

Praising Ordinary Lives: Creativity and Quality of Life  
for Australian Elders

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## Certificate of Authorship

Except where clearly acknowledged in footnotes, quotations, and the bibliography, I certify that I am the sole author of the thesis submitted today entitled:

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I further certify that to the best of my knowledge the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

The material in the thesis has not been the basis for an award or any other degree or diploma except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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## Abstract

In contemporary Australian society Elders who live at home or in aged care residences are largely unnoticed, and their living contexts under-theorised. While it is true that aged care studies are increasingly pursued at universities, and the recent Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety has put the spotlight on the sector, there is still a lot to learn about how people in the last decades of their lives spend their waking hours.

This study uses grounded theory, operating within a practice-based framework, and draws on aspects of narratology and hermeneutics to contribute to cultural gerontology. In a field study comprising three experiments, in Canberra and Melbourne, the thesis asks: What role can personal creative practice play in the lives of Elders? What does creative engagement look like for Elders in aged care residences and people who live with dementia? How can creative care improve the quality of life for Elders in their final years?

The thesis is located within contemporary positive ageing movements: examining definitions and understandings of 'creative care' for application in aged care settings in Australia; showing how creative care contributes to a philosophy of creative ageing that can improve care practices for Elders; and providing a range of meaningful word-based socially constructed activities in the form of a practitioner's tool kit to cultivate the basic conditions for creative care. In this way the thesis presents a set of practical social vehicles with which aged care workers can deliver the quality, dignity and choice that is part of the human rights specifically afforded to Elders.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) is a keystone document; however the Australian Human Rights Commission promotes human rights for older Australians – see [https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/letstalkaboutrights/downloads/HRA\\_older.pdf](https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/letstalkaboutrights/downloads/HRA_older.pdf) – In the For discussion see <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/policy-positions/cross-cutting-issues/human-rights-policy-position-uk--aug-2018.pdf> and <https://ilcuk.org.uk/do-we-need-specific-human-rights-for-older-people-2/>

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## Introduction

Initial ideas for this thesis began when my father, a retired school principal, was diagnosed with dementia and died some eighteen months later. My family was spared the need to find supported accommodation for him, but I found myself interested in the kinds of activities that are engaging and interesting for people with dementia, and became curious about the quality of life of Australian Elders, particularly those living in aged care residences. As a musician I was able to volunteer at aged care homes to give small recitals, either solo or with my students. In a previous PhD thesis (Griffiths 2003), I had mapped the value of pleasure, participation in, and access to beautiful live music; and the positive responses of the Elders I was now playing for, and the gratitude of their carers, confirmed my previous research. At the same time, I was a practising secondary school English teacher, and through these two roles was becoming increasingly interested in the quality of communication among aged care residents, between these residents and their family members, among residents and staff, and among residents and people of younger generations. I wondered how words, creatively used, in playful social settings might enrich the quality of life for Elders living in aged care residences and Elders living with dementia. I wondered how music, integrated with words, stories, poems, painting, cutting and pasting, while listening, laughing, and asking questions might increase a sense of meaning and purpose and establish new identities for Elders living in aged care residences. I also wondered about the needs of workers in aged care residences and how playful, socially constructed creative activities for residents might enrich their own professional lives and relationships.

My research was approved by the Ethics Committee at the University of Canberra and no identifiable names are used. In Experiments 1 and 3, participants are referred to with pseudonyms. In Experiment 2 participants are referred to as Commonplace Book Writer 1, 2 and 3. Consent was gained from the participants themselves when feasible, and otherwise from residential home managers or carers.

My research began in Canberra at two aged care residences, but part way through the project, and shortly before COVID-19 struck, I moved to Melbourne. The pandemic profoundly affected my research design, forcing a good deal of rearrangement. In Australia, and

particularly in Melbourne, Elders in aged care homes were impacted severely, with many deaths. At the same time, the Australian government was conducting a Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, and together these two historic events put the aged care sector on the public agenda. The Commission has now released its *Report*, and the COVID-19 pandemic continues. Within this context, my original research design of a full field study located in aged care residences was amended to include a study of creative writing for Elders who were living independently at home. Initially, my working definition of an Elder consisted of residents aged over 65 in aged care homes, as the entirety of this project was to be conducted within aged care residences. However, when COVID-19 closed down aged care homes to anyone other than essential staff, I adapted my work to include an investigation of the use of commonplace books. The definition of Elder in this part of the thesis comprised people aged over 65 who expressed willingness to keep a commonplace book in response to calls for volunteers through a Facebook page and word of mouth.

Because I am limited to English myself and because most of the participants were also English speakers, the materials used in Experiments 1 and 3 were presented in English. It is important to note that the activities were centred around universal topics and themes like food, clothes, seasons, days of the week to ensure inclusivity. Non-verbal participants were able to pick-up objects, feel and smell them if they wished, and communicate with smiles, waving their hands, and their eyes.

Chapter 1 outlines the policy and academic contexts within which the research is located. It surveys how Australian Elders are conceived by governments, and as articulated in whole-of-society health frameworks. It identifies conceptions of old age in classic and contemporary literature, and outlines the research design: grounded theory, operating within a practice-based framework, and drawing on aspects of narratology and hermeneutics to contribute to cultural gerontology.

Chapter 2, the Canberra–Melbourne Imaginative Storytelling Project, reports an experimental study that explores the efficacy of joint storytelling for people who live with dementia, using the TimeSlips storytelling method devised by Anne Basting (2009). Chapter 3, the Commonplace Book Project, is a study of the role of 21<sup>st</sup>-century commonplace books written

by Elders living independently at home – a study designed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that prevented access to aged care homes for an in-person study. Chapter 4 reports on the Creative Workshops Project, a study of creative conversation-based workshops for residents in aged care homes, some of whom live with early or middle stages of dementia. Chapter 5, the conclusion, contains a new theory and philosophy of creative ageing<sup>2</sup> derived from findings across the three experimental studies.

Since this is a creative PhD, the thesis includes an extensive set of Appendices which constitutes the ‘creative artefact.’ Appendix 6, for example, is a toolkit of creative activities, drawn from the three creative experiments. Written primarily for use by Elders, family members, aged care workers, allied health workers, teachers and students, the purpose of the toolkit is to make word-based creative activities accessible to Elders and their carers. The toolkit includes materials needed, simple instructions for how to go about implementing the activities, and ways to exhibit and share the artefacts produced – since exhibiting and sharing are essential parts of the creative process.

Thus, the thesis finds that when a regular commitment to creative care activities becomes part of daily living for Elders in aged care residences, a new environment, a new atmosphere is created. Instead of quiet places of inactivity, Elders in aged care homes can reclaim the space to choose playful activities that restore and reinvigorate a sense of possibility, strength, poise, and meaningful interactions with others. Creative practitioners need to be a part of the allied health teams that provide support for Elders; creative practitioners can be coaches and mentors to other staff in aged care services. When all these things come together, a philosophy of creative ageing that enables Elders to feel artistic, active, and respected is enacted. As Cicero put it:

Those...who allege that old age is devoid of useful activity...are like those that would say the pilot does nothing in the sailing of [their] ship, because while others are climbing the masts or running about the gangways or working at the pumps, [they] sit quietly in the stern and simply holds the tiller. [They] may not be doing what younger members of the crew are doing but what [they] do is better and much more important. It is not by

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<sup>2</sup> The philosophy of creative ageing encompasses a set of particular attitudes about ageing that enables Elders to be better understood, by themselves and their carers, through the use of creative engagement in accessible socially constructed creative activities.

muscle, speed, or physical dexterity that great things are achieved but by reflection, force of character, and judgement.; in these qualities old age is usually not ... poorer but is even richer (Cicero 2016).

And as Anne Basting (2020) founder of the term 'creative care', puts it:

This is the great hope: that if enough people learn the techniques, creative care might be poured like water into care systems themselves and change the way we understand and deliver care (2020:133).

# 1

## Theorising aged care

In earlier days, I never used to worry about old people; I looked upon them as the dead whose legs kept moving. Now I see them – men and women: only a little older than myself... (Simone De Beauvoir)

### On Ageing

When you see me sitting quietly,  
Like a sack on the shelf,  
Don't think I need your chattering.  
I'm listening to myself.  
Hold! Stop! Don't pity me!  
Hold! Stop your sympathy!  
Understanding if you've got it,  
Otherwise I'll do without it!

When my bones are stiff and aching  
And my feet won't climb the stair,  
I will only ask one favour:  
Don't bring me no rocking chair.

When you see me walking, stumbling,  
Don't study and get it wrong.  
'Cause tired don't mean lazy  
And everybody ain't gone.  
I'm the same person I was back then,  
A little less hair, a little less chin,  
A lot less lungs and much less wind.  
But ain't I lucky I can still breathe in.

(Maya Angelou)

This chapter examines policy, literature, and theory to explore the conditions within which a group of largely invisible people live their final years – Australian Elders. World-wide, the main narratives and research about aged care and Alzheimer's Disease – the most common neurodegenerative disorder among the elderly – have been shaped by medico-scientific concepts and images (Zimmerman 2017:3). These studies have largely been conducted by researchers in laboratories, who may have little or no experience of what it is like to encounter and engage with someone living with the condition of Alzheimer's (ibid.). This is beginning to change with examples like Oxford University's *Lives and Medicine Project*, a data base of 10,000 stories (Oxford Centre for Life Writing 2021), but perhaps this change is not occurring quickly enough. In Australia, at least since 1997, narratives about aged care more generally have been framed by narrow, and arguably neglectful, governmental policies that

have produced conditions of hardship for many Elders (Older Person's Advocacy Network 2021), resulting in harsh violations of human rights (Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety 2021).

Part of the change in gerontological research methods is due to the disciplines of cultural gerontology (Twigg and Martin 2015) and health humanities (Crawford 2020), which have contributed a new emphasis on healthy ageing that is now part of the corpus of data and literature emerging from the field.<sup>3</sup> Explorations in these fields have intervened in the previous scientific tendency to objectify and commodify ageing, and have critiqued government policies that tend to reduce aged care to economic imperatives. In its *Decade of Health Ageing* plan, the World Health Organization (2020) outlines four areas for action: (1) changing how we think and feel towards age and ageing; (2) ensuring communities foster the abilities of older people; 3) delivering person-centered integrated care and primary health services to older people and (4) providing access to long term care for people who need it (ibid:4).

### Aged care and human rights

A challenge resulting from fast-paced ageing is that worldwide more than 50 million people currently live with dementia – twice the current population of Australia – and this number is expected to double every twenty years, with one new case of dementia being diagnosed every 3.2 seconds (Alzheimer's Disease International 2021). Understanding the lifestyles and enriching the quality of life for people living in aged care homes and people with dementia has become increasingly important. According to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 12.1), it is 'the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health'.<sup>4</sup> Ratified by Australia in 1972, this Article has been defined in practical terms for people receiving aged care as meaning four things: (1) having 'dignity and respect' – in other words, to be valued as a person and an individual is a human right; (2) having control and choice – in other words, having self-

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<sup>3</sup> For example, see World Health Organization (2020) *Decade of health aging: Plan of action*, [www.who.int](http://www.who.int) and World Health Organisation (2021) Ageing and health, [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)

<sup>4</sup> See the Australian Human Rights Commission <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/commission-general/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights-human-rights>; and United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>

determination and autonomy that provide control and choice over our own lives is a human right; (3) having relationships with and connections to communities – in other words, whether living at home or in residential care, it is a human right to remain engaged, valued and socially connected; and (4) having a good quality of life and being able to age at home. These rights are often central to a person’s sense of identity and independence, and while quality of life over the life course may change in context, it should not diminish with age. In Australia, these universal principles and human rights form the context for organisational reform to services delivered to residential aged care consumers, and to the improvement of clinical/health literacies, and the enrichment of lifestyles. On 1 July 2019, a single Charter of Aged Care Rights (the Charter) came into effect, providing the same rights to all consumers, regardless of the type of subsidised care and services they receive.<sup>5</sup>

Within this context of human rights, interest in achieving and maintaining good health in the later years has increased, and for some time now three things have been needed: better explanations of ageing, greater understanding of common health conditions associated with ageing, and more awareness of factors that contribute to healthy ageing. Since 2015 it has been known that there is little evidence that increasing longevity is accompanied by extended periods of good health (World Health Organization 2015). If our later years are dominated by decreases in physical or mental capacity, the implications for older people and for society can be negative. This increased awareness of human rights for Elders has brought about the introduction of the Aged Care Quality Standards, a set of compliance measures for aged care service providers in Australia.

### Aged Care Quality Standards

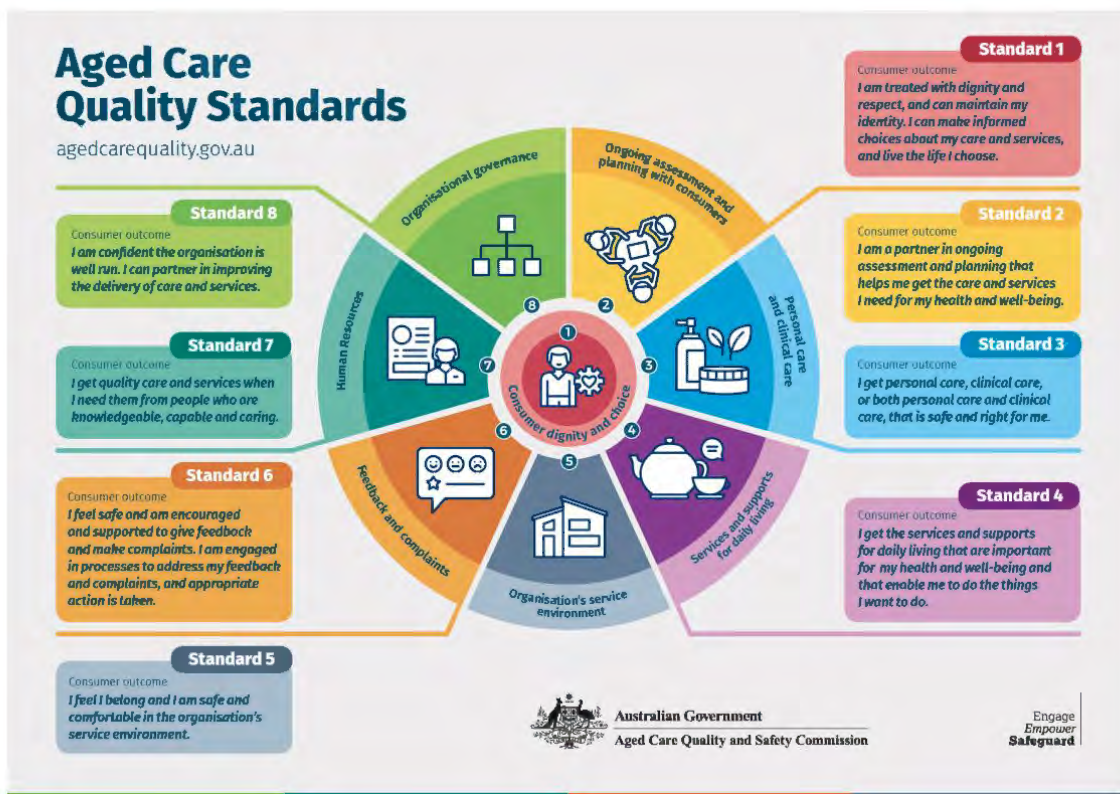
In an attempt to raise standards of care, the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission introduced these Standards in 2019 to provide a single set of measures to assess all aged care services. Interim evaluation of the Standards has been conducted by the Australian National University’s Social Research Centre, entitled *Aged Care Quality Standards Interim Evaluation Client Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission* (<https://www.srcentre.com.au/our-research/aged-care-quality-standards-interim-evaluation>) and the Australian government is

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<sup>5</sup> For a copy of the Charter see <https://www.agedcarequality.gov.au/consumers/consumer-rights>

currently conducting another review to assess: effectiveness of the clarity of wording in the Standards; the relevance of each Standard to each aged care program; whether the standards are achievable or measurable; the impact the Standards are having on consumers, providers and other key stakeholders; and contextual factors that have impacted the implementation of the Standards (Australian Government Department of Health 2021). Interestingly, there is no explicit mention of creative activity in these eight Standards, even though creativity can be used to explicitly achieve, reach, or enact them. This study aims to explore how creativity might be used to address these standards.

Figure 1: Aged Care Quality Standards



## Governance

Within the context of awareness of human rights for Elders is the need for close scrutiny of the governance of aged care service providers. In Australia, governance is variously the responsibility of the federal government, state governments and internal boards of governance in individual aged care residences. More people are now entering aged care services; and during 2019–2020, across Australia, over one million people received support



from aged care services (Department of Health 2020). On 30 June 2020, there were 335,889 consumers of residential aged care: permanent or respite (189,954), home care (142,436) or transition care (3,499). In addition, around 840,000 people used the Commonwealth Home Support Programme (home support). To put this in context, of Australians aged 65 and over in 2019–2020, seven per cent accessed residential aged care; 22% accessed some form of support or care at home; and 71% lived at home without accessing government-subsidised aged care services. In 2020 in Victoria, the state in which this thesis is being written, there were 612 aged care homes, including 284 not-for-profit and 328 private for-profit facilities. In addition, there were 156 public residential aged care homes and aged care wards, totalling 5,609 beds (Parliament of Victoria 2021).

In Australia in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic the number of people admitted to permanent residential aged care declined, with nearly 5,300 fewer admissions than in 2019 or 2018, and around 11,000 fewer admissions to respite residential care (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2021). However, despite this COVID-related slump, overall, the sector continues to grow.<sup>6</sup> Aged care is one of Australia’s largest service industries and comprises 366,000 paid workers and 68,000 volunteers (84%:16%).<sup>7</sup> Of this 84%, 240,000 (66%) are in direct care roles. In 2016 the number of registered nurses in the aged care sector had dropped from 21% of the direct care workforce in 2003 to around 15%. Enrolled nurses dropped from 13% to 10%. Over the same period the proportion of the residential direct care workforce who were personal carers increased from around 58% to 70%. This workforce is ‘understaffed...underpaid and undertrained’ (ibid:16).

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, more than 3,300 aged care providers deliver care through nearly 9,000 services outlets. The sector comprises private (for-profit) providers alongside community-based and charitable providers, and state and territory and local government providers. The mix of ownership type varies across programs, with the largest proportion of for-profit services in the residential care program (41% of residential aged care places are managed by for-profit providers). Collectively, these services support the care needs of more than 1.2 million people at a total cost to governments of

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<sup>6</sup> See page 3, Aged Care Royal Commission Final Report Summary, 2021

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

\$18.4 billion. Consumers are also being asked to contribute to the cost of care. In residential aged care, for example, the cost to governments in 2016–17 was \$12.1 billion, with residents contributing a further \$4.7 billion:

The aged care sector is set to expand to match the growing older Australian population. This means providing 125 places or packages (in residential care, home care and restorative care) per 1,000 people aged 70 or older in 2021–22. Although most of these places are allocated to the residential care segment, the home care segment is growing rapidly, reflecting consumers' expressed preference for remaining at home for as long as possible. (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2021)

Within this statistical context, the *Final Report* of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety has spawned wide-ranging discourse about aged care reform. The *Report* not only provides a fuller picture of the aged care sector than was previously generally known but recommends a whole-of-system approach to reform and redesign. The Report states that aged care in Australia is plagued with 'systemic problems' and is a 'gloomy' picture of a sector that is 'overwhelmed, underfunded or out of [its] depth' (Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety 2021:18). It is a sector that has often been treated by the Australian Government as a 'lower order priority' (ibid:14) with 'little active management or shaping of the market for aged care services' being undertaken (ibid). In addition, there is often poor governance by Boards of aged care organisations and this lack of accountability and clinical knowledge, together with poor workplace cultures, impacts directly on the quality of care that is delivered. Furthermore, the aged care system in Australia is largely reactive: 'It does not sufficiently recognise the importance of proactively supporting older people's social and emotional well-being' (ibid:16). And there is no doubt the Commission's findings mirror concerns held more generally in the wider community. For example, in a paper authorised by the Commission, entitled 'Australia's Aged Care System: The Quality-of-Care Experience and Community Expectations', Ratcliffe *et al.* (2020) report a bleak picture of the aged care system and the quality of the care experience and community expectations. Their paper summarises baseline data from a large-scale national general public survey of Australians, along with two surveys of older people receiving home care or residential care in Australia, and reports that the state of aged care in Australia is undeniably alarming. The general public survey found that the vast majority of Australians see aged care as a vital social service, with the provision of quality care as either very important or important. By far the majority felt that the aged

care system needs reform if it is to become a high-quality system; and to that end they were willing to fund the substantial costs of delivering high quality care for all Australians (ibid:21). From the perspective of aged care recipients, 'only 24% of people receiving residential aged care and only 20% of people in home care felt their care needs were always met across all quality-of-care experience attributes.' Regardless of contestable notions of what constitutes conceptions of 'satisfactory', 'high' and 'very high' measures, the data nevertheless shows that if 'satisfactory' care is understood as care that mostly meets the needs of recipients then only 58% of residential care recipients and 50% of home care recipients report that the current system 'mostly meets people needs' (ibid). These statistics may change as the Australian federal government, in its 2021 May Budget, increased the level of funding for aged care to \$17.7 billion dollars (Australian Government Department of Health 2021).

A system of 'systemic weakness', best describes the residential aged care sector of Australia, with these weaknesses clearly apparent in three areas: clinical governance; leadership and culture; and a lack of listening to the voice of the consumer. The first, clinical governance, is defined as:

An integrated set of leadership behaviours, policies, procedures, responsibilities, relationships, planning, monitoring, and improvement mechanisms that are implemented to support safe, quality clinical care and good clinical outcomes for each aged care consumer. (*Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, Final Report*)

Just as essential as financial governance, clinical governance requires board members of residential aged care organisations to have sufficient depth of understanding to oversee an effective clinical governance framework. To improve their clinical knowledge, governors, directors, and senior managers need to identify areas of weakness and undertake professional development and training. Related to the need to improve clinical governance is a second systemic weakness to do with 'leadership and culture' in Boards of aged care homes. *The Report* notes that current leadership culture of most Boards does not have a sufficient working knowledge of person-centred care. In other words, Boards are not 'listening to the voice of the consumer' and this leads to the third area of systemic weakness. According to *The Report*, boards of governors are not currently considering the importance of understanding the consumer experience and the quality and safety risk; and it recommends that governors use metrics, data and trend analysis, planned visits to operations and meetings with clients and families, and customer feedback to better understand whether their

organisation is meeting its consumers' needs, and continuously improving. At the same time, it recommends that consumers be proactively involved in the design of their own care to achieve the lifestyle outcomes they are seeking and to which they are entitled, rather than be passive 'clients' in a system which overmanages and medicalises ageing with a deleterious impact on the consumer's lifestyle. As a result of the Commission's recommendations, governors of aged care providers must now ask themselves:

What is [our] organisational approach for ensuring and documenting quality and safe care for [our] consumers? Are quality and safety metrics defined and monitored with the same rigour as financial measures of success? Does the sub-committee structure provide focus on clinical governance and quality and safety risks? Does the culture in [our] organisation put consumer care and safety first, and how is this evident? Are effective systems in place for the reporting of incidents, or 'bad news' to reach managers, directors and governors quickly, including a well-understood whistleblowing policy? (Australian Institute of Company Directors 2021)

Thus, in public policy at least, three areas of systemic weakness exist in the governance of aged care residences across all levels. These are: a lack of knowledge and understanding of good clinical governance; inadequate leadership and cultural knowledge at Board level; and inadequate listening to the voice of the consumer. These assertions in the Royal Commission's *Summary of the Report* (Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety 2021) are important starting points for improving the quality of life for Elders. The criticisms also explain why many Elders in aged care homes spend long days and nights in a kind of perpetual vacuity: clean, physically safe, and well fed but with little attention paid or priority given to creative activities or to extended social interaction for wellbeing and quality of life.

