THE BENEFITS OF COLLABORATING WITH OLDER ADULT LEARNERS TO DEVELOP A MUSEUM PROGRAM FOR SENIORS

by

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Abstract

Many museums are adopting new engagement strategies to strengthen connections and relations with their communities in an effort to better serve their community's needs. Museums are well-positioned to facilitate positive change in their communities by engaging or partnering with like-minded community groups and leveraging community assets. Museums and these community groups have much to gain by working together, but putting community engagement strategies into practice can be particularly challenging with limited resources. Adding to this challenge are current gaps in knowledge around the benefits of community engagement in museums, which have received little attention in the academic literature beyond exhibit-based projects. Using a participatory action research approach and a community engagement strategy, this study explores the benefits of collaborating with a group of seniors (or older adult learners) in the context of museum programming. Six museum-based volunteers (55 years and older) agreed to participate in four workshops facilitated by a museum educator to help develop an outreach program for seniors. Descriptions of participants' experiences were collected through post-workshop interviews and, in supplementary form, through recorded workshop discussions. The study found that participants experienced a range of benefits, including new knowledge and skills, cognitive stimulation and physical activity, transformative learning, socialization, and a stronger sense of community and identity. Participants also gained a rare view into the world of museum education and a greater appreciation for the complexities of museum work, potentially strengthening the museum's social capital. Challenges of participating in the study's collaborative process were explored, including cognitive demands, misaligned expectations, cultural differences and language barriers. Relevant facilitation strategies are suggested to scaffold or mitigate these challenges in future.

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Preface

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Introduction

Many museums are adopting new engagement strategies to strengthen connections and relations with their communities. They are finding different ways to engage meaningfully with community members in an effort to better serve their community's needs. Increasingly, to remain relevant, museums are developing more diverse exhibits and programs with multiple voices and perspectives to better represent their community's past and present. A growing number of museums are updating their missions to match socio-cultural and environmental realities of contemporary society by following the principles of diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility.

Although putting community engagement strategies into practice can be particularly challenging with limited resources, museums and community groups have much to gain by working together. The Asset-Based Community Development Institute at Northwestern University in the U.S. found that "non-profit organizations are much more powerful community actors when they are…effectively connected to the resources, or assets, of the local community" (Kretzmann & McKnight, 2005, p. 1). Community-based museums are well-positioned to transform community assets—or their community's wealth of knowledge, expertise and wisdom—into positive change. When designed and implemented properly, community engagement activities can be mutually beneficial for all involved, and achieve multiple goals and objectives for the museum simultaneously.

However, the practice of community engagement in museums is a relatively new development and there is still much to learn regarding which community engagement strategies are most effective, how best to implement them and what outcomes to expect in different contexts and cultures (Ashley, 2005; Lynch, 2011; Vårheim & Skare, 2021). Curation of exhibitions with community groups, consultations with teachers to develop school-based programs, or collaborations with youth have been the focus of many past studies on community engagement in museums (Chergui's 2020 study with teens is a recent example using participatory action research). Less studied are community collaborations to develop public programs, especially with those from marginalized or under-represented groups (Blair & Minkler, 2009; Corrabo et. al., 2019; Keith, 2007, Östlund, 2008).

Using a participatory action research approach, this study attempted to better understand community engagement within the context of public programming in museums by investigating

the benefits of collaborating with a commonly marginalized group: seniors (or older adults). The researcher-educator (author) recruited six volunteers (55 years and older) from MONOVA: Museum & Archives of North Vancouver and the Friends Society of North Vancouver Museum & Archives. These volunteers participated in four workshops to help develop an outreach program for seniors. The program development workshops were facilitated by the researcher-educator, who also conducted post-workshop interviews with each participant. This study's purpose was to explore the benefits of engaging seniors in program development, guided by the following research question:

> *How can seniors (as older adult learners) benefit from developing an outreach program for seniors in collaboration with a museum educator?*

To answer to this research question, the study focused on capturing outcomes related to physical, cognitive, social, and/or emotional well-being of individual participants. Results from post-workshop interviews helped identify a wide range of benefits for seniors, and provided insights into how a collaborative workshop approach can be a feasible community engagement strategy for program development in museums—particularly, community-based museums. Some issues and challenges that emerged during this process were identified, and recommended solutions were discussed to help improve similar initiatives in the future.

Literature Review

Community-Based Museums

As many museums become more community-minded and socially responsible, their approach to engaging the public is slowly shifting from transmitting knowledge as sole authority to environments of participatory collaboration in response to community needs. Museums play an important role in encouraging adult learning for social change through community engagement. For example, Knutson and Crowley's (2020) participatory climate change education study implemented a museum-based project in which seniors in four American cities used scientific knowledge to effect positive change in their neighbourhoods. After conducting an integrative literature review of community engagement through the lens of sociocultural adult learning theory, Kim et al. (2016) found an emphasis on community engagement in museums as effective in "providing usable knowledge and tools for visitors to explore their own ideas and

reach their own conclusions" (p. 193). Much of the literature they reviewed situated community engagement as a "co-development process of empowering community and facilitating the participation of diverse community members in activities or projects aimed to respond to the major issues that affect our lives" (Kim et al., 2016, p. 185).

At the heart of contemporary museum education are the principles of diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (American Alliance of Museums, 2022; Ontario Museums Association, 2015). Adopting these principles has helped lay the foundation for expanding the role of museums and encouraging community collaborations, so as to "deepen their civic engagement in ways that contribute to building healthier communities" (Henry, 2006, p. 228). This concept of museum transformation expands on recommendations found in the American Association of Museum's report *Mastering Civic Engagement*:

> Museums that are fully and imaginatively engaged in community life have…a deeply internalized belief that community engagement matters; that the rationale for it does not need to be explained repeatedly; and that it should happen on many levels within the institutions. (Hirzy, 2002, p.10)

More recently, Duclos-Orsello (2013), after nearly 20 years of social change work in museums, historical sites and educational organizations, wrote that "a lack of collaboration across sectors hampers every institution's efforts at effecting social change" (p. 121). She recommends that collaborations or partnerships go beyond the common financial or structural arrangements and move into democratic relationships where parties are both educators and learners:

> In collaborative museum work that aims to be responsive to social needs, all parties involved must be understood to be authorities on topics of value to the collaboration and must be understood to have the power and position to fully co-create. (Duclos-Orsello, 2013, p. 122)

Within the context of museums and community engagement, this literature review explores key understandings of museum engagement and collaboration with community groups—specifically with older adults or seniors, many of whom value lifelong learning and possess significant potential as agents of social change.

Engaging vs. Collaborating with Community Groups

The definition of community can widely vary, encompassing a range of experiences without being limited to a single location:

> Communities have been based on ethnicity, religion, class or politics; they may be large or small; 'thin' or 'thick' attachments may underlie them; they may be locally based and globally organized; affirmative or subversive in their relation to the established order; they may be traditional, modern and even postmodern; reactionary and progressive. (Delanty, 2003, p. 2)

Community collaboration and community engagement are often used interchangeably, and both terms are regularly used without clear definitions. Community collaborations are initiatives where museums work with community members to create, plan, and implement activities that help fulfill the museum's mission (Maruska, 2013). Community collaboration is akin to civic engagement (Henry, 2006; Hirzy, 2002) which focuses on consulting with community groups rather than sharing authority with them—the emphasis is on fulfilling the museum's mission and goals. Community engagement, in contrast, is based on equitable and inclusive collaboration "for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity" (Maruska, 2013, p. 28). This well-defined relationship is entered into by two or more groups with a commitment to sharing power while achieving common goals.

Engaging with a greater variety of groups within diverse social contexts creates both possibilities as well as tensions and conflicts (Lynch, 2011). Resolving these tensions and conflicts can be challenging, "but they can also result in enhancing knowledge, consciousness and connection amongst participants, making them more value [sic] as critical learning spaces for social, intellectual, and community change" (Kim et al., 2016, p. 185). Although challenging, community engagement "has the potential to achieve the best and most beneficial results" (Herrick et al., 2009, p. 69).

While both community collaboration and community engagement hold value, true community engagement—characterized by longer-term relationships, equitable partnerships, shared authority, and mutual benefits—offers the greatest potential to foster meaningful

connections, address tensions constructively, and create transformative spaces for social, intellectual, and community change.

Community engagement has certain limitations, which Onciul (2015) observed with museum exhibits (and applies equally to museum programs):

> Whilst being a worthy pursuit, there are limits to what engagement can achieve within current museological practice and engagement does not automatically grant integrity or validity to museum exhibits. Engagement has real consequences for the community and should only be entered into genuinely and with sufficient time and resources to honour community contributions. (p. 71)

In the end, each museum has its own unique connection with the community and should use the terms most appropriate to its goals and formulate its own definitions when setting organizational standards for meaningful community involvement, collaboration and engagement.

Engaging Adult Learners

Museums are prime locations for adult education and a great resource for adult learners. They provide mature visitors ample opportunities to engage in free-choice and nonformal educational experiences (Grenier, 2010) and play a key role in lifelong learning. Museums' unstructured educational settings are attractive and appropriate for adult learners who like to direct their own learning. As Monk (2013) notes, "museums have a long history of educating the public through informal and nonformal learning, and the power to confront individual's schemata and transform the way people view the world" (p. 63). Museum educators could effectively facilitate these transformative experiences and "assist adults to develop their full potential" (Holmes & Abington-Cooper, 2000, p. 51).

Considering a significant percentage of museum visitors are adults, there is a strong argument for museum educators to be well-versed in adult learning theories and tailor programs to the diverse learning needs of adults. Although museums are starting to develop more relevant, learner-centered programs for adults (Grenier, 2010), cognitive learning in museums (such as guided tours and lectures) remains a dominant approach to adult education (Hohenstein & Moussouri, 2018). When it comes to older adult learning, "museum professionals are generally not as familiar with designing and evaluating programs for the elderly as they are for younger audiences" (Smiraglia, 2016, p. 39). Adult education researchers such as Kimberly McCray

(2016) and Anne-Marie Émond (2022) "bemoan" the lack of adult learning theory guiding practice in museums, which would be useful to "inform museum professionals on the creation of various educational programs" (Émond, 2022, p. 17) and advance efforts in developing active and meaningful experiences for older adults, particularly in changing socio-cultural contexts. Perhaps this helps explain why most older adults (50 years and older) are the "least likely, among the different age groups, to visit museums" in the US (Schwarzer, 2021, p. 6).

