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Exploring the Impact of Artful Engagement with Older Adults:

**Final Research
Summary Report**

Submitted to

The Ontario Trillium Foundation

By

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LIVING THROUGH
THE ARTS



Abstract

In 2010, Living Through the Arts of The Royal Conservatory received funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation to develop, implement, and conduct research, in partnership with Baycrest, into the effects of a creative arts program for older adults (aged 65 and upward) where individuals were actively engaged in creating art.

The goals of the research study, entitled *Exploring the Impact of Artful Engagement with Older Adults [Artful Engagement]*, were to examine the ways in which the creative arts program was meaningful to participants and also to the professional artist and clinicians involved in the program delivery; to determine program effects on participants' physical, social, emotional, and cognitive health; and to delineate successful aspects of the program design and delivery. The study had an experimental design, involving a control group, and the research team was composed of experts in the fields of clinical health care practice, arts and learning, and cognition.

The research team reviewed the health care literature about creative arts programming for older adults, as well as the literature on transformative adult learning and the literature about the transformative effects of artistic activity.

The creative arts programming involved two distinct art forms, creative writing and Nia/creative movement. Study participants received experiences in one or the other. The program sessions were led by two specially-trained professional artists drawn from the Living Through the Arts artist roster. Each of the two artists was teamed with a clinician from Baycrest to design and deliver the programming.

The results of the qualitative research showed that program participants benefited in many ways. Of particular note were the significant changes to positive affect for participants in both the creative writing and the Nia/creative movement groups. Both sets of participants widely reported more positive attitudes to aging, increased self-confidence, an expanded sense of possibilities for participation in life activities, awareness that they still had contributions to make to family and friends, and understanding that aging is not only a process of loss, but can also be about new learning and new experiences.

The quantitative findings confirmed gains in positive affect and the preservation of executive functioning in program participants that were not seen in the control group. For the participants in the Nia/creative movement programming, there was the additional benefit of improved physical health.

The qualitative researchers also found that the participants' program experiences followed the three stages of *disorientation, reconfiguration, and emergence with new perspectives and skills* described by the literature on transformative adult learning. As well, the qualitative research substantiated the claims in the literature about the transformative effects of engagement in creative arts: new capacities to cherish life, to celebrate significant life moments through creativity, and to enter into a state of focussed

attention.

In this study, the qualitative and quantitative findings substantiated each other and lent greater credibility to the study as a whole.

The research team is confident that there was widespread improvement in the emotional lives and cognitive health of the older adults as a result of their participation in the creative writing or Nia/creative movement programming and that participants in the latter also experienced important physical health gains.

The researchers are deeply indebted to the generosity of the Ontario Trillium Foundation who made this research possible.

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Introduction

In health care settings, there has been a change in how the aging process is viewed. In the past, problems associated with aging, such as senility, were seen as inevitable aspects of getting older. Today, disorders or problems associated with aging are more frequently seen as modifiable and responsive to treatment. The emphasis now is on enabling older adults to age successfully, with their independence and well-being intact for as long as possible.

As successful aging has become a new focus for health care, there has been a coincidental effort to understand how the engagement in creative processes by the older adults (aged 65 and onward) might benefit the aging process. There is a growing body of evidence suggesting that participation in professionally run creative arts groups, where individuals are actively engaged in creating art, can positively impact health and well-being for older adults. However, there is a need to understand more about the factors that influence participants' experiences of these programs and how their lives are changed by them.

In 2010, Living Through the Arts of The Royal Conservatory received funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) to develop, implement, and conduct research, in partnership with Baycrest, into the effects of a creative arts program for older adults. That programming and the research have now been completed.

The OTF-funded research study was entitled the *Exploring the Impact of Artful Engagement with Older Adults (Artful Engagement study)* and was designed to examine the ways in which a creative arts program is meaningful to participants and to the professional artists and clinicians involved in the program delivery; to determine the effects on participants' physical, social, emotional, and cognitive health; and to delineate aspects of the program design and delivery that contributed to its success or that called for alteration.

This report contains a literature review, description of the creative arts programming, description of the research design, and the research findings.

Literature Review

The research team conducted a review of the literature about creative arts for older adults in health care, as well as a review of the literature about transformative adult learning and about the transformative effects of engagement in the creative arts.

The Health Care Literature

In recent years, a number of studies about creative arts programming for older adults have confirmed the capacity of such programs to enhance cognitive functioning (Mammarella, Fairfield & Cornoldi 2007); improve mental health by lowering levels of anxiety and depression (Hanser & Thompson, 1994; Fritsch, Kwak, Grant, Lang, Montgomery & Basting, 2009; Flood & Philipps, 2006; Guetin et al., 2009; Erikkala, Gold, Fachner, Ala-Ruona, Puncanen & Vanhala, 2008; Campbell, 1992); and improve physical well-being, resulting in fewer doctors visits and less use of pain medication (Cohen, 2006; McCaffrey & Freeman, 2003).

Some studies have also shown that engagement with the processes of creating art can promote a sense of purpose, positive interaction with others, personal growth, self-acceptance, and autonomy. Creative arts programs have also been shown to help seniors adapt to the challenges of aging, especially if programming allows them time to include elements of reflection and synthesis of life experiences (Flood & Philipps, 2007).

To date, most studies of creative arts programming for older adults have focused on programs delivered in nursing homes and hospitals, tracing the effects especially on dementia and Alzheimer's disease (Bastings, 2006; Fritsch & al, 2009). There is a lack of studies involving older adults living in the community settings.

In 2006, the *Creativity and Aging Study: The Impact of Professionally Conducted Cultural Programs on Older Adults* (Cohen, 2006), was published to help address the topic of community-based arts programming. The study results showed that older adults involved in a once-weekly choral program reported better health, fewer doctor visits, and less medication use; more positive responses on the mental health measures; and greater general involvement in activities. The seniors in the control group who did not participate in the art program did not show these types of improvements.

Recent advances in studies of neuro-plasticity, the notion that the brain is capable of change over the entire life span and that creative arts activity can positively influence that change, are adding to the body of work on aging and the arts. For example, Morenos's (2012) study, *Smart Aging*, is examining whether music and visual art training can improve attention and inhibitory control in older adults and is showing promising early results.

Even with the introduction of studies involving examinations of neurology and cognition of older adults, to date current studies of arts-based programs in healthcare settings described in the literature are based on program descriptions, case studies, and/or other qualitative studies (Diles & Bradt, 2008). While these studies have been extremely valuable, contributing substantially to understandings of the effects of creative arts programming for older adults, a recurring theme in discussions about the current state of the research and healthcare centers on the need for compelling scientific research to inform the development of evidence-based approaches to practice.

It is also unclear from many of the existing studies what the impact of discrete variables might be. For example, what are the effects of engagement in different arts modalities, the length of programming, the nature of the interactions with group leaders, physical settings, and other factors such as the potential benefits or drawbacks of having professional artists as program facilitators?

