students agreed that there are some benefits to art programs like theirs in
community centers. Student 1 told the group that, “The benefits are the benefits of all of
the arts like music and dance. It is important to the community. Usually the arts are the
first to get cut. People need to let their mind think of something else once and awhile and
art allows them to do that.” Student 3 agrees saying that the arts are important for
students of all ages and thinks that students need to learn art at a younger age. Student 2,
the former art teacher, says “When I taught in the public schools some students would
only come on days that they had the electives such as art, music or gym.” After this
comment, Student 1 notes, “that is what is good about the adult education. We are here
because we want to be.”

**Interview with the Instructor**

On the final day of my observations, I interviewed the instructor of the class. On
this particular day none of the students had showed up to the class session. She once
again, explained that this is typical around the holidays as people get busy or sometimes
sick due to the weather. I wanted to interview the instructor when the students were not
around so that she would feel free to answer openly. The interview took place in the
lobby of the community center and was kept conversational. I took notes during the interview as the instructor was sharing her thoughts on my questions.

**Instructor Background**

The instructor has been teaching this art class for about a year. She took over when the previous art teacher passed away. She tells me the program itself has existed for about 27 years and used to be held at the police station across the street. She has no other experiences with teaching art at other community centers. Her artistic background includes a Bachelors degree from the Columbus College of Art and Design. She does not specify what her degree is in, but it is in a studio art. I know from previous conversations that she is a painter. She says that she creates artwork in her free time at home. She does not have any teaching background or training.

**Influence on Students**

I asked her how she encourages her students and how she thinks she influences their artwork. She said that mainly, the newcomers are the ones that need the most encouragement. She tells me “you have to reassure them that their work is good and all it takes is practice.” She says that many lack confidence in their art making abilities and need more help. She goes on to tell me that her regular students that have been attending the classes for years “are pretty confident in their work and need little encouragement.”

I asked her how she creates lessons and how they influence her students’ work. In my class observations I have not seen her teach a lesson or lead a discussion of any kind. She says that when she first started teaching the class she used to create lessons but says that the regular students in this particular class are pretty set in their ways. They like to
come in and work individually on their projects. She says that she just offers advice and encouragement when she can.

**Benefits of Community Center Art Programs**

I asked the instructor a series of questions that would help me better understand how she feels the classes affect her students overall. She said that she thought the classes would benefit her students socially. She said it seems they like the class. It gives them a safe place to be productive and allows them to be a part of something. She said that the class “gives them the commonality of art.”

She said emotionally, the class benefits the students. In particular the new ones, she said it allows them to get over their fears of failure. She also thinks its beneficial because it gives the students something to look forward to every week. Cognitively, she said that they are all creative thinkers and the class allows the students to keep their “creative juices flowing.” She said that the class keeps them painting and it’s beneficial because ‘When artists don’t make art, they don’t feel good.”

**Summary**

In summary, in the fall of 2008 I observed, interviewed and participated in class discussions with the art class at the Grandview Community Center. The class observations allowed me a glimpse of the weekly routine of this particular class. The student interviews gave me insight of what kind of students participate in this program and their personal opinion on how this art program influences their lives and their artwork. The interview with the instructor allowed me to see her perspective on how she views the art program, her students and how the art program affects them.
In the next chapter, I will discuss my findings more in depth including how they relate to my research questions, the review of literature, and my suggestions for future research on the topic.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSIONS

In this chapter, I will discuss my findings and conclusions in relation to my research questions. I will elaborate on how the art programs affect the participants, how the class influences their artwork and how the program affects them cognitively, socially, and emotionally. I will also discuss how my literature research relates to my findings. Finally, I will make suggestions for future research on the topic.

There is evidence that art programs in community centers affect the older adults in many positive ways. Some of the benefits that they can gather from participating in a community center art programs such as this one include but are not limited to, the influence the class can have on the students’ artwork, the emotional support of fellow students, and the social outlet that the class provides. I have also found that the instructor of the class also plays a role in facilitating these benefits for the class and can have both a positive and a negative impact.

Influence of the Artwork

My interviews with both the students and the instructor gave me an understanding of how the students influenced each other’s artwork. In both observation and interviews it was clear that the students asked each other’s opinion, offered advice, and suggested different techniques throughout the art-making process. Although the students were not working on the same project, they were able to work together as art students towards the common goal of expressing themselves through art.