A growing number of older adults are interested in lifelong learning, which can maintain or improve their cognitive health. As Ucko found, "surveys indicate that the exploding population of older adults is worried about maintaining cognitive health and reducing the risk of dementia" (2022, p. 9). Other factors motivating adults to participate in lifelong learning can be summarized using six characteristics of adult learners from Gough (2016): "independent self-concept, need to know why, life experiences, social roles, life-centered orientation to learning, and internal motivations for learning" (p. 5). Adult learners are motivated by relatable topics and life reflection—elements found in many reminiscence programs for seniors.[1] Older adults will be more motivated to participate if the program's theme is also compelling or they have an interest in the program's topic. Smiraglia (2015b) observed that seniors "more interested in the topic…were more likely to report improved mood, willingness to attend a similar program…and recommend the program to others" (p. 196). Community-oriented topics or themes, for instance, could be very compelling because older adults often have a strong attachment to place (Knutson & Crowley, 2020; Wang, 2023).

Smiraglia (2015a) found that "most museum outreach to [seniors] takes the form of a traditional lecture, slideshow, or video,…although research indicates these formats are generally not as conducive to learning or engagement as active experiences" (p. 238). She adds that many seniors simply get bored or tired and fall asleep during presentations and lectures. Émond (2022) conducted a substantial review of adult learning theories and research from 1964 to 2016, and uncovered that a growing number of adult visitors to museums reported a desire for a variety of experiences, adding that they don't like to be lectured to all the time and want their voices heard.

[1] A simple reminiscence program recalling life events is a social activity "focusing on social bonding and enjoyable memories of past times" (Thorgrimsdottir & Bjornsdottir, 2015, as cited in Gough, 2016, p. 4).

Adults today are moving away from sitting and listening and quietly engaging with museum objects and artworks. Instead, they are active, social learners interested in collaboration and personal development (Bown, 2019). Adults "are more likely to learn when they are invited to participate and apply their background knowledge in the social contexts of museums" (Kim et al., 2016, p. 190).

Museums hold immense potential as spaces for lifelong learning, particularly for adult and older adult learners. To fully realize this potential, museum educators would do well to shift from an emphasis on traditional transmission such as lecture-based programs to an emphasis on active, participatory, and socially engaging experiences that align with adult learning theories. Ucko (2022) recommended a multi-faceted approach to effectively promote cognitive engagement among older adults:

> Factors to be considered in program development include imparting new knowledge and skills, challenging older adults within their range of capabilities, encouraging social interaction, and offering novelty in the forms of cognitive stimulation. To increase impact, participants should take part in a series of activities over a period of time. Their format will depend on the assets of the museum, such as whether it is collections-based, and strengths of partnering organizations. (p. 15)

Adult Learning Theory

Adults enter museums with assumptions and perspectives based on prior learning and experiences that sit within an established frame of reference or symbolic structure by which adults come to understand the world and their role within it. Some adults may feel uncomfortable and threatened when this frame of reference is questioned. At the same time, adults' life experiences combined with advanced cognitive inquiry, capacity for empathy, and full self-awareness, means that compared to other visitors adults can connect more deeply to and think more critically about a range of subject matter (Cross, 2002). Adult learners are "capable of participating in modes of learning that go far beyond the didactic" (Cross, 2002, p. 2).

The process of helping adults learn based on their life experience with "teachers as facilitators rather than presenters" (McCray, 2016, p. 11) is known as *andragogy*, a term originally conceived by German educator Alexander Kapp, in 1833, to describe the pedagogy of Plato (Holmes & Abington-Cooper, 2000). Andragogy has its roots in constructivism, where

people create new knowledge and meanings based on the interplay of new information and prior experiences through experiential and social interactions (Hein, 1991). Utilizing a wealth of knowledge and experience to construct new meanings plays a significant role in how adults learn, distinguishing adult learning from pedagogy (Dudzinska-Przesmitzki & Grenier, 2008). In fact, constructivism "manifests itself in the work of museum education and adult learning in several areas including experiential learning, transformational learning, reflective practice, communities of practice, and situated learning" (McCray, 2016, p. 16). The process of community engagement with adults in museums contains many elements of constructivist learning.

By embracing adult learning theories such as andragogy and constructivism, museums can improve adult programming and offer adult visitors platforms for critical reflection, experiential learning, and meaningful dialogue. As the intersection of museum education and adult learning continues to evolve, further exploration into innovative, interactive strategies will be essential to unlocking the full potential of adult learners.

Transformative Learning

Transformative learning encompasses many areas of learning listed above due to its emphasis on critical self-reflection, dialogue and fostering positive change. Transformative learning is a core theory in adult education which describes a learning process that includes a deep foundational shift or change in the way an individual thinks, feels and acts (Calleja, 2014). Jack Mezirow, the founder of transformative learning theory, identified six aspects central to this learning process: "the importance and centrality of experience, understanding one's frame of reference, the role of disorienting dilemma, the importance of critical reflection and critical self-reflection, the role of rational discourse, and of dialogue in communicating with others" (Calleja, 2014, p. 119). The *disorienting dilemma* seems to be particularly significant in distinguishing this theory from other pedagogies.

The transformative learning process begins when a person encounters a disorienting dilemma—"a life event or experience that does not fit within a person's current perspective and cannot be solved using previous problem-solving strategies" (McCray, 2016, p. 13). Adult learners are compelled to resolve this dilemma by correcting previous assumptions—epistemic, socio-cultural or psychological—by exploring, experimenting, discussing and testing new

perspectives and ideas (Calleja, 2014; McCray, 2016; Yoo, 2023). This phase of learning is where museum educators could offer key scaffolds and supports to the adult learner, providing thinking prompts, reflexive questions and/or conversational contexts (dialogic/group) to reorient and help adults develop new understandings around a certain subject or object (Émond, 2022). Most often, "the newly developed viewpoint (transformed belief/perspective) reflects a more inclusive and accommodating outlook than the original concept" (McCray, 2016, p. 13).

When andragogy and transformative learning theories are appropriately applied, museum educators can better facilitate critical self-reflection, help create a meaningful shift in thinking, and inspire adult learners to become agents of social change in their communities (Kim et al., 2016)—thereby, directly or indirectly, assisting museums in fulfilling their community-minded missions.

Transformative learning offers a powerful framework for museum educators to inspire profound shifts in how adult learners think, feel, and act. By leveraging disorienting dilemmas, fostering critical self-reflection, and encouraging dialogue, educators can guide adults toward more inclusive and adaptive perspectives. When combined with andragogy, this approach not only enriches individual learning experiences but also empowers adults to become more active in their communities.

Adult Learning Theory and Community Engagement

With the exception of creative and art-based programs in art museums—where tactile, creatively expressive, emotive and self-reflective elements are common and conducive to measuring transformative experiences—"there are very few empirical studies that discuss the application of transformative learning theory in museum programs" (Yoo, 2023, p. 48). To increase the impact of adult learning in museums, more research needs to be done to better understand the effects of applying adult learning theories to museum experiences for a variety of adult learners (Kim et al., 2016).

The study of adult education in museums is in its infancy and, thus, there is much to be explored regarding the variety of interactive learning activities, as well as how museum educators conceptualize, adopt or facilitate adult learning for social change through community engagement (Kim et al., 2016). By designing experiences that prioritize collaboration, personal relevance, and community-oriented topics, museums can not only meet the unique motivations

and needs of adult learners but also foster transformative learning experiences that resonate deeply and inspire continued engagement with museums.

Methodology

This study employed a participatory action research (PAR) methodology, a process of inquiry that involves collaborating with community members or stakeholders "for the purpose of education and action" (Blair & Minkler, 2009, p. 652). In this case, volunteers aged 55 years and older from the North Vancouver community participated in a collaborative process with the researcher-educator (museum educator) as equal partners. Emphasis was placed on the value of lived experience as well as on fostering individual agency, critical reflection and shared decision making (Blair & Minkler, 2009; Östlund, 2008).

PAR methodology also had the advantage of facilitating co-learning and providing the researcher-educator space for deep reflection while improving her own practice (Baum et al., 2006; Fernie & Smith, 2015). Baum et al. (2006) emphasized that at the heart of PAR is "collective, self-reflective inquiry that researchers and participants undertake, so they can understand and improve upon the practices in which they participate and the situations in which they find themselves" (Baum et al., 2006, p. 854).

Regarding a project's relevancy and effectiveness, PAR helps ensure an initiative or activity "matters locally; improves the relevance and cultural sensitivity of survey questions and other data collection tools; adds nuance to the interpretation of findings; and can help in the translation of findings into action" (Blair & Minkler, 2009, p. 652).

In the context of research, PAR with seniors was found to be underdeveloped. After a global review of key principles in practice related to PAR with seniors, Blair and Minkler (2009) identified only ten peer-reviewed studies that used this methodology with adults aged 55 years or older. They stated one likely factor was a perception that older adults, and "elders, in particular," may not "be up to the task" of participating meaningfully in action-based research (p. 659).[2] Another likely factor was PAR-based studies often focused on younger groups in educational

[2] Blair and Minkler noted the ambiguity of the term "older adults," which can refer to "seniors," "elders," "the elderly," and the "aging." They also recognized that "functional aging and/or perceived seniority" can occur prior to conventional benchmarks of ages 55 or 65 (2009, p. 653).

settings. More recently, Corrado et. al. (2019) conducted a critical analysis of 40 PAR studies with older adults and found that older adults often had limited involvement and were rarely positioned as partners, co-learners or agents for social change. Contemporary PAR projects with older adults, such as this one, can help address this gap by demonstrating how engagement of older adult community members as equal partners can result in meaningful outcomes and action.

Program Development Process and Reflection

Participants were invited to attend up to four facilitated, in-person workshop sessions, each 2.5 hours long. These four workshops occurred over a three week period in August 2024. The workshops progressed from gauging participant motivations, expectations and understanding of interpretation, to building capacity to ensure baseline knowledge, and to finally going through the steps of developing a program. The goal was to design an outreach program for seniors with links to North Vancouver history, which aligned with the types of museum objects in MONOVA's education collection. There was no pre-determined theme and no guarantee that a final program would be produced as a result of these collaborative workshops. The only expectation of the group, which included the researcher-educator, was to develop as much of the program as possible.

