



GSA 2023

Building Bridges › Catalyzing Research › Empowering All Ages

Tampa, FL
November 8-12

Bringing Art to Life

Experiential Learning Outcomes with Graduate and Undergraduate Student Learners

Presented by Rebecca S. Allen, PhD, ABPP

November 8, 2023

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CO-AUTHORS

- **Keisha D. Carden, PhD** – VA Maryland Healthcare System
- **Candice D. Reel, MA** – VA West Los Angeles Health Care Center & The University of Alabama
- **Angel C. Duncan, MA, MFT-ATR** - Cognitive Dynamics & Bringing Art to Life
- **Daniel C. Potts, MD** – Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center & founder, Cognitive Dynamics & Bringing Art to Life
- The authors wish to thank **Blake Peeples** for re-igniting work with these “dusty data”.



ABOUT BRINGING ART TO LIFE

Bringing Art to Life (BATL) is a 300-level undergraduate course that pairs teams of students with persons living with dementia (PWD) attending a local adult day services program and engaging in structured art therapy led by an art therapist as well as reminiscence with the student learners.

Graduate students in clinical geropsychology led BATL research efforts focused on the PWD and student learners across seven semesters from 2015 to 2018.

- This presentation will describe undergraduate learner outcomes, comparing participation in the BATL experiential learning course to a didactic undergraduate course in Psychology and Aging and Intro to Psychology 101.
- This presentation will define professional skills gained by graduate student learners managing the BATL research data collection effort.
- This presentation will report gains experience by PWD (Reel et al., 2022) and undergraduate student learners (Carden, Peeples & Potts, first authorship to be determined) through participation in BATL.



STRUCTURE OF THE BATLCOURSE

- The course, PY 391, meets for didactic lecture one evening per week from 5:30 to 7 pm. (*see below)
- This is an undergraduate writing course designated as such with a “W” in the course catalog.
- Course enrollment is limited to 15 undergraduate students.
- One to two additional undergraduate students may enroll in PY 495, an experiential Teaching Internship course, to gain experience as an undergraduate teaching assistant to the instructor of record. In this case, Dr. Daniel Potts.
- *Undergraduate students enrolled in the course also must commit to a ~ two-hour block on site at the adult day service center. Here, they work in groups with one PWD who is participating in art therapy with a trained art therapist.



BATL COURSE OBJECTIVES

- To learn about cognitive impairment through the lens of science, caregiving, and therapy using the expressive arts.
- To gain hands-on experience in facilitating intergenerational communication.
- To understand elements of storytelling and life story preservation.
- To assemble a memory book in a way that will be helpful to the PWD and meaningful to the family.
- To facilitate an empathic awakening for the student, in appreciation of the experience of persons living with cognitive impairment and their caregivers.



QUANT MEASURES FOR LEARNERS

Pre-post across any given semester & prior findings ([Ivey] Carden et al., 2017 - IAGG)

- **The Empathy Quotient Short Form (EQ; Lawrence et al., 2004; Muncer & Ling, 2006).** This 15-item scale will assess three facets of empathy.
- **The Student Assisted Independent Living (SAIL; Pillemer & Schultz, 2002).** This scale is a 20-item attitudinal scale measuring four dimensions of attitudes toward individuals with dementia.
- Items from the **SAIL** revealed the following contextual information about student learners, revealing a clear selection effect:

	Intro Psyc (N=242)	Psyc of Aging (N=100)	BATL (N = 24)
Have experience with family or friends with dementia.	33%	43%	79%
Have volunteered or worked in a nursing home?	39%	43%	59%
Have volunteered or worked with a dementia patient?	15%	20%	42%



UNDERGRADUATE OUTCOMES

Pre-post across seven semesters ([Ivey] Carden et al., 2017 - IAGG)

- Students in BATL showed **greater increases in empathy**, Wilks' lambda = .856, $F(2, 345) = 29.058$, $p = .000$ ($M = 47.52$, $SD = .75$) relative to students in psychology of aging ($M = 44.10$, $SD = .34$) or PY 101 ($M = 41.52$, $SD = .22$).
- Students enrolled in BATL exhibited **improved attitudes towards PWD**, Wilks' lambda = 0.952, $F(2,355) = 8.98$, $p < .0001$ ($M = 14.25$, $SD = .36$) relative to students in psychology of aging ($M = 12.59$, $SD = .17$) or PY 101 ($M = 11.87$, $SD = .12$).
- Change scores in **students' interest in working with older adults with dementia** were submitted to a one-way ANOVA, and students in BATL ($M = 1.17$, $SD = 2.42$) and Psych of Aging ($M = .14$, $SD = 1.96$) and exhibited greater changes in interest than students in the introductory course, ($M = -1.5$, $SD = 2.35$; $F(2,361) = 30.228$, $p=.000$).