One student in particular said that she would have not tried the different materials and techniques that were suggested by fellow classmates. Had this student not
attended the class with this group of women, her artwork would never have evolved to what it is today. Students in the class that do not have a high skill level would not have progressed as well as they did in the same amount of time. The students talk excitedly about how fellow classmates have improved since their first day. The guidance that their fellow students provide them during the class periods influence how they create and look at their artwork.

**Emotional Support**

When asked why they came to the class, almost all of them said that it was because they were not motivated enough to work independently at home. They wanted and needed the organized learning environment of the class. They looked forward to the feedback and support of the other students and their instructor. Most of them said that they do not make time for art at home and that is why they come to the class. They also encouraged me to bring my art supplies and work on something of my own. Even though I declined and focused on my research during the class periods, I still found the class very inspiring. There is something contagious about being in a creative environment.

As I mentioned in a previous chapter, the artwork is displayed in the community center classroom all year long. Once a year, they have an art show, where the work is displayed throughout the rest of the community center. During the class, the women point out who’s work is who’s and tell the artist how much they like it. Usually, the artist they are speaking of stays quiet and soaks in the praise of the other students. At one point, some of the ladies walked me around and told me about each piece on the wall and a little about the artist who created it. Other members of the community center admire the work
as well and compliment the students in the class. The art display is another way to build the confidence and self-esteem of the students.

**Social Benefits**

While the students are working, they are not only discussing their artwork. They are also sharing stories about their lives, seeking advice, and solving problems. The women talk about their families and discuss past and present problems. They discuss a variety of things from televisions shows to where to shop. They laugh and carry on. This class offers all of them a social outlet to interact with other people in their age group who have similar interests.

One woman that comes in had recently had a knee surgery. She had missed the class for a few months. She was not able to leave the house. The other women had made her a handmade get well soon card. On the day of one of my observations, the woman was able to come to the class for the first time. She was welcomed with excitement from the other students. The women expressed how much she missed going to the class and was going ‘stir crazy’ at home. When asked if she was able to work on any of her art, she said, “No, I just couldn’t get into my artwork or get inspired at home. All I did was watch T.V.” The class provides her and the other students with both a place to go work on art and a reason to get out of the house.

**The Instructor**

Through my observations and my interviews, I have come to discover the influence that the instructor has on the class. During the class periods she usually leafed through a magazine and took part in the conversation. She did not provide any organized
lesson or give instruction to the newer students. When I asked about this, she said that she used to give a lesson when she first started teaching the class, but the students are set in their ways and were there to work on their own projects. She provides them with advice and guidance when they ask for it or are stuck.

While this is beneficial to the regular students who come in with an art background and have a higher skill level, I feel that this leaves out the students who are there to learn something new. She has mentioned that most of the students are students who have been coming for years, some well before she was the instructor. When they get a new student, the student is expected to fall in with the others. They are not provided with any materials or instruction. From what the instructor has said, new students to the class rarely come back on a regular basis, if at all.

It brings me back to the way that one of the students was talking about the former instructor who passed away. According to her and other students at the community center, she was a great instructor. There is a plaque in the lobby dedicated to her. The student who had a BFA from Ohio State University said herself that she didn’t think she had anything else to learn about art when she first came to the class. This instructor was able to teach her more and inspire new students to create beautiful things. It seems that she left a legacy in this art program that is not being carried on in the same way.

Even during my interview with the instructor, I noticed a genuine disinterest in the questions I was asking and the class as a whole. She said that she honestly had never thought about how this program affects her students. Hopefully, these questions will allow her to think about and consider some of these things and she could potentially
improve her class. I do not think it is a coincidence that the students who keep coming back are the ones with natural talent and work on their own. While I feel that the class is beneficial to the regular students, the environment does not offer anything to the inexperienced student who would like to come and learn something new.

This brings up the question what should the criteria for an instructor in a program like this be? Just because someone is a talented artist and holds a Bachelor’s degree in a studio art, does that make them qualified to teach and inspire others? Would it be more beneficial to the students if the instructor had a background in teaching? Instructional courses can provide teachers with methods that develop demonstration techniques, help to inspire and engage students, and improve the overall management of the class. I feel that there is evidence that someone who has had some teaching experience could possibly have a better impact on students of all skill levels.

**Connections to the Literature Review**

The findings in my field research support the findings in the literature review in many ways. Both show that there are benefits for older adults who participate in activities and organized programs that involve art. My field research showed a specific example of how a program at a community center benefits the older adults that participate in it. The literature review provides us with a better understanding of where the older adult is in this stage of development and how these programs affect them. It also examines the different types of art programs and support that exists for older adults.