Participants fulfilled two key roles: co-developer and critical reflector. During these workshops, participants were treated as co-developers and had time to reflect critically while providing input and ideas individually, in pairs and as a whole group. Decision-making was based on group consensus. After the workshops, in September 2024, each participant was interviewed and asked to critically reflect on their experience of developing a museum program.

Participants: Volunteers from Friends Society and MONOVA

The Friends of the North Vancouver Museum & Archives Society (Friends Society) helped support this research. The Friends Society is a charitable, non-profit organization dedicated to supporting MONOVA: Museum & Archives of North Vancouver.[3] The Museum opened in its new location in late 2021 and has an updated vision "to inspire belonging and

[3] The Friends of the North Vancouver Museum & Archives Society supports MONOVA by building community awareness of cultural heritage and helping to raise funds for programs and exhibits at the Museum and Archives.

community connection across the diverse voices and histories of North Vancouver" (MONOVA, 2024, p. 2) while encouraging community participation. With a gap in programming for seniors, education staff at MONOVA were supportive of developing an outreach program for seniors in the community.

The researcher-educator was able to facilitate recruitment of older adult participants from both organizations' volunteer groups (see Table 1). The six volunteers who participated represented a *convenience sample* (ease of access) and a *purposive sample* (older adults and seniors from the North Vancouver community—many of whom, now or in the near future, reflect the program's audience).

Table 1

Participant Characteristics

	M/F	Years in North Vancouver	Retired or Semi-retired	Background	Country of Birth
P1	F	Most of her life	Semi-retired	IT Project Manager	Canada
P2	F	20+ years	Semi-retired	Immigration Consultant	Iran
P3	M	20+ years	Retired	Financial Advisor	New Zealand
P4	M	< 20 years	Retired	Pension Manager	Canada
P5	F	< 5 years	Semi-retired	Microbiology Instructor	Iran
P6	F	< 5 years	Retired	Optometrist	Iran

These volunteers had a range of lived experiences and perspectives as well as time to devote to program development sessions. As older adults or seniors, between 55 and 80 years old, the participants could better identify with the program's target audience of seniors. This is in contrast to younger museum educators whose "identities and lived experiences do not reflect the community for whom they are designing" this outreach program (Brackett et al., 2020, p. 36).

The other selection criteria required participants to be living in North Vancouver (City or District), to have a meaningful connection to the museum or the Friends Society (e.g., volunteer, Society member), and to have minimal to no experience as a professional educator (to ensure the collaborative process was not misinterpreted as consultation with educational professionals).

Participants' backgrounds and countries of birth were not included in this study's selection criteria. These characteristics reflected the community of North Vancouver and/or those community members motivated to volunteer at MONOVA or for the Friends Society. With regard to country of birth, it is important to note that based on the Canada 2021 Census, the top four countries of origin among immigrants living in the City of North Vancouver and the District of North Vancouver are Iran, the United Kingdom, the Philippines and China—with Iran being the top source country of both total immigrants and recent immigrants (Public Library InterLINK, 2023). A growing number of Iranians came to live in North Vancouver following the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The Persian culture is particularly vibrant in North Vancouver, which is now home to one of the largest Iranian communities in Canada (Richter, 2022).

Delimitations

Delimitations were used to narrow the scope of this research project and help keep the resulting data collection and analysis manageable. To expedite participant selection, only current older adult volunteers from the Friends Society and MONOVA were recruited. The study focused on designing one outreach program through facilitated group workshops that occurred in-person, at or near the Museum. Because the participants were expected to be highly engaged in the program design process, the workshop schedule had to consider their time and energy levels. The resulting schedule of four workshop sessions was collaboratively determined by an alignment of participant availability. Other people involved in this collaborative research project were available only for consultation, specifically MONOVA staff members and a seniors care professional.

Researcher-Educator in a Facilitator Role

This study's researcher-educator facilitated the program development workshops while also undertaking data collection and analysis by:

- Audio recording each workshop session and any related Zoom sessions
- Facilitating brainstorming and group discussions around program themes, structure, objects and delivery strategies
- Giving participants opportunities to document and visualize their thinking using sticky notes and flipcharts

- Scaffolding the learning process—answering questions, encouraging peer-to-peer learning, providing key content and resources
- Coordinating the review of group discussions and decisions, helping evaluate options by reflecting on pros and cons
- Helping build consensus when decisions needed to be made
- Presenting best practices and consulting museum staff and a senior care professional on behalf of the group
- Reporting feedback from consultants to the group to assist informed decision-making regarding program-option feasibility
- Organizing the group's ideas, recommendations and decisions into a draft "program overview" document for review by participants

During the program development process, the researcher-educator employed a cycle of "plan–act–observe–reflect," a common action research framework (Fernie & Smith, 2015). This guided the researcher-educator's investigation and decision making, which included planning/designing each workshop, recording participant observations, reflecting on each workshop, considering possible next steps, and taking action based on these observations and reflections, such as making adjustments to the next workshop or supporting participants between workshops.

To foster the participants' ownership over the final draft program, the researcher-educator focused on facilitating the program development process rather than leading the process. Her role was also to reinforce the value of participant contributions. When the need arose, participants were given opportunities to help facilitate the discussion.

Data Collection and Analysis

The key to this research study was to understand participant experiences of the program development process by recording and analyzing individual responses collected from post-workshop interviews. Enriching this data set were observations of participants and data recorded during the workshops, such as audio-recordings of discussions and written notes and reflections by participants. Together, these data collection methods allowed for the emergence of clear themes related to participant perceptions and experiences.

Suter (2012) emphasized, “good analysis uncovers better understanding of a phenomenon or process” (p. 352). The researcher-educator analyzed multiple sources of data using a recursive process (collecting, reading and coding the data, and then going through the same steps again). Once enough data was accumulated, common themes and concepts could be identified. Critical thinking and self-reflections from the researcher-educator allowed for nuanced interpretations of the data. Qualitative analysis of rich descriptions throughout the research process provided new perspectives and useful insights.

Workshops

Central to this research process were the four aforementioned program-development workshops, which took place over a three-week period. All participants were encouraged to attend as many workshops as possible. No fewer than three participants attended each workshop. Workshop discussions were audio-recorded. Some of the written data from the flip chart notes and Post-it notes were useful in capturing participant reflections in context.

To enhance transparency and effective collaboration, the consolidation of workshop discussions and group decisions, as well as feedback from expert consultants, were provided to all participants during the program development process. This allowed participants to make informed decisions, review key discussion points and track their progress. After the researcher-educator reviewed participants’ contributions and workshop results (see Figure 1), a draft program overview document was created and provided to participants at the final workshop. Participants had the opportunity to review it and provide feedback through group discussion and before each post-workshop interview. Moving through an authentic program development process was paramount to providing richer interview responses and deeper insights during data analysis. (The final draft program overview is presented in the Appendix.)

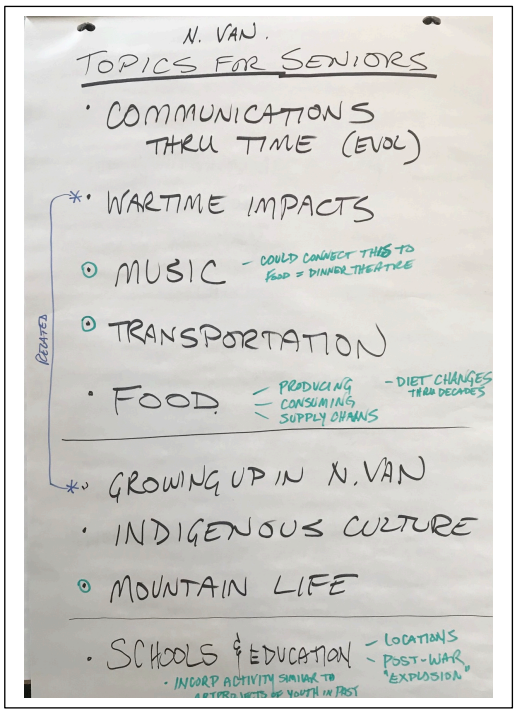
Post-Workshop Interviews

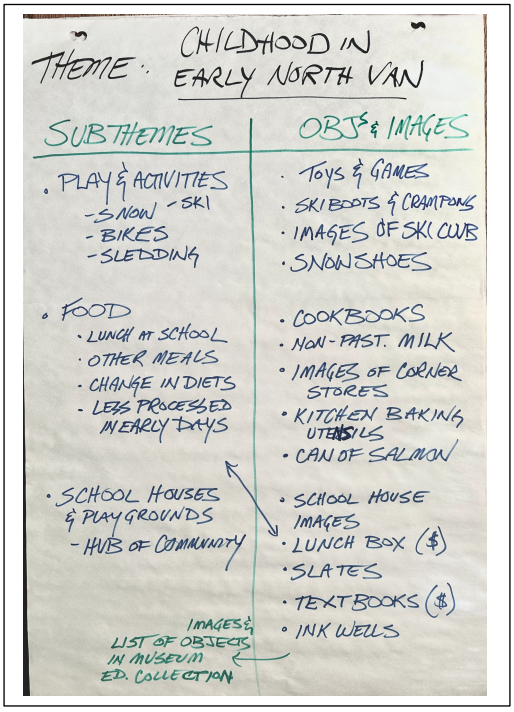
Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the six participants, one of which was conducted by Zoom. The interviews occurred in September 2024 and recorded participant reflections on the experience of collaborating with a museum educator to develop an outreach program for seniors. The interview questions were refined based on observations made during the workshops. The questions listed in the Results section were designed to explore

participant motivations and elicit what participants felt was rewarding, challenging, surprising, or enlightening about this experience. The responses to these questions provided insights into how seniors (as older adult learners) might benefit from this type of community engagement, in keeping with this study's research question.

Figure 1

Examples of Flip Chart Notes from Workshop Discussions





Participant Observations

The interview results allowed the researcher-educator to compare data to previous responses during group discussions and/or in emails, and help clarify observations she made during the workshops. As the research process unfolded, a growing understanding of what participants thought and felt about the process emerged. This complemented other data collection methods and strengthened the reliability of the results.

Results from Post-Workshop Interviews

The following results are presented using the post-workshop interview structure. Responses to each question are summarized and organized by theme. Six key interview questions explored motivations, highlights, challenges, revelations, learning outcomes and overall satisfaction with the program development experience. Each interview question is coded: IQ1 refers to interview question #1, and so on.