### Whole-of-society clinical and health literacy

Alongside findings of the Royal Commission's investigation into safety and quality of life for Australian Elders is a widespread lack of knowledge of clinical and health literacy at a societal level. The terms *clinical literacy* and *health literacy* are often used interchangeably, but there are some differences. Anusha Kanagala and Krishna Priya (2019) define clinical literacy as:

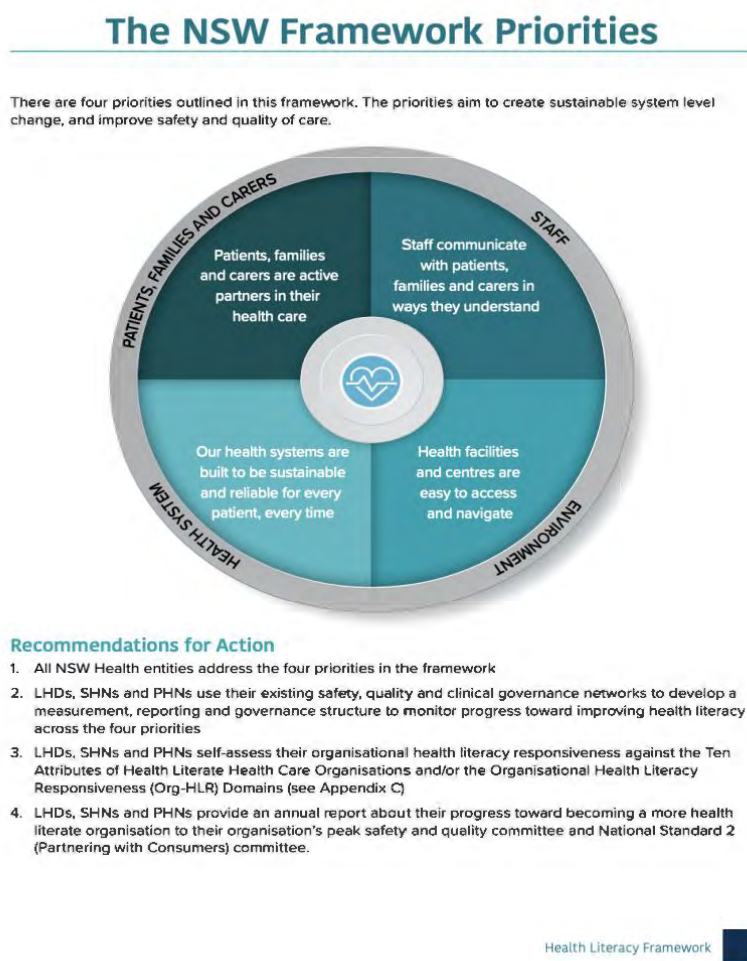
the application of knowledge relating to the observation and treatment of actual patients rather than a knowledge of theory and statistics only... a state of literacy, where one can understand or have knowledge on their disease or any others' diseases/disorders and their control. And clinical literacy management is the ability to create awareness among people of patients, diseases/disorders and treatment. (Kanagala and Priya 2019: 447)

On its webpage, *Supportive resources on health literacy*, The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (2015a) defines health literacy slightly differently, as comprising two parts: individual health literacy which consists of the skills and abilities that an individual has in order to act on health information, make health decisions and use health services (ibid:3), and ‘the health literacy environment which includes the things that help us make our health decisions and the way that health care is delivered’ (ibid: 3). According to *Health Literacy – a Summary for Consumers* (ACSQHC 2015b), ‘only about 40% of adults have the level of individual health literacy they need to make well informed decisions and take action about their health’ (ibid).

In Australia, state-based jurisdictions have their own definitions of clinical and health literacy. For example, the NSW government’s Clinical Excellence Commission has developed a Health Literacy Framework (2019–2024) with four priorities, around (1) ‘patients, families and carers, (2) staff, (3) health systems, and (4) environments.’ These priorities are an attempt to create ‘active partnerships between patients (aged care residents) and their carers; better communication between staff the people they care for, and sustainable reliable systems of care that guarantee quality standards for every patient or aged care resident, and easier access and navigation of health care systems’ (Clinical Excellence Commission 2019).

The Health Literacy Framework (see below) is an example of a practical tool developed by government that aims to facilitate better health literacy, ‘enabling patients, families and carers to understand and manage their health, improve their quality of life and reduce the impact of disease’ (ibid:8). If this Framework is used effectively then patients, their families and carers may be more included as active partners in discussions and decisions about their health care. Staff may become better at communicating with patients, their families, and carers in ways they understand. Health centres and facilities may become places that are easy to access and navigate, and health systems may become ‘sustainable and reliable for every patient, every time’ (ibid:10). Given that the Framework is designed to provide ‘safer care, for every patient, every time’ (ibid:1) across the delivery of all health services and systems, it is an important reference document for all users, including providers of aged care services.

Figure 2:<sup>8</sup> The Clinical Excellence Commission’s Health Literacy Framework



## Quality of life

A good knowledge of clinical and health literacy can facilitate a better quality of life, and measures for improvement in this area are an important priority for systems of aged care currently under the microscope. In Australia, the *Aged Care Amendment (Security and Protection) Act 2007*,<sup>9</sup> and the Department of Health, Ageing and Aged Care’s *Aged Care Principles*<sup>10</sup> provide the obligations and responsibilities that approved providers must deliver (p5). A new Aged Care Act is expected to pass Parliament in 2023.<sup>11</sup> In the mean-time the 2019 *Aged Care Quality Standards*<sup>12</sup> guide professional practice in residential aged care

<sup>8</sup> NSW Health Literacy Framework – A guide to action; <https://www.cec.health.nsw.gov.au/improve-quality/teamwork-culture-pcc/person-centred-care/health-literacy>

<sup>9</sup> See Aged Care Amendment ( Security and Protection 2007) [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Bills\\_Legislation/Bills\\_Search\\_Results/Result?bld=r2706#:~:text=Amends%20the%20Aged%20Care%20Act,the%20existing%20Commissioner%20for%20Complaint%20Depts.](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bld=r2706#:~:text=Amends%20the%20Aged%20Care%20Act,the%20existing%20Commissioner%20for%20Complaint%20Depts.)

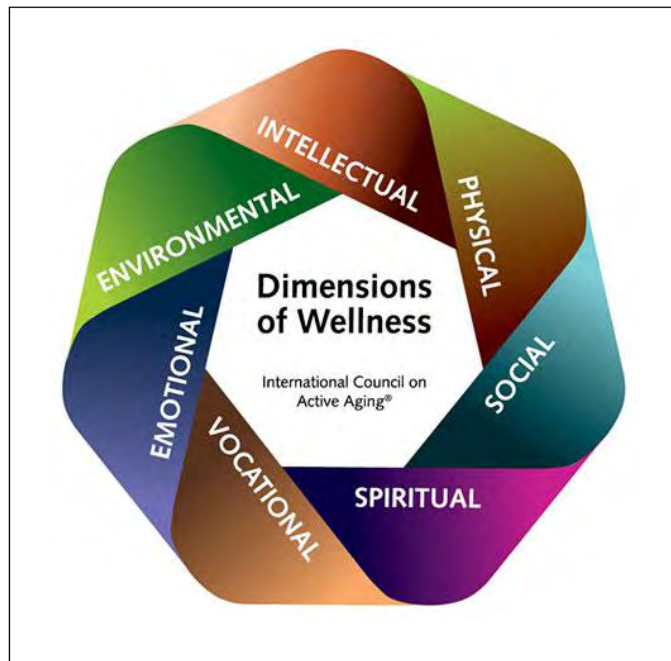
<sup>10</sup> <https://ablis.business.gov.au/service/ag/aged-care-principles/35186>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.health.gov.au/ministers/the-hon-greg-hunt-mp/media/first-legislation-in-response-to-the-aged-care-royal-commission>

<sup>12</sup> See page 11 of this chapter and <https://www.agedcarequality.gov.au/providers/standards>

programs through the following concepts: (1) Consumer dignity and choice; (2) Ongoing assessment and planning with consumers; (3) Personal care and clinical care; (4) Services and supports for daily living; (5) Organisation’s service environment; (6) Feedback and complaints; (7) Human resources; and (8) Organisational governance (see Figure 1). Interestingly, in both the Health Literacy Framework (Figure 2) and the Dimensions of Wellness paradigm (Figure 3), with its seven areas of physical, social, spiritual, vocational, emotional, environmental, and intellectual wellness, there is no explicit mention of creative activity even though creativity is connected to and forms a part of many, if not all, of these outcomes. This study aims to show how creativity can address these issues.

Figure 3: Dimensions of wellness that contribute to quality of life  
Source: <https://www.icaa.cc/activeagingandwellness/wellness.html>



### Allied Health

Allied health professionals can be defined as professionals who are not part of the medical, dental, or nursing professions. They are tertiary qualified practitioners with specialised expertise in preventing, identifying, and treating a range of conditions and illnesses. Allied health practitioners often work within a multidisciplinary health team to provide specialised

support for different patient needs.<sup>13</sup> This category of provider includes creative practitioners, and art therapists. Organisations like the Creative Art Therapy Australia (CATA)<sup>14</sup> and associated registration bodies such as the Australian New Zealand Creative Therapists (ANZCATA)<sup>15</sup> are important groups who oversee the delivery of services that can improve the quality of life for Australian Elders.

The work of creative practitioners and arts therapists is highly effective, yet as a professional group they are often under-represented members of the allied health workers in aged care residences. In 2018–2019 only two per cent of Home Care Package funding was spent on Allied Health (Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety 2021:6). While 29% of Home Care Package recipients received services categorised as allied health and therapy services, more than half of these people received fewer than five allied health services per year. In residential aged care, the findings are similar. The Report states, ‘Allied health care in residential aged care is also insufficient and we are concerned that the type of service provided may be influenced by funding arrangements’ (ibid:6). Ironically, allied health services are known to boost the quality of life for Elders in Australia, yet the evidence for this is not always appreciated.<sup>16</sup>

In terms of Allied Health, residential aged care providers ‘often fail to deliver, facilitate, or coordinate to meet the complex care needs of residents... [particularly in areas to do with] dementia, challenging behaviours, mental health, and palliative care’ (ibid: 9). To feel connected and mentally stimulated is an essential part of daily living. Routine daily care for elders, should ‘enhance a person’s health and wellbeing and avoid reasonably preventable harm’ (ibid). The Commission found ‘many examples of substandard care in providing for the most basic human needs, such as diet and nutrition, oral health, skin care, mobility,

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<sup>13</sup> Allied health disciplines include arts therapy, audiology, chiropractic, dietetics, exercise physiology, genetic counselling, medical radiations, music therapy, occupational therapy, orthoptics, orthotics/prosthetics, osteopathy, perfusion, physiotherapy, podiatry, psychology, rehabilitation counselling, social work, sonography, speech pathology (AHPA <https://ahpa.com.au/what-is-allied-health/>).

<sup>14</sup> See [www.cata.org.au](http://www.cata.org.au)

<sup>15</sup> See <https://www.anzacata.org/>

<sup>16</sup> See for example a July 2018 study by Mitchell Sarkies, Jennifer White, Kate Henderson, Romi Haas, and John Bowles entitled “Additional weekend allied health services reduce length of stay in subacute rehabilitation wards, but their effectiveness and cost-effectiveness are unclear in acute general medical and surgical hospital wards: a systematic review”, in *Journal of Physiotherapy*, Vol 64, 3, 147–158. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jphys.2018.05.004>



medication and prescription management, continence and incontinence, infection control, social and emotional needs and diversity and cultural needs' (ibid).

From this brief survey of key themes emerging from governance and public policy, I turn now to a different knowledge framework to consider other concepts and definitions of old age: what is found in classic and contemporary literature.

### Concepts of old age in classic and contemporary literature

For creative practitioners working with Elders, literary texts are good places to uncover understandings of the experience of being an Elder. In 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1946), poet and critic T.S. Eliot writes that 'direct knowledge of life, that is knowledge directly in relation to ourselves, is [also] our knowledge of what [we know of] life in general... [It is] that part of life in which we ourselves have participated, that gives us material for generalization'. Eliot also asserts that 'to each individual the world will take on a different connotation of meaning – the importance lies in the desire to search for an answer' (ibid). This kind of individual knowledge and appreciation of ourselves and our lived-in worlds that Eliot describes is precisely what this thesis aims to explore among the participants involved in three creative experiments.

The concept of individuals' knowledge of ourselves and what we know of the world is evident in the work of other writers who have described their personal understandings and experiences of ageing. In her book, *A Writer's Commonplace Book*, writer Rosemary Freidman quotes Germaine Greer who said of aging that it is the 'quality of daily life that matters, the taste of the food on the table, the light in the room, the peace and wholeness of the moment' (Friedman 2010). Irish poet John O'Donohue says old age can be a time of 'gracious harvesting', when worry and anxiety are 'transfigured'; when there is 'passion to heal what hurts'; and when there is 'a wonderful love/ In yourself for yourself' (O'Donohue 2008: 71). In his memoir, Melbourne academic Ian Hansen describes the period of ageing as comprising three stages of old age: young-old; old; and old-old (2018). For Hansen, it is the final stage, old-old age, people living in their 80s and 90s and beyond, that has been neglected by researchers. Hanson describes 'old-old age as a time of extremities'. In listing some characteristics of old-old age he claims that, rather than just a time of always feeling

disappointed, lonely and weak, old-old age can also be a time of feeling vital, astonishingly strong (Hansen 2018:10) and deeply honest.

In another memoir, written two millennia before Hansen's, the famous Roman orator Cicero makes ten points about ageing well. First, he writes, the qualities we need for a good old age must be cultivated early, indeed right from the beginning. Second, old age can be enjoyable if we have strong internal resources; and third, there are seasons of life, just as there are seasons of weather – particular activities are enjoyed at different times. Fourth, older people have genuine wisdom that can only be obtained through experience, and it is important to share this with younger people – and in turn younger people can share their lively company with elders. Fifth, old age can be active but with limitations; sixth, in old age the mind is a muscle that must be exercised. Seventh, older people must defend themselves, 'maintain [their] rights, submit to no-one, rule over their domain until [their] last breath.' Eighth, the reduction of sensual appetites that occurs in old age is not all bad, because it gives us room to enjoy other aspects of life that are more satisfying and lasting. Ninth, a worthwhile activity in our later years is essential for happiness; and tenth, death is not to be feared; it is like a good actor who knows when to leave the stage: 'To cling desperately to one's life when it has been lived well and is drawing to a close is both futile and foolish' (xvi). Overall Cicero tries to:

...follow nature as the best guide and obey her like a god. Since she has carefully planned the other parts of the drama of life, it's unlikely that she would be a bad playwright and neglect the final act. And this last act must take place as surely as the fruits of trees and the earth must someday wither and fall (Cicero 2016: 13).<sup>17</sup>

Cicero was not the first to write about old age; Greek authors had been writing about the last phase of life in various ways, for example describing characters such as Homer's King Nestor as 'enlightened bearers of wisdom'. However, what Cicero's account most importantly offers those of us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a broad portrait of old age as an opportunity for growth and completeness at the end of a life well lived. For Cicero, writing his way through old age gave him solace; a chance to explore a broader view of ageing than

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<sup>17</sup> The metaphor of ageing as a dramatic play, and life stages as the acts within this play is used repeatedly down the centuries, from Cicero to Shakespeare to gender equality versions such as 'All the world's her stage' <https://stella.org.au/a-rebellion/all-the-worlds-her-stage/>

had his contemporaries, who either idealised the elderly as enlightened bearers of wisdom or caricatured them as tiresome and complaining (Freeman in Cicero 2016: x).

Like Cicero, American neurologist Oliver Sacks continued to write and publish his thoughts about ageing up until his death. In his essay *Gratitude*, Sacks' final lines are:

And now, weak, short of breath, my once firm muscles melted away by cancer, I find my thoughts increasingly not on the supernatural or spiritual but on what is meant by living a good and worthwhile life – achieving a sense of peace within oneself. I find my thoughts drifting to the Sabbath, the day of rest, the seventh day of the week and perhaps the seventh day of one's life as well, when one can feel that one's work is done, and one may in good conscience, rest. (2015:45)

Another positive account is offered in Héctor García and Francesc Miralles' *Ikigai*, which examines the Japanese proverb that 'only staying active will make you want to live a hundred years.' The term 'ikigai' translates as 'the happiness of always being busy' (2017: 2) and their study explores Japanese philosophy as it is lived in Okinawa, an island with the most centenarians in the world, and a region that holds first place in the world's five 'blue zones' – geographic regions of the world where people live the longest.<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, in the Japanese language there is no word for 'retire.' Two concepts from *Ikigai* are particularly useful. First is the idea of microflow, the ability to enjoy and appreciate details and small things (Garcia and Miralles 2017: 81). A term coined by American psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1998), microflow is the ability to turn routine tasks into things we enjoy; in other words, it is the ability to find satisfaction in ordinary events. Second is the idea of wabi sabi, a concept that explores the idea that 'beauty is found in the fleeting, the changeable and imperfect nature of the world around us' (ibid: 172).

While there is no shortage of memorable literary figures who have written personally about their experience of ageing, not all accounts are positive. One of the oldest accounts is by Sappho, the sixth-century BCE poet who writes:

...my skin once soft is wrinkled now,  
...my hair once black has turned to white.  
My heart has become heavy, my knees  
that once danced nimbly like fawns cannot  
carry me.  
How often I lament these things – but what can be done?  
No one who is human can escape old age.  
(in Cicero 2016: x)

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<sup>18</sup> The others, in order of people with longevity, are Sardinia in Italy, Loma Linda in California, The Nicoya Peninsula in Costa Rica, and Ikaria in Greece (Garcia and Miralles 2017: 13).

Indeed, ageing is often depicted as a time of tedium and of mourning lost youth. In her essay 'The Diminished Thing', writer Ursula Le Guin reflects on old age as a time of living under the threat of the lessening of strength and stamina: 'childhood is when you keep gaining, old age is when you keep losing' (2017: 16). Le Guin's essay takes its name from a question by an ovenbird in a Robert Frost poem: 'What to make of a diminished thing?' and shows that 'just coping with daily life, doing stuff that was always so easy you didn't notice it, gets harder in old age, till it may take real courage to do it at all ... [and it] generally involves pain and danger and inevitably ends in death' (ibid: 15). Le Guin notes that facing this situation requires courage; and courage is deserving of respect.

For essayist Jean Amery, it is the ambiguity of ageing that concerns him. Amery claims that as we age, we can become strangers to ourselves: our sense of time crowds in on us, and 'we think about time all the time' (1994). It can be harder to recognise our face in a mirror, our feelings for the natural world can 'cool off', and we tend no longer to feel aligned with new developments in technology, art, politics, and fashion, all in a sort of relentless weariness. For Amery, being old means being 'constantly in the clutches of the ambiguity of alienation from and familiarity with, ourselves, of self-weariness and self-seeking' and 'punishment from the gods' (ibid). Amery goes so far as to call ageing a kind of incurable sickness, involving acute hardship that afflicts us at a particular stage of life. He writes:

Alienation from oneself becomes alienation from being, no matter how faithfully we attend to the day, fill out our tax declaration, go to the dentist...day and night cancel each other out...we each discover that one is only what one is...the world no longer concedes us credit for our future...what we *could* be...

For Romanian poet Nina Cassian (2010), ageing brings about regret:

What I regret  
...never having heard the voice of the Dodo bird...  
...never having smelled the Japanese Cherry trees...  
...never having punished the lovers and friends that deserted me...  
...never having asked for honours that I deserved...  
...never having composed a Mozart sonata...  
...never having realized that I'd live long enough to regret all of the above...  
...and much more...

This survey of varied conceptions of old age and the social worlds of ageing by writers of classic and contemporary literature reveals that ageing is an individual experience that can be approached as a kind of artform in itself, and while it may be true that 'living has yet to be generally recognized as one of the arts,' it is also true that, as with any artform or practice,

genius-level mastery is only accomplished through hours upon hours of deliberate practice.<sup>19</sup> Personal depictions of old age from literary masters show that when the ‘deliberate practice’ of ageing well is cultivated early, it provides strong internal personal resources such as microflow,<sup>20</sup> and an appreciation of small details of the beauty of ordinary moments and objects. But being an Elder is not easy: for some, old age is a time to be embraced and appreciated, at least partially, whereas for others it is a time of lament and difficulty. What is certain however is that depictions of old age by literary authors offer definitions of ageing that value the role of creativity in daily lives of Elders.

### Theory and methodology

For a 21<sup>st</sup>-century researcher in the humanities there are many ways to conduct a study of the relationship between creative activities and the quality of life of Elders in aged care residences and Elders who live with dementia. This study uses grounded theory within a practice-based framework, and draws on aspects of narratology and hermeneutics to contribute to cultural gerontology. A combination of creative practice with grounded theory is used to investigate a range of narratologically-based creative activities – both individual and collective – as a means of enhancing quality of life. The creative artefacts produced in the studies are interpreted using hermeneutics and the project itself is an example of research conducted in the academic field of cultural gerontology. It is now necessary to introduce these academic approaches, identifying the elements within them that inform the thesis.

### Creative practice

Creative practice research reflects a changing relationship between the arts and the wider society, and has been the focus of an increasing number of scholarly discourses over the last twenty or so years. Initially regarded as a realm of ‘unconventional forms of knowing,’ it has become more clearly defined as having a ‘legitimate right...to rethink and replay the history of ideas’ (Michelkevicus 2018: 10). It is a term often applied to the professional academic practice of artists, in which the work of the artist is central to the research design of a project. While this can be the case for artists who do not necessarily identify themselves as

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<sup>19</sup> See Maria Popova’s essay on Karl De Schweintiz’s 1924 treatise, *The Art of Helping People Out of Trouble*

<sup>20</sup> See Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1999) *Flow*, London: Rider.

researchers, for creative practitioners it is the applied investigation and a curiosity about the 'ordinary' which generates creative thinking, and particular modes of analysis and interpretation. Increasingly artists and creative practitioners are interested in finding art in ordinary situations, settings, and experiences:

As an artist...the poet's soul has to go where the human action is and ... that always means a descent from the heights, because love, whether for one person or for humanity - is of the valley.

-Margaret Atwood (2002: 74)

Henry David Thoreau's metaphor of building a woodshed is also apt:

The [young writer] gets his materials together to build a bridge to the moon or perchance a palace or temple on the earth, and at length, the middle-aged [writer] concludes to build a *woodshed* with them. (Thoreau, in Dillard 1989: 5; my italics)

In similar ways, creative practice is driven by a sense of innovation and exploration, and imagines a different order of things, delivering original investigations in and through creative processes. As Henk Borgdorff and Michiel Schuijjer (2010) put it, practice-based researchers 'employ experimental and hermeneutical methods that reveal and articulate the tacit knowledge that is situated and embodied in ... [creative] processes'. For Biggs and Karlsson (2012), practice-based research: makes 'order out of disorder' and allows for the explicit inclusion of research communities; acknowledges that participants are central to the research; and that the wider public is an interactive recipient and partner in the project. Furthermore, practice-based research acknowledges the professional expertise of the practitioner, which is often unique to the individual and embedded in tacit understandings.

