

Book review

Art education and creative aging: Older adults as learners, makers, and teachers of art

Davenport, M., Hoepfner Poling, L., Bourgault, R., & Manifold, M.C. (Eds.)
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“At a convening of the International Society for Education Through Art ... it seemed everyone had a story to share about applying knowledge and skills from art education to working with older adults.” (Melanie Davenport, Creative Aging, Introduction)

Wisdom-sharing became the impetus for colleagues, Melanie, Linda, Rebecca and Majorie to gather stories and reflections about the lifelong practice of generative creativities enhancing the later lives of elders. Narrating and reflecting upon lived experience (the phenomenology) of the bio-imperative of creativity, resulted in their anthology, *Art education and creative aging: Older adults as learners, makers, and teachers of art* (2024).

The seventeen contributors are from the editors' networks. Professional art educators describe encouraging curiosity, deepening exploration of each elder's creative potentials, co-learning and the final section is elders reflecting on their learned experience of their own generative creativity.

This anthology may challenge readers. By being open, comparing, and reflecting, this anthology can have the impact of recreating some of the ways we think and act about lifelong creativity, about ageing.

A related title could've been 'Come, participate, learn how elders continue to create life: by being questioners, learners, makers and teachers of art'. Elders can be self-creating lifelong actors.

Being a lifelong creative learner, without interruption? Is that a state of curiosity, awareness, expectancy, of looking, listening, receiving life's daily experiences with which one communes, creates? When I shared my delight about what I was reading, 'This book seems so exciting', responded a variously published prize-winning author, knitter, crocheter, quilt maker, Toastmaster; a theatre artist, performed playwright, actor, poet, remarked, 'I want to read the anthology'.

Being 'creators of ourselves and our futures', let us be curious. Let our creativity pedagogies dialogue with these focussing guides - our lifelong creative experiences in our communities, this anthology, and with this AJAL 'Special Edition'. Let us re-vision how across all nations, enriching community, we can consciously inspire creative futures during babyhood, childhood, growing into adult daily work and personal lives, right through ageing to end of life.

Let us learn from and with elders and their futures dreaming about making art, enhancing wellbeing (Section 1-5). The US anthology's contributors practise pedagogies which inform elders' inevitable life stage, 'flowing downhill, we never stop creating'. Themes throughout, orienting towards the specifics of developmental ageing tasks by modelling elderhood, is this not a major creative task of all adult life, to 'naturally' become skilled for ageing? (Ch3, Section 1; Ch8, Section 3)

Let us celebrate ageing. Together, we humans do recognise that 'making, doing, giving, together and alone, begets human growth'. Eight billion humans, modern USA (near 340 million) and Australia (near 28 million) peoples, share elements learnt from living with and

travelling among many cultures underpinned by millennia of humanity's transmitted capacities, enabling astonishing responsive cultures.

This anthology facilitates our creative 'improvised performance', of the demands of being inventive for performing daily living tasks when taken-for-granted everyday capacities become compromised, for maintaining optimal wellbeing, wherever, with whom, we elders are living, many alone. (Ch1, Section I)

Let us enquire about our local communities' abilities, 'Meeting Older Adults' Unique Needs' (well? unseen? unmet? Ch6, Section II)

Creating Connected Cultures includes 'intergenerational'. Here, a poster invites: 'Bringing together the young and young at heart! Intergenerational playgroup towards nurturing relationships strengthening community through Creative Play'. Pandemic gift is international digital connecting, arts and lives. Also assisting art legacy documenting? (poster; Ch7-9, Section III)

'A Critical View of Art Education's Responsibility to Disability and Aging'? Similar issues in Australia are often well-addressed. Local examples of professional co-management with elders by teaching self-care creatively? Texting from her hospital room, learning self-catheterisation and trying a complex knitting pattern; learning orthotics from the Rehab podiatrist, teaching one's carer to make them. (Ch6, Section II)

Many elders living at home with come-in carers, in residential care, eschew offered (expected participation?) community activities - bingo, scrabble, films, singalongs, bus trips to same ole', same ole' pubs for noisy, can't hear, lunch. Instead, how about prioritising Go (out), Come (back), Create? Explore! (Section IV)

We read of eldering inventive creativity down USA streets - hidden inside buildings, out in open natural spaces. What's happening down your street, in parks and coffee shops, our best 'laboratories'? Let's name, share our local, 'Engaging Older Adults With Artworks and Objects', associating with one's own precious objects. Galleries, museums, artist and craft worker studios - solo and group, welcome, sometimes with practice opportunities. (Section IV).

Let us become excited by 'In our own voices', reflective narratives by elders about their widely defined creative arts. Here we learn also from

elders' solo creativity, how 'solo' as well as communal becomes mutually co-creative. (Section V)

Do you find yourself matching these USA narratives with your country, with your professional and personal lifelong experience of adulthood? Are you noticing differences? In your country of large cities to rural communities, isolated farms and homeless people (Australia? the largest growing homeless cohort is older women). How, where, with whom, could this anthology of local creativity amongst elders be echoed, be adapted?

What might you contribute to an anthology of your country's elder creativity? An example? How is your nation or local community reacting and responding to the challenges of increases in ageing numbers and length of ageing?

We know our local communities are evidence of visionary delight from whom we learn: open-minded elders learning with professionals, teaching each other by making and sharing the learnings of each one's unique 'art/s', observed and practiced. We do learn from life-stage-experts – elders - how to live disabling ill/health so together we re-create bringing forth lifelong creativity to meet the tough new challenges of ageing. They too are real.

This anthology can encourage artists, families, therapists and care providers with elder 'clients'. For we each have unique cultural life experiences and learning from which we live and practice. Dialoguing with the anthology's stories, we can co-fashion with all-age elders do-able satisfying artistic processes from simple creative cooking to visual and performance arts to co-writing, hopefully remaining living into bio-curiosity, creatively.