Motivation to Participate

IQ1: Why did you decide to participate in developing this program?

Seven themes emerged from the interview responses about why participants decided to get involved in developing the program: supporting seniors, giving back through volunteering, personal growth and learning, curiosity and innovation, collaboration and teamwork, expanding awareness of community history, and promoting social and intergenerational connections. These themes reflect combinations of altruism, curiosity, and a desire for personal growth and community building that motivated participants to get involved in the program development process. The responses provided insights into the wide-ranging and complex nature of participant motivations and reasons for volunteering for this type of community engagement process.

Supporting Seniors

Many participants were motivated by the opportunity to support seniors living in residential care. They liked the idea of creating meaningful experiences to engage seniors in social and educational activities. Some participants saw the outreach program as something new and energizing for seniors:

> "I like the idea of this activity that considers a very special part of the community and try to keep them in social activities."

> "I really just want to support your initiative and what you're trying to accomplish here."

Giving Back Through Volunteering

The majority of participants described how developing a museum program was a way to meaningfully support the museum and contribute to their community. Participants enjoyed being part of something that benefitted others.

> "I'm also interested in helping MONOVA."

> "I enjoy being part of a group…and help MONOVA."

Personal Growth and Learning

Several participants expressed that learning new things, whether about program development, healthy aging, museum research, or the community, motivated them to join the group. A couple of participants noted that volunteering also gave them an opportunity to stay physically active by walking or biking to the workshop locations. Developing a program with others offered an opportunity for personal growth and discovery.

> "I guess I'm still young enough to learn something new."

> "It's a new thing for me… I've never been in a workshop for seniors."

> "To help me learn many things when I come from home. In the home, I don't learn anything, when I am here it's better for me."

> "I thought it was an opportunity to learn more about seniors."

> "I'm somebody who always wants to learn more about my community."

> "One of my objectives of doing things is to exercise and try and stop expanding [gaining weight]."

Curiosity and Innovation

Elements of curiosity and the unknown helped motivate some participants to volunteer in developing a program. These participants found excitement in the unpredictability of the process and wanted to be involved in something new and different. Two participants were also intrigued by the research aspect of the program. They were motivated by the opportunity to be part of academic work and learn more about research methods in education and community engagement.

> "It's always the same for every new activity, the curiosity and not being aware of what may happen at the end—it's the most attractive point…. If we know the end of something, then it doesn't have any attraction for us."

> "It's interesting to see what the senior program is and how it might develop."

> "…made me realize how interesting the process might be. Not only for the education program development aspect, but also the academic research aspect."

One participant, a member of the Friends Society, expressed a strategic interest in the program as a prototype. If successful, she envisioned the program serving as a model for future initiatives.

> "I think probably there will be a prototype, and then from there, there might be more ideas that we develop."

> "Let's see how successful it is, and then maybe come up with a strategic plan."

Collaboration and Teamwork

Some participants were motivated by the collaborative nature of developing a program. They talked about teamwork, sharing experiences and working together as rewarding and enjoyable, especially when the group effort was successful.

"Sharing is really enjoyable. You see friends or neighbours doing teamwork…and you can get a better and smoother program. This is the reward."

"I want to share our experiences with the people that are here."

"I like the interaction with people and...sharing ideas to see...how they think about common [topics]."

Expanding Awareness of Community History

Two participants liked the idea of expanding the reach of the museum's programming beyond the walls of MONOVA, and exploring other spaces and learning opportunities out in the community. They saw a need to engage more people in the community's history and promote more interest in the Museum and Archives.

"Many or most people seem uninterested in history. It would be good if there was a way to engage more people."

"The more that we can spread the message that this information [historical landmarks] is out there, like going out into the community, just to really garner more interest in the history of the community."

"I like the idea of not just using MONOVA as the venue. I think there's lots of other spaces on the North Shore that have potential [for programming]."

"I think seniors and other people with mobility challenges, or [with] other challenges, might find [the museum] difficult to get to."

Social and Intergenerational Connections

One participant described the program's potential to promote socialization among seniors and foster connections across different demographic groups, specifically between seniors and younger generations. At the very least, energetic interpreters delivering the program could help

foster cross-generational relationships, which was seen as a way to improve mental health of seniors—especially if the program was in a safe, accessible space.

> "With seniors especially, they're looking for a social connection. I think that's the big thing for seniors. But give them...a safe space and make it accessible."

> "I like the idea of developing programs that build community… something that will cross demographics."

> "It's not just for seniors, but an opportunity for seniors to connect with other demographics."

> "You're going in and doing a presentation with that energy for the seniors, I think would be really exciting."

Generally, the reasons and motivations given as to why participants joined the program development experience were wide ranging but personally meaningful. They valued opportunities to create impactful experiences for seniors, learn new skills, promote awareness of community history and work in a collaborative environment. Fostering cross-generational relationships through programming and the innovative aspects of the research process were also key motivators.

Most Enjoyable or Rewarding Aspects of the Process

IQ2: What did you find the most enjoyable or rewarding aspect of participating in this program development process? Why do you say that?

Aspects of the program development process that were most enjoyable or rewarding aligned at times with individual goals or reasons for participating, yet some unexpected aspects of the program development process were also described as enjoyable or rewarding. The sense of community and social connection during the process was found to be enjoyable by many and reflected a strong desire to feel connected and contribute to a collective cause. The program development process seemed to fulfill a need for creative contribution, where sharing ideas with

peers was both enjoyable and inspiring. Participants also appreciated working as a team and hearing diverse perspectives, suggesting they valued a cooperative and inclusive environment. On the individual level, participants enjoyed opportunities for personal reflection, self-discovery and learning, all of which highlight the introspective benefits participants gained, finding meaning and motivation through the sessions. The process provided participants intellectual stimulation and broadened perspectives, which they found enjoyable or rewarding.

Sense of Community and Social Connection

Many participants emphasized the joy of connecting with others who shared common interests, particularly around the community's history. Talking to like-minded seniors, being part of a group, listening to stories and socializing with peers was described as energizing and enjoyable. Participants often referenced the importance of community connection, suggesting that the volunteer workshops fostered a sense of belonging.

> "I'm somebody who really wants to try and contribute to the community, and I'm looking for opportunities to help organizations develop programs and events…"

> “When I listen to people who were talking about their memories and how they explain, for example, about their grandma’s recipes, and it was very nice for me. It showed me other aspects of living here in Canada. What is important for them…. Maybe here the most important time for getting together is Christmas time.”

> “Just be in this more connected community, [for] a sense of belonging, you know. I don't have to be friends with everybody in town, but I like to know some of the people in town. And for me, I like to know what the history is.”

Appreciating Team Work and Diverse Perspectives

There was a general appreciation for teamwork within the group. One participant said she enjoyed the camaraderie of coming together to accomplish something as a group, adding that teamwork or group collaboration was a new experience when she moved to Canada from Iran

where the focus is on individual performance (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2012; Nejati et al., 2010).[4]

> "It's tough to work in teams in my country because they just want to be, let's say, in the front row. So teamwork is really tough."

Many participants enjoyed hearing the variety of viewpoints. Some participants reflected on how they gained new perspectives from others. In all but one post-workshop interview, participants mentioned how interesting it was to listen to those in the group with different views, perspectives or experiences. This suggests the process fostered a cooperative and inclusive environment that participants valued (Wallen & Docherty-Hughes, 2022).

> "Getting back to the enjoyable aspect of dealing with these other seniors… and just appreciating how different some of the points of view were…they had different perspectives than I do."

> "Sharing ideas, how we share the idea of people from different backgrounds, different cultures."

> "And, I think at the end of each session, everybody was very satisfied with talking, with hearing, sharing ideas and it was great."

Learning and Expanding Knowledge

Four of the six participants said learning new things was one of the most enjoyable parts of attending the workshops. Some clearly embraced the cognitive challenge. Learning and expanding knowledge, particularly about local history and new perspectives, was frequently mentioned. They described learning in terms of deeper thinking, discovery, learning about the community's past, or being challenged to consider new perspectives.

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[4] Nejati et al. (2020) noted that "Iranian organizational culture is more focused on individual works, rather than team collaboration" (p. 109).

> “I guess what I got most out of it was having to think some more about things, basically digging a little deeper into some of the topics. To me, it was more the level and depth of information as much as anything.”

> “I like learning about new things, [and] I like to know something about other things that are outside my experience.”

> “It was a learning experience, you know, kind of pushing, keeping your mind alive.”

> “It just made me start to think about seniors, which I’m included in that age.”

> “I worked in a university. I taught many students. I did a lot of research in the laboratory. So, I believe in experience and knowledge based on examinations and knowledge from books. But it is other aspects of knowledge that I need to think about [too].... Each person, especially people my age or higher ages, have a lot of experience that [is] very valuable. I need to appreciate their knowledge, their experience, their wisdom. So it was interesting for me and I think very valuable [learning].”

Collaborative Brainstorming and Idea Sharing

Many participants were actively engaged in brainstorming during the workshops. There was a sense of appreciation for the creativity that emerged from collaboration and the diversity of ideas. One participant, who identified this theme as being the most enjoyable, emphasized the value of brainstorming which allowed the group to generate a wide range of ideas and talk them through. Aspects of problem-solving and seeing something “grow” were also rewarding parts of the experience. The workshop experience seemed to fulfill a need for creative contribution, where sharing ideas was both enjoyable and inspiring.

> “I just enjoyed brainstorming in general. Because I think that's how you get ideas. Just talking through it and just watching something grow, just from people's creativity.”

> “It was interesting, brainstorming with the other participants to see what kind of ideas we could come up with.”

> "The way that an idea may develop based on people’s experience was very interesting for me."

Personal Reflection and Self-Discovery

Several participants used the program as an opportunity for self-reflection. The discussions often led to reminiscing and sharing stories. The personal impact of developing a seniors program prompted reflection on aging, well-being, and the importance of purpose. The responses highlighted the introspective benefits participants gained. This opportunity for introspection was both rewarding and motivating, as it allowed participants to re-evaluate what brings them joy and meaning.

> "It just made me start to think about seniors…what makes me more happy in my life."