GRAD STUDENT COMPETENCIES

Foundational Competencies

- Subject matter expertise in dementia, art therapy, and caregiving.
- Knowledge of how to structure an experiential learning course for undergraduates.
- Introduction to community-based participatory research methods.

Performance-based Competencies

- Project management of a comprehensive community-based, prospective data collection effort.
- Experience with program evaluation for an ongoing intervention in a local adult day service organization.
- Opportunity to learn and implement behavioral observation skills and mixed-methods research design.
- Mentorship of undergraduate student learners.
- Interprofessional collaboration with Dr. Potts, a neurologist.



THE PWD EXPERIENCE

Reel et al. (2022) program evaluation from 143 ethnographic field notes across 100 sessions.

- Analyzed at the art therapy session level, not the individual PWD level.
- Social engagement between PWD and students > than activity engagement with the art therapy, showing that intergenerational interaction was a crucial element of PWD experience.
- Themes from field notes focused on family, social interaction/small talk, art therapy engagement, humor, advice giving from the PWD to the undergraduate students.





LESSONS: UNDERGRAD JOURNALS

One of the writing assignments for undergraduates in BATL is to keep a personal weekly journal about their experiences in class and, particularly, working as a team with the PWD during art therapy classes.

Themes & Quotes from student journals or the end of semester gala:

- **Attitudes toward PWD:** “It startles me to think about how wrong-headed my views on Alzheimer’s disease were not so long ago...I am so grateful to have expanded my understanding of Alzheimer’s disease, personhood.”
- **Attitudes toward PWD:** “I was surprised at how well some of the clients were functioning.”
- **Empathy:** “I try to continually put myself in their shoes when I experience things at [the adult day service center], analyzing how I might feel in the situation and what would make me feel more positive and loved.”
- **Mindful engagement:** “The music helped him be freer with his expression. He seemed to worry less about if the art was “good” or if he was doing it right. Any moments where he would put the brush down were because he was enjoying the music and wanted to sing/clap along. I think the music really acted as a facilitator for [the]creative process and brought images to mind that we didn’t even have to prompt PWD about.”



LESSONS 2.0: UNDERGRAD JOURNALS

One of the writing assignments for undergraduates in BATL is to keep a personal weekly journal about their experiences in class and, particularly, working as a team with the PWD during art therapy classes.

Themes & Quotes from student journals or the end of semester gala (cont.):

- **Existential awareness & self-development:** “I went into Art to Life expecting to be the one to change your life, and I left completely changed by you. I feel so honored and privileged to have gotten to know you and to have had a glimpse into your spectacular life. You are so full of wisdom and compassion for others and it’s evident that anyone you come in contact with is changed for the better because of you.”
 - “I feel as though we are continuing to grow as individuals together every week.”
- **Relationship building:** “When we asked what he wanted to name the finished piece, he said, ‘The Blob.’ [We] burst out laughing. PWD’s sense of humor has been apparent from the first session, but it has come out more every week. ... It’s clear that he likes to spend time with young people—he’s probably pretty used to our antics after all his years as a [training level masked for privacy] basketball coach.”



Experiential learning is essential to the recruitment of a new gerontology and geriatrics workforce at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. In addition to the intergenerational aspect of the program, the structured art therapy is crucial as the art projects are often the topic of conversation. Art evokes creativity and “flow” based on themes related to childhood, holidays, and families. Interactions during art therapy at this adult day service center provided PWD with meaningful social and activity engagement. Moreover, these interactions provided PWD with the opportunity to give advice to college students, and these interactions were often steeped in humor. All participants in BATL were changed.



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