Community-based creative arts programs might help older adults age more successfully, staying healthier longer, and maintaining quality of life and independence. Such arts programming might also cut down on healthcare costs, an important consideration given to what has widely been described as the approaching tsunami of aging baby boomers. Furthermore, given the estimates of the dramatic increase in our aging population over the next several decades, the demands on the healthcare system (both acute and long-term) dictate that innovative and creative strategies that are cost-effective and produce beneficial health outcomes are of paramount importance to every community. However, there is a dearth of research literature about community-based creative arts programming, and the lack of research into its effects is of concern.

Furthermore, existing studies address mainly the outcomes of programming, however there is very little in the literature that probes the question of *why* engagement in creative arts processes can have far-reaching positive outcomes for participants. What is it about the creative experience that promotes well-being? The *Artful Engagement* research team was intrigued by this question and expanded their literature review beyond the realm of healthcare to examine the educational literature about adult learning and transformative arts experiences.

The Education Literature about Transformative Adult Learning

In the 1970s, educational researchers began to examine in depth the notion of adult learning as a process of meaning-making that is internal and multi-faceted (Brookfield, 1986; Candy, 1987, 1991; Cranton, 1994; Houle, 1992; Knowles, 1975; Tough, 1971). *Transformative* adult learning was conceived as a process by which adults reclaimed authority for and were empowered to construct more fulfilling lives.

In the mid 70s, Meziow (1978, 1991a, 2000) delineated the process of transformation that can be collapsed into three main phases (Patteson, 2004). Briefly put, phase 1, *Disorientation*, encompasses the adult's encounter with an experience that nudges the adult to step outside habitual experiences and thought processes. Phase 2, *Reconfiguration*, involves exploring and sharing new learning with a group of like-minded adults with the leadership of a facilitator who is skilled and knowledgeable in the realm of experience being encountered; exploration of new roles and relationships and renegotiation of old relationships; acquisition of new skills and knowledge; and the formulation of plans for future action. In phase 3, *New Perspectives*, the adult emerges from the transformative learning experience with new perspectives on the self, others, and/or life. Within this framework, transformative growth was conceptualized as a process whereby the adult became more self-governing and self-determining.

The Literature on Creative Arts Experiences

In order to garner insight into the features of creative arts experiences that might foster the sorts of perspective changes suggested by the health care literature and the literature on transformative adult learning, the researchers turned to the works of Dewey, Csikszentmihaly, Dissanayake, Bai, Franck and Greene. While all of these individuals conducted research studies to support their theoretical writings, it was those theoretical works that contained the accumulated wisdom that the research team reviewed. The most relevant aspects of the works of each to this research are reported here in very brief form.

Dewey (1938) said that transforming learning drew on the individual's past and altered the individual's perception of where he or she fit in the world. Dewey claimed that the creative arts experiences were particularly conducive to human growth because both the sensual and cognitive processes kept the individual engaged in the learning process. For Dewey (1934), maintaining the connection between everyday lives and artistic experience was one way to teach about the rewards of elevating all of our experiences to the level of the aesthetic.

Csikszentmihalyi's (1990; 1996; 1997) conception of the state of flow has many similarities with Dewey's notions about educative experience. Flow is characterized by deep engagement in the activity at hand, a lack of awareness of concerns outside the immediate experience, alterations in the personal sense of time, the sustaining nature of the feedback from the experience encountered in flow moments: if individuals experience flow, they are engaged, and when engaged, they want to learn. In flow experiences, new knowledge is created in the individual. Flow occurs when the challenge and the skill are almost equal, the challenge being just a little beyond easy grasp with the skills at hand. The presented task must have clear goals, and the individual must be allowed to concentrate on the task. Individuals are most likely to be in flow when they feel some autonomy over their experiences, can envision their own goals, and can influence their learning paths. Csikszentmihalyi described experiences with the arts, along with sports, games, and hobbies, as particularly suited to providing the conditions needed for flow to occur.

Greene's (1993) works speak of the role of the imagination in the construction of personal knowledge. Greene's alliances with European existentialism, phenomenology, and postmodernism (Greene, 1977) are manifest in her statements about how an individual moves beyond despair over the uncertainty of life by taking responsibility for creating the Self. According to Greene, it is the individual's apprehension of the differences between self and other(s) that helps produce a concrete sense of unique individual identity (Greene, 1993). Furthermore, it is through "imagining" oneself into the world of another that empathy may be created, and the self may be expanded by incorporating part of the perspectives of others. The confrontation with difference, then, constitutes the opportunity to dislodge calcified knowledge: "It is through the ability to imagine a world that does not yet exist that passion may be aroused, and encounters with the arts are a powerful means of releasing the imagination to do its work" (Greene, 1990, p.72).

Dissanayake (1995; 2001) has described the impulse to make things and occasions “special” through artistic activity as an inborn, universal human mechanism for survival: it is an impulse that allows individuals and societies to deal with transitions and other disquieting experiences by doing something about them. More enduring examples might be wedding and funeral rituals that involve the arts and that not only allow us to express emotion, but heighten the experience so that it is appropriately acknowledged and experienced as beyond the ordinary.

Bai (2001; 2002; 2003) has proposed art-making as one activity that promotes and embodies harmony and the arrival at meanings that are contingent upon relationship. She and Franck (1973) both have found that an act of commitment to deep attention and perception required in creative arts processes allows the creator to become better attuned to the subject matter (e.g., a human life, or a tree) and to see its beauty and complexities. Through attunement, the individual is freed to perceive and thus value the world and self without the intercession of the pre-formulated concepts and values. The result is what Bai referred to as intrinsic valuing of the object of contemplation.

Review of the literature alerted the *Artful Engagement* research team to the need for the following kinds of research processes and foci, and ultimately influenced and helped refine the specific research goals and methodologies:

- A study of creative arts programming for older adults in community settings
- A study with rigorous experimental design
- A study using mixed methods, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches
- A study that examines the motivations and processes experienced by older adults in creative arts programs, as well as the outcomes of their program participation
- The need to examine the role of the professional artist in creative arts programming in health care settings
- The need to delineate the effects of discrete art forms

The Arts Programming

The *Artful Engagement* study examined the experiences of participants, professional artists, and clinicians who took part in creative arts programming offered jointly by Living Through the Arts and Baycrest. The programming had two iterations, each of which lasted 12 weeks, and involved community-based adults over the age of 65.

For each of the two program iterations, there were two distinct groups of participants, one of which experienced creative writing, while the other experienced Nia/creative movement, a system that incorporates a diverse blend of movements from the martial arts, yoga, and dance for creative

expression and the promotion of health. Each program session was led by a Living Through the Arts professional artist with assistance by one clinician from Baycrest, and lasted one and a half hours. The first iteration was offered in spring 2011 and the second took place in autumn of the same year.

The decision to include a clinician as part of the facilitation team was based on the understanding that clinicians experienced in working with older adults have more insight into the physical, emotional, or cognitive challenges faced by many older adults than do most professional artists. However, clinicians rarely have the artistic abilities and knowledge of the creative process possessed by professional artists. Consequently, it was speculated that artist-clinician teams might create the most effective creative arts programming for older adults.

Prior to the commencement of the creative arts programming, the clinicians and artists participated in two days of training for their work in the programming. The content and findings about the effects of those training days are recounted later in the *Findings* section of this report.