> “I was sitting there with you and several other seniors…all of whom were interested in North Vancouver, all of whom were interested in history. All of them had lives and reflections on their life. It was just fun to chat with them.”

Novel Experience

For most of the participants, it was the first time they had helped develop a museum program and many had never been involved in a group participatory decision-making workshop. A couple of participants described this novel experience as something that was particularly enjoyable for them.

> “Yes, and it was my first time, so it's challenging…. It was interesting, yeah. Very enjoyable.”

> "It was completely new for me. You know, a group of people get together, talk about their memories, their experience, and a person can put all of these ideas together and make a program."

Overall, participants found the experience rewarding due to the sense of community and teamwork it fostered, allowing them to connect with others, share diverse perspectives, and gain a sense of belonging. They appreciated learning new things, engaging in collaborative brainstorming, and embracing creative challenges, which enriched their personal growth and understanding of North Vancouver history. The novel and introspective aspects of the experience were also deeply fulfilling, inspiring participants to reflect on life and contribute to meaningful discussions. In contrast, one participant downplayed personal enjoyment and instead emphasized the satisfaction derived from contributing to the program's success, indicating a sense of altruism and commitment to a goal larger than themselves.

Challenges

IQ3: What did you find challenging or irritating? Why do you think that was?

Most participants had to reflect more deeply to remember or give specific examples of what they found challenging or irritating. Generally, they avoided using words like 'irritating' or 'annoying' and instead focused on describing challenges. Each participant identified at least one challenge experienced during the workshops, ranging in theme from cognitive challenges to language barriers. The responses regarding what participants found challenging or irritating provide insight into the *productive struggles* they faced during the program. Productive struggle in educational theory is based on the "the notion that learning does not merely refer to an "outcome," but rather to a process that involves "struggle" in which one engages effortfully to understand something unfamiliar" (Murdoch et al., 2020, p. 660).

Cognitive Challenge

Challenges relating to cognition, such as recall, critical thinking, and creative problem solving, all of which are embedded into the process of developing a museum program, were described. Many participants referred to the challenge of creating a theme to encompass multiple

concepts, or of finding solutions to designing a history-based program for an audience who may not be passionate about community history.

> "The hard part was choosing title and, you know, [theme] of the program and then bring it down to something that makes sense with the content of the program. That part was a little bit hard because we were talking about North Vancouver areas, so we want to do something related to that. That was, I think, a little bit challenging to be come up with things, one plan, one name."

> "The challenge was trying to think in terms of how you would engage somebody else in this stuff. Like, I've never been in a position...to teach. I've never been a teacher in my work…. How you would even approach it was a challenge and kind of an interesting one. And certainly not irritating, but outside my usual frame of reference."

Differing Expectations or Approaches to Teamwork

Three participants spoke about the effects of misaligned expectations. Differing expectations or perspectives among participants were seen as mildly challenging to navigate. They described the challenge of having to adjust their expectations during the first workshop. For instance, due to a language barrier, one participant said she expected to attend a program *about* seniors rather than a program *for* seniors.

At other times, there was a sense some participants wanted a more structured or linear approach to problem-solving, while others embraced a free-flowing, idea generation process. Irregular attendance helped perpetuate confusion about workshop expectations, activities and goals for some participants. These scenarios occasionally led to confusion or mild irritation in the group, which was acknowledged by the researcher-educator and rectified using facilitation strategies (Kaner et al., 2014).

> "And, listening to the others and how they thought things, that was a little bit challenging because long before we started the workshops, I've been thinking about it occasionally… I'd sort of formed an idea in my head of what was going to happen."

> “I kind of got the feeling that some people didn't understand the concept of brainstorming. They were like, We're getting off track. It's like, No, brainstorming means you broaden the track and you toss ideas around and, yes, sometimes we have to pull it back in.”

Overcoming Personal Frustrations

Challenges and discomfort experienced during the collaborative process, when reported, reflected frustration but were to be expected as part of group work. Responses were philosophical when looking back at these challenges. One participant acknowledged the personal challenge of being patient during group problem-solving and not rushing to a conclusion. Another participant had to adjust to what he called a “meandering” process, yet concluded that “what came out of it was quite interesting.” These examples highlight the common internal struggle of balancing the urge to take action with the need for careful, reflective thought that often accompanies teamwork and the process of group decision-making.

> “It’s learning to take a step back and not immediately jump to proposing a solution. Because that is my tendency.”

> “When I did start thinking back, I thought we meandered a lot. We didn't go from, “we need a program for seniors” to “having a program for seniors”.... I guess part of it was that you were having to satisfy some of your [research] requirements. So, like, the first part of which was very generalized and non-directed. No, what came out of it was quite interesting.”

Cultural Differences in Perspectives

Some participants noted a cultural difference in perspectives, which presented a challenge for some in reconciling diverse viewpoints and cultural positionalities. This points to the difficulty that arises when people from different backgrounds engage in discussions and contribute ideas based on their distinct socio-cultural backgrounds, values and experiences.

> “A different perspective because, for instance, in my country, Iranian people, Persian people, they think some difference from the Canadian one. So, that’s a little bit different...but it’s not annoying. Let's say tension. More tension, not annoying."

> “You and me are from different cultures. Maybe there is something in your culture that is not interesting or important for me, or vice versa.”

Language Barrier

Two participants were newcomers to Canada and, despite having access to translators and workshop notes, it was evident they found the language barrier a challenge or an obstacle to full participation.

> “My challenge is my language because I come from a different country to here, and I must learn better the English, and it's important.”

> “For me the negative points was that I couldn't understand other people completely.”

> “I was confused about objects. I thought to myself, What do you mean with the objects? It means the goal of the program or there is a physical object? You know, I thought about it for a while and then I understood what you mean, then I miss part of the [discussion].”

> “Challenge was transferring my ideas, as I told you, in a language which is not my original language. Oh, it was challenging for me.”

Overall, participants faced challenges such as cognitive tasks, differing expectations, and language barriers during the workshops. Cognitive challenges included problem solving, for example, to design an engaging theme, while misaligned expectations and cultural differences occasionally complicated teamwork. For some, language barriers posed obstacles to full participation. Although other participants who spoke Farsi provided some critical language and translation support during and between the workshops, barriers to full participation were evident, highlighting the need for clarity and inclusivity around group activities and discussions.

Surprising Aspects

IQ4: Did anything surprise you during this process?

This interview question provoked a wide range of responses. Participant background clearly influenced which aspects of developing an outreach program were particularly surprising. Emerging themes were related to individual realizations around such concepts as the complexities of developing a museum program, the role of Indigenous content, the community engagement process, and the potential of these programs for improving seniors' quality of life. The responses revealed insights into participants' expectations, the program's impact and the learning curve involved.

Complexity of Program Development

Being part of this workshop process gave participants an opportunity to experience the complex nature of developing a museum-based program. Many participants were surprised by the sheer complexity and effort involved in program development, and appreciated working closely with a museum educator (as facilitator) to keep things on track. They did not anticipate how challenging it would be to structure a program from start to finish, especially when working collaboratively to bring diverse ideas together. This "insider" perspective helped to "demystify the rarefied and privileged worlds of museums" (Wallen & Docherty-Hughes, 2022) and led to a new appreciation for museum programs and a new level of respect for museum staff.

> "What the hell do you do with all these ideas? [I know] you've got a plan. And yet it's a continuing surprise to me when I think, Oh, there's a way of dealing with it…. But it's still a bit of a surprise because I haven't thought about it."

> "And at my first workshop, I was surprised. I said, Oh my God, that's too hard. How does she want to come up with an idea for the program? It's really tough."

> "The thing that surprised me was how hard [it] is developing a program…. So much things you have to put together—this puzzle…. Just a simple program, which…when you see the program said, Oh, this is nothing. But no, behind the scenes was lots of work, lots of brain work."

The Rapid Pace of Development

Many participants enjoyed the community-engagement process, but expressed surprise that this type of workshop methodology resulted in a draft program that satisfied the original goals and objectives. They were surprised at how quickly the group could produce something valuable, despite the challenges. This suggests that the participants initially underestimated the efficiency of the collaborative process and the effectiveness of facilitated workshops.

> "You can feel how many things is going on with putting the stickers on the wall and lots of ideas [from the group] and you have to put them together, make it into one and make it happen [as one program]."

> "And you could gather a lot of information in just for four sessions. It was great."

> "The surprise was (and again, it comes down to the leadership and instruction) that something useful could be produced in a relatively short period of time. And I understand you [the facilitator] were doing a lot of work in some cases. But having said that, from the other participants' point of view, it was fairly smooth and easy."

The Role of Indigenous Content

The inclusion of Indigenous content in the program came as a surprise to some, particularly since they were unfamiliar with this museum requirement. One participant described being surprised that *all* museum programs, even outreach programs for seniors, should include an Indigenous story or perspective.

> "I would have probably been less surprised if they'd said it had to have Iranian content. Because generally, if you're doing a program for people in care homes and such, that's not where you encounter Indigenous people. [But including] it may expose their inherent biases."

Cognitive Health and Quality of Life

One participant described at length how the workshop content and group discussions helped her realize the different ways museum programs can improve the quality of life of older adults, including her own. There was a sense of discovery and personal reflection.

> "It just made me start to think about seniors, which I'm included in that age. And I was thinking, *What makes me more happy in my life?* Because sometimes a senior's life is very smooth and… doesn't change.... But if you have some of those programs and interactions with different things, at least it makes seniors…motivated."

> "I was considering myself in that program, which is once a week, twice a week. Or sometimes you have a plan, you have something extra-ordinary than your regular life, which was very interesting."

The Value of Life Experience

A few participants were surprised and appreciative of the fact that their personal experiences and memories were valued and integrated into the development of the program. One participant, a former university instructor, explained how surprised she was that a museum would consult community members. She was "amazed" that non-experts were seen by museum educators as valuable contributors to developing an outreach program. The researcher-educator's acknowledgment of the participants' life experiences and cognitive capacities as important and useful was a revelation for her. This experience aligns with museological thinking that museums are well-suited to helping adults feel valued for their "prior knowledge, expertise, skill level and capacity for independent thought" (Cross, 2002, p. 2).

> "My memories are valued. And they can help to develop a program."

> "It is very important for elderly people to get the opportunities to be more active because sometimes some people say, okay, they have done everything that they could do. No opportunity to use their wisdom, their knowledge. And when you give them this opportunity, I think it's very important."