The literature points out that our memory slows as we grow older. It also discusses the different benefits that art therapy can have on Alzheimer’s patients. In art
therapy, the activities were shown to improve upon the memory and memory retrieval of the Alzheimer’s patients. If this is beneficial for patients who have a diagnosed memory disorder, it can be assumed that art can have the same positive impact on the memory of someone moving into old age and losing memory at a normal rate; such as the women in the community art center that I studied.

It is shown in both my research and the research of others that continued social interactions as a person moves through older adulthood can give a person a better sense of well being and purpose. It was explained in the literature that the act of art making reduced depression and anxiety by giving older adults an outlet for their emotions. The women in my research often discussed how they needed to be creative and express themselves through their artwork. The research confirms that art can improve moral, decrease stress and give its participants a sense of accomplishment.

It is important to have an understanding of both the developmental stages of the older adult and the different art programs that exist to better understand the findings of my research. Both show that there are observable connections and benefits to older adults’ cognitively, socially, and physically. The field research then goes on to show the observable affects that the programs can have on the artwork that is produced and the actual interactions with each other and their instructor.

**Implications for the Findings**

The findings show that there are many positive affects that art programs have on older adults. Whether it be cognitive, social or physical, it is clear that all of the participants, including the instructor, walk away with a positive experience. The women
provide each other with a support system that creates a safe place for them emotionally, artistically and socially. The class provides them with an opportunity to share their gifts with one another even though at times that they do not realize it.

If these benefits exist in this particular example of a community center then it can be suggested that the same benefits can exists for people who participate in art programs in a different city, state, or country. It can be argued that these same characteristics could be found in other art programs and the same benefits could be applied to its participants.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

There is still much research that should be done on this issue. There is not enough awareness of the topic at hand in today’s society. One suggestion for future research would be to examine an art program in a larger community center. It would be interesting to look at the art program with a larger class or a more experienced instructor over a longer period of time. In my research I only focused on the adults that participate in a local community center that attend the class because of their own interest in art. It may be interesting to examine the affects on older adults who did not have an original interest in art.

It may also be beneficial to examine in more detail one of the art programs as mentioned in my literature review. For the purposes of my research, I only touched on them, but there could be other connections to the positive affects that these programs have. Future research could also focus and examine just one of the benefits that these programs can have that I have identified in my research.
Conclusion

In conclusion, the positive affects that community center art programs can have on its participants are significant. The social interactions, the cognitive activity, and the emotional expression are all evident benefits. The social connections and the act of art making can help alleviate the stresses of day-to-day life. The literature discusses that creating art can influence the functioning of an older adults’ memory. Additionally, the group setting can have an influence on the artwork that the students are creating. Students help each other and lend thoughts and ideas to contribute to the creative process.

It was also determined that the instructor has an influence on the class and how it can benefit the students. In this particular case, this instructor allowed for the students to have the social interactions that were needed but did not offer much instruction or guidance when it came to art making. As a result, it can be deduced that when the instructors’ teaching skills are lacking, it can have a negative impact on students who are not self-motivated or do not have an artistic background in the arts. This is evidence that the potential benefits for all students could be even greater if an individual that has had some teaching/instruction background ran the program.

People are living longer and more strides must be taken to ensure that the later years of our lives are productive and fulfilling. As much of the research I have presented points out, the mind will only go to waste if the person stops exercising it. Art classes, therapy and other creative programs can all be mind-stimulating activities to help continue positive development, as we become older adults.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A: COPY OF CONSENT FORM

Ohio University Consent Form

Title of Research: In What Ways do Community Center Art Programs Affect Older Adults?

Researchers: Christina Stapleton

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Explanation of Study

In this study, I hope to identify the influence that art programs in community centers have on the adults that participate in them. I will be observing at least four of your art classes at the community center. I do not plan to participate or disrupt your normal class routine in any way. I also plan to interview some of the students in the class. You may choose to decline an interview if you do not want to participate.

Risks and Discomforts

No risks or discomforts are anticipated. Participation is entirely voluntary and you may decide not to continue participation with this study at any time.

Benefits

In my research, I hope to discover the benefits of art programs in community centers. If the benefits prove to be significant to its participants, benefits to society as a whole would include, further research on this topic, more art programs available to more adults, and the continuation of existing art programs in community centers.