The choice of the program's art forms, creative writing and Nia/creative movement was influenced by three considerations. Firstly, there is an emphasis on story-telling and narrative, as well as physical activity at Baycrest. By offering the two different art forms, creative writing and Nia/creative writing, the program designers and the researchers hoped that insight might be gained into the benefits of each to the physical, psycho-social, and cognitive well-being of the older adult participants. Secondly, it was deemed important to have professional artists who were both experienced in group facilitation and who were engaged in their own artistic practice and, therefore, were intimately connected with the creative process. Both the Living Through the Arts creative writing and the Nia/creative movement artists met those criteria. Thirdly, it was important that the professional artists and the clinicians chosen for the study were interested in and committed to working with older adults. This was the case for both the artists and the clinicians chosen for this programming.

The Research Team

One of the strengths of the *Artful Engagement* study is the fact that it involved an interdisciplinary research team rare in studies of creative arts programming for older adults: experts in the fields of arts and learning, clinical practice, and cognition gathered together to conduct the study so that the effects of the arts programming on the senior adults might be evaluated from both a social science and a cognitive science perspective. The team consisted of the following individuals:

- **Dr. Ann Patteson** Director of Research, The Royal Conservatory; Adjunct Associate Professor of Arts Education Research, Queen's University
- **Melissa Tafler, MSW, RSW**, Social Worker/Clinical Research Coordinator, Department of Culture, Arts and Innovation, Baycrest
- **Dr. Pia Kontos** Research Scientist at the Toronto Rehabilitation Institute and Assistant Professor in the Dalla Lana School of Public Health-University Health Network, the University of Toronto

- **Dr. Nicole Anderson** Associate Professor, Departments of Medicine (Psychiatry) and Psychology, University of Toronto; Cognitive Rehabilitation Scientist, Kunin-Lunenfeld Applied Research, Unit and Department of Psychology, Baycrest
- **Dr. Takako Fujioka**, Scientific Associate, Rotman Research Institute, Baycrest; now Assistant Professor, Centre for Computer Research in Music and Acoustics, Stanford University
- **Mindy Alexander, BFA Hons., MEd Candidate**, Research Associate, The Royal Conservatory
- **Romeo Colobong, MA**, Research Associate, The Royal Conservatory
- **Jessica Neuman, MA**, Research Associate, The Royal Conservatory

Research Methodology

This *Artful Engagement* study used an experimental design involving randomly-selected intervention and control groups. Qualitative and cognitive data were collected. This section of the report provides information about the questions that guided the research, the recruitment of participants, the data gathering, and the data analysis procedures.

The Research Questions

Drawing on the review of the literature about creative arts programming in health care settings and from the literature on transformative learning and transformative arts experiences, as well as from the clinical, educational, and research experiences of the researchers, the research team formulated the following broad research questions for the *Artful Engagement* study:

1. What is the impact of a program led by a trained professional artist on the cognitive and psycho-social functioning of participants?
2. In what ways is a program led by a trained professional artist meaningful to participants?
3. What are the factors that influence the effectiveness of the creative arts program for the older adult participants?

The Research Participants

The program participants and the research participants were one and the same, with the exception of the participants in the control groups. Participants were recruited through a series of public presentations to groups of older adults attending programming at Baycrest or dwelling in the Baycrest independent living accommodations. The inclusion criteria for the programming conformed to the criteria established by the research team. Those criteria were as follows:

- 1) Participants were community-dwelling and required minimal to moderate living assistance provided by support workers, family caregivers, or privately hired caregivers.
- 2) Participants were able and willing to participate in in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and a battery of cognitive measures.
- 3) Participants did not already possess an extensive background in the creative arts and were not currently involved in another creative arts program.
- 4) Participants were willing to take part in either of the available arts-based modalities, creative writing or Nia/creative, movement or in the control group.

Potential participants were screened through an interview process to insure that they met the participant criteria. They were provided with letters of information to explain the purpose of the study, its benefits and potential risks. Participants were informed that they were free to withdraw or discontinue their participation at any time. The recruitment process was applied twice, once for each of the two iterations of the creative arts programming.

Table #1 shows the number of recruited participants, as well as the number of participants who withdrew from the program and the study for various reasons, including illness and hospitalizations. (Two participants died during the time span of the study). The rates of withdrawal within any one group and across the groups were not considered program outcomes, but, rather, as having to do with factors beyond the influence of the programming.

Table #1: Number of Artful Engagement participants by type and program iteration

Group	Program Iteration 1		Program Iteration 2	
	Recruited	Withdrew	Recruited	Withdrew
Control	7	1	9	0
Creative Writing	9	3	11	3
Nia/creative movement	9	1	10	3
Total	25	5	30	6

The average age and education of the participants were 79.1 and 14.7 years, respectively, and did not differ significantly between the groups participating in the programming and the control groups, or between the participants who completed the study versus those who withdrew. The similarities in the

participants in the creative arts programming and the control group were very important: similarities at baseline would allow the researchers to better determine program impacts.

The recruited sample included 7 men and 48 women, reflecting an imbalance of gender representation in the general population of older adults.

The Qualitative Data

Gathering Qualitative Data

For each of the two iterations of the creative arts programming, qualitative data for the *Artful Engagement* research was gathered from the groups of participants in the creative arts programming in the following ways:

Senior adult participants:

- 1) Pre-programming focus groups
- 2) Field observations during programming
- 3) Post-programming focus groups
- 4) Post-programming interviews with four participants from each of the two iterations of the creative writing and the Nia/creative movement programming.

Professional artists and the clinicians:

- 1) Post-training day questionnaires
- 2) Lesson plans for the creative arts programming
- 3) Journal entries
- 4) Post-programming interviews

Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis began with an inductive descriptive process of sorting and defining the data. All of the interview and focus group transcripts were reviewed and descriptive codes of analysis were attached to segments of the texts. Descriptive codes were then grouped into broad topic-oriented categories related to outcomes of the intervention and aspects of the program that influenced its implementation. All text segments belonging to the same category were compared. Topic-oriented categories were further refined and formulated into fewer analytical categories through an inductive, iterative process.

The qualitative researchers developed the initial coding scheme. Each independently open-coded 25% of the interview and focus groups transcripts, after which they met to compare and contrast applied codes,

and to ensure consistency in interpretation. Once an average of .80-.90 inter-coder agreement was established, the remaining data was coded by a research assistant. NVivo 9, an advanced storage-code-and-retrieval software program, facilitated the organization and analysis of the data.

The Quantitative Data

Quantitative data were gathered from participants in the creative arts programming and in the control groups. The quantitative assessments took place prior to the commencement of each of the program iterations and after that programming had been completed. Both the program participants and the individuals in the control groups received the testing.

The cognitive assessment tools consisted of the following:

- 1) Self-report questionnaires (Stanford Chronic Disease Questionnaire: General Health, Shortness of Breath, and Fatigue; Positive and Negative Affect Scale; Loneliness; General and Social Self-Efficacy)
- 2) Objective tests of
 - i. Executive functioning (DKEFS Stroop and Trail Making; Choice reaction time)
 - ii. Working memory (Spatial Span; Alpha Span)
 - iii. Fine motor skills (Grooved Pegboard; finger tapping; and gross motor ability (Timed Up and Go)
 - iv. Music perception (Chord, melody, and rhythm); Rhythm reproduction;
 - v. Language (Boston Naming Test; Letter and Category Fluency)
 - vi. Verbal episodic memory (Victoria Longitudinal Study Story Recall).

