

Grandma Layton: A Cinderella Story

“Through discussing Layton’s images and engaging in completing one section of her drawing for a community artwork, both older and younger people were brought together through heightened awareness of the other.”

Liz Langdon
Sierra McCloskey
Katie Rice
Zoe Vincent
University of Kansas

ABSTRACT

The students and professor used arts-informed research (AIR) in the practice of community-based art education bringing together community members separated by age and distance. They analyzed how Elizabeth “Grandma” Layton’s art addressed issues of ageing and mental health and directed participant engagement in coloring a line drawing replica. This postcard coloring project was adapted for fifth-grade art classes and residents of a retirement community. In AIR the choice of art activity, medium presentation and participants are related to the project’s success. The analysis is through the lens of place-based education and intergenerational (IG) learning.

KEYWORDS

arts-informed research; community-based art education; Elizabeth Layton; intergenerational learning; place-based learning

*To correspond with the author regarding this article:
lizlangdon@ku.edu*

What can we learn about each other through art? This is one of the questions we pursued in our Art in Community course at University of Kansas as we planned ways to connect the community to artworks exhibited in *Healing, Knowing, and Seeing the Body*, an exhibition at the Spencer Museum of Art in Spring 2021, when the Covid pandemic was still impactful in community settings. Our group, consisting of the course professor and undergraduate art education students, selected the artworks of Elizabeth “Grandma” Layton on display and in the museum’s collection to reflect on global key issues of mental health, age and resiliency, and to engage the museum visitors in artmaking to be shared via mailed postcard with those isolated in a retirement community. The professor asked the class to plan an activity built on the framework of community-based art education (CBAE), to bridge those in an isolating retirement residence to greater community. Designed first for social distancing, through an iteration of the plan, we were able to connect multi-age communities through the art of Elizabeth Layton and colored pencils.

Literature Review

CBAE is engaged pedagogy and andragogy, with a socially conscious perspective that is creative, collaborative and enables arts-informed research (AIR) (Lawton et al., 2019). Andragogy is the self-directed learning inherent in teaching adult learners. AIR methodology guided our work. It includes engagement with artwork to define themes and answer questions and acts as both data collection method and presentation (Blaikie, 2014). The museum exhibition theme and Elizabeth Layton’s art in particular directed the focus of the research. In presenting this research, the text and the art are inexorably linked, because Layton’s art and the community art that was created in response, is expressive and explicit of the themes and findings discussed (Blaikie, 2014). The postcard sections, colored by participants in response to prompts, contributed to a community interpretation of her artwork, and demonstrated an acceptance of sharing with, and learning from different aged-groups, children and older citizens. The visual art elements offered therapeutic relief as well.

The benefit of visual art therapy (VAT) for ageing populations has been well documented. In a systematic review and meta-analysis of literature documenting the benefits of VAT to ageing populations. Masika et al. (2020) declare it effective to prevent or manage dementia, as well as improve cognitive functioning. They found that activities of greater cognitive benefit involved a higher level of creativity and optimized the use of essential components including art education, reminiscence, art processing, cognitive evaluation, art crafts/modelling, and socialization (Masika et al., 2020). Although cognitive benefits were not the goal of our project, but rather mood enhancement and community awareness, this project included aspects of all of these essential components.

The materials used in the art production also informed this research. Layton used blind contour drawing for her self-portraits and figurative drawings, a higher-level drawing skill that is developed through practice, as well as, color pencils for coloring the line drawings. Coloring a reproduction of her drawing with colored pencils was chosen to create the collaborative artwork within the classroom and community settings. In the past, the hobbyist activity of coloring pages was a disputed form of art therapy (Malchiodi, 2015). The therapeutic role of adult coloring books is disputed as more a “feel-good” experience than

an authentic creative expression, and not art therapy because it is lacking in a relational aspect (Malchiodi, 2015). But recent research has shown adult coloring lowers symptoms of depression and anxiety (Flett, et al., 2017; Holt et al., 2019) and was preferred as a low cognitive demand activity for generating greater states of flow (Holt et al., 2019), even preferred over expressive drawing activities (Forkosh & Drake, 2017). The benefits of coloring pages to children in the classroom is still in dispute, and the coloring worksheet may be the bane of art educators who strive to offer students more creative options and confidence in drawing skills (Gibbons, 2022) yet the CBAE goals of social awareness and building community through art education was the overarching goal of this project.

