

NYSCA TA COHORT A — Entering New Communities Notes

Best Practices When Working with New Older Adult Communities

- Humility - is so key.
- Listening and really understanding as much as you can, including listening and collaborating with your teaching partner.
- Centering the participants' experience in the room.
- Ask the community what their goals are, and what they want from the experience.
- Asking questions about the community.
- Creating opportunities for recruitment that are stimulating - demo classes, drawing the students in, speaking with students and getting to know them.
- Creating a democracy - ask the older adults what they are interested in, and allow them to vote or survey them about what they want to study.
- Creating material that they are interested in exploring.
- The importance of the mentor aspect - working alongside another teaching artist who has worked in the community with the older adults and who you can learn from.
- Connect to and honor the prior experience, learning and knowledge of participants when planning a course.
- Consider beginning with a community agreement – a class discussion and understanding of the way the class will work, protocols, positive feedback. This can be created with the participants.
- Discover the students interests - this might be done in a survey prior to the course beginning or continue to develop as they become more comfortable in the online or in person formats and community.
- Put flexibility on your to do list from the start.
- Stay closely connected to those in the organization who support you as a teaching artist - staff, custodians, organizational directors of the programming.
- Develop trust by teaching in partnership with your participants, unpacking and honoring what they bring to the community and to the artform.
- Find varying modalities to connect with participants.
- Consider how you will address physical issues that may come up for older adults through universal design and align this with materials or tools you may need to consider using in your artform without assumptions of inability – the question is how can we do this?

- The ability to pivot is essential, based upon reading the room and acknowledging the font of experience and wisdom that already exists.
- We are building communities that we are an integral part of.

- Understanding we are all coming from the same basic human framework whether pre-school or elders. We are all part of a diverse, vulnerable lattice work that needs support.
- Make allies and friends of those who do maintenance at your site, if it is not virtual... and of course be tech fluent in current times.
- Find creative ways to assess the mood of the site where you work crossing more than one art genre, and find creative ways to share these noticings and wonderings to accentuate the validity of art improving our lives.
- Finally, our group talked alot about film, animation, collage, flipbooks, boxes of artistic memories and zoetropes - utilizing unexpected artforms might spark interest!
- Older adults need to move their bodies, even in simple ways, can be challenging for them, but has real benefits for the body and spirit.
- Ableist language is something that needs to be considered when approaching older adult communities, requires sensitivity/awareness; mistakes are mandatory!
- Connection is really needed, many are quite disconnected and isolated.
- Find out who's gung-ho about the art form so that it'll encourage other seniors who are more reticent to join the programming.
- Food can be a meaningful way to connect with the community.
- Recognize the importance of the human connection above and beyond teaching the art form.
- Assess and engage with community members from where they are and adjust accordingly.
- Be flexible - curriculum is critical - but be willing to alter to suit the students you are working with.
- Understand your role as a facilitator to learning - not the only expert in the room/space. Older adults have 50-90 years of life experience to pull from.
- Assess the energy in the room - not a homogenous group - (not all 3rd graders) - but varied in age, background, experience.
- Use art-making as an entry point.