The tacit knowledge of the practitioner arises from sources that are often unique to the individual and embedded in tacit understandings that require explicit externalization; these understandings evolve over time as part of the practitioner's everyday creative process. (Candy and Edmonds 2011: 126). Jeri Kroll (2013) describes the work of a creative practice-based researcher this way:

[Writers] exploit a variety of methodologies, underpin them by one or more grounding theories, and produce a range of outcomes. How they make those choices is determined by their desired goals (Kroll 2013:116).

While creative practise by itself is not necessarily research, it becomes research when it meets the criteria that there be: specific research questions; specific methods for answering the questions; and a specific context within which the research is carried out (Mäkelä 2011: 3).

While praxis is the central focus and driving force, there can also be ‘pure artistic periods’ during which theory is not able to dilute the process (ibid: 4).

The generation of artefacts is integral to creative practice-based research, and the existence *and* interpretation of the context for the production of these artefacts can bring about new verifiable, sharable, and contestable knowledge. Indeed, the making of the artefacts themselves is a significant part of the research methodology (Candy and Edmonds 2018) and is designed within the research context. To meet these aims, a creative practitioner systematically explores and reflects upon possible paths, processes of creation and exhibition, and structures as an integral part of the practice (ibid).

In this thesis the artefacts are original works produced by participants, and disseminated in small exhibitions within the particular physical, social, and cultural contexts and settings of Elders in aged care residences. While the artefacts in themselves are a form of knowledge, they still need to be ‘interpreted’. The embodied knowledge of an artefact is not apparent until it has been interpreted. And this interpretation must happen within a context, usually in the form of a critical exegesis that shows how the artefact advances knowledge, understanding and insight (Biggs and Karlsson 2012). The artist is best placed to make this interpretation as they are situated within the praxis as a ‘reflective practitioner’ (Scrivener and Zheng 2012; Mäkelä 2006), and focussed on the nature and origin of knowledge (epistemology) that is tied to the practice. In other words, the creative practitioner investigates the ‘ways of knowing’ that can be found in the artefacts of artistic practise. This is usually done retrospectively, or as perspectives emerge during the production process, gained from praxis.<sup>21</sup>

Another aspect of creative practice-based research is that it is ‘participatory.’ Participatory research is the ‘systematic enquiry, with the collaboration of those affected by the issue under study, for the purpose of education and taking action or effecting social change’ (Green 1995). According to Berge, Mendenhall and Doherty (2009), community-based participatory research (CMPR) is ‘an action research approach that emphasizes collaborative partnerships

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<sup>21</sup> The participants, in the main, are not equipped to produce the interpretation; but as researcher and co-creator I am able to perform this function.

between community members, community organisations, health care providers and researchers to generate knowledge and solve local problems.’ It is a research approach that is valued for its capacity to directly engage the community; and ‘community engagement’ has become a major part of health care practice and policy, and disciplines such as health humanities, during the past ten years.

A final element of this research approach is that it includes a ‘focus on issues, concerns and interests that are explored and manifested through the production of creative artefacts’ (ibid). In other words, in practice-based research the magic is in the handling (Bolt 2007). Thus, the ‘making’ or doing of something is not only the driving force behind the research; it is also the place where ideas are created, and knowledge and understanding enriched. In this way, it is the ‘process of making’, and the resulting artefacts, which form the body of knowledge. We learn to know through making, and the role of the artefact is critical and pivotal in the process of producing knowledge. The main feature of practice-based research is to create artefacts and present them as part of the ‘answer’ to research questions posed at the outset (Biggs and Karlsson 2012). In this way, artefacts are not simply used as evidence but are integral to the research process as arguments; they can embody the answer to the research question. Or, as Jen Webb puts it, an imperative aim should be ‘to make creative practice *and* produce research’ (2015: 109).

### Grounded theory

If creative practice-based research is suitable for a study of creative engagement and activity of Australian Elders, then so too is grounded theory. Grounded theory ‘begins with inductive data, invokes iterative strategies of going back and forth between data and analysis, uses comparative methods and keeps [me as researcher] interacting and involved with [the] data and emerging analysis’ (Charmaz 2014: 1). Grounded theorists ‘come to their projects with open minds to what is happening, so that they can learn about the worlds and people they are studying’ (ibid:3). Four principles from Glaser and Strauss’ grounded theory are used in this thesis: first, to have minimal pre-conceptions about the issue under study; second, to



engage in simultaneous data collection and analysis; third, to use various interpretations of the data for analysis; and fourth, to construct middle-range theories from the data.<sup>22</sup>

Grounded theory aims to develop a broad theory of explanation of a process, meeting the study aim 'to understand.' Its focus is on understanding human behaviour, interaction and responses to events or activities within particular contexts. In grounded theory, data form the foundation of theory, and my analysis generates the concepts constructed and allows for the collection and analysis of rich sources of data, and categorising, coding, and constructing theory from the data. For example, a fairly recent grounded theory study of positive caring among aged care residents and residents with dementia is *Psychosocial Intervention Use in Long-Stay Dementia Care: A Classic Grounded Theory* (Hunter, Keady *et al.* 2016). The theory emerging from this study, known as 'Becoming a Person Again', explains how change can be achieved through building 'psychosocial availability'. The 'Becoming a Person Again' theory is 'the mechanism of psychosocial intervention of a practice involving four components<sup>23</sup> [that] is mutually experienced by residents and staff' (ibid:2031). Another grounded theory study by Adeline Cooney *et al.* (2014), investigates using reminiscence with people living with dementia in long-term care to uncover a theory known as 'Seeing me (through my memories)' which 'explains that reminiscence acts as "... a key" mediating resident-staff interaction, enabling staff to "see" and "know" the person as an individual and thus increasing the potential of their "understanding" (and potentially accommodating) the person's behaviour in the present (in context of his or her past)' (2014: 3572). Like the 'Becoming a Person Again' theory, this theory is comprised of a number of elements that are 'two- way' or mutual in that residents begin to see staff as individuals, and as they begin to know one another their relationships deepen.

## Cultural Gerontology

Cultural gerontology is a relatively new 'lively and insightful [field] of academic analysis' (Twigg and Martin 2015). Emerging over the last 10 to 20 years, it draws together work from

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<sup>22</sup> Middle-range theories, developed by Robert Merton (1968), are abstract theories that are also close enough to the observed data to be incorporated into propositions that permit empirical testing.

<sup>23</sup> The four components are: 'Balancing Institutional and Personal Influences; capacity and inclination for 'Individualising Status'; 'Striving to Make the Most of Time' through use of psychosocial intervention and 'Interpreting the Response to Care Delivery' (Hunter and Keady *et al.* 2016: 2029).

across humanities and social sciences into a field that has ‘changed the ways in which we study human life in the later years’. Perhaps in response to demographic shifts and the growing cultural visibility of older people, there has been a burgeoning of work exploring the experience of old age in films, novels, poetry, biography, and art.<sup>24</sup> Scholars too have turned their academic gaze towards the area, bringing new approaches influenced by psychoanalytic, linguistic, post-structuralist, and other literary theories. As the editorial for the *Axon: Creative Explorations* issue ‘Finding our Voices’ (2018, vol 8.2) reports, ‘research in the areas of art and health, art and wellbeing, and health humanities are rich fields for both research and creative production.’

Cultural gerontology ‘challenges old stereotypes, brings new theories, new methodologies, as well as new forms of political and intellectual engagement, to bear’ (Twigg and Martin 2015). Theories of culture have come relatively late to the field of gerontology, and it is only in the last decade or so that these influences have begun to be fully felt. Cultural gerontologists argue that cultural theory now provides the force behind some of the most stimulating work in the field (ibid). Its emergence has forced a ‘shift from a focus on structure – and with it the earlier grand narratives of social science epitomised by Marxism – towards agency, with renewed interest in subjectivity, reflexivity and individuation’ (Giddens 1991).

Cultural gerontology includes work that attempts to recover the individuality of older lives through autobiography or narrative (Thompson 2000; Ray 2000; Bornat 2015), through ethnographic techniques (Degnen 2015), and through other approaches that place the voices and visions of older people centre stage (Richards *et al.* 2012; Martin 2015). Such work emphasises the range and variety of older people’s experiences and views, reiterating the point that people in later years – contrary to the stereotype – are more, rather than less, diverse than the young. There is an emphasis on agency reinforced by an understanding of society as malleable, constituted in and through cultural practices and discourses capable of being made and remade through changing lifestyles.

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<sup>24</sup> For example, films featuring older age, and people living with dementia include: Florian Zeller’s *The Father* (2021) featuring Anthony Hopkins and Olivia Colman; and Natalie Erika James’ *Relic* (2020) featuring Emily Mortimer, Robyn Nevin and Bella Heathcote. Novels include Josephine Wilson’s *Extinctions* (2018). Artworks include Picasso’s run of self-portraits as an old man (see Kelly Richmond-Abdou’s website). Interestingly, an article by Martin Lindauer called ‘The Old-Age Style and Artists’ (1993) argues that many artists actually have an old-age style.

Other research on lifestyle as the locus for identity includes studies of consumption of goods (Jones *et al.* 2008; Moody and Sood 2010), of dress and fashion (Fairhurst 1998; Twigg 2013; Twigg and Majima 2014; Twigg 2015), of hair and appearance (Furman 1997; Ward 2015; Hurd Clarke and Bennett 2015), and music (Bennett 2013; Jennings 2015). Activities like gardening (Bhatti 2006; Milligan and Bingley 2015), volunteering (Warburton 2015), sport (Tulle 2008; Phoenix and Griffin 2015), and caring for grandchildren (Arber and Timonen 2015) become increasingly important in older peoples' lives, which are also shaped by cultures of widowhood (Martin-Matthews 2015), retirement (Vickerstaff 2015), finance (Price and Livsey 2015) and, for some, dementia.

As an academic discipline, cultural gerontology challenges the problematic notion of old age which emphasises frailty and its consequence of social burdens. It produces a fuller and richer account of later life, one that places the subjectivity of older people, and the width and depth of their lives, at the forefront of analysis. Both the context of ageing in late modern society and the experience of age itself have changed, becoming more diverse, less embedded in social structures, and more influenced by cultural phenomena like consumption (Blaikie 1999; Gilleard and Higgs 2000). Indeed, Twigg and Martin's review of the impact of cultural theory on studies of gerontology shows that the 'cultural turn' or influence has 'de-stabilis[ed] and deconstruct[ed] definitions of age,' thus questioning earlier bio-medical or chronological definitions and norms. Of five central themes outlined in *The Routledge Handbook of Cultural Gerontology* it is themes of identities and social relationships, and of consumption and leisure, which best fit a study of creativity and quality of life for Australian elders. These two themes mark a focus on subjectivity and identity, reflecting a more fluid conception of 'being in society' (Rojek and Turner 2000). Thus, being in society and living a life is becoming an increasingly important focus, spreading across many areas of social science,<sup>25</sup> and is a defining characteristic of cultural gerontology. The question of what being in society actually looks like

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<sup>25</sup> For example, Angie Voela and Louis Rothschild's paper, 'Creative Failure: Steigler, Psychoanalysis and the promise of a life worth living,' in *New Formations*, Number 95, January 2019, pp54-69 (16), Lawrence Wishart. In this paper, Voela and Rothschild analyse Bernard Steigler's 'call for change on all levels and for care between generations and in all fields including the cultural and political...they argue that] care and living an affected life may not precipitate a revolution but [will] certainly make life worth living.'

for people living in aged care homes and people living with dementia is central to this field of study.

This nexus between art and health, or creative engagement and quality of life for people with dementia, is also investigated in Gail Kenning *et al.*'s 2021 survey of journal articles. Applying four criteria – (1) reporting on original research; (2) with subjects with mild cognitive impairments; (3) that include a method or tool for assessing wellbeing or quality of life; and (4) that evaluate an art intervention or creative engagement, other than staged performed arts – they extracted data from 29 articles, 18 of which were published in the last five years. Measurement tools in many of the studies included the Standardised Mini-Mental State Examination (SMMSE)<sup>26</sup> for cognitive impairment, and the Greater Cincinnati Observation Scale<sup>27</sup> to measure wellbeing. The survey reported three findings: that there is a growing interest in bringing art and design projects that are fluid and dynamic and aimed to support wellbeing into the dementia care space (2021:11); that often projects needed to have a range of methods, tools and techniques available to them, particularly at times when project aims shifted or changed because of developments in qualitative or iterative projects; that too often the reporting of these projects did not provide a sufficiently 'clear overview of the of decisions made as the project developed, ...[so as to be helpful to others working in the] "real-world" "messiness" of arts engagement projects that intersect with the healthcare and dementia care space' (ibid: 12); and that it is important 'to identify at least working definitions in studies to allow for a full understanding of what has been achieved' and in an attempt to reduce the variability in definitions used for well-being and quality of life (ibid: 13)

The academic discipline of 'health humanities' is also concerned with the nexus between creative engagement and quality of life. Health humanities is an interdisciplinary approach to the meaning of and approaches to the practice of health and wellbeing, combining creative or fine arts and humanities disciplines with health disciplines. It has emerged out of a desire to escape the dominant paradigm that has presented later years life within a social welfare and public policy framework, emphasising frailty and burden. Leading the field of health

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www.ihsa.gov.au/whatwe-do/standardised-mini-mental-state-examination-smmse>

<sup>27</sup> This scale is used in many studies of creative engagement and dementia. For example, social science studies such as Lokon, Sauer and Li (2016); Kenning *et al.* (2021) and music therapy studies such as Kirsty Beilharz's *Music Remembers Me* (2017).

humanities is Paul Crawford's research which focuses on applying knowledge from the social sciences, humanities and arts disciplines to the development and practice of mental health, health, and well-being (2020). Similarly, organisations like the Centre for Humanities and Health at Kings College London<sup>28</sup> conduct research that shows how arts and humanities-based projects can improve quality and ethical care for a range of illnesses.<sup>29</sup>

## Narratology

Part of the new turn of research in cultural gerontology and health humanities has been an embracing of theories of narratology and hermeneutics as ways of bringing into focus the situated knowledge of the people who are being researched. Narratology, a central theoretical domain that informs this thesis, explains that we live our lives immersed in narrative. As Roland Barthes (1975) notes:

Narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind, and there nowhere is or has been a people without narrative...caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself.

Traditionally a sub-discipline of the study of literature, narratology first emerged as a discipline in the 1960s with a definition coined by Tzvetan Todorov and Arnold Weinstein (1969), and developed over subsequent decades by the work of Gerard Genette (1982), Monika Fludernik (1996), and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (2003). Five theories of narratology, from Michel de Certeau, Wallace Martin, Hayden White, Monika Fludernik, and Manfred Jann in particular are used to frame Experiment 2, The Commonplace Book Project, and these are explained in detail in Chapter 3. Together these five theories form a framework for a study of how texts, or in the case of this thesis, artefacts, conversations and word-based socially constructed activities, can frame understandings of individuals and their personal and collective realities. When narrative is defined as anything that tells or presents a story, be it oral or written, picture, performance, conversations, jokes, novels, poems, plays, songs or a combination of these and other forms, then narratives are evident all around us.

## Hermeneutics

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<sup>28</sup>See <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/research/the-centre-for-the-humanities-and-health>

<sup>29</sup> See for example 'Reading Medical Anecdotes as Narratives of Epistemic Vigilance' webinar by the Oxford Centre of Life Writing (2/6/21) <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/reading-medical-anecdotes-as-narratives-of-epistemic-vigilance-tickets-155759231053#> and the *Lives and Medicine Project* <https://oclw.web.ox.ac.uk/lives-medicine#/>.

Closely associated with narratology is hermeneutics, that part of the domain of knowledge that deals with interpretation, and it helps to frame analysis of the personal stories and creative artefacts made by Elders in this study. For scholars of hermeneutics, knowledge and meaning-making are not objective or disinterested, but are driven by factors such as personal commitment, personal history, creative imagination, and passion.

Informed by Hans Gadamer's work, hermeneutics comprises three main concepts that he refers to as 'pre-understanding', 'the hermeneutic circle' and the 'fusion of horizons'. Pre-understanding, for Gadamer, is what the observer brings to any new context or experience: that is, our understandings are "pre-figured by the determinate tradition in which the interpreter lives and which shapes his [or her] prejudices" (Gadamer 1979: 108). To address this pre-understanding, and how it might limit the possibility of seeing the world more fully, it is necessary to integrate what is unfamiliar into the familiar context. This allows another's viewpoint to fuse with our own, and produce an encounter in which we are transformed because our understandings are broadened. As Gadamer puts it in *Circle of Understanding*, (1988:74), 'the understanding [of the text] remains permanently determined by the anticipatory movement of the pre-understanding ... This requires one to be aware of one's own pre-opinions and prejudices, and to permeate the act of understanding with historical awareness.'

In this thesis both my own understandings and the understandings of those being researched are acknowledged as particular ways of 'being in the world', and ways to build understandings of others' ways of being can be considered through Gadamer's concept of the 'circle of understanding, or the hermeneutic circle (1988). This key element of interpretation recognises the particularity of each interpreter's personal perspective, as well as the process of movement between the aspects of the text/artefact and the interpreter of the text. In other words, it is "the movement of understanding [that] always runs from whole to part and back to whole" (1988: 68).

A 'fusion of horizons' occurs when there is a 'dialectical interaction between the preunderstandings of the interpreter and the meaning of the text' (Moules *et al.* 2011). For Gadamer, it is not necessarily a full agreement between interlocutors, or between interpreter and text, but rather an expansion of understanding: a fusing of the horizon that "I" see, from

my particular standpoint, with the perspective or standpoint seen from another's horizon (1989: 302). This allows the beginnings of a 'connected human consciousness – a universality' (ibid), between my own knowledge as researcher and the knowledge of those being researched, which generates an appreciation for both the commonalities and contradictions among the texts, stories and artefacts being researched. In this thesis, a fusion of horizons occurred at various times both in the research field and in the writing up process following the experiments.

Rasha Alsaigh and Imelda Coyne (2021) have developed a useful framework for hermeneutical research that is used in this thesis, comprising nine steps: (1) choosing an appropriate research question; (2) identifying pre-understandings; (3) gaining understanding through dialogue with participants; (4) preliminary reading/transcribing of texts; (5) gaining secondary order understandings (my own horizon constructs); (6) meshing the horizons/themes; (7) linking the literature to the themes identified; (8) critiquing the themes/reporting final interpretation; and (9) establishing trustworthiness.

## Research Design

As mentioned in the Introduction, the research design was directly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The initial design involved me working exclusively in aged care homes as a creative practitioner, with grounded theory informing the development of three experiments. When the Coronavirus struck the world in 2020 and emergency lockdowns were declared, the research design necessarily changed. Melbourne, the main city where the research was to take place, has been in lockdown for 267 days as this thesis is being written.<sup>30</sup> Thus, only one part of the initial research plan had been implemented prior to city-wide lockdowns in Melbourne in March 2020: the joint imaginative storytelling sessions conducted at Southern Cross Care in Canberra during July 2019, and at Hazeldean Transition Care Unit in Melbourne during October 2019; and this became Experiment 1.

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According to the Australian government's Department of Health, as of 29 August 2021, Australia has recorded 993 deaths from Covid-19 and 49,937 cases, <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/coronavirus-covid-19-case-numbers-and-statistics> By 20 December 2020, 95% of Australia's coronavirus aged care deaths happened in Victoria. These 655 people constituted 82 per cent of the 801 people who died in Victoria during the second wave outbreak <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/lack-of-preparation-blamed-for-aged-care-virus-deaths-20201223-p56pvl.html>.

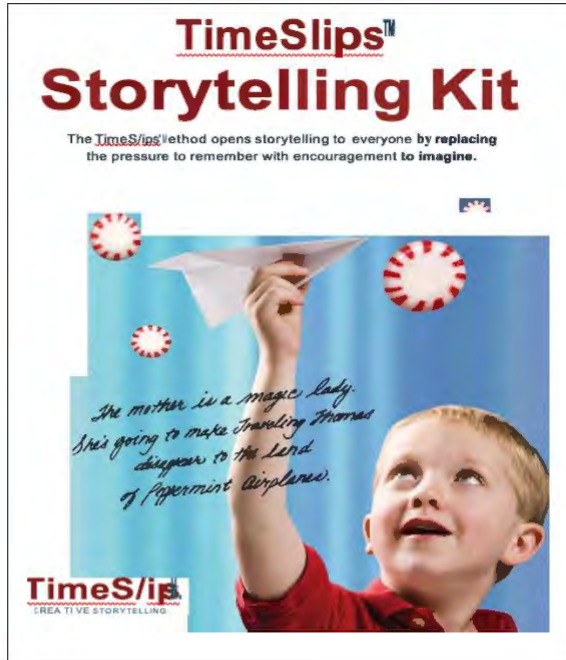
Once direct access to aged care homes was prohibited, I developed a new experiment design with people over 65 years who were living at home. This project, beginning in May 2020 and ending in December 2021, involved personal journaling and scrapbooking. This is referred to in the thesis as ‘21<sup>st</sup> century commonplacing’, a form of writing for pleasure, and about ourselves, in our ordinary daily lives. This became Experiment 2. Then in 2021, between Melbourne lockdowns, it was possible to access an aged care home in Melbourne as a volunteer to conduct creative workshops. By this time, aged care homes had widened their policies, recognising that with the continuing pandemic, residents desperately needed contact with people ‘from the outside world’. This became Experiment 3, and involved creative workshops comprising conversations, poetry, music, painting, and cutting and pasting craft work. I discuss each experiment in the chapters that follow.

Table 1: Three Creative Experiments

<i>Experiment</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Cohort</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
1	The Canberra - Melbourne Imaginative Storytelling Project for People Living with Dementia	Two groups of approximately ten people living with dementia in aged care homes, one in Canberra and one in Melbourne	July-December 2019
2	Commonplace Book Project for Elders Living Independently at Home	Six people aged over 65, retired, and living independently at home	May 2020-Dec 2021
3	Creative Workshops for Elders in Aged Care Residences	Three groups of approximately ten aged care residents in Melbourne, some with early and mid-stages of dementia	March- August 2021



## Experiment 1: The Canberra–Melbourne Imaginative Storytelling Project for People Living with Dementia



'Anne Basting's approach to aging invites us to shift focus from how well we remember the past to how well we inhabit the present - for ourselves and with others. She reveals the power of creativity to expand our humanity and enrich the time we have.' (Marie Therese Connolly, <https://www.anne-basting.com/creative-care-1>)



### Creative care

A product of the positive ageing movement and the rise of cultural gerontology and health humanities is the concept of creative care developed by American scholar, Anne Basting. For Basting, creative care is not an intervention; rather it is a way of daily living, defined as:

a mutually nurturing and generative process ...that helps people move through the barriers to connecting with elders (or anyone for that matter) – the fear, the guilt, the grief to name just a few – and to feel confidence in people's creative capacity to facilitate and experience meaningful connection together. This process can bring us back to one another and teach us the power of the very human act of caring for one another. (2020:21)

Creative care, as both noun and verb, embraces the idea that we can all be creative and artistic. The idea that 'the whole world is a work of art' (Woolf 2021), and that 'artistic experiences are everywhere' (Basting 2020) encourages us to adopt an artistic sensibility with which it is possible to see beauty in everything in the world. Creative care gives Elders a voice, a consumer voice as storytellers, a means of 'self-examination and communication' (Shimada 2014)

Both the positive ageing movement generally and the creative care movement in particular embrace storytelling as an essential part of person-centred care. When storytelling frames the environment within which Elders live, it becomes easier to see how residents in aged care homes and people with dementia can find hope and meaning through human connection in the present moment.