The professor guided the students to consider Layton's artwork as a site for place-based pedagogy and intergenerational (IG) learning because it challenges ageism and gerontophobia, the fear of getting older. Place-based education is defined as meaningful learning that is rooted in place, where students are more active, motivated and tend to remember more (Kemp, 2006). IG programming is a social vehicle that creates purposeful and ongoing exchanges of resources and learning among older and younger generations which aims to enrich IG relations (Cumming-Potvin & MacCallum, 2010; Kaplan et al., 2002). Activity theory expands the intergenerational relationship to include the activity that is part of the relationship (Vandervan, 2004). Activity theory is a relationship between how people interact, what they do, the tools and objects that mediate these interactions, and the contexts that situate both (Vandervan, 2004).

Various engagements with artmaking have been shown to challenge ageism and gerontophobia in intergenerational settings (Rubin et al., 2015). The arts-based program used by Rubin et al. indicated not only the improvement of college students' attitudes toward older adults but also the improvement of students' attitudes toward their own aging. IG activities between college students and residents of retirement communities that promote engaging conversations are preferred (Aguilera-Hermida et al., 2020). Additionally, IG pairings of college students and older adults in creative situations demonstrate the positive effects of interactions in IG pairings. IG pairings of participants in a creative block building exercise showed those positive characteristic behaviors of each generation were affected when working together (Tabuchi & Miura, 2018). In Tabuchi and Miura (2018) older adults offered more new proposals when in IG groupings, showing that younger adults adjusted older adults' overly cautious behavior, and older adults encouraged youth's creativity.

Participants

The participants were approximately 25 members of a local residential retirement community, two fifth-grade art classes from different school districts, and members of our group. College students met with groups individually at their respective locations. The college students were invited to observe in the elementary art rooms with a seasoned art educator, and then teach a lesson. The professor had arranged for the students to present during "coffee talk" at the retirement community to teach about the art of Elizabeth Layton, and to ask for participation in the creation of a community artwork.

Materials

The key material in this AIR is Layton's artwork. AIR incorporates both research and creation and the choice of her art is significant because it offers "the authenticity of lived experience" (Blaikie, 2015, p.239). We selected Cinderella (Layton,1986) and gained access through the museum to appropriate and respectfully recreate the image for a communal artmaking project. We chose this work in anticipation that many people would draw connections to the major league baseball team symbol crowning Glen's head (Figure #1).



Figure 1. Layton, E. (1986). Cinderella. [lithograph]. Spencer Museum of Art.

Layton's art is important to this IG project because she began to develop her artist skill at age 68. After attending a college art course and learning blind contour drawing, she practiced daily until her death, with her husband Glen and herself as subjects. She was born in 1909 and lived in Wellsville, Kansas, not far from our location. She fought manic depression (bipolar disorder) for 35 years and did not find a cure until she found her love for art. In her art she would show all of the hardships of aging including visual markers of age like dark spots, wrinkles, double chins, and other imperfections. She also showed herself involved with many other social issues like women's rights, AIDS, capital punishment, hunger, homelessness, and racial prejudice. Layton's artwork is significant locally and globally, is in museum collections across the US, and has been exhibited world-wide. Her work dealt with life and death issues of depression, self-healing and aging. These issues were particularly timely and intense because of the ravaging physical, psychological and social toll Covid 19 had taken on all ages but particularly the elderly around the world in the past year. Figure 2 shows a study of hands and the artist's face, drawn from life, from

looking in the small circular mirror depicted in the upper left quadrant, and possibly from memory, where Layton holds a pencil in her right hand (Braun, 2021).



Figure 2. Layton, E. (1984). Untitled, August 1984. [colored pencil]. Spencer Museum of Art.