> "And the other point is that the way you develop the program, in a meeting, in a workshop, a group of people [that] they are not experts of that area."

The Unique Nature of Community Engagement

The idea that a museum would consult community members based on lived experience rather than professional expertise was surprising for some participants. The inclusion of older adults in the program development process was a surprising aspect for some participants. They were not accustomed to projects that actively seek input from older adults, particularly in shaping and developing a museum program.

> "I never experienced ever before you invite some [elders] to help you to develop a program. It is completely new… It's completely different perspective for me."

> "It was amazing for me how those memories are useful for you to develop a program. It is very, I think, interesting and rewarding part of this kind of developing a program."

In summary, participants were surprised by the complexities of program development, the rapid pace of progress during workshops, and the inclusion of Indigenous content in an outreach program for seniors. They also appreciated the value placed on their life experiences and the unique approach of involving community members in shaping museum initiatives. These surprises highlighted both the challenges and the rewarding aspects of community-driven program development.

Types of Learning and Discovery

IQ5: What would you tell others about things you learned during this process?

There was a sense of discovery during the program development process. The responses suggest a transformative element of the experience, particularly in terms of learning about the value of programs designed for seniors, the engagement of seniors in cultural activities, and the importance of personal involvement in community life. Although this question relied on what participants could specifically label or identify as learning, the responses revealed insights into

participants' understandings of seniors and programs for seniors (including misperceptions), the learning opportunities embedded in developing a program with volunteers, and the potential for participant self-discovery and empowerment.

The Value of Museum Programs for Seniors

Some participants experienced a shift in perspective regarding museum outreach programs for seniors. Initially, seniors' residences and care homes were seen as merely places for the elderly to be cared for. During the workshops, these participants came to realize the value of these structured outreach programs in offering opportunities for learning, engagement, and personal development for seniors, especially isolated seniors. The initial perception of programs for seniors as passive or associated with caregiving shifted to recognizing different kinds of programs for seniors with educational and social benefits.

> "I didn't take it seriously for the senior program, but after the workshop, I'm serious about that."

> "I didn't know that there is a senior program... I thought that they just take care of the old people when they have nowhere to go. They just put them there. But I realize now… it's a serious program. So…like a school, like college. When you go to the college, you learn something. When you register to senior program, you learn something."

> "You have to do something positive for yourself... We need to have a plan for schedule for our life, senior life."

> "There's a benefit for you to register for that.... So you have to use your brain. So this kind of program, it helps you to have better life."

Shifting Perceptions of Aging

The workshop challenged misconceptions about aging, showing seniors as active, rather than passive, learners and contributors. Cultural differences in how aging and the elderly are

perceived were evident. In particular, seniors in retirement homes engaging with history and culture (e.g., museums, storytelling) was seen as a novel concept by a few participants.

> “In Iran... there is no such thing as senior houses... you have to take care of your parents... when I came to Canada, I see a different world, different treatment with parents. It was very annoying for me at the beginning... I get used to that..."

> “I have seen in some countries that for seniors, there are some...parks, there are the place that they can sit and talk with each other, play games, play chess. But [seniors] going to a cultural place like a museum, think about history, about culture, about objects, remembering the memories. It was completely new for me.”

Emboldened with this new knowledge, participants described how they encouraged other older adults to find ways of keeping mentally and physically engaged through museum programs and community activities. The importance of being proactive was emphasized, whether that means contributing to program development or participating in existing programs, to maintain cognitive health and overall well-being.

> “First thing that I suggest to my friend, which I did after your workshop, they definitely, definitely register for senior program.... This is my perspective.... I didn't take it seriously for the senior program, but after workshop, I'm serious about that.”

> “We think old people have done everything that we need to do, but they still need to learn and experience something new."

> "It helps you have a better life—not just being taken care of, but thinking, using your brain."

Community History and Cultural Exchange

Some participants described their learning as acquiring new historical facts about their home, North Vancouver, which broadened their understanding of the community’s significance.

There was also an element of cultural exchange during the workshops when participants had time to reflect on personal histories and connect with others. Participants learned more about Canadian traditions or more about Iranian culture, and learned how different communities perceive history, museums and societal roles.

> "It was very nice for me. It showed me other aspects of living here in Canada."

> “I guess some of the stuff about...the railway, such like, which I hadn't even thought of as being particularly relevant to North Vancouver.”

Reminiscence and Local History Research

Exchanging stories and personal experiences was seen by some participants as not only useful in developing programs but a valuable way to gather information from seniors memories about local history. One participant talked about the workshop process as a learning experience and could see how engagement of community members might be applied in different ways.

> “I learned that there are ways of building a structure to engage elders in bringing forth their own memories. And that's very interesting. It could actually turn into a successful session, could turn into a very useful information gathering tool for MONOVA, like memories of people on the ground.... I have no clue how to approach something like this, but there are people who do. That's cool.”

In summary, participant responses reflected different learning and discovery outcomes, some more pronounced than others, that were valued and appreciated by the participants. This study’s workshop discussions challenged traditional views of aging and emphasized the importance of outreach programs for seniors, which led to new understandings and broadened perspectives for some participants. Additionally, participants appreciated the cultural exchange, historical insights, and the potential of seniors’ reminiscence as a tool for enriching community history and program development. The workshops highlighted the importance of proactive involvement in community and cultural activities, promoting cognitive health and personal growth.

Participant Satisfaction

IQ6: If given the opportunity, would you volunteer again to develop the program further? Why is that?

Most participants said they would volunteer again to develop the program further. Four out of five participants did not hesitate with a positive answer, of which one participant expressed an interest in helping implement an outreach program for seniors. One participant declined to volunteer again due to her struggles with English. These responses provide some insights into the satisfaction of being involved in a museum-based collaborative project and their willingness to contribute again to program development or implementation. The researcher-educator expressed appreciation of participants' contributions and progress at key points in the workshop process, and re-emphasized this at the conclusion of the final workshop.

> "One hundred percent! Because I have learned a lot. Honestly, I learned a lot.... It was a wonderful experience for me.... Being creative to develop a program based on people's experiences..."

> "If there's other program development opportunities in the future, I'd be interested."

> "If I felt like I was contributing, then probably."

> "It's kind of fun to watch the process…[and] it might lead me to volunteer for one or more of these sessions. I would volunteer to be the assistant in one or more [program delivery] sessions."

The positive responses highlight the rewarding experience, opportunities for learning and meaningful outcomes of co-creating an outreach program. Participants expressed a general openness to volunteering again in program development and, perhaps, program implementation. However, their willingness was often contingent on factors such as availability and their interest in the topic. This shows that, while they found the experience valuable, logistical and motivational considerations could affect future participation.

Discussion

This study explored how older adult learners would benefit from developing a program for seniors in collaboration with museum educators. The study participants volunteered for reasons largely linked to their personal interests and goals: supporting other seniors, giving back through volunteering, personal growth and learning, curiosity and innovation, collaboration and teamwork, expanding awareness of community history, and promoting intergenerational connections. All participants had a keen interest in helping the museum by creating new experiences for seniors and expanding awareness of community history in North Vancouver, both of which can help museums build community connections.

The study results suggested that engaging older adult learners in a dynamic museum-based program development process led to a series of positive outcomes for the participants, as well as for the museum. Participants reported individual benefits that ranged from broadened perspectives, to transformative learning, to increased social engagement; while potential benefits for the museum ranged from advanced volunteer training, to expanding community members' appreciation of museum work, to correcting misperceptions about seniors' capabilities and roles in society. These positive outcomes as well as issues and challenges are discussed in detail below.

Benefits for Seniors as Older Adult Learners

The process of co-developing a program with a museum educator resulted in these older adult participants benefiting in the following ways: acquisition of new knowledge and skills, cognitive stimulation, physical health, personal growth and development, transformative learning, social engagement, and a stronger sense of community and identity.

Despite the limitations of this study, many of the outcomes discussed below show interesting connections to existing museum research with seniors, where elements of storytelling, social engagement, reminiscence, learning and discovery, and/or community engagement led to improved mood or overall well-being for participants (for example, Beauchet et al., 2022; Gough, 2016; Smiraglia, 2015a; Smiraglia, 2015b; Smiraglia, 2016; Wallen & Docherty-Hughes,

2022).[5] Although many of the outcomes of this study point to the improved well-being of participants, the scope of this study did not explore participants' overall well-being as an outcome of co-developing a museum-based program.

Acquisition of New Knowledge and Skills

Acquiring new knowledge was a clear benefit for participants, who particularly enjoyed learning more about community history and cultures, the program development process and, to a lesser extent, the community engagement process. This suggests that being involved in this type of dynamic, multi-faceted process was a fulfilling endeavor because it provided intellectual stimulation and broader perspectives, reinforcing lifelong learning as an important part of the participants' lives. Improved understanding of North Vancouver history, interpretive theory, audience needs, and program delivery strategies, as well as new cultural perspectives, can be incorporated into participants' interpretive practice when volunteering as docents at the museum.

Cognitive and Physical Health

Cognitive challenges, such as creating themes and identifying strategies to engage uninterested audience members, were expected due to the novelty of the process for participants. Some participants found learner-centred thinking to be somewhat challenging, reflecting a distinct mental transition for those not used to roles that involve engaging learners or presenting ideas in a way that others can understand.

The researcher-educator facilitated activities for the group to help participants grapple with difficult questions and concepts. Training in or review of interpretive (i.e., informal education) strategies and theory also helped to scaffold this process. Participants made an effort to understand the unfamiliar and, in doing so, went through periods of "productive struggle" needed to expand learning and develop new understandings (Murdoch et al., 2020).

Co-developing an outreach program for seniors activated the mind and body of participants in ways that promoted cognitive and physical health. Beyond the cognitive endeavor

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[5] Well-being in the context of museums is psychological well-being, which goes beyond a momentary experience of happiness and is a combination of feeling good and functioning well—this outcome has been increasingly recognized as an important aspect of museum experiences and community engagement (Dragija and Jelinčić, 2022; Wallen & Docherty-Hughes, 2022).

of learning something new, the workshop experience gave participants opportunities to stretch their thinking, consider new perspectives, recall historical facts, remember their pasts and contribute creatively by sharing ideas and solving problems. These activities fit the "growing body of neuroscience research that supports the impact of cognitive engagement in maintaining or improving brain health among older adults" (Ucko, 2022, p. 9). To maintain physical health, some participants benefitted by walking or biking to the workshop locations. The ability to walk or bike to the two locations for some participants influenced their decision to volunteer.