Other work on storytelling enables us to think more about ‘possibilities’ than about ‘loss’. For example, L-C Hyden (2018) reports that for successful ageing and the daily management of dementia, we need to understand that storytelling is an acknowledged critical way in which humans share their experiences and history with others, and that this capacity is not prevented by dementia. Hyden’s work, *Entangled Narratives*, is organised around four themes — dementia; story; memory; and self and identity — and shows how people with dementia can join with others to tell a story. Hyden shows that with the collaboration of others, people with dementia can still take part in their own storytelling as ‘collaborative meaning-makers’. His work reveals a common meeting place where professionals with clinical backgrounds — nursing, occupational therapy, gerontology, psychology, or dementia studies — can meet narrative scholars who are interested in the application of narrative theory within the medical field, particularly dementia (2018: p24).

Storytelling as a form of creative care is not only an example of person-centred care, but is also a practice that engages with the contributions of those professionals who are often marginalised from the so-called medical and clinical professions – for example, some allied health professionals. Storytelling is, as Paul Crawford puts it, an example of much-needed ‘new thinking to develop the discipline of health humanities, to develop, provide and share research, expertise, training and education.’<sup>31</sup> It is therefore not an overstatement to say that storytelling has a discursive trajectory in the positive aging, health humanities, creative care movements, and provides a context within which attitudes about and practices for people who live in residential aged care homes and for elders who live at home can be changed.

Some aged care communities, committed to the positive ageing movement, have adopted elements of creative care by appointing lifestyle coordinators or coordinators of volunteers,

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<sup>31</sup> See Paul Crawford *et al.* ‘Health Humanities: the future of medical humanities?’ *Community Mental Health Review*, Vol 15, Issue 3, (2010); and Crawford *et al.* (eds) *Routledge Companion to Health Humanities* (2020).

who, as part of their duties, organise and implement types of creative care.<sup>32</sup> However, there is a long way to go before the fundamental laws that underpin creative care are part and parcel of everyday life for Elders and visibly improving their quality of life. That said, there is clearly an eagerness among managers of aged care residences to provide increased opportunities for creative engagement for their residents and in my research, I found that all aged care residences that were contacted were keen to be involved and improve their provision of positive experiences for residents.<sup>33</sup>

### TimeSlips storytelling

The TimeSlips storytelling program is a playful challenge for people living with dementia and restores a role to those who have had so many roles taken away by dementia (Estrade 2018). Since its inception, TimeSlips Storytelling has grown to be an international program. According to the *Australian Journal of Dementia Care*, TimeSlips Storytelling is happening in various parts of Australia (Shortridge 2015) with certified TimeSlips facilitators in Western Australia, South Australia, Queensland, Victoria, and NSW. In Sydney, at the Carinya Dementia Unit of St Joseph's Village, Paul Hurst runs weekly sessions and has experienced the program's positive impact on people with memory loss. For Hurst, storytelling reduces loneliness and isolation:

By sharing the creative story experience participants are no longer alone or isolated...Closer relationships develop during the story time that would normally take many conversational encounters to achieve. As the participants become chroniclers of their own story, their dignity and humanness begin to infuse their being (Shortridge 2015).

A growing body of research on the positive impacts of Timeslips story telling has been emerging. In 2014 Daniel George and Winona Houser found that TimeSlips programs engender benefits for people with dementia and staff in aged care homes and care home communities. In their study, participants reported experiencing an increased sense of creativity; improved quality of life; positively altered behaviour; and increased involvement in meaningful activity. Staff members reported that they learned new practices, developed a deeper understanding of the residents, and appreciated the involvement in a meaningful activity. Across the community as a whole, the

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<sup>32</sup> Anne Basting (2009) outlines song writing, dance, visual arts, theatre, conversation, photography, autobiography, window walls, buddy visits, choir, story collections, Timeslips storytelling as examples of creative care.

<sup>33</sup> See Appendix 1: Email from Lifestyle Coordinator re workshops – identity redacted.

study found that relationships were nurtured and there was an improved atmosphere (George and Houser 2014: 680).

In another study, themes which characterise TimeSlips stories-telling experience were analysed (Kim, Chee and Gerhart 2020). Kim *et al.* found that for participants living with dementia, TimeSlips storytelling was a social activity that focuses on communication, improvisation, and creativity. It produces a collective narrative that is a channel through which participants express themselves, and signifies clues about their identities, values, and experiences. Using the generativity model<sup>34</sup> as a theoretical underpinning for analysis, they examined emergent themes of collective storytelling sessions and found three topics:(1) caring and promoting the well-being of others, (2) family values, and (3) positivity. The study reported that:

the narratives [produced in TimeSlips storytelling] show that participants living with dementia continue to express their generative values and concerns... [There are] generative identities held by persons living with dementia, which help destigmatize dementia...and shed light on why creative group storytelling may affect multiple positive outcomes for its participants. (Kim, Chee and Gerhart 2020)

In TimeSlips storytelling, participants report enjoying the experience saying, 'It brightened my day, made me feel like I was making something'. And 'Today I felt like my brain was not out of date.'<sup>35</sup> In their article, 'Play and People Living with Dementia: A Humanities-Based Inquiry of TimeSlips and the Alzheimer's Poetry Project Joy', Swinnen, De Medeiros and Pruchino (2018) report on two arts programs, observing that: 'people learned to play again, there is power in playing together, and play often led to expressions of joy. Overall, [they found] the notion of play to be a helpful framework for future research into innovative arts-based approaches to dementia care.' Swinnen *et al.* use Johan Huizinga's framework of homo ludens ('man the player') to consider 'play' as a framework for their research on people living with dementia. 'Play,' according to Huizinga, is at the heart of human activity and what gives meaning to life. They note that play is not used to infantilize and trivialize

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<sup>34</sup> Generativity, a concept first introduced by Erik Erikson as a part of his psychosocial theory, outlines eight stages of development in the human life. Generativity versus stagnation is the main developmental concern of middle adulthood; however, generativity is also recognized as an important theme in the lives of older adults. Building on the work of Erikson, McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) developed a model explaining the generative process. See <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22950351/>

<sup>35</sup> These comments by participants were reported by Mary Ashton of her work with TimeSlips at the Inpatient Rehabilitation Unit at Calvary Health Care Sydney, quoted in Susan Shortridge, 'The Freedom to Imagine', *Australian Journal of Dementia Care* 2015.

people living with dementia but as a way to explore potential for expression, meaning-making, and relationship-building in later life.

### The Canberra–Melbourne Storytelling Project for People Living with Dementia

The Canberra–Melbourne storytelling project was conducted at two aged care residences: Southern Cross Care in Canberra and the Hazeldean Transition Care Unit at Williamstown Hospital in Melbourne. It was based on the TimeSlips storytelling program devised by Anne Basting (2009), a structured storytelling activity delivered by trained facilitators.<sup>36</sup> The Canberra component of the Experiment consisted of six one-hour long sessions with 8–10 residents, most of whom had dementia. Participants sat in a circle with the facilitator in the middle. A volunteer scribed on a big notepad. Initially participants were intrigued; then they became visibly engaged. Staff who were present commented on how ‘different’ participants were, how ‘animated’ and ‘happy’ they seemed. In each session, between 6 and 10 participants sat in a semi-circle, each person holding the same picture prompt, and responded to specifically chosen questions asked by the facilitator. Answers were written down either by a scribe or the facilitator and together the group built a story that was then recounted every few minutes until it was finished. It took about 20–30 minutes to build a story, which the facilitator then read out, in its entirety, to the group. All contributions were included; for example, a story could have several titles and settings, and characters could each have several names. At the end of the workshop, the facilitator took the stories away and finessed them lightly in readiness for the next workshop where they were read out to the group to commence a new storytelling session.

For this experiment, I undertook facilitator training with a Timeslips Master Trainer in 2019, and used the recommended program manual and protocols. Several of the picture prompts in the program were used, as well as pictures with more local content.<sup>37</sup> Some stories created in the workshops were sent to a Master Trainer for feedback, and this helped improve the facilitator’s skills in eliciting more detail from participants to enrich their stories.<sup>38</sup> The requirements to deliver a TimeSlips Storytelling session are minimal: half an hour to an hour per session, an appropriate environment such as a quiet light room, images used as story prompts, several

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<sup>36</sup> See Appendix 2: TimeSlips Facilitator Certificate

<sup>37</sup> See Appendix 3: TimeSlips stories created at Southern Cross Care.

<sup>38</sup> See Appendix 4: TimeSlips Master Trainer’s comments about a TimeSlips story created in 2019.

participants, a notepad or flipchart and pen or marker. The creative practitioner/facilitator needs to be well prepared, charismatic, non-judgemental, and inclusive. Overwhelmingly, the response to the sessions by participants showed that it was an activity that strengthens relationships among participants, among residents and staff, among residents and family and friends who visit, and among family members and staff. It can change the perspective of staff who see residents participating with laughter, engaging purposefully with the activity, giving answers to the questions, making up a story and responding with surprise and delight when the story is recounted to them. 'Did we do that?' one Elder exclaimed when the joint story was being recounted to the group.

Thus, in the Canberra-Melbourne Storytelling Project for People Living with Dementia, the creative abilities of people who live with dementia are evident in five main findings. (1) the power of the imagination to distract, delight and empower people within their everyday living conditions; (2) an improvement in well-being for participants – a reduction in boredom, helplessness, and loneliness; (3) improved communication and strengthening of positive relationships between and among residents, staff, and family members; (4) a clear contribution to positive affect; and (5) improved attitudes towards ageing and people living with dementia.

### [Intergenerational storytelling](#)

The Melbourne part of the Storytelling project included a collaboration with a small group of Year 9 students from Westbourne Grammar School, who participated alongside the Elders. These sessions were an opportunity to test out, in an Australian setting, an intergenerational version of the TimeSlips program. Intergenerational programs are forms of creative care, and while still in their infancy in terms of research and reporting, some interesting work is happening in the United Kingdom. Organisations such as the UK Centre for Intergenerational Practice support more than 850 organisations and practitioners engaged in intergenerational work (Hatton-Yeo 2006; Sanches and Hatton-Yeo 2012). In Germany and the United States, kindergartens and aged-care homes are often located together. Sometimes childcare centres are co-located within nursing homes. In their article 'Older Care Home Residents' Views of Intergenerational Practice', Glenda Cook and Catherine Bailey (2013:441) survey international research which reports that positive intergenerational interaction has health and social benefits for older and younger participants. The importance of such interaction is signalled where they

note that ‘across industrialised countries, societal and economic trends are having negative impacts on intergenerational connections’ (ibid: 411). These trends include population disparities such as increasing numbers of older people and decreasing numbers of younger people; economic recessions leading to relocation of younger people for employment; and age-segregated activities and living arrangements all contribute to lessening contact between generations, particularly between non-kin (ibid). Hatton Yeo (2006) defines intergenerational practice as ‘an exchange of skills’ while Crowther and Merrill (2012; 2011) claim that it is about individuals getting on together with everyday tasks and this can lead to natural conversation between the generations.

The sessions at the Hazeldean Transition Care Unit occurred at the end of 2019, just before the global COVID pandemic, and involved a partnership between Western Health, Westbourne Grammar School, and the University of Canberra’s Centre for Cultural and Creative Research. The project comprised four 2-hour workshops with approximately 15 elderly residents of the Transition Care Unit, part of Williamstown Hospital, and twelve Year 9 secondary school students from nearby Westbourne Grammar School. The first three workshops focused on story building, the fourth was the official ‘launch’ and celebration of these stories in booklet form. Fortunately, I was also the teacher of the Year 9 students, and this dual role gave me access to both secondary students and aged care residents. Furthermore, the liaison officer and coordinator of volunteers at Western Health was an arts practitioner herself, and a strong advocate for creative care therapies.

A rapport between the students and residents in the group was quickly established, and laughter, participation, collaboration, and imagination were encouraged. A volunteer wrote down every contribution from each participant and from time to time she would read all of the contributions back to the group. In this way, the story was recounted regularly. In each workshop, participants assumed the identity of ‘storyteller’, building stories together and cultivating an imaginative storytelling culture. In collaborative storytelling there are no right or wrong answers. All contributions add to the richness of the story. Each week the number of participants grew, and the gathering became a lively social opportunity to make stories together.

In his journal, Year 9 student Greg writes:

Apart from the stories we created, there were other little successes. Personally, I was proud of how I communicated with the residents in chat time...I actually had a few conversations with people. So, for me, although the workshops started off shakily, they grew in momentum and became something everyone enjoyed and valued.

Student Seth writes:

At the start I felt uncertain. I certainly did not expect to be in an aged care facility that day instead of my English class. But much to my surprise the experience was fun...it felt warm and welcoming as both groups grew closer together.

Student Olivia writes:

Today I found out that the lovely woman I met last week is called Inga. I feared butchering the pronunciation, so I tried to avoid saying her name, but like the last time, she was an absolute angel. She didn't quite remember me, but I made sure to remind her of our past conversations and she was very happy to talk.

Student Sehaj writes:

Hazeldean was the best part of my day...the volunteers at Hazeldean were also enjoying the program as they hadn't seen anything like this happening with the elderly...The stories that we made consisted of feelings and emotions...and they were amazing to hear when they were finished and edited. The elderly people were chortling and laughing because the story we had made was funny, just hilarious.

The stories produced in the workshop surprised all participants. 'Did we do that?' an Elder asked as a story was read out aloud.<sup>39</sup> The facilitator is also able to send the stories to a TimeSlips master trainer who can provide feedback and suggestions.<sup>40</sup>

## Obstacles

One reason for the paucity of intergenerational programs is that they are difficult and complex to organise. Internal organisational operations and compliance requirements lead to challenging logistics, particularly at the school end. Administrative processes and regulatory compliance in schools are arduous, and permission from layers of school bureaucracy are needed before students can leave school premises. Furthermore, it was important to ensure that the workshops happened during a regular class lesson time, so that no negotiation with other class teachers was needed. Negotiating with Hazeldean Transition Care was more straightforward, as the Unit was able to accommodate school timetable needs. While the

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<sup>39</sup> See Appendix 3: TimeSlips Stories at Southern Cross Care in Canberra

<sup>40</sup> See Appendix 4: Master Trainer's comments about a TimeSlips story



negotiation of practical logistics within the school was difficult, the good news is that after it has been done once, the process can then be repeated relatively easily. For example, intergenerational storytelling can be a regular part of a school English course, as long as the English teacher and the manager at the aged care facility are willing.<sup>41</sup> An invitation I received to speak at an English teacher's conference suggests there is an interest among schoolteachers to engage in intergenerational storytelling programs such as this.

Another obstacle to the Experiment was the Covid pandemic lockdowns. A second series of intergenerational storytelling sessions was due to commence with residents at Dousta Galla Aged Services, Kensington and Year 9 students at Simonds College, North Melbourne in March 2020. At Simonds College, as in many secondary schools, community service is compulsory, timetabled for one afternoon per week, and requiring students to support vulnerable people in the community. Students either organise it themselves or choose from options given them by the school. Permissions and the administrative obstacles I faced in the Hazeldean project were already overcome. This model seems easier than the former one because the Community Services Coordinator in a secondary school administers all the arrangements for students, and no teacher or staff member from the school needs to attend the aged care residence; it is a good solution to the administrative and regulatory barriers I faced as researcher.

It is worth noting that despite the obstacles of dealing with school administration requirements, this experiment was relevant to academic and social learning outcomes in at least four of the seven general capabilities in the Australian curriculum: increased literacy; personal and social capability; and ethical and intercultural understanding.<sup>42</sup> For schools who deliver the International Baccalaureate Diploma program there is also a component known as Creativity Activity and Service (CAS).<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, for managers of residential aged care

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<sup>41</sup> The findings of this intergenerational experiment were presented at an English Teachers' conference on 31 October 2019 at the Hedley Beare Centre in the ACT. Part of the presentation included a description of how to negotiate permission needed from school administrators (and now with Covid-19 also from the aged care centre) in order for students to participate in off-campus in a series of workshops. See Appendix 5: 'How To' give an intergenerational TimeSlips storytelling session.

<sup>42</sup> See the Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority General Capabilities, <https://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/foundation-year-10/general-capabilities>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.ibo.org/programmes/diploma-programme/curriculum/creativity-activity-and-service/cas-projects/>

organisations, intergenerational storytelling is an example of evidence showing they are meeting the Aged Care Quality Standards, particularly Standards 1 and 4.<sup>44</sup> Indeed the program is a clear way of explicitly meeting outcomes and professional Standards from both education and aged care sectors.

### Exhibition of stories

Exhibiting the joint imaginative stories is an important part of how creative practice enriches the quality of an Elder's life. Informal and formal exhibitions are essential to creative care because they not only remind us that 'small objects tell big stories' (Museums Victoria 2022) but also serve as reminders to the composers/participants themselves that they are creative beings: storytellers, painters, people with memories, experiences, and wisdom. Exhibitions are also another way in which Elders can have their consumer voice heard. In both the creative workshops and the joint imaginative storytelling sessions, various forms of exhibition were used. Examples of informal and formal exhibitions ranged from recounts by me within the sessions to small wall displays at the end of sessions, and more formal displays in the form of events such as booklet launch. Regardless of the size and type of exhibition, each one was a celebration of creative endeavour; an integral part of creative care; and a rich source of data for the positive ageing movements.

As exhibitions go, an informal wall display, a book[let] launch<sup>45</sup>, and a foyer display are inexpensive forms of exhibition and relatively easy to host.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore each of these can be easily followed up or accompanied by website and social media displays. Most importantly, however, the exhibitions are opportunities for sharing the creative materials made by Elders, and in this way their creativity and playfulness is not only made visible but is also being extended. Rejoicing and sharing in the creativity of healthy ageing is just as important as the rejoicing we do to celebrate creativity at other stages of the life course.

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<sup>44</sup> These two Standards require aged care providers to honour consumer dignity and choice and provide consumers with services and supports for daily living that are important for their health and well-being and that enable them to do the things they want to do. See the Australian government's *The Aged Care Quality Standards* <https://www.agedcarequality.gov.au/providers/standards> (See Chapter 1.)

<sup>45</sup> See Appendix 6: Intergenerational Storytelling booklet Launch Program which exhibited a booklet produced by the joint imaginative storytelling sessions at a launch which consisted of a concert by the participants and readings from the booklet.

<sup>46</sup> See Appendix 7: Creative Care Toolkit for guidelines for how to conduct workshops and then host exhibits

## Conclusion

Creative care and imaginative storytelling sessions based on the TimeSlips program are playful word-based socially constructed creative activities that can turn mundane living into marvellous moments; they are ways of finding virtue in the necessities of everyday living. While these workshops require a trained facilitator in order to stimulate and maintain momentum and follow whatever direction the conversation or storytelling may take, and produce the short sparkling stories that can entertain and delight, it is a program that is relatively accessible, and inexpensive, with many materials available for carers and aged care staff on the TimeSlips website.

The best feature about joint imaginative storytelling is that it is utterly inclusive: there are no wrong answers, everyone's contribution is included, and participants are able to jointly build interesting imaginative stories. When stories are made together and then shared informally and formally, people with dementia can think of themselves as 'storytellers', and a warm 'change in the air' becomes apparent to residents, family, and staff in aged care homes.



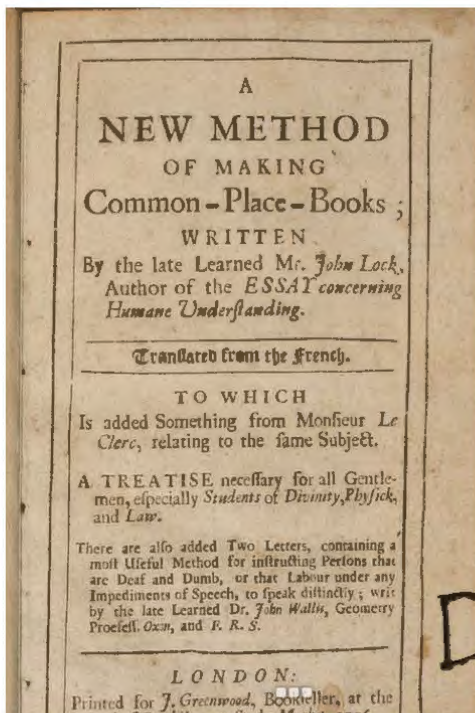
## Experiment 2: The Commonplace Book Project for Elders Living Independently at Home



Left: keeping a commonplace book (2020). Photo (name redacted) used with permission.

Below left: John Locke's method for making a commonplace book (1775)

Below right: Désiré François Laugée, 1882. Posted by Carolyn Curtis-Mahony on the Facebook page, 'The Cool People The Night People' 16 June 2021



This part of the thesis was initially intended to be an extension of the 2019 Canberra–Melbourne Imaginative Storytelling Project. I had expected that the storytelling experiment would be continued as an ‘in-person’ project via solitary writing or small group writing by participants living in aged care residences, in response to the data that would emerge from the grounded theory. I expected too that analysis of this personal story writing component

would investigate the properties of narrative writing for wellbeing. However, the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown required me to pivot from an in-person collective approach with residents in aged care homes to an individual approach with participants who were living in their own homes and who could not have direct contact with me. While still focussing on the stories we tell about the world and ourselves within that world, Experiment 2 was now focussed on the act of writing while being in isolation, and writing primarily for the self rather than for others. This part of the thesis, known as the Commonplace Book Project gives Elders a voice to speak their truths, through writing, jotting down, collecting, and in so doing not only provides relief from boredom and loneliness but also becomes an enduring record of how moments of joy can be created during difficult times.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, theories of narratology are well-placed to frame a study of the personal writing of Elders, indeed of any individuals. Michel de Certeau (1980) asserts that each day we walk through a 'forest of narratives', often beginning by being awakened by the radio (which he names 'the voice of the law'), and then from morning till evening we are immersed in narratives that articulate our existences by teaching us what we should be. We often have little control over these kinds of daily narratives. Certeau alerts us to the connections or clashes between the 'forest of [cultural] narratives' we are immersed in, and our actual lived reality (ibid). Within this forest of narratives, we tell ourselves stories about our lives. This is the first idea from narratology that informs the thesis. For Certeau, there is nothing more real than the stories we tell ourselves. The stories we tell ourselves form our sense of the world, as T.S. Eliot has said (see chapter 1), and this notion is similar to the idea of 'lifeworld' in phenomenology, which is at the heart of much of philosopher Edmund Husserl's work. Husserl (1970) asserts that the world is directly experienced in the subjectivity of everyday life; it is the taken-for-granted stock of knowledge that acts like an architecture, regulating the everyday intersubjective association of social agents. It comprises the environment or surroundings that we live in, and it forms a kind of 'home world' that shapes and influences our lives.