Music perception tasks were included in the cognitive assessment based on the hypothesis that the Nia/creative movement training might enhance discrimination of musical features such as melody, and harmony, because the training is accompanied by music. During the tests, participants had to listen to a pair of sound patterns and judge whether the first and the second sounds were same or different.

Research Findings

The summary of the research findings is divided into two sections. The first section provides a summary of the qualitative findings, while the second provides a summary of the cognitive findings.

Qualitative Findings Regarding the Creative Process

This section of the report on the qualitative findings first focuses on findings about the *processes* participants and program leaders experienced during the creative arts programming. The second conveys the findings of the *cumulative effects* or *outcomes* of the program for those individuals.

Since the experience of the professional artists and clinicians was one focus for the research, an examination of the nature and effects of training provided to those individuals is reported here first.

Process Findings

The Professional Artist and Clinician Training Days

Prior to the commencement of the creative arts programming, the professional artists and the clinicians who would be facilitating the programming took part in two days of training. In order to help the clinicians and the artists better understand and appreciate the two professional worlds from which they were drawn, one day of training took place at Baycrest (the health care venue where the programming was to take place) and the other at the Royal Conservatory a leading centre for music and arts and the home of Living Through the Arts. The training was an innovation in the field of the arts in health care, and an examination of its effects was part of the research agenda.

The goals of the training were as follows:

- 1) To provide basic information about the psychological, emotional, and physical issues of aging, and how to deal positively with them in order for artists and clinicians to deliver an effective arts-based program geared to older adults
- 2) To allow an opportunity for artists and clinicians to create a foundation for effective working, carving out mutual roles and responsibilities, and understanding mutual hopes and expectations for this experience
- 3) To allow artists and clinicians to get to know each other and gain perspective on what each professional can bring to the partnership: their unique talents, skills and knowledge
- 4) To integrate the special abilities of professional artists into a healthcare setting and for health care clinicians to gain understanding into how the arts and arts-based approaches can be integrated within their clinical repertoire
- 5) To developing a framework for problem-solving, mutual support, and continuous feedback and critical reflection to ensure a rich experience for the professional artists, clinicians, and other participants involved in this research.

Throughout the training a strengths-based approach to programming for older adults was emphasized, that is, building on the strengths, dignity, potential, and life experiences of the participants.

In their post-training questionnaire responses and in interviews, the artists and clinicians identified several benefits of the training days. They all emphasized the important role that the training played in fostering rapport and trust within the newly-formed artist-clinician teams. As one of the clinicians noted:

It provided a foundation for us. It allowed us to get to know each other to some extent and to develop some trust and [I got] a sense of who she was, and she was able to get a sense of who I am. And so, just in terms of our working together, I think it was crucial. (Creative writing Clinician)

In the questionnaire, the artists and clinicians identified the following training activities as those that most promoted rapport and trust:

- 1) The sharing of personal experiences of their own adult learning by the professional artists and clinicians and of their previous experiences working with older adults
- 2) The presentation by the artists of an activity they might include in the current programming and the feedback from clinicians and facilitators about the appropriateness' of those activities for older adults
- 3) The playfulness and joyousness of many of the arts-based training experiences that made risk-taking possible
- 4) The opportunities provided for artist and clinician teams to plan the content of the up-coming programming

The artist-clinician teams also noted that their training experiences reminded them of the importance of creating similar feelings of trust, safety, and joy for the older adults in the up-coming programming.

Artists and clinicians further delineated aspects of the training that were particularly useful to them. The professional artists, in particular, reported that the training had reminded them of a central principle of adult learning and of transformative arts experiences: honouring and building on the previous experiences of the adult learner.

The clinicians, who were more familiar with the learning processes of older adults, indicated that the training had reminded them that artistic processes often involve risk-taking and that an air of playfulness and joy smoothed the way for stepping into the unknown. In their explorations of the creative writing aspects of the up-coming program in particular, the clinicians were also reminded that there was a lot of value in being able to hear narrative the way the client wants to tell it, versus through pre-determined questions, an important insight for the programming and for their own clinical work.

One stumbling block for the professional artists and clinicians was a lack of clarity about their respective roles in the provision of the up-coming programming: the clinicians, in particular, were not sure if they were to act largely as supports for the artists, safe-guarding the physical safety of the program participants and providing insights into their program experiences, or if they, the clinicians, were supposed to take a more active role in the design of the program sessions. While both artist-clinician teams successfully navigated this issue in their program delivery, with the designation of the

professional artists as the lead programmer and the clinicians as support and resource person, the initial confusion over roles caused some awkwardness, and the artists and clinicians recommended greater clarity about the program roles of the professional artists and the clinicians prior to the training.

The professional artists and clinicians were also concerned that they might unintentionally do things that could negatively affect results given that the programming and the research were so intertwined. The research team was equally concerned that providing too much information about the goals of the research might influence the how the professional artists and clinicians structured the program. As a solution, the researchers later met with the artists and clinicians to assure them that they were the programming experts, and that they should be free to determine program content within the creative writing and Nia/creative movement sessions.

When reflecting on the training days, both immediately after they had taken place and at the end of the programming as a whole, the professional artists and clinicians indicated that they had benefitted substantially from the training program and suggested that, if there is to be more than one program iteration a de-briefing day between the first iteration and the next be provided (as was not the case in this instance), so that artists and clinicians can share their programme experiences and discuss any needed changes to program delivery.

Brief Description of the Creative Writing and Nia /Creative Movement Programs

This section of the report is intended to provide brief snapshots of some of the *Artful Engagement* program contents and approaches that the artists and clinicians created. The information conveyed is drawn from an examination of the lesson plans of the artists and from their reflection logs and in no way conveys the richness of the program content.

Creative Writing

The overall focus of the creative writing classes was exploration of the life experiences of the participants. Each session of the program had a theme, such as a specific holiday or a colour and the memories it evoked. In addition, props (for example tea pots, paintings, and candelabra) were typically used to inspire stories based on memories, emotions, and/or the senses. For instance in the lesson plan for the class before the Passover and Easter break, the professional artist and the clinician brought in items related to Passover. Participants were also encouraged to bring in objects of personal significance related to these holidays. The objects prompted memories, which were shared with the group orally and then through writing.

Throughout, writing techniques were introduced to assist the participants in developing writing skills. For example, in one class, the participants explored similes through completing the phrase, *as quiet as a . . .* supplying a variety of possible nouns. In another session, the participants explored written dialogue. Many other writing techniques were explored throughout the sessions in order to help the participants create meaningful and engaging written work.

In the sessions, concepts introduced early in the programming were reinforced and developed further in subsequent lessons. For instance, lesson 3 featured exercises, discussions, and poetry related to the five senses. This was connected to lessons 10 and 11 which included collage making and a writing exercise called “The colour red” and the personal memories associated with it.

Personal reactions and memories were used throughout the classes as a source of story-telling and writing, culminating in the explicit exploration of the concept of writing memoirs.

