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- valued co-participants' thoughts and feelings;
- is one which could be adopted on a wider scale to explore the route to self-fulfilment through active participation in arts, where cognitive and social enhancement might be the outcomes of aesthetic and kinaesthetic engagement.

Involving Older People Research Programme:

The older persons' experiences of creativity in relation to wellbeing: a collaborative research project.

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The aim of this project was to explore the experiences of creativity in relation to the wellbeing of older persons who have recently retired. Creativity is defined by Esquivel and Hodes (2003) as a person's ability to produce new original ideas irrespective of the discipline they are working in. Its development is influenced, they believe, by social and cultural factors.

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Project Outline

The aim of the project was to understand the recently retired older person's experience of artistic creativity and how this impacted upon the person's social and psychological wellbeing. As such two tangible research questions were asked:

1. What are the experiences of recently retired older person regarding creativity?
2. Can participation in creative activities enhance the older person's wellbeing?

The literature suggests that the post-retirement years can be lonely and leave older persons feeling isolated, especially if they have moved to live in a new area. Participating in arts can give new meaning to their lives and enable them to reach out to a new community of like-minded people (Sandel and Johnston 1987), offering them the social and cognitive stimulation they seek.

This project explores how newly retired older persons perceive the experience of active participation – actually *creating* art – rather than simply being passive consumers, e.g. visiting art galleries or theatres.

Implementation

Fifteen older persons from the local community volunteered to join our action research group. We also enlisted the help of two co-researchers, who were also newly-retired people with an interest in the arts, and who lived outwith the area. Their remit was to monitor the process and the way we conducted it, in effect, acting as “go-betweens”, feeding back their observations to both co-participants and researchers. Using a local church hall as our venue, we held two group discussions over the course of the winter, followed by a day of arts workshops, where co-participants could sample creative activities in drama, visual art, music and dance. During and after the workshops, they had the chance to reflect and post comments anonymously in a box. At the end of the session, we came together to share our thoughts.

Findings

Key findings from this study were that:

- the feeling of belonging to a community was important to most, though some preferred to work on their own;
- Most co-participants liked a wide choice of arts activities and were often introduced to new ideas by their friends. They sought sustained, in-depth art experiences where they felt challenged and stimulated, rather than short, superficial courses;
- some like to strive towards a finished product and were critical about their own achievements, while for others, taking part was more important.
- The stimulation of new forms of creativity was perceived to be beneficial to mental and physical wellbeing, but the activities had to be fun as well.

- For some participants, the act of creating was more important than the final product, others liked to feel the achievement of the end product, rather than relishing the process.
- The research process, which valued co-participants' thoughts and feelings, is one which could be adopted on a wider scale to explore the route to self-fulfilment through active participation in arts, where cognitive and social enhancement might be the outcomes of aesthetic and kinaesthetic engagement.