A second theory of narratology is that narratives are considered within the context of the structures of which they are a part: even when there are many contexts, frameworks, and ideologies within which we try and make sense of the world. Wallace Martin (1986) notes

that all writing occurs within a social context, it sometimes involves a plot – what happened and why – and there is always a narrator who imposes on the past a certain order, ‘so we can tell a coherent story about it’ (Martin 1986:43). Third is Hayden White’s theory that narrative is a ‘meta-code, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted’ (White 1987). Fourth is Fludernik’s concept of a ‘natural’ narratology (1996), which argues that narratives can be ‘naturally occurring’ and ‘spontaneous conversational storytelling and oral discourse’.<sup>47</sup> As Fludernik puts it:

Natural storytelling is a term that has come to define ‘naturally occurring’ storytelling in the linguistic literature of discourse analysis (Labov 1972) and that comes in a great variety of forms, involving the narration of personal experiences, the retelling of other people’s experiences the telling of imagined scenarios, right through to the more formal ‘culturally institutionalised’ forms such as family histories or memoirs. (Fludernick 1996: 10)

Following Fludernik’s notion of naturally occurring narratology is a fifth idea that focuses on the making of the narrative, the process of producing it, rather than its structure. As Manfred Jann (2017) puts it: “‘when we ask who narrates what and how?’” we are considering the processes of telling, rather than what is told, and can recognise affinities and similarities and differences among narratives.’

When humans write their thoughts in book form it enriches their sense of identity, and their interconnectedness with people and the natural environment, even though they may not be in physical contact with anyone, and may even be isolated, in a room or space on their own. Personal writing provides opportunities for growth, and the informal anecdotes, lists, thoughts, and casual jottings of selected prose contained in the notebooks, journals and commonplace books of Elders not only shows what old age is really like as it is being lived, but can also help the writers themselves understand and value their lives better, and appreciate the role that creativity plays in these lives, and the enrichment it brings to daily life.

As humans move beyond middle age into old age, they are likely to experience solitude, and when solitude is used creatively it can bring about personal satisfaction. Voltaire wrote that

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<sup>47</sup> Ross Gibson (2010) has said that ‘without narrative structures, there is no way to organise, or store, or communicate our thoughts and feelings about how things play out, as cause and effect, through time and space’.

‘the happiest of all lives is a busy solitude’ (Cronk 2017). For Carl Jung, solitude was a ‘fount of healing which made [his] life worth living’ (Jung 1957). Jung found that talking was often a ‘torment and [he] needed many days of silence to recover from the futility of words’ (ibid). Poet Rumi writes, ‘there is a difference between loneliness and solitude, one will empty [us] and one will fill [us]. [We] have the power to choose.’ Rumi also directs us: ‘Do not feel lonely, the entire universe is inside you’ (2020).

Similarly, as humans grow older, they also sometimes grow lonelier. While ‘solitude’ and ‘loneliness’ are often used interchangeably, they are very different in terms of their meaning and impact on individuals. While there are many positives in solitude, loneliness is, as Michelle Lim *et al.* (2020) state, increasingly recognised as the next critical public health issue, and they identify the need for rigorous evaluation of programs targeting loneliness. They define the issue of loneliness as ‘a subjective experience where one perceives a discrepancy between [a person’s] actual and desired levels of social relationships’ (2020:793). When loneliness feels like disconnection, it eventually leads to suffering and has in fact been associated with about a 50 per cent increased risk of serious medical conditions (Centres for Disease Control and Prevention 2021) including premature death. Loneliness produces a 29 per cent increased risk of heart disease, a 32 per cent increased risk of stroke, and is associated with higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide. With loneliness now recognised as a particular problem for Elders, organisations such as the National Institute of Ageing, Council on the Ageing, and Dementia Australia are mobilising resource materials in catalogues of support programs for older adults, care givers and health care providers.

## Research Context

Ordinary lives, those being lived in lockdown conditions in contexts of solitude and loneliness, formed the setting within which this experiment was conducted. As discussed in the previous chapter, everyday objects and immediate environments can be meaningful topics to write about; mundane things can be marvellous when we know we are able to reflect on their value. The research questions for this experiment were: does the keeping of a personal journal or commonplace book contribute meaning to those dealing with their own ageing? Does



personal writing extend opportunities for the writers to experience greater creativity and quality of life, including during periods of isolation and loneliness?

In academia, the writings of all kinds of people are researched. For example, in faculties of education, scholars examine the writings of early learners, adolescents, students with neurologically based conditions, students for whom English is an additional language, and many others. In arts faculties, scholars scrutinise all aspects of the works of old and new 'literary' and 'popular' writers. In faculties of psychology, history, anthropology and geography, scholars collect and analyse authentic personal writings of 'patients' or 'primary sources', or 'ethnographic artefacts.' In medical faculties, researchers increasingly incorporate the use of 'narratives' into their investigations. Numerous aged care and dementia studies report the positive impacts of, and the knowledge and understandings gleaned from, storytelling by people living in residential aged care, such as those undertaken by Brian Hurwitz at the Centre for Health and Humanities at Kings College London, and by Martina Zimmerman's work (2017). Other examples include Leva Stoncikaite and Nuria Mina-Riera's 'A Creative Writing Workshop on Sexuality and Ageing: A Spanish Pilot Case Study' (2020) which examines the positive impact of poetry on sexuality, ageing and creativity. However, before investigating the ways in which we can construct our lives using personal notebooks, journals, poetry, or commonplace books as a particular kind of writing, it is necessary to briefly discuss the role of writing over the life course.

For many, the thrill of writing diminishes as we age. People first begin to write at age five or six, and this causes excitement and delight in classrooms and family homes.<sup>48</sup> Like learning to drive a car, learning to write is a ticket to independence. However, the initial pleasure derived from writing decreases as our writing becomes more utilitarian, and becomes a tool by which students show their understanding of topics. Writing for pleasure diminishes, and writing for assessment takes over. This happens in late primary school and continues through secondary school; in these years writing seems primarily valued in terms of its grade given by a teacher. Thus, the joy, wonder and awe of writing that is so precious in our early years is replaced by anxiety and uncertainty. In secondary classrooms, students repeatedly ask, 'Is my writing good enough? Am I doing it right?' Or even worse they will say, 'I can't write' or 'I hate

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<sup>48</sup> In her book *The Secret of Childhood*, educator and pedagogue Maria Montessori wrote that when children first learn to write they experience 'unspeakable happiness' and feel they have been given a 'gift of nature'.

writing'. At tertiary level our writing is also primarily used for assessment by teachers. Furthermore, in a knowledge economy, contemporary government, business, education, and industry all rely on writing (Petelin 2017:1). In these settings, writing is highly professionalised, its purpose and audience related to the workplace.<sup>49</sup> The rise and rise of the internet, social media and the so-called 'participatory society' provides almost limitless opportunities to interact in conversations and publish our thoughts and ideas easily and widely. Ironically, in this kind of world, the explicit act of writing for personal pleasure has become less common.

### History of commonplace books

Writing for pleasure, as opposed to writing for work or practical purposes, is a less well-known form of writing, yet creative personal writing has been part of the human experience for at least as long as the practice of keeping a commonplace book has been around. A commonplace book has been described variously as 'an annotated personal anthology' or 'a project worked on daily, weekly, or randomly over the course of years' (Auden 1970), and 'a personal journal in which quotable passages, literary excerpts, and comments are written' (American Heritage Dictionary 2011). A survey of the history of the commonplace book reveals that it has served many purposes over the centuries.

The commonplace book as a writing form emerged hundreds of years ago when reading and writing were still relatively new. The excitement of the new-found skills of reading brought immense delight to people. To retain important ideas and information many folks kept a commonplace book which they could then read over for reflection and amusement at their leisure. While the term 'commonplace book' is almost unknown in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there are nevertheless several versions of it. Facebook posts, Twitter tweets, Instagram photos, Tic-Tok postings and blog pages are, in many ways, 21<sup>st</sup>-century forms of commonplace books in which humans personally select, record and comment on information, almost daily. Each day, on social media, we identify and select ideas worthy of thought or comment, and jump around from screen to screen and site to site to make sense of our own day and of the world around

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<sup>49</sup> For example, early learning educators write and send daily reports for parents of babies and toddlers in day care centres using software such as Story Park (<https://main.storypark.com>).

us. Indeed, in this way 21<sup>st</sup>-century reading and writing habits are not dissimilar to those of early commonplace bookkeepers who, as Robert Darnton puts it:

...read in fits and starts and jumped from book to book. They broke texts into fragments and assembled them into new patterns by transcribing them in different sections of their notebooks. Then they reread the copies and rearranged the patterns while adding more excerpts. Reading and writing were therefore inseparable activities. They belonged to a continuous effort to make sense of things, for the world was full of signs: you could read your way through it; and by keeping an account of your readings, you made a book of your own, one stamped with your personality. (2000)

Thus, 'common-placing' is not unlike 'googling' and 'posting' today; it involves locating interesting or inspirational pieces of information then transcribing these passages from one's reading, assembling a personalized encyclopedia of quotations, and annotating them.<sup>50</sup> Steven Johnson (2010) describes this type of writing as 'a kind of solitary version of the original web logs: an archive of tid-bits that one encountered during one's textual browsing.' Furthermore, in keeping a commonplace book the author is also the reader and in these two roles, they 'write' the meaning of the text. As Roland Barthes puts it in his essay, 'Death of the Author':

We know ... that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. (1977: 146)

The purpose of a commonplace book has, of course, changed over the centuries. Its heyday was arguably in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, a time when 'commonplacing' was an integral part of the culture of the day. Then, it was a physical artefact with the capacity to shape literary preferences and intellectual habits. More than just a notebook, it was seen as a fully functioning apparatus that served as a 'laboratory of individual experience and sensory responses' (Allen 2010); a space where individuals could properly study, observe and reflect upon the human experience. It was a bespoke compendium of knowledge, a private alternative to a printed encyclopaedia, a way of selecting and owning one's own understanding of the world (ibid). Commonplace books were kept by enthusiastic readers to note their reading experiences (ibid: 20); these 'lasting record[s] of a person's reading in a separate notebook, ...were an opportunity for a reader to respond tangibly to the texts that he or she encountered'. They were 'not always meant for the exclusive use of those who made them' (ibid:31). Some were manufactured as gifts by adults to children; there is even a

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<sup>50</sup> Today we might simply 'copy and paste' but the function is the same.

case in 1749 of a two-volume commonplace book of elegant poetic transcriptions made by a child aged 5 years for her father (ibid: 31), presumably with some help from her mother or another adult!<sup>51</sup> And they have even been part of last bequests (Allan 2010: 34).

Another substantial change occurred around 1800 when cheap newsprint emerged: the looks and uses of commonplace books changed, and people began keeping scrapbooks of original cuttings from printed sources (ibid:29). Instead of their primarily being material manuscripts that contained 'evidence' of one's reading, hand drawings were now often included, such as diagrams that illustrated descriptions of local sites and travels (Allen 2010:31). Some commonplace books embraced a sense of playfulness, with writers giving their books humorous or self-effacing titles, such as that of William Congreve, a Staffordshire squire who called his book 'private rubbish of sorts' (Allen 2010:28).

The commonplace book has had a significant place in the unfolding history of English reading (ibid: 21), some examples occupying a high place in the world of public discourse as a form of literary and intellectual firepower useful for authoritative philosophising, others occupying a valued place in the domestic worlds of women, and overall providing evidence of living a highly respected and committed life of 'bookishness and scholarly disputation' (ibid:44). Commonplace books are comprised of 'notes', and serve as proof that in previous centuries notetaking was a highly regarded way of selecting and processing information. The notes were about all sorts of topics: the consumption and analysis of texts, thoughts about ideas and events, and lists of facts or instructions. Keepers of commonplace books would hunt out helpful pieces of teaching and the spirited and noble-minded sayings which are capable of immediate practical application – not far-fetched or archaic expressions or extravagant metaphors and figures of speech – and learn them so well that words became works. Notes in commonplace books were used to assemble evidence for arguments, practice the pursuit of knowledge, and deepen understanding.

In perhaps the most important aspect of its history, the commonplace book is associated with John Locke, the most well-known commonplacer who is largely attributed with its development as an essential writing tool and text type. Locke used a commonplace book

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<sup>51</sup> Allan refers to this, and it is available at Houghton: MS Eng 768 (I) (Courtesy of Houghton Library, Harvard College Library) title page.

during his studies at Oxford in 1652 and wrote his widely studied book, *A New Method for Making Common-Place-Books* (1706). Two aspects of Locke's work are relevant to this experiment, the first his use of headings to arrange and classify notes in a commonplace book. Locke's index method required the commonplacer to analyse the content of each extract, then enter it under an appropriate, self-determined subject heading, much as a cataloguer would. In Locke's method, each commonplacer chooses their own headings, and in this way commonplace books create or reflect a sense of self. This 'sense of self' leads to the second crucial aspect of Locke's work, which is that a commonplace book is at the nexus between the act of compiling and ordering knowledge for self-improvement and understanding of the world, and the formation of a conception of a sense of self in our conscious memories. In this way Locke was one of the first scholars to point out that our concept of the self lies in the mind (Nimbalkar 2011).

Along with Locke, John Milton, Samuel Butler, and Francis Bacon were also zealous users of commonplace books and great believers in its memory-enhancing powers. The commonplace book was also popular in Jane Austen's time, as a kind of 'pedagogical activity of compiling a personal anthology' (Bander 2014: 3). It was a form valued by Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner, W.H. Auden (1982), Walt Whitman, Aldous Huxley, Katherine Mansfield, and Walter de la Mare, among others (*New York Times* 1970). Today the commonplace book is still valued. A number of contemporary commonplace books have been published, one of which is *The Commonplace Book* by New Zealand poet Elizabeth Smither (2011). For Smither, her commonplace book is something to write in when the occasion demands (Smither 2011: v). It is a mix of reflections on writing and other texts, and on her daily experiences; in it she makes connections between what she reads or listens to, and her current state of mind. She flits from thought to thought: for example, in a single entry she notes 'two adorable things about Mozart' (ibid:27) and her own method of working; she reflects on Henry James' notions of kindness and her own understanding of kindness (ibid:8); she links Emily Dickinson's work to her own thoughts about the notion of 'character'; and she compares the lines from TV program, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* with her own situation:

At 4pm I poured a glass of wine, hours earlier than usual. And yet in the head and brain department the day had been a success. But my unexercised limbs feel heavy, sluggish. And the sandwich is sitting heavily in my stomach.

“We’re getting you back in the game, peanut...”

[This is a] lovely programme and a lovely line. A peanut got back on its feet, off the beer-stained table, away from the chip packet and the overflowing ashtray, back into the optimistic pulsing streets of New York (2011: 100).

Maria Popova’s work is also written in a contemporary commonplace book style, more in the vein of a Lockian style than Smither’s style (2019). Popova works in digital and book form to cover<sup>52</sup> wide-ranging scientific and literary topics, synthesizing branches of academic research and philosophy in weekly newsletters, as well as hosting a large annual event, all based around her work as a 21<sup>st</sup>-century commonplacer.

### 21<sup>st</sup>-century commonplace books

A wide definition of a commonplace book is needed to accommodate the 21<sup>st</sup>-century imagination and to frame the Experiment. In postmodernism, texts are blends of many forms, and this is true of the commonplace book. They can be like artist books, yet even the term ‘artist book’ has many meanings; the State Library of Victoria defines an artist book as one made by an artist and intended as a work of art. Other definitions include the production by an artist of a work-like book, consisting of working notes, ideas, sketches, pasting in of images and samples. Artist books incorporate a variety of practices, from traditional print techniques – woodcut, etching and lithography – through to offset, photocopy, or digital production. Certainly, artist books have made a place for themselves in the collections of museums, libraries, and bibliophiles; they have caught the interest of art historians and critics; and numerous studio programs in art schools are dedicated to the art of the book, ushering in new generations of artists making books (State Library of Victoria 2021). If artist books exist at the working edges of various forms of art – printmaking, photography, poetry, experimental narrative, visual arts, graphic design, and publishing – then commonplace books are workbooks that exist at the edges of daily lives, written (very often) by ordinary people, recording, discovering, noting, lamenting, or celebrating their lives. Along with artist books, a short survey of five further forms is needed, as each of these writing forms verify the wealth of everyday material that ordinary people draw on for their own blend of forms. 21<sup>st</sup>-century commonplace books are exotic and fluid mixes of the following: pillow books; journals,

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<sup>52</sup> See Popova’s digital commonplace book at <https://www.themarginalian.org/>.

scrapbooks and diaries; narrative writing therapy; memoirs and personal essays; and digital commonplace books.

## Pillow books

The pillow book is a notebook form that dates back to a tenth-century record of a courtier's experiences, *The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon*, daughter of provincial official Motosuke no Kiyohara (967). The author writes:

One morning Shikibu no Omoto [one of the Empresses's ladies] and I lay in the side room (where we had slept that night) till the sun was well up. Suddenly we heard someone sliding back the door that leads into the main building, and there before us stood the Emperor and Empress! (Sei Shonagon 2011:63)

Examples of contemporary pillow books include the work of Singaporean poet Jee Leong Koh, in *The Pillow Book* (2012). As in a commonplace book, Koh uses headings to assemble his thoughts:

### *Well Organised Thing*

A dictionary. A rainforest. A supermarket.

A columbarium, a place to urn the dead is organised the convenience of the living. The Civil Service, a place to earn a living, is organised for the dead.

The passport office in Singapore.

A dragonfly

A quartz (p12)

### *Disorganised Things*

The Botanic Gardens after a storm. The apartment after a party.

Before the command to come to attention, the enlistees relax in various states of sleep, their rifle slings entangled with their limbs. When I cross the checkpoint into Johur Bahru, I cannot help observing that the trees that were planted in regimental intervals now sprout in confusion. The city has poured and set round them, and not they for the city. If the trees have given the pleasure of pattern before, they now surprise with their surge of green.

Disheveled hair. (p14)

Other headings in Koh's book are: 'when my parents gave up their idols; musical instruments; The cartoons I loved; Chinese wedding banquets; sharp things; things that tilt; when I go home with someone; when someone comes home with me; her name was Margaret; China; happiness; first things; the pledge; why I moved to the United States and not the United Kingdom; things out of place; Japanese things; the old Chinese poets.' Clearly a pillow book is a way of drawing together disparate things.

## Journals, scrapbooks, and diaries

Along with artists books and pillow books, journals, scrapbooks, and diaries can also be considered modes of commonplace books. Maria Popova (2021) describes journaling as ‘a practice that teaches us better than any other the elusive art of solitude – how to be present with our own selves, bear witness to our experience and fully inhabit our inner lives, Popova also argues the importance – the educative power – of journaling. Many writers echo Popova’s view of journaling. For example, writer Anaïs Nin has said of her own journaling:

keeping a diary all my life helped me to capture the living moments... [in it] I only wrote of what interested me genuinely, what I felt most *strongly* at the moment, and I found this fervour, this enthusiasm produced a vividness which often withered in [my] formal work.

For Nin, improvisation, free association, obedience to mood, and impulse brought forth countless images, portraits, descriptions, impressionistic sketches, symphonic experiments, into which she could dip at any time for material. Similarly, French writer André Gide (2000) who journaled for over six decades writes:

‘A diary [was] useful during conscious, intentional, and painful spiritual evolutions. [When] you want to know where you stand... An intimate diary is interesting especially when it records the awakening of ideas; or the awakening of the senses at puberty; or else when you feel yourself to be dying’ (in Popova *ibid*)

In yet another example, Joan Didion (1968) writes:

I think we are well advised to keep on nodding terms with the people we used to be, whether we find them attractive company or not. Otherwise, they turn up unannounced at 4 am of a bad night and demand to know who deserted them, who betrayed them, who is going to make amends. We forget all too soon the things we thought we would never forget. We forget the loves and the betrayals alike, forget what we whispered and what we screamed, forget who we were. I have already lost touch with a couple of people I used to be...

Double entry journal writing<sup>53</sup> is also a form of commonplacing. A double entry journal is where a page is ruled into two sections. On one side is written a text, an idea, a piece of information. On the other side the author writes their reflection about the text. It is a way of deepening our thinking, a private conversation with oneself, and a safe place to experiment with different writing styles. It is a place for brainstorming, keeping lists, or being organised and focussed. It is a place to record past accomplishments and milestones, and for storing

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<sup>53</sup> Joyce, M. (1997). *Double Entry Journals and Learning Logs*. Retrieved 2008, January 23, from <http://www.maslibraries.org/infolit/samplers/spring/doub.html>



source materials, such as snippets of writing, images, videos, and websites for sharing with others in blogs and assignments. According to Petelin (2017), 'double-entry' journals are particularly valuable because they allow for deeper learning:

A double-entry journal – that is, a journal in which you reflect in a meta-entry on what you have written previously ...[allows you to] expand on your learning, achieve perspective, remember and take stock of where you have been, synthesise, self-evaluate, and delight in your progress. (2017, p.8)

An example of this in Smither's commonplace book:

Thumbing through [my] fish commonplace book, as though map reading, it is easy to pass over the letter of Rilke that contains the sobering but hopeful thought:

*Once the realisation is accepted that even between the closest human beings infinite distances continue to exist, a wonderful living side by side can grow up. If they succeed in loving the distance between them.*

I would deny nothing of this wisdom: I've always been a lover and preserver of mystery in relationships- how else could they retain their interest? (p 45)

In *The Diary of Anne Frank* (2009), Frank sometimes engages in a type of double entry journaling when she revisits earlier entries and comments on them. Another example of double entry journaling is Anne Carson's *Nox* (2010), where the verso page throughout is her translation of Catullus' poem of mourning for his lost brother; and the recto page throughout is her own compilation of writing, pasting in of letters and photos, and making sketches about her own lost brother. Not only is this a remarkable work but it can be conceived of as a commonplace book. In these examples, the work is not so much a commonplace as such, in that it is less likely to include the writings of others, but is nonetheless evidence of how people write their lives and identities into public being.

Another subgenre is joy journaling, such as that of Rebecca Kochenderfer's *Joy Journal* (2012), which claims to 'make joy a daily experience'. Kochenderfer asserts that her method of journaling helps the writer remember little things that can bring joy; it uses prompts to help writers have particular kinds of days; it deepens appreciation for the present; and it gently helps writers learn new habits and ways to make life better (ibid). In this same spirit of recording moments of joy, writer Ursula Le Guin described her weeklong visit to a writers' retreat, Hedgebrook, nestled on the coast of Whidbey Island north of Seattle USA in 'The Hope of Rabbits: A Journal of a Writer's Week'. In her journal, Le Guin charts little moments of wonder, discovery, and delight in her handwritten journal:

[When] remembering writing outdoors at Edgebrook and elsewhere, I think about the humane pace of longhand, and how one is constantly looking away from the notebook at

things around it, near or far, changing position as one sits, doodling in the margin while working out a transition, half-consciously noticing the slant of the sunlight, the advance of shadows, the colour of the sky: fully absorbed in the work, and yet open to the surrounding world, as we are when not working on a computer screen (Le Guin 2016:302).

This same sense of wonder is evident in Le Guin's essay, 'Kids' Letters', where she describes with delight the thrill of receiving a great variety of letters: loveable letters from kids under ten, some written as part of a class exercise imposed by their teacher, some laden with questions and drawings, and some as little booklets with stories in them. Le Guin notes that 'as an experienced connoisseur...the best letters and books by kids are entirely handmade... A computer may make writing easier, but that's not always an advantage: ease induces haste and glibness' (Le Guin 2017: 46).