Confidentiality and Records

Your name and identity will be kept confidential in all of my research notes, interviews and final thesis.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:
Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research; Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU;

Contact Information
If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact
Christina Stapleton, 614-886-9338, ChristinaStapleton1@gmail.com

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664.

By signing below, you are agreeing that:
• you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions
• known risks to you have been explained to your satisfaction.
• you understand Ohio University has no policy or plan to pay for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this research protocol
• you are 18 years of age or older
• your participation in this research is given voluntarily
• you may change your mind and stop participation at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled.

Signature_____________________________________________ Date_____
Printed Name__________________________________________
I arrived at the Community Center promptly at 10 o’clock because that is when the art class is scheduled to begin. The lobby is full of chattering seniors all putting their coats on and getting ready to go out into the cold. I see a man standing behind a desk and try to ask him where the art class is. A short lady who is one of the community centers administrators comes over and asks me what I need. I explain to her that I’m here for the art class. She misunderstands me and thinks I’m here for the exercise class. She tries to get me to go on the walk that the seniors are getting ready to venture out on. Finally, I am able to explain to her over the crowds of people what I’m there for and she points me in the direction of the room. She didn’t remember me from when I asked her permission a few months back to observe the class. All the same she didn’t mind and told me where to go.

I go in and it is completely empty except for one man who is setting up five tables in a square shape. I walked around the perimeter of the room and check out the artwork that hangs on the walls of the main room. This room is used for various activities at the center. The artwork displayed has various content and skill levels. They range from realistic landscapes to abstract figures. You can see that many of the pieces are done by the same artist. The artwork is displayed all around the room mixed in with pictures of smiling seniors in various workout classes. On one of the art pieces someone has written a note that says “If you would like to sell this please call…” This person likes the work so much that she is interested in buying it.

I decided to wait in the lobby for a bit with a few other people who are hanging out on the old couches. They are chatting about different things. One lady out of nowhere asks me where I live. I tell her and then she continues to tell me where she lives and how much she likes it.

Finally, I see the instructor enter the room. I introduce myself and tell her who I am and what I am doing. She remembered me from the summer when I approached her to get permission to observe her class. She says that there might not be much to observe today since no one was there yet. By now it is about 10:20 and no one is there. I asked her what time they usually start and she says about now. She said that the class is not very structured at all. Students come in and work on their projects. There is no formal lesson or instruction. Everyone is working at their own pace and on their own project. She then sits down and starts reading the paper.
She arrived with another one of the students. The student looks about 40 and says that she used to be an art teacher herself. She taught in Columbus public schools for about 10 years. She said that when her budget became 50 cents a student she decided to stop teaching. She didn’t say what she does now. She brings with her two square canvases that have a design already on them. They appear to be finished pieces of work. The instructor says that the biggest problem with her is that she always paints over her work. There is nothing anyone can do to stop her. It appears she has a really nice piece of artwork and then she proceeds to cover up one of the canvases with modeling paste. She uses this to create texture for her work. The instructor tries to make her promise not to cover up the other one because she likes it. But by the end of the class I notice that she is making changes to the piece already.

Next a very lively woman busts through the door carrying her bags and supplies. The instructor goes, “here comes the entertainment, I better get out of her seat.” The woman sits down and immediately starts taking out her supplies. Books, magazines, a small painting and various other things are spread out over the table. She passes me the catalogs and says here take a look at those. The others explain she supplies the catalogs. They like to look at the graphic images, the poses of the models and the merchandise for inspiration. She pulls out some molds that she found on sale that she thought the other student might be interested in.

She takes out a small canvas board that she has painted a scene of mountains and what she says is a Russian village out in the middle of the sea. She has decided that it is missing something and needs a figure. Throughout the class she draws a figure onto a piece of tracing paper and proceeds to place it onto the painting.

For a while it’s just the four of us sitting in the room. The women chat about various things. Their weekend, their husbands, children and grandchildren are all topics of discussion. They ask each other where they get supplies for their projects and the best places to get materials on sale. The instructor discusses the same things too. When someone asks for her opinion on something she goes over and tells them what she thinks, almost always the other student will get up and give her opinion as well.

Occasionally the administrator comes in and out talk to the ladies. She looks at and admires the art they are working on. They then demand wedding pictures from her. She leaves and comes back with wedding pictures from her sons’ wedding in California. She points out everyone in the pictures and the ladies ooo and aw at them.