Nia/Creative Movement

Each of the first five sessions of the Nia/creative movement programming focussed on concepts such as body awareness or using emotion as a creative source for movement. The remaining lessons focussed on a specific body part, such as the spine or hands.

Each lesson started with a social warm-up or ice-breaker followed by the instructor’s introduction to the session’s theme. Three to four physical or sensual activities made up the bulk of the lessons, followed by time for guided reflection and feedback on the session.

There was always a large element of free expression in the sessions. For example, lesson 6 started with an activity where participants used only their hands to respond to the question “How are you today?” The instructor then gave a short lecture on the power of hand movements to “give voice to the silent world inside you.” Then there were three activities focusing on use of the upper extremities to elicit creative movement, including a guessing game where participants hand gestures to convey an activity such as knitting or playing the piano.

As in the creative writing sessions, concepts were reiterated and developed in the Nia/creative movement programming. For instance, the theme of session 4 was *breath and sounding in movement* and by lesson 7, participants were encouraged to “make low frequency sounds to activate the energy of your pelvis” and to use their breathing to manipulate an imaginary pearl in the centre of the pelvis to encourage movement in that part of the body.

There were many commonalities in the structure of the lesson plans and the approaches used in the creative writing groups and the Nia groups. First, the lesson plans from both groups included time for the participants to share their experiences with other participants. Secondly, both sets of lesson plans had focused activities to arouse creativity, although the writing group focused on memories, while Nia/creative movement focused on current bodily awareness and release. Additionally, both lesson plans emphasised the importance of the senses and emotions in creative expression and both incorporated other art forms such as music, paintings, or poems to help draw out participants’ creativity.

Although they were skilled practitioners who obviously were capable of guiding the learning paths of program participants, the professional artists and clinicians also participated in the creative arts activities, shared their own creations with the group, and invited feedback.

This report continues with a summary of the findings about the processes that the study participants experienced during the creative arts programming.

Participant Motivations for Joining the Creative Arts Programming

In the pre-programming interviews and focus group discussions, the older adults provided a list of motivations for wanting to take part in the creative arts programming and research:

- to maintain and promote personal cognitive and physical health
- to feed a hunger for new experiences and adventure
- to have a sense of purpose
- to have a sense of contributing to knowledge about aging (through the research)
- to experience the pleasure in having created something
- to have arts experiences that were denied earlier in life
- to feed a passion for the arts

Participants' motivations belied the notion held by some that the older years are necessarily characterized by a passive acceptance of what might be considered inevitable limitations. These findings concerning motivations suggest that the participants were motivated to participate as a result of wanting to take a pro-active approach to the process of aging and emphasize the wisdom of taking the strength-based approach that was recommended in the training workshop. As one of the participants in the creative writing group put it when he was describing his own experience of age-related limitations, *"I guess the experience of having Parkinson's has called for some kind of creative response because it's very devastating in a lot of ways."*

Safety and Comfort in the Creative Arts Sessions

The qualitative data gathered from participants revealed a concerted effort on the part of the professional artists and clinicians to create safety and comfort in the creative arts sessions.

The following is an example of the many quotes made by Nia/creative movement participants who were appreciative of the fact that the artist was accepting of and responsive to the physical limitations of the group members:

She was so good at allowing people to do what they could do and didn't impose her will on anyone. There were some exercises where I felt I couldn't stand up and do them. And she actually sat down and did some of them with those of us who couldn't stand. (Nia participant)

The importance of tailoring the programming to the variety of capacities represented in any group of older adults was emphasized by the same participant when she said, *"Everyone ages in different ways. Sometimes it affects attitude, physical movement, [or] just appearance."*

Participants also reported that safety and comfort were created by the pervasive air of non-judgement in all of the programming. For example, one Nia/creative movement participant said the following:

You know each person in the group was made to feel important, and whatever I did or whatever anyone else did, you know, we weren't, you know, chided or told that, you know, you should be doing it another way, it was just, you know, whatever you did, you were there, you did it to the best of your ability and, you know, that was it. (Nia/creative movement participant)

In the pre-programming interviews and focus group discussions, the participants had indicated that, although they might previously have wanted to take part in creative arts programming or to attend arts performances during their older years, there were several features of those experiences that made them feel uncomfortable and insecure. For example, the evening scheduling of many events, the need to navigate crowds and public transportation systems, trouble finding parking spots near venues, and the costs of many programs and performances were barriers to participation.

The current program circumvented those barriers and made it possible, safe, and comfortable for them to participate in the current program. The program took place in the daytime when the older adults were not as likely to be tired; parking was convenient and free; the venue that the programming took place in was designed to accommodate the needs of seniors; and participation was subsidized contingent upon their agreement to participate in the research study .

In the end-of-program interviews and focus groups, participants also spoke of some of the aspects of the physical setting of the programming that influenced their program experiences. Due to conditions that occurred over the duration of the program, including a flood at Baycrest, the creative arts sessions took place in a number of different rooms. The participants indicated that they had found the most pleasing and relaxing session accommodations to be those that had windows that allowed natural light and views to the outdoors. Room temperature was also an important element in creating comfort: some rooms were found to be too cold; some were too hot. Many participants were inspired and reported having their spirits lifted by the presence of plants in the rooms.

The creative writing group eventually settled on a circular constellation of tables as opposed to the original board tables at which they first met and where the artist sat at the head in order to be seen: the latter arrangement was described by the artists, clinicians, and program participants as more egalitarian and provided a situation in which they could hear more easily and make eye-contact with one another. The circular arrangement also facilitated more verbal exchanges among the group members.

For the Nia/creative movement group, the size of room was extremely important. Having room to move easily and comfortably was essential, although too large a space eliminated feelings of intimacy and group cohesion.

Both the creative writing and the Nia/creative movement participants reported that the group learning experience had many positive impacts on their program experiences.

The Importance of the Group Experience

Both the creative writing and the Nia/creative movement participants reported that the group learning experience facilitated their own learning in important ways.

Creative Writing

Through sharing their writings in the creative writing sessions, participants became aware of the complexities of the lives of others and were challenged to reflect more upon their own experiences:

Another good thing about this group is that when we read what we had written, we talked about it and shared experiences One person said something and that evoked a response from someone else. So maybe we came out of it learning more about ourselves and learning more about each other, which I thought was wonderful. (Creative writing participant)

Also in the writing group, hearing the stories of others diminished the sense of isolation that many of the participants had brought with them into the creative arts programming:

Well it just makes you realize that you know, everybody's life isn't what it seems sometimes, you know, behind closed doors, you know, everybody goes through, you know, emotions, illness, loss, you know, wars, you know, deaths and ah, it kind of makes you feel like you're not sort of, just an entity all to yourself: there are others who have other problems and happiness too. (Creative writing participant)

Often participants in the creative writing groups would write about difficult life experiences. The support of the group was very helpful to them. The creative writing artist spoke of her observation of this dynamic when describing the reaction of the group to an emotional passage created and read aloud by one participant:

There was silence. Everybody could feel what she was feeling. (Creative writing participant)

When describing the impact of her own writing on the group, one participant said the following:

I think that it was a breakthrough for the whole group because when I had that emotional reaction to my own words, they were all there with me. I think from that time on everything everybody wrote had more emotional content in it. It [the writing] was much more personal after that. We like sort of broke through the barrier of being strangers in the class. (Creative writing participant)

Often participants in the creative writing groups would write about difficult life experiences, such as their experiences of the holocaust, the death of a spouse, and past relationships with other family

members. With the support of other group members, participants were able to better accept their own feelings and feel supported in their pain or joy. Sharing of life experiences often moved other group members to move to a deeper, more profound, writing about their own life experiences.