The students contributed their technical skill to recreate Layton's Cinderella as a simple line drawing using computer software to scale and reproduce it and divide into 36 postcards which could be given out to participants from the community. Figure 3 shows a section that was further divided into 9 postcards and numbered on back. Colored pencils were selected as the medium for coloring the line drawing. Additionally, images of other Layton's artworks were used to teach about Layton's life and art and encourage discussion.

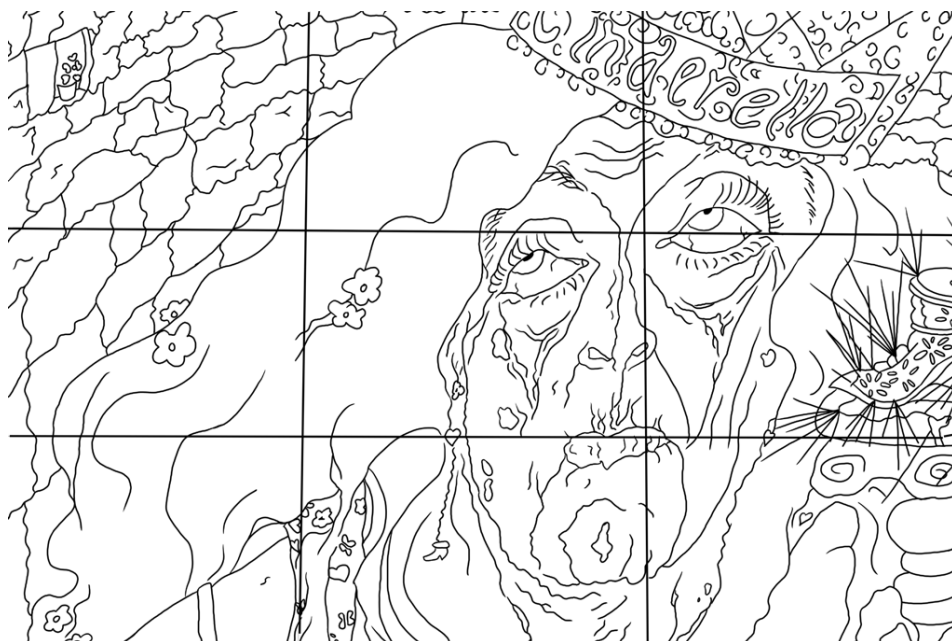


Figure 3. Section of student's line illustration featuring Layton's Cinderella.

Procedure

College students taught lessons at two different schools' art rooms. They showed a presentation about Elizabeth Layton using images of her art to lead discussions about the artist's practice, age, mental health and local place. They explained to 5th grade students they would be part of a community project to recreate Cinderella in a colorful poster, by contributing their coloring to the cryptic design on their postcards (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Elementary students coloring.

In one classroom the art teacher created a video tutorial, coloring one of the cards to demonstrate good techniques and to demonstrate expectations for the finished product. Many students did not have time to finish, which created space for the retirement center participants to finish the cards and reconstruct the interpreted artwork. At the retirement community, the college students presented Elizabeth Layton's story and artwork and the children's unfinished postcards. This created the opportunity for the retired residents to participate in artmaking to color their own or finish coloring a student's card, and almost all did. A few residents were hesitant to participate, and those who did not, engaged instead in conversation.

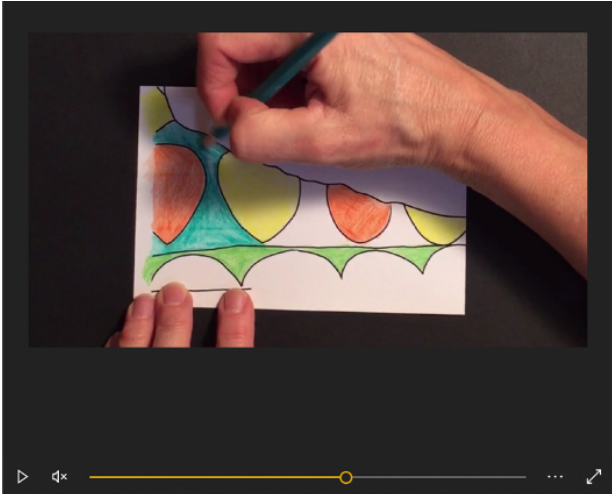


Figure 5. Video produced by a supervising art teacher demonstrating color pencil techniques.