At this point, one more student walks in the door. She is also carrying bags full of books and supplies. She introduces herself to the other students and the instructor. She has only come once before and has not yet met the instructor. She sets up and the instructor comes over and asks her what she is working on. The woman is working on a cartoon style drawing of lambs. She has a few children’s books for reference. She said she is making it
for a friend and plans to mat and frame it. They then discuss the best and most affordable ways to mat and frame artwork.

As the women are working they continue their chatter about clothing, family and art materials. The new student mentions that she wants to buy new clothes from a popular store for older women. The second student to come in produces a catalog from this store from her bag. As they are talking the new student suddenly speaks up and says “Well this is just nice how creating artwork allows the conversation to just flow. Art is to me what alcohol is to others. I just frees up my mind and allows for good conversation.”

This is how the rest of the class goes. The women chat, someone occasionally gets stuck and the others help them. Eventually, it is time to go and the women clean up their spaces and head home.

11/25/08

Today I arrived later to the class because no one was there right on time the first time around. As I walked up to the door the instructor was helping a women get out of her car. She had had a knee replacement and has not been able to make it to the class for the past few months. As we walk in the door the women is greeted with cheers from her fellow students. They have not seen her since her surgery and are very happy to see her.

She gets set up and starts working on a painting full of flowers. There is another woman here that was not here last week. Throughout the class she works on what appears to be more of an abstract piece. She seems to be a regular and just couldn’t make it the week before. All of the other students praise her and tell me how talented she is. They point out some of her pieces that are hanging on the wall. The other two women are the same that were here last week with the exception of the new student who appears to have not come back.

The women have a lot of questions for the student who had the knee surgery. The conversation this time focuses on the women’s cats. And the catalog woman from last week of course has a new catalog that focuses on cats to share with everyone.

The instructor this time sits and starts working on a drawing of her own with charcoal and pencil. The others ask her what she is doing and are interested in her work. Last week she sat and talked to the women as she casually looked through a magazine. She would occasionally get up when the student needed help or her opinion. She does the same this week.

The student with the knee surgery talks about how much she missed the class and the other students. She tells how she has been going stir crazy in her home because she has been unable to leave the house. The others asked her if she has been working on any
artwork since she has had time to be on the couch. She said no, she just couldn’t get into it at home or get inspired. She just wasn’t in the mood and the only thing she did was watch TV. The others all agree that it is hard to work on artwork in the home environment.

At one point she has a problem with the perception of her work. The one lady next to her, the one that everyone praises as the best student, and the instructor go over to help her with the piece. The instructor gives her some suggestions and the student tells her what she things she would do. At the end of the period the other student checks up on the piece. It appears that she did what she suggested and they agree that it works better that way. All of the students seem to trust each other’s suggestions and are not afraid to make the changes that are suggested by each other.

Mostly this class period goes the same as last week with the addition of a few more students.

12/2/08

This week I arrived to the class about the same time I did last week. This time there are only two students set up and the instructor is not there. The women tell me that there won’t be much of a class to observe today. The two here today are the student that is the former art teacher and the other student who received her BFA from Ohio State many years ago.

The former art teacher is still working on the same pieces she had last week. The other student is painting off of a picture of her grandchildren using gauche. I decided that it would be a good time to ask these two students some of my guiding questions to get the conversation going about community art centers. One reason I decided to do this is because the instructor was not there and I felt that the students would feel free to speak their mind about the class without her present. Also, the small number of students today would allow them to share their ideas. I also was interested in these two women’s opinion because the both have degrees in art and both continue to create and participate in the art community. During the interview I took notes and tried to keep the conversation open and casual.

When I asked them why they choose to join this class at the community center. Student 1, who is the student who has her BFA said that it gave her a chance to paint on a regular basis. The community center is close to her home and the price is reasonable. Once she joined she started seeing people she recognized and meeting new ones. She joined because her need of the actual doing of art and painting.

Student 2 who is a former art teacher said that she doesn’t get started much at home. She likes and needs the feedback from the other women and they offer a form of camaraderie.
She said that when you work alone you tend to beat yourself up more about your work and she doesn’t do that as much in the class. Her classmates offer her good suggestions. She said that she never got paid enough as a teacher so that factored into why she no longer teaches. She does a lot of crafts at home but saves most of her painting for the class. She said that being an art teacher is very isolating in that the other teachers generally are not interested in painting and cannot offer feedback. She taught in Columbus public schools for 10 years and eventually quite because the budget she was given to each student was down to 50 cents a child so she was forced to buy a lot of the materials out of pocket. She has her masters from OSU in an administrative field.

