

TUE MAR 22 Mapping Perceptions

The MoMA Alzheimer's Project Summit

The afternoon session, **You Are Here: Engagement with Art**, took place in the galleries of The Museum of Modern Art. Over the course of the session participants reflected on teaching practice, framed through discussions around works from MoMA's collection. The conversations in the galleries with participants addressed some of the major elements of gallery teaching and art-looking and discussion with people with dementia and their caregivers. The conversations were rich and varied. Interestingly, certain topics seemed to be at the forefront of all participants' questions and preoccupations. These topics are presented here.

1. How effective are inquiry-based techniques and how does one layer the information? Overall, participants from various museums who have used inquiry-based methods in their gallery programs have found that this approach allows participants to engage with the educator, each other and the artwork. Educators must always be attuned to the needs of participants and make sure that they will have a positive experience. In essence, this approach is not so different than working with other groups. Adjustments that take into account the changing cognitive capacities of participants are necessary, but it is equally important to keep the conversation at a high level and be respectful of the contributions of participants.
2. Many of these strategies also work in settings other than museums, but with adaptations, of course. Since original artworks will be absent, projections or reproductions can be used. Also, even though elements of the museum experience can be lost, practitioners can also envision what can be gained for the care organization by incorporating quality art programs, and making the care organization a potential site for engagement with meaningful activities.
3. There were many conversations around approaches to standard components of a learning experience: how much information to provide, what works to look at, what to avoid, and how to layer the conversation, among others. Most participants agreed that the suggestions provided in the MoMA book, *Meet Me: Making Art Accessible to People with Dementia*, and on the website, MoMA.org/meetme, had worked very well, but questions and debates persisted around, specifically, the types of artworks one chooses to discuss. Overall, most agreed that there should not be any excessive inclination to exclude works, but that one should be cognizant of logistical issues that might negatively affect with participants' experience of the work. Further, one must always think well about the theme and the selected works in advance. Most also agreed that art

- historical and theoretical information should be included, and integrated within the flow of the discussion. This by definition means that every experience is different for the educator, and demands that they be very attuned to the particular dynamics of the group in question.
4. Everyone also agreed that digressions and personal narratives should be a part of the overall experience. One museum educator said: "Sometimes diverging from the artwork momentarily or as an intro is a spring board for something new and different and we should be open to that."
 5. One of the more poignant elements of conversations related to the training of docents and educators themselves. Richard Taylor brought up the point that part of the training is not only about the works, but teaching educators and docents around the country to be more open-minded. Continued training and understanding of both the specifics of Alzheimer's disease and the way it is represented and talked about in culture are important components of training programs.
 6. Given the variety of programs happening around the country (and the world) and the benefits of them all, the conversations in the galleries also pointed to how museums and programs should continue to create unique customized experiences based on their unique resources, philosophies and spaces, and to think about integrating social components, which many summit participants considered particularly successful (i.e. tea after a gallery program).

Overall, the conversations about art-looking and discussions that took place during **You Are Here: Engagement with Art** were very fruitful. The merits of creating programs with dementia were validated, and participants were involved in productive discussions about methodologies for facilitating experiences with artworks. We also agreed that any type of education program, be it in a museum or elsewhere, should be constantly revisited, with feedback coming from participants. It is an ongoing process that allows one to revise and improve upon practice. Just being in the galleries when no one was present was further proof of how the very ritual of visiting a museum and sharing in a personal and intellectual exchange with others is a powerful experience!