

Concept and Rationale of the ART-AGE project

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I. Concept

The project idea

The EU Commission designated 2012 as the European Year of active ageing and solidarity between Generations. This Grundtvig Learning Partnership intends to address the educational challenge of an ageing population in the field of amateur arts and voluntary culture. This is entitled "Art based learning and active aging" (acronym ART-AGE) and is carried out in the period, August 2012 - July 2014.

The project idea is to exchange experiences and identify new methods to demonstrate the importance of art-based learning for active aging.

The partnership circle

includes six organisations from five countries, where four are national organisations of voluntary arts and culture, and two provide curricula or research of learning in a civil society context.

- Interfolk (DK) (Applicant and coordinator) - www.interfolk.dk
- Cultural Councils in Denmark (DK) - www.kulturellesamraad.dk
- Voluntary Arts (UK) - www.voluntaryarts.org
- Kunstfactor – from 1 January 2013 changed to LKCA (NL) - www.lkca.nl
- Republic of Slovenia Public Fund for Cultural Activities (SI) - www.jskd.si
- Löftadalens Folk High School (SE) - www.regionhalland.se/vara-skolor/loftadalens-folkhogskola

The initial partnership of the application also included "The Latvian National Oral History Project" (see www.dzivesstasts.lv), but they were put on the waiting list in Latvia due to stiff competition from other applications for Grundtvig Learning partnerships with Latvian partners.

The work programme - phases and work packages

First phase: Clarify views on aesthetical learning and active ageing, Aug – Dec 2012

1. Start the project, Aug – Sept 2012
2. First 3-days partner meeting, 3 - 5 Sept 2012 in London, UK
3. State baseline, complete stakeholder local seminar, Oct – Dec 2012

Second phase: Present methods for documentation of learning outcome for elder, Jan – May 2013

4. Second 3-days partner meeting, 16 - 18 January 2013 in Åsa, SE
5. Clarify and define possible documentation methods, Feb – May 2013

Third phase: Document outcome of art based learning and active ageing, June – Nov 2013

6. Third 1-day expert seminar and 1-day partner meeting, 4 -5 June 2013 in Copenhagen, DK
7. Apply and test new documentation methods of learning outcome, Aug – Nov 2013

Fourth phase: disseminate and exploit project results, Dec 2013 – June 2014

8. The fourth 2-days partner meeting, 2 - 3 Dec 2013 in Cardiff, UK
9. Disseminate project results, Jan – April 2014
10. European seminar for elder learners, 6 - 8 April 2014 in Utrecht, NL
- 10a Fifth 1-day partner meeting, 9 April 2014 in Utrecht, NL
11. Exploit developed validation methods, April – June 2014

All phases – transverse, Aug 2012 – July 2014

12. Design, launch and update a project web portal, Aug 2012 – June 2014
13. Monitoring and Evaluation, Oct 2012 – July 2014
14. Project coordination and management, Aug 2012 – July 2014

Aim and objectives

The overall aim is to identify and define new methods to document, validate and profile the learning qualities of the arts-based learning in a civil society context, including its implications for active aging.

The objectives are

- to exchange knowledge and experience of the qualities of arts -based learning in relation to active aging;
- to identify and define new methods to document the art -based learning outcomes;
- to test various methods to document qualities and benefits of arts -based learning, including its impact on active aging;
- to complete a transnational seminar for active participants in the involved associations in order to get more feedback on the applied methods and current practices.
- to disseminate the outcome to the wider sector of voluntary arts and other stakeholders.

Outcome - so far

All partner organisations have:

- first phase - stated the baseline and completed local vision seminars with stakeholders and experts in the field;
- second phase - clarified and defined the documentation methods they want to use for pilot tests;
- third phase - completed pilot tests and evaluated local seminars and presented the results to the partnership;
- and in the fourth and final phase - planned to present the results at the International Seminar in Utrecht, 6 - 8 April 2014, and disseminate the results to the wider voluntary arts sector.

The most concrete results are the reports from the pilot test in work package 7, which concluded the third project phase.

WP 07 - P1 and P2, IF and KSD - Memo on pilot test of documentation method

WP 07 - P1 and P2, IF and KSD - Pilot questionnaire, English version

WP 07 - P3, LKCA - Grondtvig analyse vragenlijsten 26 Nov 2013-ENG

WP 07 - P3, LKCA - Questionnaire and a raw data collection in Dutch

WP 07 - P4, JSKD - Memo on pilot test of documentation method

WP 07 - P4, JSKD - Interview, man 72

WP 07 - P4, JSKD - Interview, woman 68

WP 07 - P5, VA - Memo on pilot test of documentation method

WP 07 - P5, VA - Art Age validation survey v4

WP 07 - P6, LF - Art Age project Löftadalens interview, English version

WP 07 - P6, LF - Art Age questionnaire

These documents can be downloaded at the project website.