I asked the women how they heard about this class and student 1 said that her neighbor down the street asked her to start going with her. Her oldest child had just gone off to kindergarten and she was looking for something to do in the mornings. She has been participating in this class for more then 30 years. She told me how she has her BFA in commercial art and can remember her professor telling them how television was going to be the next big thing in advertising.

Student 2 said that she received a mailer for the class. She explained that Grandview residents often receive schedules and mailers of the activities that go on at the community center. She has been involved with the class for about one year.

Next I asked the students how the instructor and the other students influence their artwork. Student 1 said that the previous art teacher influence her greatly. She said that she already knew a lot about art and composition and balance and things of that nature but this instructor was still able to teach her so much more. She said she helped free everyone up. She said what she brought out of people was amazing. She said she also learns a lot from the other people in the class. She only mentions that the current instructor is doing a good job, but does not talk of her the same way she does the previous one.

This is not the first time I have heard mention of the previous instructor. She passed away more then a year ago and you can still feel how missed she is among the members that knew her. She was the mother of one of the administrators who works there. Her picture is hanging on the wall with a dedication plaque. From what I can gather she was sick and one of the students mentioned how it was just her style to leave too soon. She said some people are just like that and you shouldn’t expect anything else from them but to not stick around. Student 1 in particular brings her up the most and mentions how good she was. Every time she does though, she is always sure to follow up with an assurance that their instructor now is doing a good job. From my perspective, it doesn’t appear that it is the same with the current instructor.

Student 2, who did not know the previous instructor, says that she tries more new things since she has joined the class. Other students have introduced her to more things. She
mentions that she started using stamps, molds and Gesso that she wouldn’t have tried on her own.

My next question for the students is if they create artwork on their own at home. Student 1 says that she paints at home. She creates her own Christmas cards and paints pictures for her kids that they want. Student 2 says that she does crafts at home and also creates her own Christmas cards.

At this point a 3rd student has joined the class. She sets up her work and is working on a painting of a poinsettia. She hears the question I asked and mentions that she creates crafts on her own time like knitting blankets. I asked her some of the previous questions to catch her up with the others. She said that she has no previous art experience but has always liked to draw. She said she has improved with painting since she has started the class. She has been in this class since May so she is fairly new. She said she has seen the class advertised for years and always wanted to join, so one day she finally decided to start.

I asked if they felt they had made lasting friendships in this class and they all just casually said yes, but no one gave any specific examples.

I asked the students if any of them do anything with the arts outside of this class. Student 1 said she belongs to a women’s artist group that meets monthly. The also put on art shows of their work. She is actually missing this class next week because she is attending their luncheon. Student 2 said she has always wanted to and has looked into one that meets at the convention center but has not yet joined.

Next I asked the students what they feel the benefits of having a art class in the community center. Student 1 said that the benefits are the benefits of all of the arts like music and dance. It is important to the community. She said that usually the arts are the first to get cut. People need to let their mind think of something else once and awhile and art allows them to do that.

Student 3 says that children need art for these same benefits and should learn about it at a younger age. Student 2 agrees and mentions how she taught in the public schools some students would only come on days that they had the electives such as art, music or gym. Student 1 mentions that that is what is good about the adult education. She said we are here because we want to be.

The next thing I asked was about how this class has affected them cognitively. I’m not sure they understood what I meant. Student 1 told me that once she started back with her art classes she started looking at things differently. She would see things with an artist’s perspective again. Things she didn’t think about before, she would notice and think how that could be a painting. Student 3, who is a new student to art, says how she knows what
she means. She said that she will look at a magazine or a picture and will consider how she could turn that into a painting.

After a while of discussing a few more things not related to my research, student 1 and 2 offer to show me the different artwork on the walls. They walk through and point out their work and the work of the students that are not there. Student 1 mentions that many of the works are from students that are no longer involved with the class or community center. They compliment each other. Student 1’s previous work shows that she has a very high skill level. She said that she enjoys painting things that have perspective in it. She often looks off pictures because she said she is not very good at looking at real life. One painting is of a golf course. She said she was inspired by the green grass and sand traps that were on Memorial tournament that is on every year. She explains how she frames them and where she orders her frames from at a discounted price.