Personal Growth and Development

Personal growth and development are common motivating factors for people who volunteer at museums (Fristrup & Grut, 2016). Many study participants, as museum-related volunteers and lifelong learners, said they were motivated to get involved because they wanted to try something new and use the experience for personal growth and development. Pursuing personal growth and development experiences in retirement is an effective way for seniors to enhance their "ability to exercise a degree of control over their own lives" (Fristrup & Grut, 2016, p. 215), which in turn can boost feelings of empowerment and self-esteem. Thus, engaging community members in these capacity-building activities is not only educational but can be galvanizing experiences for older adults and seniors.

The study participants' innate curiosity, receptivity to peer-to-peer learning, maturity, and their openness to new challenges and perspectives helped optimize opportunities for self-discovery and achievement of personal goals. Facilitating a participatory group decision-making process for program development enhanced participants' readiness to learn and contribute. The workshop sessions were designed to foster group discussion, promote the exchange of ideas and perspectives, provide moments of quiet reflection and build consensus in a supportive environment. When participants felt at ease, they did not hesitate to share stories and reminisce during exploratory discussions—conveying both personal and historical narratives to help problem-solve, debate with peers and build rapport. Because there is a deeply rooted need for humans to use storytelling as a way to make sense of the world (Fristrup & Grut, 2016) this aspect of the workshop process was considered a valuable part of everyone's personal growth and development.

Transformative Learning

The participants' varying levels of open-mindedness, self-reflection and ideation, as well as their desire to tell stories and share perspectives, resulted in both subtle and profound moments of transformative learning—or a foundational shift in the way participants thought, felt or acted after adopting a new perspective or broader understanding of the world.

These transformative moments came to light during the post-workshop interviews, specifically when participants described new information or perspectives that surprised or confused them—i.e., a disorienting dilemma (Calleja, 2014; McCray, 2016; Yoo, 2023)—during the program development process, for example:

Including Indigenous Content. The idea that Indigenous content should be included in all museum programming prompted one participant to re-evaluate prior assumptions. The confusion behind this inclusive guideline was not so much a matter of existence but a matter of implementation, where links between seniors in residential communities and Indigenous groups were seen as tenuous. The response suggests a potential discomfort with, or lack of understanding of, integrating Indigenous perspectives into every museum program. Upon critical reflection, however, the participant started to see new possibilities and implications of including Indigenous content in museum programs for seniors.

Community members or volunteers involved in museum-oriented initiatives or activities would benefit from a thorough review or explanation of the museum's strategic objectives, including principles and guidelines for incorporating Indigenous history, and other cultural perspectives, to help reduce potential biases or misunderstandings.

Value of Life Experiences. One participant experienced a significant shift in how she perceived non-expert knowledge. When she realized her participation in developing a program was based on the value of her lived experience and memories, her assumptions around knowledge and museums were challenged. After some reflection, she appreciated how different kinds of knowledge, such as unique perspectives and skill-sets, can be valued and useful in different contexts. This new understanding was an exciting discovery or personal epiphany. She welcomed this broadened perspective and discussed how she would incorporate this learning into future endeavors.

There can be a strong sense of empowerment that comes from participants realizing the value of their own contributions. Highlighting the value of lived experience in future initiatives

could strengthen community engagement, particularly for those who may not initially see themselves as subject experts or contributors in such processes.

Shifting Perceptions of Aging. Perceptions of aging shifted significantly for some participants who, prior to the program development workshops, saw limited societal roles for, and overall capacities of, seniors. The combination of workshop content, peer-group discussions, and the cognitive-health rationale underpinning museum programming for seniors discussed during the program development process, exposed them to new possibilities for improving seniors' lives, including their own. The importance of object-based, educational programming for seniors in promoting well-being through social and cognitive engagement was transformative for these individuals.

For participants who immigrated from Iran, their different perceptions of aging and seniors' residences were described as being linked to Persian culture. Perhaps the expectation in Iran that adults should look after their aging and ailing parents led to constricted views of seniors' needs and abilities. Maryam Noroozian (MD), calling it "caregivers' burden," wrote in an Iranian psychiatric journal that in Persian "history and religion, taking care of the elderly has been one of the major commitments for families, therefore, most families are seriously opposed to [letting ailing parents] live in institutional homes," although this is changing (2012, p. 5).

One study participant shared an example of this during a workshop—highlighting the complexities some immigrants[6] face when adjusting to different approaches to healthy aging and seniors' care in Canada:

> That's the most challenging for the Persian people who...invited parents here and they are disabled. They cannot do anything. I have a friend and still she's struggling with her mom and her mom has Alzheimer's, and still she's keeping her at home because she said, 'I feel guilty if I put [her] in a senior house.' So…you see difference between...our cultures?

Differing perceptions of seniors in the community underscores the importance of communicating the benefits of museum programming for healthy aging. This message could be reinforced in

[6] This includes immigrants from Iran and countries with similar collectivist cultures, "in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, often extended families" (Nejati, et. al., 2010, p. 106), where elderly parents tend to live with their adult children.

future communications to shift public perceptions and help increase participation in museum programs for seniors.

Social Engagement

Peer-to-peer discussions during the workshop sessions helped participants form new social connections or reinforce established social bonds. Side conversations commonly occurred between individuals and with the facilitator. Some participants also reported talking to one another between workshop sessions. Many participants appreciated being in a group environment where collaboration and teamwork were encouraged.

The benefits of social bonding and increased socialization for older adults participating in museum-based activities are well documented and often point to a "greater need to socialize and a greater need for cognitive stimulation" (Smiraglia, 2015b, p. 187). According to Hamblin and Harper (2016), "engagement with museums and galleries as...volunteers is beneficial for older people in a number of ways... including in terms of promoting social engagement, health and well-being, and reducing isolation" (as cited in Fristrup & Grut, 2016, p. 211).

One participant emphasized that programs for seniors have the potential to foster connections between seniors and younger generations. The outreach seniors program she was helping to develop inspired a discussion around the mental health benefits of adding intergenerational experiences to museum programming, which could result in learning and other positive outcomes for both seniors and youth. She added that these initiatives could help relationships across demographics to "build community." Her interests aligned with intergenerational initiatives occurring elsewhere in the museum sector (Coates, 2019) and with current understandings of the benefits of intergenerational approaches in promoting healthy aging (HelpAge International, 2022).

Stronger Sense of Community and Identity

"A sense of belonging is what keeps people in communities. This belonging is the goal of community building. The hallmark of a strong community is when its members feel that they belong" (Bacon, 2009, as cited in Maruska, 2013, p. 34). Learning more about North Vancouver's history, connecting with members of the community who share similar interests, and working in a team with other museum volunteers are aspects of program development that

helped build each participant's sense of belonging and individual identity within the following two communities:

1. Geographic community: Learning more about the history and cultural heritage of North Vancouver improved the participants' understanding of their community and strengthened their feelings of community connection—reinforcing their community identity and sense of belonging in North Vancouver. This form of "place attachment" process, in the context of museums and active aging, is "closely connected to their identity processes in the form of meaning making...[using] historical and cultural references of specific events in concrete places" (Fristrup & Grut, 2016, p. 217).
2. Museum volunteer community: the participants were given a rare opportunity to work closely and collaboratively as a group. Developing a program together, which required a substantial time commitment, established participants as dedicated museum volunteers supporting MONOVA and seniors in North Vancouver. The overlapping motivations and interests reinforced their identities as highly valued and appreciated volunteers within the museum community.

Benefits for the Museum and Community

This study also offers insights into the benefits of this community-engagement approach for the museum and community. Co-developing a program with a museum educator resulted in participants gaining a rare view into the world of museum education and a greater appreciation and respect for museum staff. Participants' fuller appreciation of the inherent complexities of museum work could improve relations between volunteers and staff.

The program development process included some advanced volunteer training, which could lead to higher-quality, volunteer-led programs conducted by these participants in the future. These benefits, when recognized and communicated effectively, might promote a more welcoming and accessible museum environment for attracting and retaining volunteers. By encouraging involvement through collaboration, adult volunteers feel appreciated and valued as they use their wealth of knowledge and experience to enrich museum processes and programs. This has the potential to strengthen positive relations between the community and the museum.

Museums can "safely" engage community members by collaborating with their most committed volunteers and community partners.[7] This arrangement of co-creation and shared decision-making with volunteers is not uncommon. In fact, the cultural heritage sector has a history of volunteer teams operating small museums across Canada,[8] reflecting a desire and dedication within Canadian communities to promote cultural heritage.

Fristrup and Grut (2016) noted that meaningful engagement of older adults in cultural heritage activities can also lead to reflections and learnings on citizenship. The study participants' increased sense of belonging and connection to the North Vancouver community—a significant outcome of this study—creates an opportunity for museum educators to facilitate conversations around citizen action and social change. When older adults are given the time and space in museums to think about and practice citizenship in our rapidly changing world, a stronger sense of belonging and connection to community can reinforce their roles as democratic or political citizens for community benefit (Fristrup and Grut, 2016).

Community engagement strategies that grow a sense of citizenship or civic capabilities "enhance people's ability to exercise a degree of control over their lives; to take part with others in decisions that affect the contexts of their lives; and to envisage alternative futures for themselves and their families" (Schuller & Watson, 2009, as cited in Fristrup & Grut, 2016, p. 215). For example, after the workshops, two study participants felt empowered to communicate their newfound knowledge of healthy aging and program for seniors to their peers within the Iranian community. Providing opportunities for more marginalized groups, such as isolated seniors and newcomers, to feel more empowered not only helps museums meet their community engagement goals but also promotes positive change in their communities.

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[7] "Safely" here means these relationship dynamics are at low risk of negatively affecting the museum's brand, and the relationship themselves are at low risk of being undermined because dedicated volunteers and partners have a vested interest in helping the museum succeed.

[8] "Approximately 20% of heritage sector organizations were solely run by volunteers in 2020, a level consistent over the past decade" (Government of Canada, 2021).