For downloads and more information

See the ART-AGE project website: <http://www.theloveofit.org/art-age/>

II. Rationale of the project

Lifelong learning on the agenda

Lifelong learning has in the last decade - especially after the European Commission released the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning in 2000 - become a key concept in pedagogy and education in general and in liberal adult education and community organisations in particular.

The term includes the double meaning that we learn life-long from cradle to grave as well as life-wide both through formal learning from primary school to university, and more freely through the non-formal learning in liberal adult education and the informal learning in associations, including amateur arts and voluntary cultural activities.

The tradition of liberal adult education, including the Nordic Grundtvigian tradition, has had the intention of promoting "learning for life" - not only for the work life, but equally for the human life and the societal life. This tradition is grounded on two pillars respectively for the academic and general purposes. The goal of the first pillar was the work life and the means were the training to become a capable employee, and the goal of the second pillar was the human and societal life and the means was "Bildung and Enlightenment" for the formation of active citizens and fellow human beings and thereby the formation of an enlightened and democratic people.

However, the agenda for lifelong learning in the EU member states has been dominated by a one-sided business-oriented agenda, which is blind to important learning aims in adult education and community organisations, especially of the unique Bildung qualities of amateur arts and voluntary culture.

Background

The sector of amateur culture in the Europe Union represents the splendid diversity of European culture. All EU Member States have a comprehensive civil society sector of voluntary arts and arts-based adult education, where a myriad of cultural and educational associations unfolds learning for 20 to 30 percent of its peoples.

Here, the learning providers unfold much time and energy to create free learning areas beyond public control and market needs, which offer aesthetic learning, personal and democratic education, equality and joy of life for many citizens, not least for senior citizens.

Even though this sector provides lifelong learning offerings, there exist only an initial acknowledgement of this reality among the organisations and their stakeholders. Typically, these art-based activities are not interpreted and presented from a learning discourse, but more traditionally from an artistic and cultural discourse, and there is no developed practice of documenting the results of the arts-based activities as a learning activity. Moreover, the area also lacks methods to document and profile the relevance of the arts-based learning for active aging.

Need

We see a general need in the formal as well as the non-formal educational systems to gain a more clear understanding of the qualities of the aesthetic learning, especially its high degree of Bildung potential.

We see particularly a clear need in the sector of voluntary arts and culture to clarify the outcome of the aesthetic learning and to provide methods to document the main values and outcome of arts-based learning - including its relevance for active ageing.

Without an elaborated understanding it is not possible to provide methods that can document and profile the main values and important outcome of arts-based learning, neither in general nor for the particular groups of older learners.

Obstacles

The intentions of bringing answers to these questions may seem a mission impossible, considering the wide range of diverse theories and view points on the issues of art, learning and aesthetic experience. However, we can make the task more manageable by giving priority to important traditions in the liberal adult education, where the major challenge in learning situations is to ensure learners have sufficient desire to learn. This is because the learning desire is linked to the involvement of aesthetic experiences in a wide sense.

This is, unfortunately, not appreciated in the current main stream pedagogical discourses. The first reason may be that aesthetics is reduced to an affective domain and placed in contrast to the privileged cognitive domain and receives less attention. Thereby, the possibility of applying aesthetics to the problem of instilling desire to learn remains partly unexplored.

The second reason may be the one-sided focus on factual knowledge. However, when subject matter is composed only of facts, concepts, and principles specified by the curriculum, and when the desired outcome is simply the ability to demonstrate that these have been learned, the potential for aesthetic experience is very likely thwarted.

The third reason for the downgrading of aesthetic learning could be a misunderstood separation between the narrow and broad sense of art. The narrow sense typically refers to the fine arts, such as fiction and poetry, paintings, plays, musical compositions, etc. The ability to engage fully with art in the narrow sense is often thought to require connoisseurship or good taste.

The broader sense of the word "art" is used in reference to highly skilled or creative application of our powers to affect our world. Rather than the narrow sense of "art," it can apply to nearly any human activity. Although distinct today, art broad and art narrow should not be considered separate, but seen as varying forms of aesthetic experience that allows us to be more responsive and affective human beings.

The qualities of aesthetic learning

It is the depth of engagement and achievement of consummation that marks a learning activity as aesthetic, not the undertaking involved. For instance, "ars" in ancient Greece referred to any effort to make desired changes in the environment that increase our unity with it, and with reference to John Dewey, we can say that aesthetic experience is the glue that holds together a wide range of activities.

