Exploring internalised age stereotypes through the arts: Some practice examples 😊

Dr Trish Hafford-Letchfield
Professor of Social Care

On behalf of WG5 COST EU: Ageism 2017, Eindhoven
• Some examples of how I have used the arts to challenge internalised ageist stereotypes in my own professional context
Our recent systematic review (Leonard, Hafford-Letchfield, Couchman 2016) on the impact of the arts on social work education identified three key advantages:

1. Positioning practice by linking micro and macro thinking
2. The cultivation of leadership beyond verbal reasoning
3. Art as pedagogy.

THE ARTS PROVIDE A CHANNEL FOR THE COMMUNICATION OF AFFECTIVE OR EMOTIONAL FORCES THAT INTERSECT WITH STRUCTURAL FORCES IN THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF AGEISM
Co-production in professional education & practice
Participation and Involvement of Older People in Professional Education and Practice

• Including people with a diversity of experiences
• Overcoming the practical challenges in involving older people
• Developing links with wider community through outreach to service users and their organisations
• Sustainability - more involvement of ‘educators’ with the community
• Addressing the ethics involved in the process as well as confronting difficult topics
RUDE OLD PEOPLE

Challenging and exploring views of sexuality and intimacy in later life through improvisatory workshops and film making

http://www.1stframework.org/rude.asp
Intimacy and Sexuality in Later Life

• Intimacy is at the centre of meaningful personal life and a fundamental human need.
• Thinking about sexuality of older people, and expression of older people’s sexual needs.
• Relative silence in policy and social work practice
• Potential role played by social care professionals in recognising, interacting and confronting any barriers that serve to perpetuate myths and stereotypes of the ‘asexual’ older person.
• Creating opportunities for expression of their needs for intimacy and sexual wellbeing

(Hafford-Letchfield, 2008)
What was it about?

- Intergenerational initiative
- Addressed neglected issue of intimacy and sexuality in later life
- Using the arts to promote and enjoy learning
- Learning with older people rather than about them
- Developing learning materials through a process of experimentation and negotiation
- Sharing power, being innovative and promoting active learning for all those involved.
- Learning new skills, blogs, filming, editing
- Resulting in 17 short clips to be used in learning & teaching (see paper Hafford-Letchfield et al, 2010)
I enjoyed the diversity, the mix of young and older people, the different views...

So many issues touched my heart and gave me a new dimension to think about which I don't think would have been possible without this experience.

The gentle, supportive environment allowed us to cover hard hitting topics in a non threatening way and we had such a laugh!
I have had so much fun and have learnt so much in the process, I cannot even begin to describe…

I became aware of so many issues usually subconscious… this brought them to a conscious level so I could discuss them.

Students share thoughts and ideas
Queens Visit
Tailor made comedy within day care and making of a mockumentary to express the views about older people about their care environments (Hafford-Letchfield, 2012).

The Queen’s Visit: http://www.kaltura.com/tiny/lky65
Opening Doors: production of evidence based digital stories to promote positive interactions between carers and people living with dementia
Opening Doors Digital Stories

• Donald’s Story: http://www.kaltura.com/tiny/oxop2

• Lily’s Story: http://www.kaltura.com/tiny/v7z3g

• Elizabeth’s Story: http://www.kaltura.com/tiny/rce71

• Vincent’s Story: http://www.kaltura.com/tiny/sjxj2

• Cheese or Ham?: http://www.kaltura.com/tiny/mhy4v

• Rita and Addy: http://www.kaltura.com/tiny/txrgh

• Mr James: http://www.kaltura.com/tiny/nhvcp

• Mr Dunn: http://www.kaltura.com/tiny/uw71c
Coming soon....... 'Falling Down'

Problematic Substance Use in Later Life

“Marilyn”
Has been going through gender reassignment. Always felt “weird” through her life but was married with two children. Son in the US is supportive, but daughter can’t cope with her father now being a woman. Marilyn wants to be in the “right” body. Isolated. Started drinking. Borderline, she is worried that she is starting to have a problem. The medical side of things is well attended to, but not the social. Reticent to join a gender reassignment group because afraid of “weird” people. Needs help and encouragement with the social side of things.

“Friya”
On Methadone, but actually taking a cocktail of drugs. Confused and disorientated. Sleeps a lot, and unaware of when she sleeps. Perhaps is showing signs of dementia? Is it the drugs or dementia? Repeats herself. Unhappy. Her partner has dependency problems too. Results of blood tests will be helpful, but her medication needs checking.

“Donald”
Donald is 67. He is lonely, sad, solitary. Problems with communicating with his family, he is suspicious they will commit him to a mental ward. He has a history of mental illness. A psychiatric social worker comes in to visit, but antagonises him. He has “a few beers” to relax. He has had some falls and been to the GP. No hobbies, just the pub and buying beer. He himself is more worried about depression than alcoholism. No one is looking at his combined problems. The support he is getting is not working.
Innovative approaches using the ARTS

- Cultural theories from the arts and humanities offer new insights
- Sharing power about *content* of learning materials and their construction
- Process of experimentation and negotiation
- Opportunities to develop creative imagination on basis that every person has potential within them for creativity
- Close encounters in more creative setting helps stimulate thinking through issues and closer working relationships.
- Promoting inclusion and identity
- Use of imagination, emotion and empathy away from technicist or instrumental approaches to learning
- Threshold theory – transformational learning
- Unlocking tacit knowledge, rehearsing sensitive scenarios
- Foucault’s “authoritative gaze” – reliance on text based knowledge
References


Thank You for Listening

If you are interested in collaborating regarding the arts and older people or professional education, please contact me at:

Department of Mental Health, Social Work
School of Health and Education
Middlesex University
Ground Floor Town Hall Annex
The Burroughs, Hendon,
London NW4 4BT

p.hafford-letchfield@mdx.ac.uk

+044 (0) 208 411 4506