The positive experiences of having their writings heard and their talents praised by other participants were also very important to the development of confidence in the writing abilities of individual participants.

Nia/Creative Movement

The Nia/creative movement group participants also drew inspiration from one another. One of the younger participating adults spoke of how the example of an older participant made her more hopeful about her own aging:

[Name of another participant] blew me away. I thought she was fabulous, oh, her life, her sense of humour, and the fact that, at her age, she's going and doing. And she's got a raw foods [diet], and she's teaching yoga. I thought that she was just incredible. . . .It gives me hope for the future. (Nia/creative movement participant)

Expressing and Experiencing Emotions/Reframing Life Experiences

The participant data revealed that many participants in both the creative writing and Nia/creative movement groups went through a process of changing the ways in which they viewed their life experiences.

Creative Writing

The data gathered from the creative writing data attests to the fact that many participants went through a process of reframing many important life experiences. As the preceding report section conveys, the support and affirmation of the group, the artist, and the clinician were essential contributions to this process. The creative writing clinician explained the importance that hearing the stories of others can play in the perception of one's own life:

I think through learning about others' experiences, I think that can help us go to a deeper place within ourselves and sort of . . . maybe rethink or shift our thinking in a certain way, or help us understand something in a clearer way. (Creative writing clinician)

However, it was clear from the comments of many of the participants that the creative writing process itself was a means to re-examine, come to terms with, and reshape their memories. For example, one participant wrote the following:

I think we sort of put things on paper that we might not have thought about prior to that. We learned as we were going along how to express those things that we might not have thought. (Creative writing participant)

In fact, many participants indicated that, through writing, they were reclaiming their pasts, retrieving memories and forging a new relationship with grief that allowed sad and happy feelings to coexist. In an interview, the creative writing artist spoke about this dynamic in her description of one participant's experiences:

She had written about her first husband and hearing the rain on the roof and how she felt, well, that he would have loved to hear the rain, and then she would be sad. But, you know, she also was thinking about things that made him happy. . . . She realized you could use writing to talk about, bring your "good" and "bad" feelings together. You know, she had a sister. She wrote about her sister, who died, and she could also talk about the love for her sister and her whole face lit up. (Creative writing professional Artist)

Nia/Creative Movement

As pointed out in the earlier description of the two programs, the creative writing group focussed more on memories, weaving together past and present experiences, while the Nia/creative movement groups focussed more on the present moment of experience. It was clear from the Nia/creative movement participant data that the sessions also provided many opportunities for expression and celebration of feelings and acknowledging the import of an experience through creative expression. The Nia/creative movement clinician had the following to say as she witnessed the solo dance of another:

She was holding her cane above her head and she had been in the hospital off and on for the last two or three sessions, and it was sort of like a dance of victory of "I survived." . . . She sort of broke free and totally expressed what she was feeling in that moment. (Nia clinician)

There were many references in the Nia/creative movement participant data to the joy experienced through creative movement. As one participant put it: *"Well, self expression is something that's delightful. . . [It's] pleasure for the whole body."*

Another Nia/creative movement participant described the shift in emotions that she experienced when she participated in the program activities:

Yeah, most days I felt okay when I came in, but there were some days that I didn't, and I felt better after. Yeah, that's partly because of being with a group of people and hearing the music and participating in the activity. So it was the combination of everything. They were a very nice group to be with.... It would be a mood thing, which is emotional, because it would get my mind off of whatever it was that was stressing me in life, even if it was just the traffic, or looking for a parking spot.... It just took your mind off of other things, and the focus was on the here and now. I know I felt better after. (Nia participant)

Physical Changes in the Nia/Creative Movement Group

Not surprisingly, it was in the Nia/creative movement group that participants reported feeling alterations in their physical states. The Nia/creative movement clinician observed the physical changes in one woman during the sessions:

She had swelling of the legs and so on but it seemed you know during those times when she was engaged in whatever we were doing. She had a huge smile on her face and um, just sort of, she kind of had this stoop, like rounded kind of posture, but [in Nia] she'd be more open kind of shoulders lifted up and back and looking out um and just a very sweet smile, you know, um, so I noticed that about her.... her face really would brighten up during some of those moments and she had that very hardy kind of laugh that would come out. (Nia/creative movement clinician)

One Nia/creative movement participant described the easing of symptoms through the programming:

I have asthma So sometimes it's very hard to breathe deeply. With Nia I can breathe deeper . . . get rid of the air fast. It rejuvenates you. You feel like the blood is rushing. It rejuvenates you. (Nia/creative movement participant)

Another Nia/creative movement participant made a comment that suggested the relationship between physicality and cognitive health:

It's moving to music and my sense of rhythm isn't that great, so I say it's a challenge, and its mental as well as a physical challenge, and I think that's a good thing. . . . You have to keep the neurons firing. (Nia/creative movement participant)

The Artist-Clinician Teams

The professional artists and clinicians clearly acted as a team in the individual creative arts sessions. While the professional artists took the lead in the programming, the clinicians brought indispensable knowledge of and sensitivities to an older adult population. The clinicians were also often freer than were the professional artists, who were leading the activities, to offer support to individuals who might be experiencing distress. One artist provided an example:

[Name of participant] had quite an anxious/upset expression on her face and kept standing up and sitting down in a dramatic manner (sighing)....I was so grateful that was that [name of Nia Clinician] came over to discuss with [name of participant] what was happening for her. (Nia/creative movement professional Artist Log)

The Program Outcomes: Qualitative Findings

The previous pages provided a glimpse into important effects that engaging in creative arts had for the older adults *during* the programming. The next section of this report provides information about the cumulative effects, or the outcomes, of the creative arts programming.

New Attitudes about Aging

In the post-programming interviews and focus group discussions, many participants credited the creative arts programming with helping them to develop more positive feelings about aging. For instance, in a post-programming interview, one participant in the Nia/creative movement sessions spoke of her new-found knowledge that she could have more control over the aging process, her own attitude, and her social interactions than she had thought prior to her program involvement:

“[Because of the program, I realized] that I could age in many different ways and a lot of it is within my power to control some of the things that will happen to me, and how I will react to different things, and attitude, and stuff like that, and [the] physical.... if I stayed more active, try to be active, and try to keep my strength and mobility as an ongoing project, this will certainly benefit me. It’ll benefit me with my attitude as well because, if I’m comfortable in myself, then I won’t be self-conscious as much. (Nia/creative movement participant)

Even for some participants who were living with physical disabilities, there were feelings of empowerment that accompanied an acceptance of limitations and the realization that there are a variety of realms in which one may grow.