In aesthetic experiences, learning is just not something that happens to us, but includes the interactivity inherent in any true engagement with the world. In these experiences, mind, body, and the world is not distinct thing. We feel, think, do, and are responded to in one indivisible movement that is affective, practical and cognitive in scope.

Experiences in which we also engage in reflection about our feelings, thoughts, actions, and about the responses our actions receive, those are learning experiences. It was along the dimension of ability to stimulate growth and desire to learn that Dewey sought to distinguish types of experience, and it was aesthetic formed experience that he valued as the most intense and motivating learning process.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of aesthetic experience is its engaged and integral nature. It “runs its course to fulfilment” and such internal unity leads to high levels of reflection and growth. As inquiry, aesthetic experience has the expressed purpose of increasing our unity with the world around us by understanding how we fit, or how we can better fit, in our physical or social environment. In everyday settings, learning results naturally from experiences involving inquiry and the reflection it requires.

Driven by a need or desire, we attempt to change something about ourselves or our environment and learn from the results of that attempt, whether successful or not. At times learning experiences become aesthetic, exhibiting deep engagement and agency, or ownership of outcome and providing a high degree of satisfaction.

Aesthetic experience and active ageing

In caring for the aesthetic potential of learning, new avenues to learning open up. Aesthetic experience can be had in virtually any human activity, even though it is most directly called out in engagement with the arts. For this reason, art can also provide guidance for stimulating aesthetic experience in activities outside the arts. For example, when the connection between art and inquiry is more apparent, we are now justified in looking to the arts (in the narrow sense), where expression and aesthetic experience play obvious roles, as models for developing engaging teaching.

The value of art, and the reason it plays such a pervasive role in our lives, is that it values all the materials of experience that have potential to contribute meaning. It knows that the surfaces of things are worth attending to, but it also reaches down into both our thoughts and feelings about experiences to find beauty in the constellation of meanings that exist for any experience. When learning experiences have such breadth, it no longer matters whether they are informal, non-formal or formal situations, because the experience itself will be sufficiently complete to affect learners in memorable, if not transformative, ways.

This complies with the need of learners of all ages, but it may in particular have value for older people. Because their retirement from work life may imply a retirement from life and the community as well; and they are confronted with the risk of isolation and loss of active relationships and engagement. Their involvement in aesthetic learning processes can enliven their learning motivation and renew their relationships with other people and the community and help them to achieve a unity or stability in the world, by bringing new perspectives on their current and potential place within it.

Guidelines

We know that active participants in amateur arts and voluntary culture have important learning outcomes, and they can also put many words on its value - such as: It contains experiences of beauty, joy and passion; it strengthens sensuality, sensitivity and sense of moods; it brings community feelings and sense of freedom; it enhances self-awareness, develops the interpretation register, improves communication skills, increases imagination and the ability for poetic expressions; it refines our taste in many areas, etc.

But we need to incorporate these varied descriptions in a more systematic learning discourse. We need to elaborate and refine our learning theories as well as validation methods in relation to the outcome of aesthetic learning processes.

We need to clarify our answers to main questions such as: How does art based/aesthetic learning differ from other forms of learning, what characterises its specific learning qualities, and why is its outcome important in a broader societal context, including its values for active ageing?

Theoretical grounding

Fortunately, such a theoretical development does not need to start from scratch; because important philosophical (and pedagogical) discourses from Kant to Habermas are based on a tripartition of the human experience in respectively cognitive-instrumental (epistemic), moral-practical, and aesthetic-expressive forms of knowledge and the corresponding goal-settings and assessments with reference to the domains of Truth, Good and Beauty. This tripartition of the forms and domains of knowledge has its roots in ancient Greek philosophy's main division of our mental abilities in *reason, will and emotions*; and it is a tripartition that most people still today can understand and agree with by using their common sense.

A Pedagogical theory (in philosophical as well psychological terms) based on this tripartition of the learning dimensions and their integration will per se assign the aesthetic learning with a parallel importance to the epistemic and moral learning. Furthermore, it can be based on a theoretical tradition that has been able to articulate the specific mental functions and qualities that characterise the aesthetic knowledge, judgment and learning.

According to this tradition, with roots in German Enlightenment and Neo-humanism, the free arts-based learning conveys both personal and universal experience, and it expands our forms of expression and opinion horizons during free creative activities.

From this point of view, voluntary arts and culture has a high potential for promoting humanistic values and aesthetic learning processes with a high degree of personal and democratic formation (*Bildung*). Its activities enliven as well as enlighten - it promotes the main aims of lifelong learning defined as personal development, active citizenship, cultural cohesion and social inclusion.