Issues and Challenges in Facilitated Workshops

Overcoming Individual Frustrations

Collaborative work is not without its struggles, but experiencing tension and frustration can be transformative moments of personal growth and development. At times, participants experienced challenges and discomfort during the program development process. The most frustrating moments for two participants seemed to stem from differing approaches to teamwork and brainstorming, perhaps linked to differences in a linear approach to problem-solving versus a more free-flowing, expansive idea-generation approach; or perhaps linked to differences in attendance—some participants were only able to attend two workshops. Either way, to avoid such challenges in the future, museum educators could clarify the parameters and goals at the outset of each brainstorming activity. For example, setting expectations that brainstorming involves open exploration and that some divergence is normal before narrowing down ideas, however, parameters are in place to keep the activity on track.

When the researcher-educator observed individual frustrations or internal struggles, she strived to respond by acknowledging feelings, facilitating an independent activity that fostered reflective thought, and/or encouraging written suggestions from each participant to ensure everyone felt heard (Kaner et. al., 2014). When reflecting on specific frustrations during the post-workshop interviews, participants were often philosophical, having overcome their personal challenges and recognizing the positive outcomes resulting from co-developing an outreach program for seniors.

However, to promote full participation and a more rewarding experience for everyone involved, minimizing unproductive struggle (Murdoch et. al., 2020) should be considered when designing facilitated collaborations. This is especially important when meaningful progress requires decision-making based on group consensus. Helping individuals appreciate the value of each step in the process, not just the outcome, may contribute to a more balanced and rewarding experience. Addressing these challenges thoughtfully will help optimize the learning experience and make this community engagement process more inclusive and productive for all participants.

Cultural Differences

Although the diversity of perspectives within the group was welcomed and enjoyed by most participants, when differing perspectives were deeply cultural (and lacked an ontological context) they became a source of confusion and tension during group discussions. To create a more harmonious and enjoyable experience when engaging a diverse group of participants from the community, it would be beneficial to foster intercultural awareness. In the context of engaging older adults, facilitating dialogue is an effective strategy in this regard.

For this study, the researcher-educator facilitated an ice-breaker activity at the beginning of the first workshop based on a universal theme of "food," specifically a favourite family recipe. This allowed participants to share something inherently cultural, while getting to know one another.

In retrospect, inserting more inter-cultural discussions into the workshops likely would have helped improve cultural understanding amongst participants. Sparking dialogue by incorporating more listening exercises or discussions that focus on cultural understanding can encourage participants to consider or embrace differing perspectives and learn from each other's backgrounds. As Silverman (1993) observed and emphasized, museum educators can hone their skills as *facilitators* by "learning and improving in the areas of listening, supporting, prodding, and negotiating—skills that grow increasingly vital to the functioning of a multicultural society" (p. 10).

Language Barriers

Two participants identified language barriers as a challenge. For those learning or struggling with English, expressing ideas or understanding others fully was difficult, potentially leading to miscommunication or feelings of isolation in group discussions. These participants faced confusion about terminology that was not clearly defined. For example, a term like "object" with multiple definitions led to a temporary misunderstanding and thus undermined full participation. This might lead to frustration, especially if participants feel they are not fully grasping the workshop's goals or processes.

During this study's workshops, the language barrier was alleviated to some extent in four ways: 1) writing down critical aspects of the discussion and participants' thoughts on a flip chart and reading them out to everyone in the group for clarification, 2) having a fully bilingual

participant in the group who could be called upon when needed to translate between English and Farsi, 3) providing participants with a summary of workshop discussions and key outcomes to read and ponder at their own pace before the next workshop, and 4) encouraging participants to contact the researcher-educator with questions or concerns.

Addressing language barriers involves providing language support (e.g., offering translations, a slower pace of speaking, or more visual aids). Additionally, encouraging an inclusive environment where everyone feels comfortable asking for clarification can reduce these challenges. With regard to new concepts and terminology, facilitators might consider explaining key concepts and checking for understanding before moving forward, particularly when introducing new terms or concepts that may be unfamiliar to some participants.

Study Limitations

This study was situated in the context of a community museum in North Vancouver, BC, and the findings might not be applicable to museums with different missions or museums serving significantly different demographic communities. Some inconsistent participant workshop attendance could have undermined aspects of the research process, although this limitation was somewhat mitigated by recruiting a larger number of participants than was needed for a program development team.

One key benefit of collaborating with study participants who closely reflect the program's target audience is the potential for participants' audience-relevant perspectives to improve the overall appeal and effectiveness of the resulting draft program. For instance, in contrast to a basic reminiscence program, the participants decided to include a cognitive challenge or new learning aspect in the outreach program for seniors because they agreed it would be more interesting and appealing to a broader senior demographic. Moreover, they voted against an outreach kit for "on-loan" programming because they agreed a museum educator would add an interactive quality and be more effective than an untrained facilitator in delivering this multi-layered outreach program. These contributions by participants likely improved certain aspects of this program for the target audience. However, this study was not designed to test how participants influenced the relevancy or overall program quality for the target audience. Determining this would require evaluation during the program delivery phase and further consultation with museum professionals.

Conclusion

This study used a participatory action research approach to explore the process and benefits of engaging older adult learners as equal partners in co-developing a museum program. This type of community engagement provided older-adult participants with opportunities to learn, socialize, share stories and ideas, consider new perspectives, self-reflect, think critically and fulfil altruistic goals. Within an environment of partnership and reciprocity, engaging older adult learners in this program development process generated a series of positive outcomes for participants. These older adult learners benefited through acquisition of new knowledge and skills, promotion of both cognitive and physical health, personal growth and development, transformative learning, socialization, and a strengthened sense of community and identity. Other positive impacts included empowering participants, filling current gaps in the community engagement process to meet museum goals, and reinforcing the museum as an innovative organization in the community that is working to improve the lives of seniors.

The study's findings contribute to the emerging body of knowledge in museum education and community engagement work with nuanced insights into the benefits of collaborating with community members. Museum volunteers, with their skills, knowledge and altruistic motivations, can play an important role in sustaining community-based initiatives, and museum educators are well-suited as facilitators to implement community engagement strategies that advance efforts in developing active and meaningful museum experiences for adults. Once relationships with community groups are established, public-program collaborations that are well designed and implemented appropriately can be mutually beneficial, financially advantageous, and achieve multiple goals and objectives for the museum simultaneously.

In the context of this study, the full potential of collaborating with older adult learners or seniors to develop a museum-based program will not be fully realized until the draft outreach program is finalized and delivered to its target audience in a pilot phase, and then evaluated. An investigation into how this outreach program for seniors can be further developed and implemented in meaningful collaboration between seniors and museum educational staff may reveal further insights into the andragogical possibilities and identify other benefits of engaging seniors, as older adult learners, in program development.

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Appendix: Draft Outreach Program for Seniors

PROGRAM OVERVIEW: *DRAFT Outreach Program for Seniors* *September 2024*

GROWING UP IN NORTH VANCOUVER

Program Highlights
• North Vancouver has a range of opportunities and experiences for families and children, many linked to nature and mountain activities. • During this program, seniors handle objects of childhood, reminisce, share stories from their youth, try to identify some more peculiar items, and compare past to present. • Reminiscence and new learning are incorporated into the program. • This program theme can incorporate different sub-themes such as neighbourhood development, school lunches over time, Indigenous games/sports, and different cultures. • The program is designed to bring together childhood objects such as school supplies, toys, games, toboggan, lunch boxes, and archival images. • Universal ideas help ensure everyone can relate to the theme, including newcomers, using questions such as "What did you do in the outdoors when you were a child?" • Facilitating different perspectives and comparisons enriches everyone's learning.

Content and Outcomes

Topic	Growing Up in North Vancouver
Main Theme	The joys of childhood in early North Vancouver *
Subthemes	• Our childhood experiences help shape who we are • North Van's proximity to nature has attracted many families with children—it's a great place to grow up • Childhood diets have changed over the years
Outcomes	• Maintaining cognitive health • Increased socialization and feelings of well-being • New understandings of North Vancouver history & cultures • Reinforcing individual identity through reminiscence
Media	Child-related artifacts, archival images

** NOTE: Early school experiences for Indigenous groups were often traumatic and some people's school experiences were unhappy. Indig. consultation & sensitivity required.*

Program Type and Audience

Program Type	Outreach program - informal
Age of Audience	Seniors
Motivations	Socialize, cognitive health, reminiscing
Educational model	Older adult learning with emphasis on dialogue
Location	Independent living facilities / residences

Program Structure

Length	1 hour		
Maximum Group Size	8	Small group recommended during pilot phase	
# of Interpreters (staff)	1	Role	Lead facilitator - setup/take down
# of Volunteers	1	Role	Ambassador (optional) to assist

Logistics

Registration Required?	Yes		
Community Contact	Organization's Community Outreach coordinator		
Development Partner(s)	Friends of NVMA Society		
Program Availability	Once per week maximum during pilot phase		
Program Creator(s)	JP & Volunteer Advisory Group	Date	September 2024
Program Updated by		Date	

Accommodations: Physical, Mental, Emotional

Audience Accommodation	Individuals likely have one or more physical limitations that might require accommodation. These can be reviewed with seniors residential-living staff before each program. Try to adapt the program as much as possible.
Safety and Sanitation	Facilities will have protocols in place for safety and sanitation. The lead facilitator and volunteer assistant must wash hands and follow any protocols required by facility. Objects and re-usable program materials require cleaning before each program.
Safe-Space Needs	Audience members may have negative emotions associated with aspects of their childhood, including going to school. Facilitator may need some trauma-based training. Before program, obtain as much information as possible about each person registered for the program and adjust the design and delivery of the program to accommodate.

Program Outline

Activity	Duration	Featured Objects and/or Media
Blast from the Past - Ice breaker	15 min	Share one or two jokes/riddles from the 1950's, encourage seniors to share jokes or riddles they enjoyed from the past. Or play/demo a game from mid-1900's.
Reminiscence	30 min	Pass around 8–10 objects (TBD) from childhood, depending on group size. Include objects related to local Indigenous games/sports. Supplement with archival images, for context.
Mystery Object	15 min	Pass around an object that is more challenging to identify, see who can guess what the object is used for. Supplement with archival images to provide clues.
Wrap-Up & Post-Program Activity	5 min	Provide something engaging for seniors to do after the program. Could be a themed crossword or a topic to explore further. Send the audience off with a "mission" or new knowledge/perspective they could share with others.

Background Information & Specific Objects: TBD in next phase of development