Some of the work of American environmentalist Rachel Carson can also be considered a type of joy journaling. In *The Sense of Wonder*, Carson records moments of joy including a time spent with her small nephew Roger, introducing him to the natural world. Carson writes about sitting with Roger 'in the dark living room before the big picture window watch[ing] the full moon riding lower and lower toward the far shore of the bay, setting all the water ablaze with silver flames and finding a thousand diamonds on the shore as the light strikes the flakes of mica embedded in them' (1998). The quiet whispering and physical closeness between the two during this experience is a sublime example of 'piercing the mundane to find the marvellous'. Carson's writing is full of the 'lasting pleasures of contact with the natural world...available to anyone who will place himself under the influence of earth, sea and sky' (1992: 102). For Carson it is important to retain a child-like sense of wonder and an ancient longing for unity with the living world, and appreciation of 'the vast serenity of the night and the mystery of nocturnal space and sound.' (Carson 1998:10): She puts it thus:

A child's world is fresh and new and beautiful, full of wonder and excitement. It is our misfortune that for most of us that clear-eyed vision, that true instinct for what is beautiful and awe-inspiring, is dimmed and even lost before we reach adulthood. If I had influence with the good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children, I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life, as an unfailing antidote against the boredom and disenchantment of later years, the sterile preoccupation with things that are artificial, the alienation from the sources of our strength.

One stormy autumn night when my nephew was about twenty months old, I wrapped him in a blanket and carried him down to the beach in the rainy darkness. Out there, just at the edge or where-we-couldn't-see, big waves were thundering in, dimly seen white shapes that boomed and shouted, and threw great handfuls of froth at us. Together we laughed for

pure joy – he a baby meeting for the first time the wild tumult of Oceanus, I with the salt of half a lifetime of sea-love in me (Carson 1998: 15).

Another personal journal writer, equally enthralled by the natural world, is Henry David Thoreau whose depictions, sketches, and meditations on trees from his two-million-word journal are joyful.<sup>54</sup> In his *Journal*, 15 Feb 1859, Thoreau wrote:

A distant white birch, erect on a hill against the white misty sky, looks with its fine twigs, so distant and black, like a millipede crawling up to heaven.

Thoreau's journal offers 21<sup>st</sup>-century commonplace book writers an example of engaging with the natural world, even if it is simply a view of whatever is outside a hospital window or an internal garden or courtyard.

### Narrative therapy writing

Yet another type of commonplace book writing is the personal writing people do for themselves that is motivated by a variety of circumstances and needs, sometimes difficult ones, to help themselves feel better. Often known as narrative therapy, it is an example of a process of writing undertaken by 'ordinary writers' as a kind of therapy. Developed by psychologist Michael White (2007), and widely used in psychological counselling, narrative therapy shows how the writing of personal stories enables people to 'suddenly find themselves interested in novel understandings of the events of their lives' and to 'become curious about aspects of their lives that have been forsaken, or to become 'fascinated with neglected areas of their identity' (White 2007: 5). In *What is Narrative Therapy?* Alice Morgan explains how narrative therapy helps patients seeking support to better understand and live their lives through stories. Morgan notes that 'as humans we are interpreting beings' and we give meaning to our lives by linking selected events together in a sequence over time to find a way of explaining or making sense of ourselves (Morgan 2000:5). In narrative therapy, in a mode of hermeneutical practice, people are shown how to make new stories of their lives, build new self-images and learn ways to develop rich understandings of their skills and abilities.

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<sup>54</sup> In his book *Thoreau and the Language of Trees* (2017), Richard Higgins studies Thoreau's 14-volume journal and claims it is increasingly seen as Thoreau's masterpiece but 'is less well known to his readers' (p2)

Related to personal writing inspired by narrative therapy is the expressive personal writing advocated by James Pennebaker. For more than 30 years Pennebaker has reported the benefits of expressive writing about things we find traumatic or emotionally difficult. His work joins that of other psychologists, social workers and chaplains who expound the therapeutic benefits of writing our way through trauma. Examples of this kind of writing include expressive writing workshops for prisoners and others who have experience trauma and emotional upheaval. In their book *Expressive Writing* (2014), Pennebaker and Evans draw on the scientific studies that support the use of writing to enhance wellbeing and explain writing techniques and writing experiments such as stream of consciousness writing (2014: 15), writing to appreciate the good in a sometimes-bad world (ibid: 60), acknowledging and expressing positive emotion ((ibid: 61), and writing to find benefit (ibid: 63). While therapeutic writing is not part of this thesis it is important to note that these forms of personal creative writing are tried and tested forms by 'ordinary writers' in their daily personal notebooks, journals, and commonplace books. It is writing that produces a personal sense of affirmation, redemption, forgiveness, mindfulness and cultivates multiple perspectives.

## Memoirs

Memoirs can often be seen as forms of narrative therapy. The study of older people's memories and their contribution to quality of life has become a significant field of research on ageing, and it seems strange to recall that less than 50 years ago, even in care settings reminiscence tended to be seen as a symptom of mental decline rather than of wellbeing and was actively discouraged (Coleman, Ivani-Chalian and Robinson 2015: 86). However, the work of psychotherapist Erik Erickson shows the importance of accepting and appreciating the life that we have lived as a crucial developmental task of later life (Erikson and Erikson 1987) and the necessity of 'life review' as an inevitable aspect of growing old has changed this. Holocaust memoirs written by survivors in their later years are examples of this kind of writing, and serve as mediations that distil complex harsh experiences into meaningful ideas and values. Eddie Jaku's *The Happiest Man on Earth* (2020) and Ruth Kluger's *Landscapes of Memory* (2004) use personal creative writing to recount and reflect on events in their life courses. Self-published memoirs too are increasingly popular. In the author's own circle of acquaintances,

Betty Shinkfield (2019), and Tony Atkinson (2016) have written their stories. Memory is what people are made of, along with skin and bone.

Related to memoir is the personal essay, a genre for exploration, discovery and sense making. Personal essays can be written about anything, but often fall into one or more of the following categories: home and family, food, ethics, gender, education, class, place, history and politics, language, and communication.<sup>55</sup> In her collection of reflective essays, *Upstream*, poet Mary Oliver charts a personal quest for her sense of self, first by reflecting on her childhood then on other significant moments. Of her childhood she writes:

I walked, all one spring day, upstream, sometimes in the midst of the ripples, sometimes along the shore. My company were violets, Dutchman's-breeches, spring beauties, trilliums, bloodroot, ferns rising so curled one could feel the upward push of the delicate hairs upon their bodies. My parents were downstream, not far away, then further away because I was walking the wrong way, upstream instead of downstream. Finally, I was advertised on the hotline of help, and yet there I was slopping along happily in the stream's coolness. So maybe it was the right way after all. If this was lost, let us all be lost always. The beech leaves were just slipping their copper coats; pale green and quivering they arrived into the year. My heart opened and opened again. The water pushed against my effort, then its glassy permission to step ahead touched my ankles. The sense of going toward the source. I do not think that I ever, in fact, returned home (Oliver 2016: 5).

Both memoirs and personal essays contain elements of commonplacing. For example, in his personal essay, 'Me Talk Pretty One Day', David Sedaris recounts his efforts to learn French at the age of forty-one (Sedaris 2000). In *The Patch* John MacPhee (2018) reflects on his childhood hunting golf balls in the woods, stories of family and travel in a series of personal essays. In her essay 'A sense of place' from *In Deep*, Maxine Kumin explores her life as a farmer and poet and her attachments to words and place. She writes:

How can you be a poet? I ask myself in the bitter February dawn, stomping out in my felt lined L.L Bean boots, feeling my nose hairs freeze in the first ten seconds of exposure to the shocking air of twenty below zero (1987:157)

In *Kitchen Table Memoirs*, editor Nick Richardson (2018) collects personal essays about family, celebratory events, domestic landscapes, all centred loosely around the idea of kitchen table.

In his introduction, Richardson states:

[This] is a book for all who have a kitchen table in their life- whether it is recalling those chats around the table with a mother as she slides into the darkness of Alzheimer's; or the unique and unforgotten sport of table climbing; or the annual family gatherings that degenerate around the table into a replay of ancient grudges. (2018:11)

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<sup>55</sup> Melissa A. Goldthwaite (editor) uses these categories to assemble her selection of personal essays in *The Little Norton Reader* (2017) New York: WW Norton and Company.

While looking back to record the past is important, so too is noting and recording the present. The present is all that's genuinely available to anyone, and it is fleeting, always turning instantly to the past (Roobach and Keckler 2008). The sense of the present features prominently in notebooks, journals, commonplace book writing. Australian writer Helen Garner (2019) captures a strong sense of the present in her notebooks that span nine years from 1978–1987. Garner's commonplace book-style journal entries record the present moment in disarming clarity through snippets of thoughts and observations about her immediate life:

I know what the matter is. I haven't got any women friends here. I miss, I miss. I feel  
crazy and weepy (2019:1)

### Digital commonplace books

Writing memories and thinking and writing about the present seems easier when we consider the digital versions of commonplace books that are all around us. Melbourne journalist Liz Martin (2022) publishes a Facebook page entitled 'Legacy Design for Seniors', a private group for 'vibrant and reflective people of mature years, who seek to share ideas and acquire practical tips on "legacy design" for the benefit of self, loved ones and future generations.' Martin offers three tips: 'celebrate your own greatness' in which she suggests that 'falling in love with your true and flawed self no matter who we are is the foundation stone of a profound legacy'. Second, she suggests living (and writing) about life through the lens of death. This idea acknowledges that death informs life and if we think and live through the lens of death, we have the opportunity to 'design our life and show up in it, exactly as we want to be remembered – a type of reverse engineering'. Martin argues that 'keeping death front and centre in our thinking is not morbid, rather it's like setting the compass to the north-star and giving yourself half a chance of arriving at the destination whole, intact, and most critically – at peace' (posted 15/8/2020). Martin's third tip is to 'Record it! And don't take yourself too seriously'. Her site notes that 'since time immemorial the greatest souls seeking to make things better for the future, have understood the need to write things down' and encourages elders to write their life stories. Other digital sites include the long running, *The Life Writing Project* which gives online writing guidance by writer Andrea Monteach, that assists people to write a personal life story, and *Next Avenue*, an American news and

information organisation for people over 50,<sup>56</sup> publishes personal essays in its online newsletter and social media pages such as that of Lydia Blake's essay, 'Are These the Little Girls I Carried?' (2021). Exploration of these many text forms leads to an expanded definition of the commonplace book, one that incorporates all forms of personal writing.

#### Experiment 2: The commonplace book project for Elders Living Independently at Home

Working from the evident value of these many modes of personal writing, I set out to recruit participants for the project who would be willing to work on their own idea of a commonplace book, and provide feedback about their experience in order to develop insights into the affordances of this mode of writing for Australian Elders.

Interested persons in the 'young old age' category (aged between 60 and 85), people in the baby-boomer generation, were invited to keep a traditional commonplace book, or their own version of one. They were Elders living independent lives and retired from full-time paid work, and it became part of the thesis when Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns in Melbourne prevented access to residents and staff of aged care homes. 'Word of mouth' and a Facebook advertisement were the ways that 'ordinary writers' were recruited for the project. Mostly already known to me, they were people who would perhaps never call themselves 'writers' but who liked writing or the idea of it. Participants were volunteers, living independently with full lives, and with the capacity to write, cut, draw, or use computers to write about their ordinary lives in whatever form they desired, and to reflect on how it felt for them to do so. Participants were sent a letter of invitation<sup>57</sup> and then a 'commonplace book' for their own use: an ordinary blank-page artist book with headings created from Margaret Atwood's reasons for why we write from Chapter 1 in *Negotiating with the Dead* (2002).<sup>58</sup>

It transpired that each of the commonplace book writers was female, tertiary educated, and highly engaged with the world around them and their place within it. Interestingly, 25 people originally expressed willingness to be involved and requested a commonplace book, but by

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<sup>56</sup> See <http://thelifewritingproject.com.au/> and [see https://www.nextavenue.org/](https://www.nextavenue.org/)

<sup>57</sup> See Appendix 8: Letter of Invitation and Participant Information Form

<sup>58</sup> See Appendix 9: Reasons We Write: A List of Headings for a Commonplace Book for participants to use as prompts, if needed.

the end of the project, only five people had written one. In interviews with volunteers who did not end up writing, reasons for their reluctance were as follows:

I was not able to write anything interesting  
It would not look any good  
I couldn't think of anything to write about  
I want to be able to 'write' but I can't  
I just never can get around to it  
'English is not my first language' (You could write in your first language, I had said)  
'I liked the idea of it, but it was harder than I thought'

Even for motivated participants, encouragement and support were found to be necessary for some participants to complete their book. I established a Facebook page, entitled *The Commonplace Book Club*, to provide aid in the form of writing prompts and models.<sup>59</sup> Participants needed to commit regularly to the activity, and through this commitment came to enjoy it. However, an unexpected finding was that when volunteers agreed to be a part of the project there was some element of self-consciousness that hindered their writing because they had agreed to share their commonplace book in a small exhibition at the end of the PhD project.<sup>60</sup> For example, in her responses to reflection questions following completion of her book, Commonplace Book Writer 1 (female aged 70), a participant and prolific journal writer, compared the experience of writing a commonplace book which she knew was part of a 'research project and which would be exhibited' to the experience of her everyday personal journal writing. She was conscious of the difference between writing for an unknown public audience at the University of Canberra, and writing for herself as the sole private reader of her own personal journals. This was an issue that emerged during the course of the experiment, and if the project is replicated it is recommended that commonplace books be written by their authors purely for personal benefit first and foremost; then on completion, the writers could be approached or invited to give permission to display their work.

Participants found that, on balance, it was their regular commitment to daily writing that facilitated joy and satisfaction with the task. The regularity, the sense of treating oneself, and the companionship that personal writing provided emerged as strong reasons for writing. This is how Commonplace Book Writer 1 answered eight reflective questions following the writing of her commonplace book:

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<sup>59</sup> See the Commonplace Book Club <https://www.facebook.com/Commonplace-book-club-114926653664737>

<sup>60</sup> See again Appendix 8: Letter of Invitation to Join the Project



*Why do you write in a commonplace book?*

My regular journal is a significant part of my life. Writing in it, in a café, with a coffee, usually twice a week, helps me organise my thoughts, sort out my feelings, get perspective on any issues, reflect on my life, and record and plan my teaching and various activities. Occasionally I write a one-page poem, usually to express an emotional state. *I also have re-started a little notebook which I update twice a week: "The Best Things about today. . ." which I guess is a little (A6?) Gratitude Journal.*

In a commonplace book, I was happy to try writing and be a part of this project. I write in it (my commonplace book) because it was sent to me! It's something a bit different to try.

*2. What sort of things do you put in it?*

In my private journal, I write quite a lot (8-10 handwritten pages each session). Anything that has happened of significance since the previous time, or that I need to consider. My entries often end with a plan for the day, or the next few days.

With my commonplace book, I've called it "My life on the verge of 70" and am trying to do it as a record for myself but which can be public as well. I have put photos, bits of music, patterns/drawings, photocopies of coloured designs (Turkish 'colouring-in'), lists of music played, a double page summary of my life activities, a poem or two, print-outs of typed material, bits from websites. I have done some drawing/ background patterns with coloured pencils or paint, and stuck in various things from my life – print-outs of Kiva microcredit loans etc.

*3. How do you feel when you work in your commonplace book?*

My private journal feels like a treat – giving myself that time to indulge in just thinking about myself and my life. Buying notebooks for this writing is a pleasure. (Plain coloured Moleskin ones from Office-Works, and beautiful embossed ones from Dymocks in Belconnen, are my most common sort – A5 my preferred size.)...

Because the commonplace book was going on exhibition it was not like my private journaling. I usually quite enjoy it when I get to it, but it takes time and space and the right mindset. I have some conflict over it needing to be public, so no putting personal thoughts of information in it!

Another conflict is that some articles and writing I have done which could be public is better typed. Then it needs to be stuck in the book, and I'm concerned it will get too over-stuffed with extra print-outs and pages added in.

*4. Do you share /show it to anyone? (If so, to whom and what has that been like?)*

My private journals are just for me.

I have not shown my commonplace book to anyone yet but I expect I might. Am willing to have it in the exhibition.

*5. Are there times when you don't feel like using it?*

With my own private journal, no, never! I always enjoy writing in it. A treat for myself. I feel more settled, self-aware, organised and in control of my life at the end of a session. It's excellent self-therapy! ("Why am I feeling anxious/happy/sad/agitated? – Oh – because of . . . and . . . and . . .! That makes sense.")

With my commonplace Book:

It is too big to take into a café.

It is limited to being available to others/public.

I have to make a particular time to sit and work on it.

*6. Has it become part of your life? (If so, how? If not, why not?)*

My private journal, very much so. I feel it is a strong record to ME of what I do, and my box of journals now spans 20 years or more.

I always look forward to my mornings of café writing.

I feel it really helps me balance my thoughts and feelings and feel more control and awareness of the many strands of my life.

I have a hope that in years to come I will find it interesting and perhaps satisfying to read. Already it is sometimes good to read my activity and thoughts from past years.

My father kept a diary for decades – a more factual record than my Journals, with daily temperatures, comings and goings of people etc and nothing really personal – but he greatly enjoyed re-reading them in his 90s. (At 98: “So HM, why did you go to Hobart in February 1982?”)

In my commonplace book, not really. Because of the limitations mentioned above.

(Size. Need to be public. Feeling articles for general exhibition need to be typed/available to be changed/sent around by email etc.)

*7. What else would you like to say about 'keeping a commonplace book'.*

It's been an interesting exercise. Good to try the big 'open book' format and function.

It has been good to reflect on my own journal writing and realise how much I value it in my life.

*8. Anything else?*

It's been an interesting activity to try.

Thanks so much for the opportunity to try this concept, and become much more aware of my own journal writing and how important it is in my life!

The reflections (above) and others provided by participants, show that personal writing for oneself can reduce feelings of loneliness, facilitate a sense of pride in one's memories, experiences, and nurture a sense of appreciation and engagement with the natural physical world, everyday objects, memorable events, and interactions with others.

### Ways of personal writing: six findings

Using a flexible definition of the age-old genre of commonplace book, six elements of 21<sup>st</sup>-century commonplace booking emerged from the study: (1) the use of headings; (2) embracing the role of a 'selfish narrator'; (3) the use of a sense of the ordinary as cause for celebration; (4) use of writing as a solitary activity; (5) use of thoughts and ideas about beauty, love, death and suffering; and (6) using intertextuality and multi-directionalism to find meaning and purpose. What it shows is that the commonplace book can not only be defined as a contemporary genre, but also be used as a creative tool to enrich engagement with daily life, maintain a sense of purpose, and increase quality of life by people in the first stage of old age – young old age. The Experiment showed that by incorporating the use of a commonplace book into daily life, Elders were able to focus their thinking and organise their thoughts.

A close look at these findings indicates first, that the use of headings as prompts enables Elders to get started on writing when the task seems daunting or overwhelming. Headings can act as small 'chunks' or steps or slices of ideas rather than having to think about grand topics or narratives. While headings are not essential, they are nevertheless one of the characteristics of a traditional commonplace book. Traditionally, headings were chosen by the author as ways of arranging, finding, and thinking about selected information, not unlike the way secondary school students arrange their learning in subject folders such as History, English and Geography. In the Experiment, as noted, a list of headings derived from Margaret Atwood's *Negotiating with the Dead* (2002) was included in the commonplace books given to participants. The Atwood-inspired list of wide-ranging topic headings was so generic that anything at all could be written under any heading. Participants were also told they could ignore the headings, replace them with others or not use headings at all: *anything goes!* It was hoped that the freedom to be able to write about anything would also free participants from anxieties they may have about not being a good writer, and would enable them to write about mundane topics or anything else. However oftentimes this 'open-ness' was too vague, and participants needed suggestions that were more practical in nature such as 'favourite recipes', 'daily walks', 'my dog'. Furthermore, this response by some participants to the Atwood-inspired headings was noted, and changes to the Creative Care Toolkit produced at the conclusion of the thesis reflected this finding.

A second finding was that the narrator was always at the centre of the writing. Such autonomy is powerful and well understood by journal keepers such as John Milton, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Thomas Jefferson, Henry David Thoreau, E.M. Forster (1985), Walt Whitman, Virginia Woolf, Mark Twain, Elizabeth Smither, and Virginia Woolf who writes about her habit of commonplacing as follows:

Let us take down one of those old notebooks which we have all, at one time or another, had a passion for beginning . . . Here we have written down the names of great writers in their order of merit; here we have copied out fine passages from the classics; here are lists of books to be read; and here, most interesting of all, lists of books that have actually been read, as the reader testifies with some youthful vanity by a dash of red ink (Woolf 2003).

This is evident in the book produced by Commonplace Book Writer 2 (female, aged 85) which was like an annotated photo album and scrapbook of artefacts, which reported events that

were significant to the author, placing her at the centre of the collection and showing her values and thoughts.<sup>61</sup> Her book begins:

We write for our children  
My First Entry  
16<sup>th</sup> June 2020

Today I read that W.H. Auden had written in his Commonplace Book called "A Certain World" back in 1970. What W.H Auden said was meditation is a "Learning Process". Indeed, a process to pay attention, to concentrate and to attend. He also said "schools were places that could teach the spirit of prayer in a secular context". Auden maintained that to do this was to concentrate fully on whatever was before you. Be it a poem, picture, maths, or leaf under a microscope, and to concentrate on these for their own sake. By the "spirit of prayer" he means "selfless attention"

I agree with W. H. Auden. However, I firmly believe that before the classroom comes "at home with the parents" and that is where the concentration and attention is really taught. All these little things like making their bed, setting the table, putting out the bins, drying the dishes, making their own lunches, etc etc

All of these can be taught and encouraged from ages 4-5 years onwards. Paying attention to ourselves first THEN learning to LISTEN and Attend. Rather than to THINK.

A third finding was that writing about daily topics, objects and events can be positive and transformative. Writing about our ordinary objects can be an experience that, like alchemy, turns ordinary metals into gold; and can quite literally be a means of prolonging life. It brings pleasure back to the act of writing. The subject of ordinary things as topics for writing has a long tradition. In his *Odes to Common Things*, for example, poet Pablo Neruda (2018) writes about objects such as tables, chairs, beds, bars of soap, a cluster of violets, yellow flowers, gillyflowers, pairs of socks, cats, dogs, guitars, violins, pairs of scissors, boxes of tea, oranges, apples, bread, artichokes, onions, tomatoes, French fries.

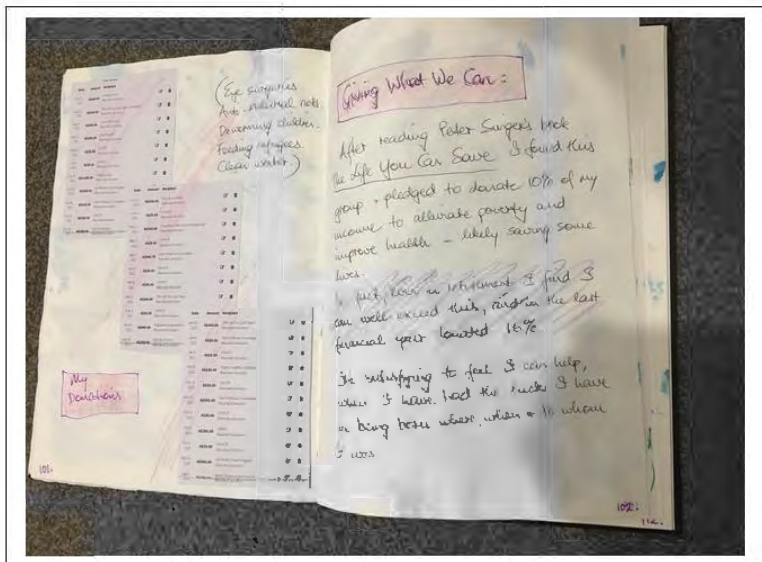
In the commonplace books, writing was sometimes unfinished, inaccurate, and speculative. And this was fine. Subjects and content were sometimes disconnected, and while there is no

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<sup>61</sup> See Appendix 11: Extract from Commonplace book Writer 2.

wish to dismiss the polished, edited, and formal writing of memoirs and family stories, the books in this project show that it is important to assert the relevance and value of informal, unedited, spontaneous drafts. In his essay ‘It’s Just a Draft: On the messy, the unfinished and the speculative in writing’ Joseph Doubtfire (2020) proposes the relevance and value of writing that ‘falls short of academic expectations when considering the relationship between the arts practice and the academic analysis that is required to accompany it.’ This kind of writing could be used to describe the writing that is done in commonplace books: indeed, messiness is almost essential because it shows that the actual process of writing is at the heart of a commonplace book, not the finished product. It is the act of writing that matters.