Figure 6. Retirement community members coloring.

After all the postcards were finished and collected, a member of the community joined us in assembling the colorful postcards together and redrawing the key contour lines in black marker to make the image stand out (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Retirement community member finishing with black outlines.

Discussion and Analysis

The data collected for this AIR includes both the creation, documentation and presentation of the community artwork seen in figure 8 and our reflections from engagement with participants in dialogue with Layton's artwork. Like the blackened contour lines defining the figures in *Cinderella Redux*, the themes in Layton's artwork outline many topics surrounding aging and mental health, including depression and institutional care of the elderly. Conversations between professor, college students, children, and senior residents within the discursive space of Elizabeth Layton's work, brought understanding from multiple age perspectives. The following sections demonstrate how some important pedagogical understandings evolved.

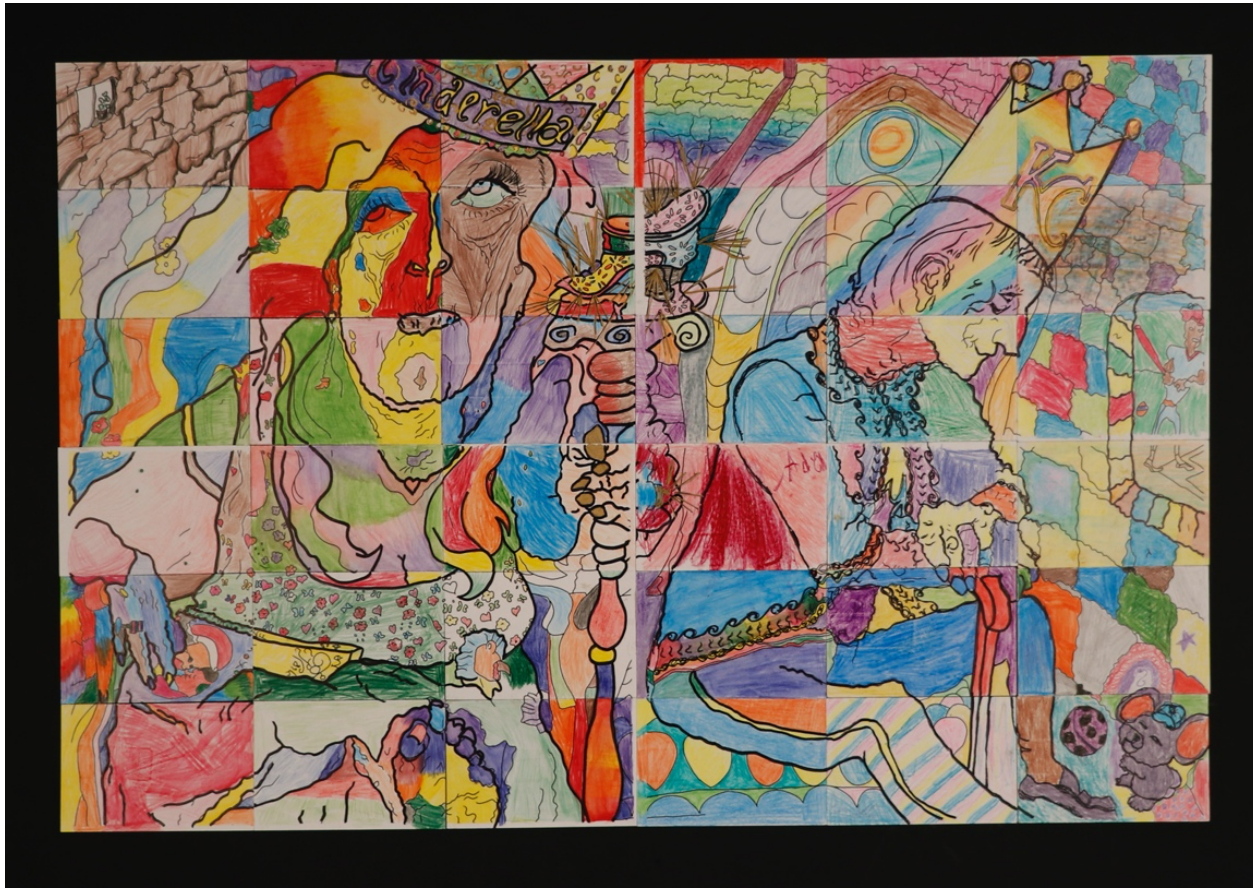


Figure 8. Finished poster: Cinderella Redux, after Elizabeth Layton's Cinderella.

Place-based Education

Place is a powerful connector in IG learning (Langdon, 2017). Each group shared an enthusiastic response to *Cinderella* because a local connection is drawn from the image. Children at the elementary schools recognized the major league baseball team's symbol immediately and upon looking further, recognized the team outside the castle window. People in the retirement community recognized Layton herself. Some of them even knew her or her family personally, so we were able to connect through our shared knowledge. As professor and pre-service art educators, we experienced that the commonality of local place is a powerful connector that engages participants across ages. It allows individuals to make connections with a home base of familiarity. People can have an 'ah-ha' moment of realizing they live close to an artist and that they may have grown up in similar circumstances.

IG Learning and Ageist Stereotypes

IG learning was based on Vanderven (2004) activity theory and was facilitated in this research both in person and remotely. Through discussing Layton's images and engaging in completing one section of her drawing for a community artwork, both older and younger people were brought together through heightened awareness of the other. The young were asked to consider ageist stereotypes and the older were asked to recognize art as a unifying communal exchange with youth. Layton's art challenges ageist stereotypes as she centers herself in every drawing as an active participant in a thoughtful and often critical social stance. The professor noted how Layton draws every fold and

wrinkle in her skin to capture the beauty of her age. Her drawings show honest and sometimes humorous portrayal of normal situations as well as those that are courageous and fearful, in other words a full range of human experience. The following discussion points were shared by the pre-service students regarding three drawings shared and discussed with fifth-grade students and retired community members.

