



'Awakened Art Stories'—Rediscovering pictures by persons living with dementia utilising TimeSlips: A Pilot Study



Andrea Loizeau^{*,1}, Yvonne Kündig¹, Sandra Oppikofer

Center for Gerontology, University of Zurich, Sumatrastrasse 30, CH-8006 Zurich, Switzerland

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: 'Awakened Art Stories' is the first creative expression intervention study for persons with dementia (PWD) and their caregivers. The study was conducted at the Kunsthau Museum in Switzerland. The intervention utilised TimeSlips to encourage persons living with dementia to create stories about artwork in response to open-ended questions. The aim of this pilot study was to assess the efficacy and feasibility of an intervention through storytelling and a social gathering.

Materials and method: A mixed-method pre-post design using semi-structured interviews, written questionnaires, validated and adapted scales, and a self-generated observations' sheet as well as a visual analogue scale assessed the efficacy as well as the feasibility of the intervention. Participants were four PWDs and their caregivers as well as four volunteers, who supported the PWDs during the sessions. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analyses and descriptive observations, as well as further feedback from participants, while a Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to analyse quantitative data.

Results: The quantitative findings revealed a statistically significant, positive effect on PWDs' and caregivers' mood on the Smiley-Face Assessment Scale directly after the museum session (all participants: $Z = -4.84, p < 0.001$; PWDs: $Z = -3.57, p < 0.001$; Caregivers: $Z = -3.34, p < 0.001$). On the Dementia Attitudes Scale, no significant differences in the caregivers' and volunteers' attitudes towards dementia were found. No significant differences were found on the Caregiver Burden Inventory either. Although the qualitative findings revealed via thematic analyses that while PWDs attributed their mood to the atmosphere, caregivers attributed it rather to social contacts. All caregivers and most of the volunteers reported a positive change in their attitude towards dementia. In addition, PWDs' reported that they welcomed the opportunity to contribute and express their thoughts. All participants were highly satisfied with their experience.

Conclusion: Despite the small sample size, the many benefits of making art accessible to PWDs and their caregivers, as well as the feasibility of an innovative intervention based on TimeSlips resulted in both quantitative and qualitative evidence.

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1. Introduction

Society's understanding of dementia is mainly deficit-oriented. Moreover, the person affected by dementia and their caregivers typically find it hard to accept the illness, and often downplay it instead (Schweizerische Alzheimervereinigung, 2013).

Resource-oriented approaches in dementia are based mainly on

a person-centred model, in which all individuals, including persons with dementia (PWDs), are able to live a fulfilled life independently of their health condition (Kitwood, 1997). Kitwood's model integrates the physical and psychosocial needs of PWDs and proposed the existence of five essential needs: consolation, bonding, meaningful occupation, inclusion, and identity (Kitwood, 2008). Meaningful activities for PWDs have to be adequate for adults and capable of being integrated into everyday life; further, they should be fun, provide stimulation, and allow expression of individuality (Wickland and Basting, 2009). These ideas are of course reminiscent of earlier insights from positive psychology such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which includes, among others, feelings of belonging, self-respect and – in this context most importantly – the desire to realise one's potential (Maslow, 1943). When providing PWDs with an art based intervention, it is essential to stimulate PWDs and give them an opportunity to

Abbreviations: CBI, Caregiver Burden Inventory; DAS-D, Dementia Attitudes Scale-Deutsch; MMSE, Mini Mental Status Examination; PWDs, persons with dementia; SFAS, Smiley-Face Assessment Scale

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: andrea.loizeau@zfg.uzh.ch (A. Loizeau), kuendig.yvonne@gmail.com (Y. Kündig), sandra.oppikofer@zfg.uzh.ch (S. Oppikofer).

¹ These authors contributed equally to this work.

experience competence by encouraging them to use their preserved abilities or to discover them (Neubauer and de Groot, 2012). Carers are frequently involved in the day to day life of PWDs, and an activity that is interesting to caregivers and PWDs is beneficial to both, and can strengthen their relationship (Mittelman and Epstein, 2009). In addition, such activities provide an opportunity for healthy and unwell individuals to share an experience on the same level, and promote self-identity, sense-making, fun, and enjoyment (Neubauer and de Groot, 2012). This suggests that creative expression interventions in a social context could be a sensible means of integrating a PWD's essential needs. In addition, art based activities can provide shared experiences, reduce the negative image of PWDs, soften role attributions (Wickland and Basting, 2009) and provide a feeling of freedom as participants do not need any formal qualifications in order to take part in the discussion (Goulding, 2012).