By this time the class is nearing to an end and the women start cleaning up their workspace. Student 1 answers a last minute question for student 3 who is having trouble getting her poinsettia to look realistic. The women tell me that the administrators have their phone numbers if I need to contact them if I have any more questions about my research.

December 9, 2008

Today I walked into the community center room where the art class takes place and found that the room was empty except for one table set up. I could see that there were people in the lobby so I peeked out there and caught the eye of the instructor. She was sitting out on the couches talking to other members of the community center that do not participate in the art class.

I walk in and sit down on one of the old couches and join the group. The instructor tells me that there might not be much for me to observe today. She knows that at least 3 students are home sick and I then remind her that one of the students is attending an luncheon this week so she is not coming either. That leaves only one student that might come and another student that does not come regularly.

As we are sitting there I decided to take this opportunity to ask her my instructor questions since the students are not present. She agrees to answer my questions. Instead of a formal interview I try to keep it more conversational.

She says she has been teaching the art class for about a year. The art class itself has existed for at least 27 years and it used to be held at the police station across the street. She tells me that she has not had any other experiences teaching in community centers.

Her artistic background includes a bachelors from the Columbus College of Art and Design. She also makes artwork in her free time.
When I ask about how she encourages her students she said that newcomers are always the ones that need the most encouragement. She said that you have to reassure them that their work is good and that all it takes is practice. Students who come in with low-self esteem towards art need more help. The existing regular students are all pretty confident in their work and need little encouragement.

I asked her about her lessons and how or if she creates them. While I have been here I have not seen her teach a lesson. She says that she used to teach lessons when she first started but these students in this particular class are pretty set in their ways. So she just offers advice and encouragement when she can.

She feels that this class could be good for the students socially. They like the class. It’s somewhere safe that allows them to be productive and feel like they are a part of something. It gives them the commonality of art.

She said the emotionally it’s good because newcomers get over their fears of failure. It’s also good because it’s good for the students to have something to look forward to every week.

She didn’t see any physical benefits except for the ritual of keeping going every week. She also didn’t see any cognitive benefits. Like my students, I don’t feel she understood what I was asking her. I try to phrase it a different way but she replied that they are all creative thinkers anyway.

The instructor felt that the overall benefits included keeping their creative juices flowing. The class keeps them painting. She said that when artists don’t make art they don’t feel good.

I asked her if felt more communities need art programs in their community centers. She said she doesn’t know how many do so she wouldn’t know, but they wouldn’t hurt anybody though.

She told me my questions were a little too deep for her to answer at this time in the morning and maybe if she thought about them for a while she could think of better answers. I’m not sure if she has ever given much thought to the benefits that her art class could potentially have on her students. Hopefully, some of my questions will allow her to consider and think about these things and potentially improve her class.

Throughout the interview and the entire class she shows an overall level of disinterest in the class as a whole. I realize that the existing students are set in their ways but that does not allow for others to feel welcome into the class or get a starting point. I don’t think it’s a coincidence that the students who keep coming back are the ones with natural talent and
work on their own. Students who come to learn and try something new are short changed and it appears rarely come back for a second class.

While I feel that the regular students are benefiting from the class socially, emotionally etc. The environment is not welcoming to an inexperienced student who would like to take this class to experience something new.

As we are sitting in the lobby the one student that hands out catalogs to everyone shows up. She asks why we are sitting in the lobby today. The instructor says we were waiting for people and no one is coming. She pulls out one of her bags and starts handing out magazines to the instructor and the other people in the lobby. She explains that she had to leave early today anyway because of an appointment. The instructor explains that around this time of year people tend to get sick and are busy with the holidays so they don’t come.

A moment later the less experienced student comes in. She said she was just stopping in but didn’t have anything to work on. This is something that she does often. She just comes to the class with no work. It appears to me that she just wants to chat with the other ladies and see what they are working on. On her arrival the catalog lady runs out to her car to get her a book she has that has all cats in it. The lady seems really pleased to have it.

While we are sitting there other people in the lobby discuss different things and the ladies join in and chatter away. One man who appears to work there is in a big discussion with the catalog lady about bamboo and how he likes to grow and decorate with bamboo. She then pulls out a piece of paper and starts to show him how to draw bamboo. He said it was his first art lesson ever. She jokingly told him to go home and practice and she would check up on him later.