It is also clear that the creative arts programming had given participants more tools for dealing with the isolation and losses that can be part of aging. As one Nia/Creative movement participant put it, *“I don’t mind being home alone [now] you know if I’m listening to music.”* Another Nia/creative movement participant made a comment that captured both the lingering joy of her participation and her continuing use of her learning in the sessions:

If I can . . . if I listen to music in the house, I can skip to it and I can sing to it, and . . . it makes you feel that you can express yourself better. (Nia/creative movement participant) participant)

Part of participants’ new orientation to the aging process had to do with new feelings of gratitude for the people and experiences of their pasts. This appeared to be so particularly for the creative writing participants, whose explorations of memories often led to deep changes in how they viewed their past and present lives:

Well, I think [I came away with] gratitude for my parents . . . gratitude for my life. . . . I think that has been deepened. (Creative writing participant)

Developing Tools for Self-Expression

It was clear from the participant data that the creative arts programming provided participants with the tools for self-expression and communication with others. For example, one creative writing participant wrote the following:

I learned that there are a lot of different tools to make the work speak to others—in other words, technical tools....Yeah. Like this dialogue for instance....I never really took a writing

course before so for me, realizing that dialogue can really depict a character or can really move the action along was amazing. Also, there's other ways of making things interesting to people.
(Creative writing participant)

There were many comments from the Nia/creative movement participants that indicated that the artist showed them how to move effectively so that they were freed to create their own creative movement without experiencing discomfort.

Nia/Creative Movement and Physical Changes

Many Nia/creative movement participants reported positive changes in their physical health that they attributed to their program experiences including relief from neck pain and backaches, better overall mobility and lessened need for medication. For example, one woman described her lessened reliance on diabetes medication and then speculated that various elements of the programming might have been the cause:

I am a diabetic. I push[ed] down my sugars, the last three months, almost no sugar. . . . I am on the same diet For sure. For sure, it's better. If I am stressed, then it goes up....I think it's very much related [to the program]....Maybe the social, maybe the exercising, maybe just to come together with some people. I think it did affect me, for good, for better. (Nia/creative movement participant)

Another participant reported a lessening of physical discomfort through continuing to use Nia movements:

I have spinal stenosis and that sort of effects your whole skeletal and in my case nerves as well, and, um, the when I was doing the, um, movements that I thought were quite, you know, avant-garde for me, I found that some of them really released a lot of, um, areas. Like at one time . . .if moved my neck I saw stars, but then she [the Nia/creative movement artist] taught us these movements, and I [now] find myself, when I am walking from the bedroom to my dining room, into my kitchen, . . . doing this or that. [movement form the programming]. (Nia/creative movement participant)

Several program participants referred to general increased mobility that they attributed to the Nia/creative movement programming:

Normally I would be stiff. . . . [Now], when I'm by myself I can dance and twirl around the house, and that's from Nia. (Nia/creative movement participant)

Increased Engagement in Activities

A number of participants in both groups referred to the fact that the creative arts programming had reawakened their love for arts activities and had fostered the realization that they could and should still make the arts part of their lives:

I've been neglecting plays and musicals. I mean, my husband and I went to Mirvish [theatre] for thirty, forty years, you know, and those are the things that I've been putting off, that this program has stimulated. (Creative writing participant)

There was also recognition on the part of some participants that they it was still possible for them to participate in a wider range of activities in the community than they had thought prior to their creative arts program participation:

So, you know, sort of being in the Nia group has sort of, it just broadened my horizons, in the sense that there are a lot more things out there that are possible for me and for other people who have mobility issues. (Nia/creative movement participant)

Another theme that ran through the post-programming interviews and focus groups was a recommitment to physical activity and the pleasure it brings. One woman described how her Nia/creative movement experiences had prompted her to forego household tasks in favour of the pleasure of walking with friends:

See, we don't have as much as opportunity as when we were younger to have physical pleasure of different kinds and, ah, so anything that comes our way certainly, is certainly great and makes life feel more fulfilled you know. (Nia/creative movement participant)

Several study participants in the creative writing group also indicated that they would continue to make creative arts an aspect of their lives. The following quote illustrates one participant's continuing engagement in creative writing and the importance that the programming played in giving her the confidence to do so.

Well I do make a point of taking time to sit down, turn off all distractions in the house and write. . . .Yeah, I never took specific time to sit down and write....Just the encouragement of having come to the group and writing, and getting the pats on the head....I'm doing it a couple time a week....I'll sit for, I tend to sit down for fifteen or twenty minutes, it usually ends up being closer to an hour. Because I find that once I start writing, it keeps on coming and I don't want to stop while it's coming....I'm trying to write my play....Right now what I am doing is specifically the physical set up of the play, I'm writing down all of the things that I want to cover in the play, the incidents, the story, the kinds of feelings and emotions and things, so just like the bare bones. (Creative writing participant)

New Feelings of Self-Confidence and Empowerment

Many mentioned the encouragement and understanding of the program artists and clinicians as having played an important role in fostering feelings of greater self-confidence. However, for many it was also the fact that they had taken a challenge, stepped out of their comfort zones, and succeeded in their creative activities that led to enhanced self-esteem and confidence. One participant explained it this way

I don't write that much [normally]. That was just such a different way of expressing yourself. I didn't think that I could, you know,—I could do it. It was a good feeling of satisfaction: that you could do something that you didn't think you could do. Maybe I can climb mountains now and I didn't think I could. Maybe I can do other things. (Creative writing participant)

Changes to Current Relationships

There was evidence in the findings that the program eased communication between the participants and their families. Participants in both groups reported that their families were delighted and excited about their parents' and grandparents' program participation and were eager to talk about them.

It was also evident from the data that many creative writing participants attributed a commitment to write their memoirs to their program experiences. Those participants indicated feeling more useful to their families as they contemplated the role of those memoirs in passing on important family history.

Artist and Clinician Learning

Both the professional artists and the clinicians reported learning from their program experiences. For example, the Nia/creative movement artist reported the following:

I did, like a couple things this year differently with my own Nia practice, um, that were different, and I don't think I would have had the confidence to do them [without this program experience] because they're sort of a little away from the norm. . . . I think I built up a sort of level of confidence in myself as being able to do different things creatively. (Nia/creative movement artist)

In their post-programming interviews both the creative writing and Nia/creative movement clinician reported that they would incorporate elements from the creative arts programming in their work. It is obvious from the qualitative findings that participants' lives were positively impacted in many ways by the creative arts programming. This report now turns to a brief recounting of the quantitative findings.

Quantitative Findings

There were statistically significant quantitative findings for both the Nia/creative movement and creative writing groups.

The creative writing group showed an increase in positive affect.

The Nia/creative movement group reported significantly improved general health, greater positive and less negative affect, and greater general self-efficacy after the intervention than prior to it. This group also showed improved fine motor control in the dominant hand and better verbal memory.

As can be seen in Table #2, when results for the two participant groups were combined, statistically significant gains were evident in affect and verbal memory, as well as in spatial working memory, the latter effect being driven by a marginally significant improvement in the Nia/creative movement, but not in the creative writing group. As well, table #2 illustrates the areas of assessment where statistically significant gains were achieved for the participants in the creative writing, Nia/creative movement, and control groups. No statistically significant gains were found for the control group.