Several museums and institutions already offer activities and programmes for PWDs and their caregivers (Balzani et al., 2014; Brägger, 2012; Eekelaar et al., 2012; Kaster and Winkler, 2008; MacPherson et al., 2009; Mittelman and Epstein, 2009; Potter, 2012). The 'Meet Me' study at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York was one of the first art-viewing interventions that included PWDs as well as caregivers and showed benefits for both PWDs and their caregivers among others through an improvement in PWDs' and caregivers' mood directly following the session (Mittelman and Epstein, 2009). However, adequate scientific evaluation of the efficacy and feasibility of programmes based on the *TimeSlips* method has not been undertaken thus far. The first creative expression intervention study in Switzerland, titled 'Awakened Art Stories' at the Kunsthhaus Museum in Zurich, was initiated by the Center for Gerontology at the University of Zurich. It sought to address this gap in research, using art and social interactions to point out the positive aspects of dementia.

1.1. *TimeSlips*

The *TimeSlips* method, developed by Anne Basting in 1996, offers an opportunity to express one's spontaneity and creativity (Basting, 2012). It encourages PWDs to create stories in response to open-ended questions while viewing staged photographs. PWDs are able to start a creative process without the pressure and need to recall details about the past (Sullivan et al., 2014). This approach is called '*failure free*', because it accepts verbalisation as well as unintelligible noises and gestures as valid responses (George and Houser, 2014). Art and creativity becomes a means of communicating and sharing emotions (Balzani et al., 2014), and neither language difficulties nor memory loss pose any barriers. The interaction between the facilitator, who moderates the storytelling, and a group of PWDs encourages an imaginative process (Oppikofer et al., 2014). The answers are subsequently collected and continuously woven into a story. The final product is the story created by the group of PWDs, who benefits from their role as storytellers.

Originally, *TimeSlips* was implemented with nursing home residents, and focused on both PWDs' quality of life and professional caregivers' quality of care (Fritsch et al., 2009). Fritsch et al. (2009) demonstrated a positive relationship between PWDs' engagement and mood, and the nursing home staff's development of a more positive attitude towards the PWDs. This resulted from '*viewing residents in more positive terms*', as well as more and better interactions with and between residents. Another study using *TimeSlips* highlighted an improvement in medical students' attitude towards PWDs because they were 'surprised' by the PWDs' abilities (George et al., 2011).

1.2. Differences between 'Awakened Art Stories' and *TimeSlips*

'Awakened Art Stories' followed the same guidelines as *TimeSlips* with the following exceptions: the activity was located in a museum instead of a nursing home; abstract and realistic paintings were used instead of staged photographs; a group setting included caregivers and volunteers; an additional introduction was given, which consisted of reading the story, that was created in the previous session and a subsequent gathering; and PWDs received a printed version of the session's artwork and story. These changes in the setting of *TimeSlips* were introduced partly due to important findings of the 'Meet Me' study, which emphasised the benefits of art-viewing intervention in an environment that was deemed valuable by both PWDs and caregivers (Mittelman and Epstein, 2009). In the 'Meet Me' study, all participants contributed equally to the art-viewing (Rosenberg, 2009), whereas in this study only PWDs contributed to the storytelling discussion in order for their voice to be valued by avoiding any imbalances due to the caregivers' contributions.

1.3. The present study

This pilot study sought to assess the efficacy and feasibility of the intervention project 'Awakened Art Stories' based on *TimeSlips*. The novelty of this study lies in the combination of the location in a museum, the method used with *TimeSlips*, and the group setting, which included PWDs, caregivers, volunteers, a facilitator, and a transcript writer.

Based on the general feedback of a smaller study received in spring 2013, a positive effect on PWDs' and caregivers' moods directly after the intervention was predicted. It was hypothesised that a social-related intervention through art would decrease caregiver burden. With the help of intellectual stimulation within a respectful environment, PWDs and caregivers should be able to express common experiences and emotions. Thus, it was predicted that the encouragement and support would enhance PWDs' competences and resources in terms of preserved or discovered abilities. The focus of the caregivers and volunteers were expected to shift towards the PWDs' preserved or discovered abilities, positively altering their attitude towards PWDs. Lastly, it was hypothesised that all the participants would be satisfied with the content and organisation of the intervention, while the volunteers would view it as an inspiring and positive experience.

2. Material and methods

2.1. Participants

The intervention took place in autumn 2013 at the Kunsthhaus Museum in Zurich, Switzerland. Participants were recruited with the help of the following partners: Alzheimer Association Canton Zurich; the Sanatorium Kilchberg; Kunsthhaus Zurich; the commune of Horgen; and a nursing home that serves a middle class urban neighbourhood. Additional organisations, general practitioners, and the media were contacted to promote the intervention. A project description was handed out at several locations to assist in participant recruitment. Volunteers were recruited through an existing database of previous participants and supporters of the Center for Gerontology Zurich as well as information events organised by the study's partners. Before the study began, the intervention received ethics approval from the Ethics Commission at the University of Zurich and the Cantonal Ethics Commission Zurich. Participants were given an approved information sheet that described the study and signed a consent form.

The study inclusion criteria for PWDs were an understanding of

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