Figure 4: A page from Commonplace Book Writer 1’s book<sup>62</sup>



Participants reported writing in various places and the pleasure that it gave. For example, Commonplace book Writer 1 says:

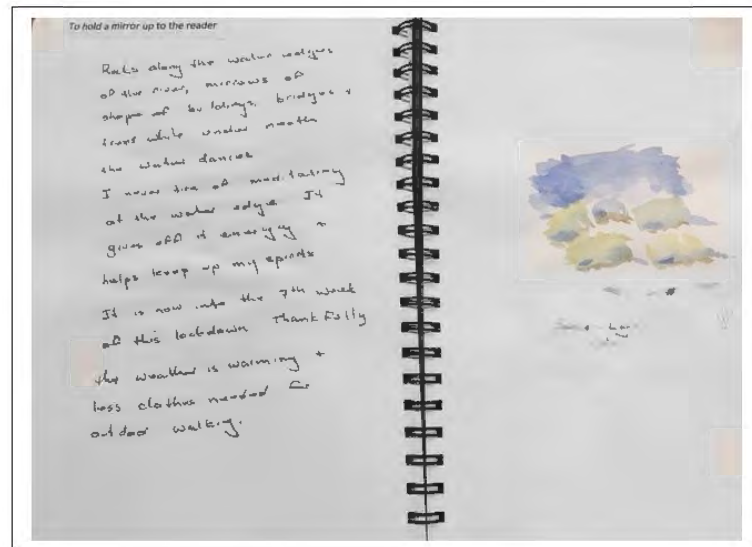
I choose a different café, and order a welcome coffee, on my two ‘fast days’ each week (I do the 5:2 ‘diet’), and spend about 2 hours there. I feel I am caring for myself, through both the hunger (!) and the time taken to write. The actual sensation of a good pen in a lovely journal is pleasurable. I use a different pen colour for each entry, rotating through nice ink pens from OfficeWorks: purple, blue, aqua, black. . .

A fourth finding of the Experiment was that commonplace books were mostly written during moments of solitude. Pandemic lockdowns, and living alone were experiences common to all

<sup>62</sup> See Appendix 11: Extracts from Commonplace Book Writer 1

six participants. As mentioned previously, solitude can be an antidote to loneliness. Keeping a commonplace book allows the author to be both writer and reader, and previous entries can be re-read, changed, and shared with others at later times if desired.

Figure 5: A page from Commonplace Book Writer 3's book<sup>63</sup>



A fifth finding in the Experiment was that commonplace books often contained material related to four themes: beauty, love, death, and suffering. As all personal writing begins for the writer's own sake, often with the assumption that it will not be read by a wider audience, it usually has reflections on the hard times, times of loneliness and abandonment, the ones we love or miss, and our experiences of death. Well-known examples of personal writing of this kind that have recently been published include that of asylum seeker, Kurdish journalist Behrouz Bouchani who wrote his memoir *No Friend but the Mountains* in an attempt to 'rename' things, to affirm his personhood, and establish a sense of authority. Bouchani's personal writing is a way of reclaiming authority from prison (Bouchani 2018: xxvi) or, as Richard Flanagan puts it in his introduction, 'The one thing that [Bouchani's] jailors could not destroy in Bouchani was his belief in words: their beauty, their necessity, their possibility, their liberating power' (ibid 2018: viii). In another much older example, A.B. Facey, writing of moments of solace amidst a harsh childhood in the wheat belt of rural Western Australia at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, recounts:

<sup>63</sup> See Appendix 12: Extract from Commonplace Book Writer 3's book

On Sundays, when we didn't work much, I would often go into the bush and watch the birds and they were lovely. In some ways they were like me – they had to fend for themselves as soon as the mother bird thought that they were old enough.

Other works such as *Diary of Anne Frank* (2009), *Landscapes of Memory* (Kluger 2004), or *The Happiest Man on Earth* (Jaku 2020) begin as a way of working through many forms of suffering, such as in times of war. Anne Frank wrote in order to 'write down all that she thought and felt otherwise she would suffocate completely'. Ruth Kluger claims she wrote to stay sane, to endure grief, to record experiences, and to remind ourselves of particular lives and times. Eddie Jaku writes of seeing 'the very worst of mankind, the horrors of the death camps, the Nazi efforts to exterminate [his] life and the lives of all [his] people but now considers [himself] the happiest man on Earth' (2020:3).

We often write about love: a love of the ordinary things around us, of reading, gardening, or cooking, the ordinary things of daily life. For people who love reading, a daily reading journal of thoughts about what they read can be a satisfying part of ordinary life. For example, when aged in his mid-50s, essayist and novelist Alberto Manguel (2006) decided to make a list of books he wanted to reread. 'It occurred to me...that rereading a book in a month, I might complete in a year, something between a personal diary and a commonplace book: a volume of notes, reflections, impressions of travel, sketches of friends, of events public and private, all elicited by my reading' (2004, x). Cathy Rentzenbrink does something similar in *Dear Reader* (2021), her personal response to the comfort and joy she finds in reading books, over the course of her life. Music is another love and participant GD, wrote extensively about her love of music and nature with reflections followed by quotations from Shinichi Suzuki, Maria Montessori and Ludwig van Beethoven. She writes:

*My world: Music and Nature*

From nature and music my spirit soars, how could I ever live a day without hearing music and enjoying the nature around me

MUSIC: 'The end of all good music is to affect the soul'. Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643)

'I shall seize fate by the throat; it shall certainly never overcome me.' Ludwig von Beethoven (1770-1827)

NATURE: Our world has changed over the past year with the coronavirus lockdowns. How fortunate was the time I spent with Erica in London and Europe in December and January 2020 without the worry of the infection? As spring emerges in Sydney the weather invites me to explore the nature around me. Walks allow me to explore the beauty of this expansive Sydney region, so many nature trails along the Parramatta River and Eastern coastline.

TEACHING: How my world lights up as each young piano student gains confidence and shares their love of music with me. Hours of struggle and perseverance together will not be forgotten as they emerge into adulthood. 'Music is the language beyond words and letters.' Dr Shinichi Suzuki (1898-1998).

EDUCATION: 'Education is a natural process carried out by the child and is not acquired by listening to words but by experiences in the environment.' (Maria Montessori 1870-1952)

'I believe that every human being is formed through the great activity of life, through absorbing from the environment.' Dr Shinichi Suzuki

And we write about death; after all, its 'face at the window, peer[s] in' and forces us to wonder what all our living has meant, what life has been about (Hansen 2018:112). Old age is a time for 'living gently with big questions' (ibid). Commonplace Book Writer 2 included a letter from her mother, a prolific letter writer who lived between 1906-2001, who towards the end of her life wove the theme of death into her daily correspondence to family. While spending respite time in a nursing home, the letter has references to death interspersed with accounts of her other daily activities:

Dear Angela, Don, and family

This is a wonderful home. Could not fault it, food great and I sleep all night, lovely shower in the morning. It is very cold here today. Peter calls with mail and shopping. Zoe is not very well, and Mary her little sick friend passed away – getting buried today. Marie is taking her to the funeral as her own car is not so hot. Mary Scully passed away. I have had lots of mail from the Friday Club. We play Housie here and I collected two men's hankies. I fill in my days with rugs and coat hangers. I am really having a good rest and still enjoying the biscuits Don made. Lolly tin never seems to go down. I hope you can read this scribble. Love to all, Mother.<sup>64</sup>

Similarly, in her book, Commonplace Writer 3 notes:

Death is inevitable so why thumb our nose at it? I may not dwell on the future but at times I concern myself that I may be a problem for my daughter if I can't live independently.  
31.08/2020

A sixth finding of the Experiment was that the commonplace books contained intertextuality and were multi-directional. In the extract from Elizabeth Smither's commonplace book quoted earlier, where the author's reflection goes from Mozart to herself; Henry James and herself; and Emily Dickinson, herself, and a TV program, there is a clear example of intertextuality. When we use intertextuality, it is relatively easy to find ourselves going off in various directions instead of sticking with a single topic or purpose. The idea of writing 'in any direction' is similar to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's 'rhizome' literary theory (1987;

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<sup>64</sup> Used with permission of the owner as per Copyright Council.



1972), which uses the metaphor of a rhizome plant stem putting out a complex system of underground roots to celebrate difference, randomness, and chaotic interplay. A rhizomatic approach to writing does not rely on hierarchies, definitions, and classifications. Instead, it embraces openness, tolerance, and the celebration of diversity, and can capture and explore the lived reality of our lives and identities in contemporary spaces and cultures. Smither describes her own rhizomatic approach this way:

... [my] commonplace book which, after all, is compiled haphazardly, neglected for long periods and, since writing tidily is a minor torture, often stuffed with scraps of paper on which future entries are scribbled. There comes the day when they are transcribed on to the pages, thick portentous paper that instantly makes my wrists ache. I don't arrange the scraps: whichever is nearest to hand goes in first, so there are some curious juxtapositions (p11).

Further evidence of multi-directionalism or intertextuality is found in the broad range of topics in the commonplace books. For example, the first five pages of participant Commonplace Book Writer 3's commonplace book includes: music and nature; how children learn; reflections on spirit, integrity, honour, morals, the spirit of life, and the environment; and death. Similarly, Commonplace Book Writer 2 covers meditation, death, peace, silence, childhood, maternal, parents, ancestors, and reflections of WW2 in the first five pages. And Commonplace Book Writer 1's first few pages includes reflections on Kiva loan lending; the joy of writing; and her music collaborations.

### Future uses of commonplace books

In addition to the benefits of making a commonplace book for people who are living alone in their homes, there is scope for making commonplace books within a social setting as part of a group activity and over a cup of tea or coffee. Organisations like Council of the Ageing (COTA), and Community Centres, and 'Over 55s' retirement complexes have expressed interest in hosting writing groups, and commonplace book writing is a good fit. While not part of this particular experiment, writing in a commonplace book can be done in group settings as part of social gatherings, a way of coming together to create a sense of solidarity with others. Like a craft club, participants sit together, use writing prompts if they wish, and create short poems, origami booklets, stories, or other projects. Writing prompts such as photos and objects are useful. As Linda Flowers has shown, writing in a group can encourage 'speaking up, speaking against, speaking for, and speaking with as expressive practices (2008: 20).

Flowers shows that when a 'supportive rhetorical space' is constructed, transformative relationships can emerge (ibid:2) and a 'common life' among the writers is negotiated.

## Conclusion

Experiment 2: The Commonplace Book Project for Elders Living Independently at Home shows that 'ordinary' writers derive pleasure and meaning from writing about their 'ordinary' lives. The 21<sup>st</sup> century commonplace book is a flexible form of personal creative writing that accommodates contemporary living, particularly the lifestyles of many Elders who live independently at home. The use of headings can serve as prompts to get started, if needed. It is a form of writing that places the author at the centre of the writing and in this way a sense of the ordinary can become a cause for celebration. It is a satisfying solitary activity, can be undertaken anywhere at any time, and reactivates engagement with symbolic expression through personal accounts of a writers' thoughts and ideas about beauty, love, death, and suffering. Making and writing a commonplace book is a way of communicating in a world that we can live in. As philosopher Nelson Goodman writes: 'We can have words without a world, but no world without words or other symbols' (1978:6). Furthermore, a commonplace book is a personal impromptu narrative that embraces intertextuality and multi-directionalism, resulting in an enduring record of reflections and observations.

## Experiment 3: Creative Workshops for Elders in Aged Care Residences

This is the great hope: that if enough people learn the techniques, creative care might be poured like water into care systems themselves and change the way we understand and deliver care (Basting 2020: 133).

The Creative Workshop Experiment for Elders living in residential care, some of whom had mild dementia, and were in the 'old age' stage of life, was the third and final experiment. The three experiments of the thesis have been reported on in the sequential order in which they were undertaken. Experiment 1 — the Imaginative Storytelling Project involving people living with diagnosed dementia, often in the 'old-old' stage of life in residential care was undertaken just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Experiment 2 — The Commonplace Book Project was conducted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and involved Elders who were living independently at home. Experiment 3 — the Creative Workshops Project was conducted during the pandemic, between lockdown periods in an aged care residence in Melbourne, when heavy restrictions were still in place. Because Experiments 1 and 3 both relate to residents who live in aged care homes they can be drawn together and the discussion in this chapter reflects this.

Each of the experiments were designed to offer opportunities for Elders to have their voices heard, primarily through the co-creation of the making of art: stories, books, and in this case poems, drawings, songs and other pieces produced through conversation around a table.

The initial research plan was to have Elders in these communities write their life stories and use narrative writing to construct a sense of the value of their lives, and expand this value in ways that could accommodate the impacts of dementia. However, the grounded theory approach in Experiment 1 made it clear that writing was beyond the capacity of many people living with dementia, which directed me to make changes, in Experiment 3, that included other easily accessible creative modes to open up similar positive experiences. For this reason, the central questions informing both Experiments 1 and 3 shifted from a specific focus on writing to ask: what does participation in imaginative or creative activities show us about the meaning of growing old? And what part can these activities form in a toolkit of creative care practices?

Before reporting on the Creative Workshops Project, it is necessary to outline the positive ageing movement that forms the context in which the experiments were undertaken.

### Positive ageing

Now more than ever, health professionals are seeking ways to promote positive communication and self-worth when supporting people in the three stages of ageing: young-old; old; and old-old. Terms like ‘successful ageing,’ ‘the longevity dividend’ and ‘life celebration’ are evident in the literature of positive ageing. For example, a meta-analysis by Jean-Pierre Michel, professor of Geriatric Medicine at Geneva University and Ritu Sadana from the World Health Organization (Michel and Sadana 2017), reported that there were 3000 new scientific articles devoted to ‘healthy aging’, of which more than 500 focused on ‘successful aging’.

In the positive aging movement, research focuses on a person-centred approach to investigating health care. First defined by Tom Kitwood in his book *Dementia Reconsidered: The Person Comes First* (1997), person-centred care acknowledges that the individual is a person who can experience life and relationships despite the progressive disease of dementia. Other principles of person-centred care are offering and respecting choices; including the person’s past life and history into their care; and focusing on what the person can do, rather than the abilities that have been lost owing to the disease (ibid).

Narrative practices, the practices of talking or telling and listening to stories, are an important part of person-centred care. In 2016, Maria D’Araújo and colleagues published a study showing how narrative practices can be used in the ‘co-construction of a community positive future.’ Their study of the Wednesday Tea Project (Chá das Quartas), a weekly meeting of women from a small village in Portugal – which was initially established to combat high levels of loneliness and isolation of women over 80 – found that narrative practices gave these women ‘the opportunity to celebrate life after the age of 80, while allowing the community to be part of and to benefit from the process.’ Using positive psychology methods and narrative practices, the study produced four findings: first, the deconstruction of the dominant social discourse of loneliness and old age as a ‘problem’; second, the publication of

a book for the local community entitled *To Plough the Time*, a metaphor for preparing and nurturing the present so that the relationships we establish are well-rooted and the future is fruitful; third, the reduction of feelings of loneliness by re-remembering significant figures; and fourth, new levels of action undertaken by women and by the community as a consequence of a re-authoring process.

## Creative care

Creative Care is an important part of the positive ageing movement, and requires detailed discussion. Academic discourses on positive ageing and various conceptions of creative care are found in health humanities, medical humanities, creative practice, cultural gerontology, arts and music therapy, and arts practice. Creative care is not merely an intervention; it is a way of daily living. Basting defines it as:

a mutually nurturing and generative process ...that helps people move through the barriers to connecting with elders (or anyone for that matter) – the fear, the guilt, the grief to name just a few – and to feel confidence in people’s creative capacity to facilitate and experience meaningful connection together. This process can bring us back to one another and teach us the power of the very human act of caring for one another. (2020:21)

Creative care programs allow organisations to see people with dementia through a lens other than a medical one; to move to a more person-centred model of care. Person-centred creative care allows for joy, laughter, camaraderie, and shared empowerment. It is both a noun and a verb, and draws on several conceptions of art. For example, creative care embraces Virginia Woolf’s idea that we all have creative attributes:

Behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we — I mean all human beings— are connected with; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. Hamlet or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself. (Woolf 2021)

Woolf’s phrase, ‘the whole world is a work of art’, is similar to theorist Michel Foucault’s observation:

What strikes me is the fact that, in our society, art has become something related only to objects and not to individuals or to life. That art is something which is specialized or done by experts who are artists. But couldn’t everyone’s life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object but not our life? (1997: 261)

Further evidence of the democratisation of art or ‘the whole world as a work of art’ is in the description of university courses in creative therapies such as those offered by Charles Darwin University and the University of Melbourne that state that it is not necessary to be an artist in order to be a creative practitioner: that ‘little c’ concepts of creativity are of equal value.<sup>65</sup> ‘Little c’ creativity permeates the lives of all human beings, no matter how many times [we] may have been told [we] are not creative (Basting 2020). So, while there is some overlap between creativity and art, this thesis is an interrogation of how ordinary lives can be embraced in creative ways — to find meaning and purpose in our surroundings by using the innate creativity of the human imagination. In this way creative care is accessible to all; all can participate in activities that transform the daily culture of aged care residences.

One of the most accessible forms of creative care is storytelling because it doesn’t need equipment or specialist training since narrative is so much a part of everyday life. Both the positive ageing movement generally and the creative care movement in particular embrace personal storytelling as an essential part of person-centred care. Four laws about storytelling are contained in Basting’s theory of creative care: 1) everyone has stories inside them; 2) everyone has some kind of tool for expressing these stories; 3) everyone has barriers keeping their stories from coming out — some more than others; and 4) it is up to the individual staff caring for individuals to figure out how to invite the story out and how to ‘listen it’ into existence (ibid: 20). Storytelling can be playful and fun, and Scott Eberle’s (2014) six elements of play, which he names as anticipation, surprise, pleasure, understanding, strength, and poise, were evident in the behaviours and responses to the storytelling that occurred among Elders in the Conversation Workshop project.

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<sup>65</sup> Anne Basting shows that literature on creativity comprises many models, not just the division between Big C and little c, but also the 4-C model discussed by Kaufman and Beghetto – mini-c (personal creativity), little-c (everyday creativity), Pro-c (expert creativity), and Big-C (genius creativity) – in ‘Beyond Big and Little: the Four C Model of Creativity’ in [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/978-1-137-46344-9\\_2#:~:text=In%20this%20chapter%2C%20we%20highlight,%2DC%20\(genius%20creativity\).](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/978-1-137-46344-9_2#:~:text=In%20this%20chapter%2C%20we%20highlight,%2DC%20(genius%20creativity).)

### Experiment 3: Creative (Conversation) Workshops for Elders living in residential aged care



Photo of participant M, in the 'Hats n Socks' creative workshop. (Permission to display photo given by participant in the Participant Information and Consent Form – Appendix 8)

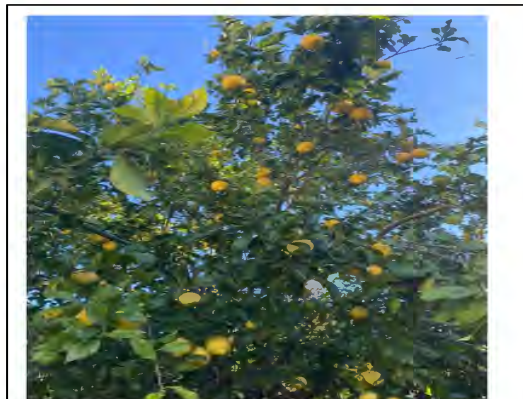


Photo of lemon tree used as a conversation prompt in a creative workshop.

This experiment consisted of a series of workshops delivered in a private residential aged care home in Melbourne. The word 'conversation' is included in the title of the project in parentheses because it was the primary mode in which the creative activities were undertaken. The primacy of conversation as a mode for creative practice emerged from the grounded theory principles informing the research. A high-profile aged care residence was chosen for this experiment as it is well known for its programs and publications, and has a new dementia unit inspired by the Hogeweyk Village model in the Netherlands.<sup>66</sup> When approached, the organisation, Hammond Care, clearly understood the value of creative care and was eager to have programs offered to residents. After discussion with the Coordinator of Volunteers, it was decided that a round table conversation-based workshop, telling stories, making poems, painting, and singing with participants would best meet the particular needs of residents. Participants had low level dementia or no formal diagnosis.

Between March and August 2021, six workshops, informed by Anne Basting's creative care model (2009, 2020), were held with aged care residents, gathered around a table in a common area such as a loungeroom. In each workshop participants focused on informal storytelling, laughter, reminiscence, music, and celebration. I facilitated the hour-long

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<sup>66</sup> See The Hogeweyk Dementia Village <https://www.detail-online.com/article/dementia-village-de-hogeweyk-in-weesp-16433/>

conversation, using a range of tools including Anne Basting's 'beautiful questions',<sup>67</sup> poetry, picture prompts, impromptu singing and violin playing, painting, cutting, and pasting. Elders sat at a table with me, and I was assisted by another volunteer. Before each workshop commenced, the table was carefully laid out with brightly coloured and interesting arts/craft and storytelling materials, around a particular theme.

Workshop materials were selected to look inviting, and to cultivate a physical space that would facilitate conversational storytelling. Elders were selected and invited by care workers. They arrived in walkers or wheelchairs, or were assisted by care workers, then sat around the table which served to provide a shared focus. Elders could choose the way they joined in and the extent to which they contributed. They could leave the workshop at any time and return to their room. Sometimes a visitor would arrive. When this happened, some participants invited their visitor to join in with the group while others left and went to their room with their visitor. While some participants were keen to join in from the start with a 'give it a go' attitude, others, particularly in the first workshop, were wary, silent, and unwilling or unable to participate. They sat nearby and observed. But by the second and subsequent workshops, this wariness dissipated, trust was established, and all participants were more interested and engaged in what was happening. The prompts on the table made the gathering a space for sharing thoughts, ideas, and memories; a place to feel comfortable and where a sense of community was established if only temporarily. At the end of each workshop, the materials produced were displayed on walls and served as talking points in the following days until the next workshop. 'Can you come every day?' care workers would say at the conclusion of each workshop.

### Six positive outcomes of creative workshops

Findings in the Experiment confirmed the affordances of Eberle's six elements of successful play – anticipation, surprise, pleasure, understanding, strength, and poise. The first was evident in the sense of anticipation and curiosity shown by residents before each workshop began. 'What is happening here?' some would ask as they saw the table being prepared with

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<sup>67</sup> See Appendix 13: Beautiful Questions from [www.timeslips.org](http://www.timeslips.org)



objects and materials, and 'What is going on?' I would respond by saying, 'We're going to have some fun, chat, make a mess, do whatever we want!' One resident, with quite severe dementia, would walk around each day with a pen and notepad asking, 'what is happening today? What is on the schedule?', such was her sense of anticipation and eagerness to be involved. These questions showed, 'a moment of preparation and suspension [was being experienced] before a playful activity commences' (Eberle 2014).