Table #2: Significant ($p < .05$) pre- to post-test gains in functioning

Test	Control Group	Creative Writing Group	Nia/Creative Movement Group	Creative Writing + Nia/Creative Movement
Stanford General Health			✓	
Positive Affect		✓	✓	✓
Negative Affect			✓	✓
General Self-Efficacy			✓	
Grooved Pegboard Dominant			✓	
Story Recall			✓	✓
Spatial Span Backward				✓

Furthermore, there was no decline in executive function¹ skills for either the creative writing or Nia/creative movement groups, unlike control group where executive function declined, especially in the area of working memory.

¹Although the term *executive function* is still a contested one in the literature, there is general agreement that the term applies to the complex coordination of a subset of other brain functions in order to do such things as plan, problem-solve, and alter behavior to achieve a goal. (Elliot, 2003).

After the training, the Nia/creative writing group showed a marginally significant improvement on accuracy in rhythmic pattern discrimination, whereas, in the creative writing group, there was a significant decline. There was no significant change in performance of the Control group. As for the melody and harmony tasks, there was no notable difference observed. This result is in line with neuro-imaging literature, including studies that have shown a close connection in the brain between musical rhythm processing and motor systems.

Overall, the results suggest that Nia/creative movement programming was somewhat more effective than creative writing at changing individuals' psycho-social well-being, fine motor control, story recall, and spatial working memory, as well as the detection of musical elements. However, involvement in *either* one of Nia or creative writing increased positive affect and preserved executive function

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the *Artful Engagement* study showed that the engagement of older adults in the creative arts programming resulted in widespread and important changes to their psycho-social and cognitive well-being.

Of particular note are the significant changes to positive affect for participants in both the creative writing and the Nia/creative movement groups. In the psych-social realm, both sets of participants reported many gains:: more positive attitudes to aging, increased self-confidence, expanded sense of possibilities for participation in activities, renewed awareness that they still had contributions to make to family and friends, and understanding that aging is not only a process of loss, but can also be about new learning and new experiences. All of these program effects were undoubtedly causes for increases in positive affect that were detected through the cognitive testing.

It is very significant that the control group, who did not receive a creative arts intervention, did not experience similar increases in positive affect, but, rather, experienced increases in negative affect, as well as decreases in executive function that were not present in the program participants. These findings suggest that participants' creative arts experiences played an important role in preserving executive function and increasing positive feeling states.

The discrete art forms of creative writing and Nia/creative movement also offered different sorts of benefits. For many of the creative writing participants there was a process of coming to terms with painful life experiences and losses through writing, which provided them with the means to let painful and joyful memories to co-exist.

For the Nia/creative movement participants, the pleasure that participants felt in the Nia/creative movement classes had more to do with the present moment of experience rather than with the past. Many of those participants revelled in their abilities to move and to express themselves through

movement, and some experienced a reduction in physical symptoms and medication use. The quantitative findings confirmed that there were discernable physical gains for the Nia/creative movement group. As well, the data supported previous research that made a link between physical movement and rhythm discrimination.

Many of the patterns and themes that exist in the literature about transformative adult learning and transformative arts experiences were present in the qualitative data. The researchers found that the participants' recounting of their experiences revealed that they had experienced the three stages of *disorientation*, *reconfiguration*, and *emergence* described by the literature on transformative adult learning.

During the *reconfiguration* phases of their experiences, the program participants engaged in activities that challenged and expanded their skill sets, as well as their habitual ways of regarding their lives, the world, and their place in it. Their journey through the learning process was inspired and supported by the presence of a group of other individuals on similar learning paths and by program leaders who had the skills to guide the learning, who honoured the life experiences and capabilities that participants brought to the programming, and who treated the participants as companions in the adventure of learning.

When participants emerged from the learning process, many had, indeed, arrived at new perspectives and skill sets that expanded their views of what was possible for them in their older years.

The qualitative research findings also further substantiated the claims in the literature about transformative creative arts experiences. As Dewey (1934) claimed, the combination of connecting the learning to the life experiences of the program participants, the sensual experiences provided by the arts, and the stimulating ideas encountered in the arts experiences kept the program participants committed to their program learning. In that learning, participants used their imaginations to arrive at new understandings of their lives and capacities, and began to value and celebrate them (Bai, 2001, 2003; Franck, 1973).

There were many elements of the learning process that prompted participants' reorientation to their own lives that can be considered elements of experience of the *flow* states that were mentioned in the literature review. Csikszentmihalyi's (1990; 1996; 1997) description of flow states, characterized by deep engagement in the activity at hand, a lack of awareness of concerns outside immediate experience, alterations in the personal sense of time, and the sustaining nature of the feedback from the experience encountered in flow moments, was applicable to the experiences of many of the participants.

An essential element of flow experiences is that the learning challenges are only slightly beyond the existing skill set of the participant, thus providing the individual with the sense that, while the learning is challenging, the goals of the learning process are within reach through effort. This study revealed that the professional artists in the programming used their intimate knowledge of the creative process to

provide participants with experiences that promoted the sequential and gradual development of arts skills that enabled them to express themselves in new ways.

The professional artists also used the iterative process of introducing writing or movement techniques early in the program and then expanding and deepening them later in the programming. The professional artists also brought with them the attitudinal dispositions that result from long hours of studio work and that were essential to maximizing the program experiences for the participants: they knew that creativity involved trial and error, that there are no right or wrong answers in the arts, and that negative judgements can put a damper on the creative process. With the guidance of the specially-trained professional artists, the program participants were enabled to have the kinds of deep experiences that would ultimately affect their lives in many positive ways.

The clinicians also brought indispensable knowledge to both the program planning and the creative arts sessions themselves. They were cognizant of the capacities of the older adults and were alert to instances when participants might be frustrated, uncomfortable, or unsafe in the sessions.

The pre-program training was described by both the professional artists and the clinicians as valuable opportunities to gain new knowledge; to be reminded of the excitement, joy, and challenges that accompany the creative arts, and to forge productive working relations with their artist or clinician team partner.

While the program participants clearly benefited from the kinds of expertise the artist-clinician teams brought to the creative arts sessions, the clinicians and professional artists themselves learned from one another in ways that they said would influence their future work with older adults.

When conducting a mixed methods study, researchers hope that the various kinds of findings will support one another. This was so in the case of the *Artful Engagement* study, where the qualitative and cognitive findings substantiated each other and lent greater credibility to the study as a whole. The qualitative findings showed that the *why* of the outcomes, that is, what it was about the creative arts programming that caused the changes detected in the cognitive findings. The cognitive findings reinforced the qualitative researchers' conviction that their findings were robust.

The research team is confident that there was widespread improvement in the emotional lives and cognitive health of the older adults as a result of their participation in the creative writing or Nia/creative movement programming. For the participants in the Nia/creative movement programming, there was the additional benefit of improved physical health.

While this report has presented an overview of the study findings, it should be noted that there are further, more detailed papers to come out of the vast amount of data collected in the study. The

researchers look forward to coming together again for more writing and thus making more contributions to the literature about the arts and aging.

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