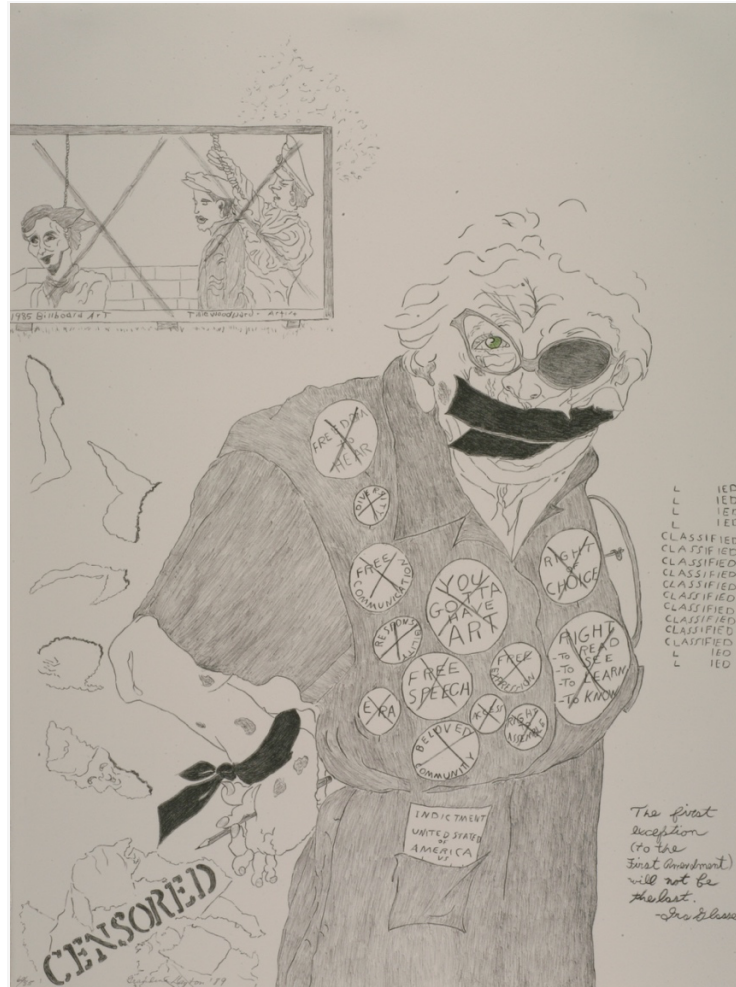


Figure 9. Layton, E. (1986). *Censored*. [lithograph, hand coloring]. Spencer Museum of Art.

College students chose *Censored* (Figure 9) to demonstrate how Layton challenged social issues and noted these aspects in discussions with students.

- This image shows Layton bound and gagged so she can no longer draw.
- Her principles have been crossed out which are shown as buttons on her clothing.
- There is a pile of this woman’s drawings torn up and censored.
- The text states, “The first exception to the First Amendment will not be the last”.

Many people can connect to the statements being shown by this work. Fifth-grade students made connections to censorship in media and their own parents’ boundaries.



Figure 10. Layton, E. (1981). *Fear*, August, 1981. [colored pencil]. Spencer Museum of Art.

College students chose *Fear* because it addresses mental health (Figure 10). The drawing is littered with things we may associate with mental health, like an empty pill bottle and a padlocked door. The elementary students may not read the significance of everything but could understand the general fear in Layton's face as she pictured herself locked in her room and hiding in a closet. The strong narrative constructs a scene of isolation, fear and loneliness with one bright spot seen in a squirrel on the windowsill. Layton lost her son in 1979 and struggled with mental health until she began a drawing practice. For those of us who do experience mental health issues, she is relatable, while other drawings offer a more hopeful perspective.



Figure 11. Layton, E. (1979). Raggedy Ann and Andy on a shelf. [colored pencil on paper]. Spencer Museum of Art.

Ageing

The professor selected *Raggedy Ann and Andy on a Shelf* from the exhibition (Figure 11) because it directly addresses issues of aging through personifying Layton and Glen as rag dolls set on a glass shelf. On either end of the rainbow are metal handgrips and below are two hospital beds and a commode. Layton said the glass shelf was positioned in front of a window to symbolize lack of privacy in institutions of care and the outdoors appears as a great distance in one-point perspective which does not seem to lead to anywhere (Braun, 2021). This image critiques how aging and accompanying loss of abilities leads to infantilizing adults, which negates their dignity. By using Elizabeth Layton's artwork, issues of aging were directly discussed. For instance, in one elementary classroom, students gasped when informed that Elizabeth Layton started her art career at age 68. Some students mentioned that was their grandparents' age, and giggled with surprise when they were told their grandparents could still become an artist—it's not too late.

Art Education Pedagogy Through AIR

In looking to respond to our original question, what can we learn about each other through art, beyond looking and discussing the art we extend pedagogy to artmaking processes. As students of art education, we were amazed by Layton's honest portrayals in blind contour

drawing. A pre-service student noted that even though at first some found it quirky, viewer's eyes are drawn to her work, to follow the linework, to see an image appear and find meaning in it. Both participant groups were amazed that she drew without looking at her paper. The art education students realized contour drawing lessons would be a perfect follow-up lesson in the future, with the work of Elizabeth Layton.

We found coloring is a simple way to freely engage with visual stimuli in a social setting and it proved to be a positive communal activity. This research demonstrates that coloring is a skill that demands awareness and practice. The two different age groups were similar in terms of their physical capabilities. The students' hands would get tired as they colored the postcard, and they would have to take breaks. They also struggled being able to color in the whole space in a timely manner and the same happened with members of the retirement community. One woman told us that she had a hard time coloring with the colored pencils, and she would try to use crayons next time so her hands would not hurt so much.