At this point, the woman has to go to her appointment and they other lady leaves too. The instructor is more than happy to go home early. I thank the instructor for allowing me to observe her class and say good-bye. She apologizes that it is not that exciting and hopes that I have enough for my research. I told her I would come back if I needed more information. At this point, I feel that I have a very good sense of what goes on in these classes and how it is run.
APPENDIX C: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Student Questions

Why did you join this class at the community center?

How did you hear about it?

How long have you been participating?

Do you have any previous art experience?

How would you describe your skill level?

Has your skill level improved?

Do you feel comfortable sharing your artwork with others in the class?

Do you discuss your artwork with others?

How does your classmates/instructor influence your art?

Do you feel you have grown as an artist during your time in this class?

Do you create art outside of this class?

Have you made lasting friendships as a result of this class?

Do you feel this class enhances the quality of your day-to-day life outside of this class?

Do you participate in any other art related activities in your community? If so, what kind?

In your opinion, what are the benefits of art programs like this one (If any)? What would be the negatives (if any)?

Do you feel this class influences your socially?

Do you feel this class influences your cognitive abilities?

Do you feel this class influences your emotional well-being?

Instructor/administrator questions

How long have you been teaching this class?
How long has this program existed?

Have you ever taught or had experiences in other community center art programs?

What is your artistic background?

How do you encourage your students to create artwork?

How do you create your lessons/instruction?

Do you feel your lesson/instruction influence your student’s work?

How would you describe the over all climate of your class?

How do you feel your class affects your students socially?

How do you feel this class influences your students emotionally?

How do you feel this class influences your students physically?

How do you feel this class affects your students’ cognitive abilities?

In your opinion, what are the benefits of art programs like this one (if any)? Are there any negatives?

Do you feel that more communities need art programs in their senior centers?
APPENDIX D: SIGNED CONSENT FORMS

By signing below, you are agreeing that:
- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions.
- known risks to you have been explained to your satisfaction.
- you understand Ohio University has no policy or plan to pay for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this research protocol.
- you are 18 years of age or older.
- your participation in this research is given voluntarily.
- you may change your mind and stop participation at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled.

Signature ____________________________ Date __________________
Printed Name _________________________

Version Date: [insert mm/dd/yy]
By signing below, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given
  the opportunity to ask questions.
- known risks to you have been explained to your satisfaction.
- you understand Ohio University has no policy or plan to pay for any injuries you
  might receive as a result of participating in this research protocol.
- you are 18 years of age or older.
- your participation in this research is given voluntarily.
- you may change your mind and stop participation at any time without penalty or
  loss of any benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled.

Signature ___________________________ Date 11/18/08

Printed Name MEG HANSEN

Version Date: [insert mm/dd/yy]
By signing below, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions.
- known risks to you have been explained to your satisfaction.
- you understand Ohio University has no policy or plan to pay for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this research protocol.
- you are 18 years of age or older.
- your participation in this research is given voluntarily.
- you may change your mind and stop participation at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled.

Signature: [Signature]

Printed Name: [Printed Name]

Date: [Date]

Version Date: (Insert mm/dd/yy)

Office of Research Compliance

Rev. 05/2008
By signing below, you are agreeing that:
• you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions.
• known risks to you have been explained to your satisfaction.
• you understand Ohio University has no policy or plan to pay for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this research protocol.
• you are 18 years of age or older.
• your participation in this research is given voluntarily.
• you may change your mind and stop participation at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled.

Signature  Nancy Walter  Date 11-25-08
Printed Name  Nancy Walter
By signing below, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions;
- known risks to you have been explained to your satisfaction;
- you understand Ohio University has no policy or plan to pay for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this research protocol;
- you are 18 years of age or older;
- your participation in this research is given voluntarily;
- you may change your mind and stop participation at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled.

Signature: Marilyn L. Walker  Date: 11/25/08
Printed Name: Marilyn L. Walker

Version Date: [insert mm/dd/yy]

Office of Research Compliance 2
Rev. 05/2008
APPENDIX E: IRB PERMISSION LETTER

OHIO UNIVERSITY
Office of the Vice President for Research

A determination has been made that the following research study is exempt from IRB review because it involves:

Category 2 - research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior

Project Title: In What Ways do Community Center Art Programs Affect Older Adults?

Project Director: Christina Stapleton

Department: Art Education
Advisor: Rosemarie Basile

Rebecca Cale
Institutional Review Board

Date: 10/13/08

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your application for review. Any additions or modifications to the project must be approved by the IRB (as an amendment) prior to implementation.