



Grundtvig project: Educ-Arts

Report on Best practice in Culture and Arts Education in the UK

Introduction

Culture and Arts Education in the UK is a vital part of the UK economy with the industry contributing over £12 billion. This contribution has been recognised in the report, commissioned by Arts Council England, entitled “The Contribution of the Arts and Culture to the National Economy” (CEBR May 2013). Education is at the forefront of engaging people in culture and arts particularly in the years of compulsory education as well as further and higher education. However, in focussing on the needs and activities of the 50+ age group we need to examine where best practice takes place and how engagement occurs and demonstrates success that can be communicated regionally, nationally and in the European context. Further, it has been demonstrated in the UK that regular activities in the arts and culture can have a substantial effect on subjective wellbeing and positively impact on the health of the older individual (Fujiwara 2013).

While mainstream educational establishments still take the lead in formalised education for all ages, there are institutions that cater for the older learner. The Open University has over 20,000 people aged 50+, with many studying academic courses in culture and arts. The University of the Third Age, with 320,521 registered members, is a self help organisation for those no longer in full time employment providing education and creative and leisure opportunities. The subjects they cover are self-generated but often related to cultural and arts pursuits; this is “learning for pleasure” and is a genuine success story in engaging the older citizen.



Communication and dissemination

The inspiration for work in this field is of vital importance. The Age of Creativity is a website designed to “to share, celebrate and inspire work in the field of arts and older people”. In this way it provides a national focus and showcases pioneering work throughout the UK. In the same way the BBC, the national broadcaster funded through the Licence Fee, provides a good source of information on culture and arts activities for the 50+ on its website as part of its Charter requirements. Further, Sky Arts is a TV channel that focuses on a variety of arts activities, many with an appeal for the 50+ viewer, and which provides opportunities for engagement.

Regional activity

Much of the activity has been based on effective research in Scotland. The Scottish Arts Council produced a research report into “Lifelong Learning, the Arts and Older People”. In essence, it was recognised that there was some positive work with the elderly in care homes in terms of the “plastic” arts and recognised the need to engage the 50+ in more activities that have a significant benefit and well as stimulating arts and cultural engagement. CAFE (Creative Activities for Elderly people) showed how it was possible to improve the quality of life for elderly people in care homes. In a positive sense Scotland’s Creative Ageing Festival, Luminare, ran in 2013 helping dramatically increase the number of older people enjoying quality arts activities as performers, participants or consumers.

In Northern Ireland, initiatives growing out of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland report “Arts and Older People” (July 2010) led to projects that included creative writing (such as drawing upon experience of the trauma of conflict in the area) to theatre projects including writing as well as social dance.

The Welsh Arts Council report on Health and Wellbeing highlighted excellent practice like Celf o Gwmpas, a community arts organisation working with adults with disabilities. Also Gwanwyn is a national festival that celebrates creativity in older age in Wales each May. It offers opportunities for greater participation by older people in



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the arts, whether visual arts, drama, storytelling, music, literature, photography, dance or film.

Liverpool became the UK's Capital of Culture in 2008 and this type of initiative has led to what Phil Taylor, Arts Development Manager, described as "the Largest community Arts Programme in Europe" and demonstrates how such major events can stimulate arts and cultural engagement for the older participant.

Conclusion

Across the UK there have been a number of examples of best practice as exemplified above and more but with a conscious effort to look for great ideas and positive improvement through dance, art, music, singing and creative writing.