The art education students in our group experienced the difference between pedagogy and andragogy. Teaching good coloring techniques to elementary students was a craft-based pedagogy and encouraging older participants to try something different is a key aspect of andragogy. Differences were found in expectations. The older participants seemed to care more about coloring accurately whereas the elementary school students wanted their card to look unique. The members of the retirement community worked to be more precise and filled the spaces completely. Some did not approve of the elementary school students' color choices and techniques, while others found it endearing.

Older participants enjoyed considering what the younger children had created with their coloring. College students noticed both groups tried to guess what imagery their postcard contained, which let us to see that this coloring activity had creative potential as it engendered imaginative looking. In one instance a retired community member found Santa Claus and an elf in the card she was completing (Figure 12). In these ways, coloring the cards collectively is both a creative expression and relational, and meets Malchiodi's (2015) standard for coloring as art therapy.



Fig. #12. Colored postcard design can be seen as Santa Claus and an elf.

Implications

Future iterations of this project could bring the older and younger participants together for a coloring session, if not in-person, at least virtually in a zoom classroom environment and if coloring postcards asynchronously, as in this lesson, they could be introduced to each other beforehand. This could extend findings of Tabuchi and Miura (2018) where older people exhibit goal-oriented behaviors and younger groups exhibit greater experimentation, while, within intergenerational groups, the older participants act as both directional control as well as encourage innovation among younger participants.

Intergenerational and Place-based Learning

The IG and place-based aspects were essential to learning. All groups enjoyed learning about others in a different generation, contributing to something bigger than themselves and learning about an artist that addressed issues common to them, with a local connection and global impact. College students addressed ideas with an anti-ageist perspective and expanded expectations for lifelong learning in teaching about Layton. The limitations we place on persons because of age are widespread. All age students were amazed that Elizabeth Layton was 68 when she started her art career. The children thought that you had to be in college or even out of college to become an artist. This opened their eyes to the possibilities of them following their dreams and college students relayed similar amazement when telling classmates, family, friends and other adults about Elizabeth Layton and her artwork.

Talking about Layton easily led the older residents to share their connection to other artists, or to those who knew Layton's relatives, as well as stories of their own personal experiences in Kansas. A few were eager to tell us stories relating to art or show us their own artwork. Resident participants encouraged us to continue to engage community members and the success of this project inspires us to continue to work to connect more community members in the future.

Community Art Through Coloring

Overall, we learned that when initiating a community art project, simple is good. College students found elementary students were excited to be a part of something bigger, as they engaged in coloring their cards to create the community artwork. Both groups were eager to participate in our project, maybe because coloring is not considered a demanding task. This research concludes that to disparage coloring as an irrelevant art education activity is ableist. Groups coloring together toward an end goal has positive aspects for classroom use, encouraging hard work and empathy for others. We have shown that it can engender creative involvements for those with some limited capabilities and create relationships through shared efforts. This research suggests coloring was therapeutic in the elementary classroom and in the retirement community as participants worked toward a common goal of contributing to a community artwork. Our project included aspects that Masika et al. (2020) identified as essential to successful visual art therapy: reminiscence, art processing, cognitive evaluation, art craft, and socialization.

Our *Cinderella Redux* is artifact and visual presentation of complex data showing the importance of visual art-informed research– AIR, and the multi-faceted learning that takes place in CBAE. *Cinderella* is art that challenges ageist stereotypes and champions the voices of the aging. Awareness of ageism, feminism, and power results from discussions of Layton’s artwork. We have shown that Elizabeth Layton is metaphorically the Cinderella of artists, bound by issues of age and mental health, Layton’s work carries the weight of many social issues in her telling self-portraits, yet she is not widely recognized for these strengths as other critically conscious modern painters or sculptors may be, because of her age, place, or medium.

We also have found our simple project innovation may be the Cinderella of IG collaboration. Using the simple act of coloring postcards shared between two groups created a significant tribute to an artist in a shared community artwork, engendering creative involvements for those with limited capabilities and creating relationships through shared efforts. This is how we answered the question: What can we learn about each other through art?

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