Eberle's second element emerged in the sense of surprise experienced by participants as they sat around the table at the beginning of the workshop, looking at, picking up and asking about the objects on the table. This sense of surprise continued into the workshop as poems were read out, ideas and stories shared, and when I jotted down the stories and images and turned them, on the spot, into a short poem or creative artefact. The third, pleasure, was evident in the laughter, the confidence and the frivolity that characterised each of the workshops. The invitation to 'make a mess' and 'make noise' created a sense of freedom to joke, laugh and enjoy other's company among the participants. The impression was given that this doesn't happen much, and that residents and staff would like it to happen far more often.

The fourth element was clear in the obvious understanding among participants shown in response to one another, to the question prompts I used, and to the objects on the table. Eberle asserts that when we have understanding we gain empathy for others and knowledge about the world around us. One participant with severe dementia who was nonverbal showed appreciation of the objects by picking them up, touching and feeling them, particularly pieces of fruit or fabrics and textiles. With each workshop she became more relaxed and communicative, eventually smiling, waving hello and goodbye and making eye contact with the other participants. It took time for her to show her thoughts and feelings, but they were clearly evident. Another example was the way participants would respond to someone's story and develop it with their own example or version, so that the stories were actually shaped by the relationship between teller and listener (Basting 2020:20). Participants used their imagination to reconjure memories of shipboard trips to London with girlfriends at eighteen years of age; or of life in Sri Lanka with a beautiful young bride. They reimagined Saturday night dances, and leaving Europe after World War II, remembered long-lost pets such as Molly dog and Brave dog, and recounted life in the Corps de Ballet, being on staff at the

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and enjoying Sunday lunches after church. The questions I asked were usually understood by participants and allowed the conversation to develop and take new directions.

Eberle's fifth element, strength and confidence, was also shown by participants in their own personhood and presence. Strength need not be simply physical brawn and muscle; rather, it can be a range of skills that come from mastering a particular competency within play, which, Eberle writes, 'can sharpen our mental abilities and deepen our insights into our social capabilities' (Eberle 2009). In this Experiment the voices of participants became stronger with each workshop, and contributions to the conversation were more forthcoming as topics were explored in more extended ways.

The sixth element is the sense of poise, a 'sense of composure, ease, wit, fulfilment, spontaneity, proprioception and grace that comes from participating in a play activity' (Eberle 2014). Not unlike Mihaly Csikszentmihaly's idea of 'flow' (1998), Eberle's notion of poise is the feeling that is achieved when one is immersed in a playful activity within an environment in which one can comfortably and safely explore ideas at length. One participant, usually grumpy and anti-social, was highly engaged in the workshop and was polite and charming throughout. However as soon as it ended, she would resume a demeanour of isolation and separation from the other residents, for example complaining about the number of tissues used by others and remembering her own aches and pains. Maybe if the organisation could manage to conduct a lot more of these workshops her poise might be more sustained.

Another aspect of playfulness to emerge from the workshops was to do with the social experience of imagination and uncertainty. The 'social imagination is the capacity to invent visions of what should be and what might be in our deficit society, in the streets where we live, in our schools' (Green 1995). Uncertainty is 'the seat of creativity' (Menger and Rendall 2014:17). Writer Ursula Le Guin (1969) says 'the only thing that makes life possible is permanent, intolerable uncertainty: not knowing what comes next'; and poet Mary Oliver writes in *A Thousand Mornings* (2012):

The man who has many answers  
is often found  
in the theatres of information  
where he offers, graciously,

his deep findings.  
While the man who has only questions,  
to comfort himself, makes music.  
(*A Thousand Mornings*)

Yet another finding was a reduction in fear or caution among participants. In one workshop, out of the blue a participant said, 'Do not be afraid to die. You died billions of years ago before you were born, and you did not suffer any slight inconvenience from it'. Social interactions among participants were lively, meaningful, and enjoyable. Functionality increased, some became competitive during game playing,<sup>68</sup> and engagement was high. For the duration of the workshops, noise and laughter became part of the environment of the aged care residence.

This reduction in fear was replaced with a sense of wonder achieved by the use of 'beautiful questions' and the 'yes and' technique<sup>69</sup> which cultivated meaningful conversations and 'proof of listening'. These techniques enabled participants to 'connect to the larger world beyond their immediate physical surroundings' (Basting 2020). A sense of wonder was experienced by looking at a picture of a lemon tree or a beautiful vista, or looking at the colour of the sky out of the window, or remembering a beautiful dress or pair of shoes. The experiment showed that wonder can be experienced anywhere, even at home in an aged care residence. When participants embraced a sense of wonder their sense of the mundane – a more dominant disposition – diminished, and a state of curiosity seemed to take over. Wonder allows us to renew our sense of awe in a shared moment of remembering and thinking, and the conversations in the workshops, triggered by carefully selected prompts, enabled participants to embrace a shared sense of humanity and belonging. This in turn brought about an obvious sense of awe.<sup>70</sup> Thus, when I used particular strategies in my role as creative practitioner, the result was that a sense of surprise, pleasure and fun around an activity made the experience enjoyable and enriched the sense of awe, motivating participants towards an end goal, such as the production of a range of artefacts for display or a performance of a song.

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<sup>68</sup> In one workshop a game of colour matching was played with the first person to finish ringing a bell – a lot of fun but not always easy!

<sup>69</sup> See Anne Basting *Creative Care* 2020.

<sup>70</sup> For Basting awe is cultivated when participants share an observation such as noticing magnificent vistas. A sense of 'awe brings participants into a shared moment that connects them in the face of something vast and inspires a rethinking of thoughts previously known' (ibid:133).

The workshops also produced a change in the living environment. While there was no physical change, the space where the workshops were conducted became a place of socialisation and creativity. For me it felt as if the residents were 'reclaiming' the space as their own, and that at least for the duration of the workshop they were 'in charge' of the space.<sup>71</sup> So while the physical space remained unchanged, the activity within it changed the sense of space, control, and authority. Participants felt free to grumble about the 'rules' of the aged care residence, such as not being able to hang pictures on bedroom walls because these had been freshly painted, and participants would laugh and joke about what the staff might get up to in a nearby cloakroom that was for 'staff only'. When one participant, Velma, who clearly loved painting lamented that she couldn't paint every day, a conversation between me and unit manager ensued about how staff could support Velma with a small painting corner in the lounge room each day. Sadly, the staff member deemed this 'too difficult' to arrange and oversee. 'Staff simply do not have the time or commitment for these things', he said sadly. The temporary change in the living environment that occurred during these workshops echoes the view of the *World Alzheimer Report* (Fleming *et al.* 2020), which is that physical environment illustrates the role that design has to play in the provision of quality care for Elders, and sits alongside other vital therapeutic and non-pharmacological interventions (2020).<sup>72</sup>

For the duration of the workshops, elements of playfulness cultivated an environment that reduced fear of the dullness and dissatisfaction of daily life; created a sense of wonder and awe in the ordinary lives of ourselves and others; and changed the living environment to become a place of socialisation and creativity rather than being primarily a pharmacological one. These qualities were expressed through the social relationships and actions that occurred as part of the interactions around the table. Clearly in these workshops playfulness [was] not a prelude to the creative act: it [was] the creative act itself' (Morris 2017: 13).

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<sup>71</sup> I made notes after each workshop.

<sup>72</sup> The World Alzheimer Report 2020, 'Design, dignity, dementia: Dementia-related design and the built environment' <https://www.alzint.org/resource/world-alzheimer-report-2020/> highlight the importance of aesthetics in the delivery of best practice dementia care. 'It claims that building design for dementia is 30 years behind the physical disabilities movement – and that this must change.' The Report contains discussions with eight pioneer, architects and researchers in the field who list ideas and principles most important and inspirational for them when designing spaces for people living with dementia.

## The role of the creative practitioner/researcher

Maintaining the momentum and focus during the workshops required skill. I needed to do three things: stimulate and maintain the storytelling conversation throughout the workshop; follow whatever direction the conversation took; and produce on-the-spot short creative writing pieces that captured some of the ideas articulated in the workshop. One thing that did not require any encouragement to participate was when I played a musical instrument.<sup>73</sup> When this happened participants become animated, made special requests, and residents and staff from other sections of the building would be curious and come and have a look.

A careful selection of materials by me was essential, along with a lively and friendly persona. Such preparation encouraged participants to comment and contribute. A strong rapport between the practitioner and group needed to be quickly established, and with playfulness at the centre of the activity, participants in this Experiment confirmed Basting's claims that creative care enables Elders to 'move through their fears and come to feel real pride and overwhelmingly joy, to show compassion and selflessness, and to 'even express bawdy humour and dry wit' (Basting 2009: 4).

Inviting participants to play with ideas required nuanced and sensitive pedagogy, and I needed to use effective strategies to facilitate and maintain engagement, and create a sense of safety and feelings of pleasure.<sup>74</sup> When a nuanced and sensitive approach is used by the practitioner, the participants can embrace the idea that anything is possible. In their collection of studies, *Playing with Possibilities*, Peter O'Connor and Claudia Rozas Gomez (2017) claim that access to a sense of 'possibility' should be a human right:

The obscenities of just eight human beings owning more than half of the world's wealth, of Trump as a world leader, the permanent austerity that creates Grenfell Towers, the disgrace of Aleppo, these suggest the tide of human history is going out, carrying with it all the progress made in the last half of the twentieth century for a more just and equitable world (O'Connor and Gomez 2017:2)

Furthermore, research can embrace the idea and value of 'possibility and play' as a way to imagine and 'slow wonder' (2017:3), and illustrate the idea that 'private imaginings are

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<sup>73</sup> As a violinist, the author was able to play a range of tunes prompted by and related to the workshop theme, and conversations.

<sup>74</sup> See also Scott Eberle's *The Elements of Play: Toward a Philosophy and Definition of Play* (2014).

connected to public possibilities' (ibid). Public possibilities — that is, the idea that creative activities can produce and increase high levels of engagement with the community — require collaborations and partnerships with schools, and community arts groups such as 'The Beowulf Sydney Project' (Anderson and Cameron 2017) which was a hybrid project of story interpretation, puppetry, video game design by artists, academics, teachers, and digital game makers for school children to study the Beowulf story. Another example in the collection is of community dance for people with dementia entitled 'Dance and Dementia: Don't Forget to Play' (Buck and Newall de Jesus 2017) which reports that play and playfulness are not only central to dance pedagogy but also for working with the elderly more generally.

A running sheet<sup>75</sup> was used to facilitate conversation and maintain momentum, along with the Montessori Practical Life Curriculum and narrative theory principles drawn from Barthes (1975) and Certeau (see Chapter 2). Each workshop had a theme, which guided the selection of materials to ensure a positive outcome<sup>76</sup> and served to focus attention, and provide starting and return points if conversation waned. Craft supplies such as painting materials, coloured paper, short poems, pictures, and photos were on the table, along with everyday objects related to the theme.

The materials on the table encouraged participants to create with their hands.<sup>77</sup> Some painted as they talked and listened, or cut and pasted. For the most part, cutting and pasting required fine motor skills that many participants did not have. Nevertheless, they were keen to watch me, and the volunteer assistant cut and paste during the group conversation. I also read a range of short, carefully chosen poems that served as prompts to storytelling and often reminded participants of similar poems or song lyrics they knew.

In essence, my task was to capture the ideas and anecdotes of participants and quickly write these down on attractive paper to turn them into short poems, or phrases for display at the end of the workshop. Periodically during the workshop, I would read out loud some of these contributions, causing surprise and delight for the participants.

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<sup>75</sup> See Appendix 14: Running Sheet Account of Creative Workshop

<sup>76</sup> See Appendix 15: Workshop materials: 'Oranges and Lemons'

<sup>77</sup> For example, while talking about gardens, Elise found a sticker of a pineapple and glued it to a coloured piece of paper writing the word pineapple next to it. A conversation about Pineapple Upside Down cake and other foods ensued.

## Montessori's Practical Life curriculum

Another program that embraces playfulness and contributes to the creative care for people living with dementia is inspired by the Montessori method of education and some materials from this pedagogy were used. An education method originally established by Maria Montessori in 1907 for pre-schoolers and young children up to the age of six, it has grown into a Kindergarten—Year 12 school program, and recently been extended into aged care. In Australia, a leader in the field of Montessori aged care is Anne Kelly (2017), and Montessori Australia, a peak body, is increasingly partnering with aged care providers, realising that pedagogical activities for early learning, and indeed the learning that occurs through all stages of development in primary and secondary school, are relevant to people in their older frailer years. In this way learning can be enjoyed from birth to death! This approach uses a 'Teachers' model' which emphasises that the children, Elders, and other participants in the program are all learners and all teachers. Activities like painting, flower arranging, pottery, and exploring specific subjects such as puzzles and physical resources to learn about animals are self-contained tasks set up by the practitioner with the intent of teaching or reinforcing a particular skill or concept. Examples include South Australia Montessori which over the last four years has partnered with ECH, a large integrated provider of independent retirement living and ageing care services in South Australia (Montessori 2021a).

Some Montessori schools have 'urban farms' which provide opportunities for 'animal therapy' for both children and Elders. In addition, cooking and preparing afternoon teas, and buddy partnering to write pen-pal letters, are regular interactions that provide 'activities, experiences, traditions, and excursions that ...create a space where children and elders live and learn side-by-side in an atmosphere of companionship, connection, and continued growth' (ibid: 5). Increasingly, Montessori schools are including aged care and intergenerational programs into their strategic plans, forging practical partnerships.<sup>78</sup> In America, Hillcrest Health Services in Nebraska and Iowa has been one of the first aged care residences to integrate the Montessori philosophy into the daily lives of people who live with dementia (Hillcrest 2021). In Melbourne Australia, research has been undertaken into

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<sup>78</sup> See Echoes Montessori in South Australia <https://www.samontessori.com.au/echoes/>, and Gisborne Montessori School in Victoria [www.gisbornemontessori.vic.edu.au](http://www.gisbornemontessori.vic.edu.au)

Montessori approaches to aged care. Gail Roberts and colleagues (Roberts *et al.* 2014) undertook a pilot project which showed significant behaviour changes, such that ‘the quality of life with dementia [was...] greatly enhanced through the care received...[and that when] a composite model of care based on person-centred principles, social ecological models and the Montessori method is used, the positive impact is substantial.’<sup>79</sup> The Melbourne-based Villa Maria group of aged care homes first implemented Montessori programs in 2018,<sup>80</sup> and the Association of Montessori Internationale Montessori for Ageing and Dementia has an advisory group, a charter of quality of areas and a set of standards and indicators<sup>81</sup> that are much more targeted and practical than the Standards developed by the Australian government’s Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission.<sup>82</sup> In what appears to be a paradigm shift from other aged care approaches, Villa Maria Catholic Homes encourage all staffers to engage in Montessori-style interactions with residents, in a person-centred care culture. If our lives are defined by the roles we have, then the sole role of ‘resident’ in an aged care home is not sufficient. In Montessori-inspired aged care residences every elder has a variety of roles and a daily schedule, i.e., as gardener, cook, deliverer of mail, sorter of cutlery, storyteller and so on. In dementia units staff, residents and family members are invited to wear name tags which, while seemingly a small thing, allows a resident to greet and initiate staff instead of the other way around. This gives residents some agency – when we forget the names of people around us, we are reluctant to initiate conversation and greetings but with name tags elders can take the lead and initiate exchanges (Montessori for Dementia and Ageing 2021b; Villa Maria Catholic Homes 2021).

Another example of the shift in agency that is apparent in Montessori aged care environments is reported in an Adelaide study by Sue Booth *et al.* (2020). Their Positive Interactive Engagement (PIE) project incorporates non-pharmacological sensory techniques into a person-centred, Montessori approach in a model that demonstrates encouraging outcomes in the quality of life for people living with dementia in a residential aged care setting. Booth

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<sup>79</sup> This partnership project explored the feasibility of a new model of dementia care known the ABLE model, based on building the capacity and ability of people of residents with dementia using environmental changes.

<sup>80</sup> <https://vmch.com.au/blog/introducing-montessori-to-aged-care/>

<sup>81</sup> The Montessori Ageing and Dementia Quality Areas and Standards include 1) Leadership, with seven sub areas; 2) Staff, with nine sub areas; and 3) the Prepared Environment for Ageing and Dementia, with six sub areas, [www.montessori-ami.org](http://www.montessori-ami.org)

<sup>82</sup> See Chapter 1.



*et al.* found benefits not just for participants but also for staff, and identified some of the essential structural, physical, practical elements necessary for successful program implementation.<sup>83</sup>

## Obstacles

Experiment 3 was not without obstacles. Conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, the workshops occurred entirely as part of the 'volunteer service' section of the organisation. While strict regulation, such as police checks for working with vulnerable people were in place prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, regulation and compliance requirements for staff and volunteers in aged care homes have increased exponentially. To be a volunteer now requires scores of hours of compulsory compliance training including a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) online module plus police check, plus the organisation's own internal training.<sup>84</sup> In many aged care residences it can be observed that volunteers provide all of the 'extras'. Without volunteers, residents can face hours of nothingness. This was the case prior to the pandemic but even more so now. 'Thank God you're here' one resident said as I entered the room to conduct a workshop. "We do nothing, all day everyday'. And from a manager, 'Can you please come every day?' echoing the sense that the work of volunteers is heavily relied upon by paid staff. To be fair a music therapist came once per fortnight, along with a pastoral care coordinator who ran special events like Mother's Day afternoon teas, Anzac Day commemorations and fortnightly church services. But overall, among the participants in the workshops, there was a sense that volunteers were needed for anything 'special'. In addition to the essential roles that volunteers play, they are also often required to provide written observation records of the nature of residents' participation, and these are offered as evidence that the provider is meeting the Aged Care Quality Standards.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> For participants, the study reports a lessening of behaviours considered to be 'disruptive' such as agitation, wandering, trying to get out of locked doors. And an increase in social connection such as chatting, joking, smiling, applause, waving and verbal encouragement of others. Staff were found to have increased job satisfaction and heightened awareness of the importance of encouragement. Necessary elements of program delivery include the importance of routine, and the need for individualised programming within the wider program itself (2020: 981-983).

<sup>84</sup> See Appendix 16: NDIS Volunteer Approval

<sup>85</sup> See Appendix 17: Notes on residents' engagement by volunteers for aged care managers.

It was frustrating to note that the series of compliance tasks, totalling at least the equivalent of three full workdays, needs to be repeated as a necessary requirement for attendance at any other aged care home. Currently, there is no mutual recognition of volunteer compliance among residential aged care homes. This obstacle not only limits access to Elders by volunteer creative practitioners, but also limits the creative practitioner's capacity to access participants.

Another obstacle was that once clearance was granted to me as a volunteer creative practitioner, another person was also needed for support and assistance to ensure smooth running of the workshop. The workshops can happen with one facilitator but having two is better. Aged care staff were 'too busy' to be spared from their routines of delivering personal care, food preparation or administration. Sometimes a family carer would join in, and this was a great source of support and encouragement but nevertheless an ad-hoc arrangement. Ongoing creative workshops require a reliable second volunteer. In the current over-regulated environment, this is no easy task. Fortunately, for this experiment, two excellent highly capable volunteer assistants were involved and their work contributed to the success of the workshops.

## Exhibition

Exhibiting and sharing creativity with others was an important part of the experiments. Not only is creativity —the telling of stories— something that we can all do, and benefit from but when our creativity is displayed on walls, in foyers, on windows and in sitting rooms and hallways, the invisible is made visible, living spaces are reclaimed by those who live in them, and the mundane becomes a little bit marvellous. The exhibitions can be imperfect, making do with what we've got in the spaces in which we find ourselves. In aged care residences, when we engage in activities like this we are delivering and fostering 'creative care' and creative care is much needed in Australian aged care residences and dementia care centres.

The thesis culminated in an exhibition of artefacts from each of the experiments. Initially this was planned to be held in the foyer of the University of Canberra's Rehabilitation Hospital but again, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was moved to the foyer of the Arts and Design

Faculty at the University.<sup>86</sup> Held during Orientation Week it became a pop-up PhD exhibition entitled *Praising Ordinary Lives: Creativity and Quality of Life for Australian Elders*. The three experiments were presented at three stations, each colour-coded to emphasise the differences between them<sup>87</sup>. It was hoped the displays were attractive, detailed, yet relatively informal, to emulate the kind of displays that can be made in aged care homes. Attendees were able to wander through the exhibits and have discussions with me. Short speeches were made, refreshments shared, and The Toolkit for Creative Care<sup>88</sup> was presented to the gathering and a film of the event was made<sup>89</sup>. The layout comprised three tables with posterboards — each table a different colour to emphasise the three experiments. This enabled attendees, approximately 40 people to move freely through the site, reading artefacts on the tables and boards while being Covid-safe. A number of managers from aged care homes attended and several meetings were arranged between attendees and myself to continue the conversation about creative activity for Elders living in aged care residences.

Figure 6: Praising Ordinary Lives exhibition at the University of Canberra



<sup>86</sup> See Appendix 18: Concept map and plan for Praising Ordinary Lives exhibition

<sup>87</sup> See Appendix 19: Photos of Exhibition at University of Canberra 4 February 2022

<sup>88</sup> See Appendix 7: Creative Care Toolkit

<sup>89</sup> Available at [https://youtu.be/xH6YQ7RaP\\_g](https://youtu.be/xH6YQ7RaP_g)



## Towards a theory of ageing creatively

It is in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self (D.W. Winnicott 2005).

This thesis has investigated the role of creativity as a source of meaning and purpose for Elders who are living in aged care homes with or without dementia, or living at home alone. The investigation has turned out to be a celebration of the ways in which beauty and intrigue of the ordinary lives of Australian Elders can be turned into creative activities, and it reports practical ways in which creative practice in aged care residences is a co results in artefacts that are verifiable sharable sources of knowledge about the lived realities of Elders.

In three creative experiments, artefacts were produced, then displayed at informal and formal exhibitions and this practice-led research culminated in a toolkit of activities for family and carers. This non-traditional research output thesis has used grounded theory approaches to report that there are many versions of old age – in fact there are many old ages. Yet, in all versions of old age, imagination and curiosity are aspects of the self that are retained right to the end of life.

Experiment 1 was an imaginative collaborative story building project; Experiment 2 was a commonplace book writing project by Elders living alone during COVID-19 lockdown; and Experiment 3 was a series of round-table creative conversation workshops held in an aged care residence. The three experiments were playful and fun for all involved. Being playful, being with one another simply to talk, listen, tell stories, paint, look at pictures, cut and paste, hold and smell fruit, and embrace the ordinary, the imperfect, the mundane in our lives can produce a magnificent sense of purpose and meaning. Playfulness involves anticipation, a sense of possibility, uncertainty, and brings about strength and poise for those who are playing. Elders need to be playful just as much as anyone else.

Overall, the thesis finds that socially constructed activities such as imaginative storytelling, personal writing, and conversation-led workshops, can have positive effects on Elders living with dementia, Elders in retirement, and Elders in residential aged care. It finds that while a

royal commission and the research spawned by it has increased awareness at a macro level of the conditions within which many Elders live their final years, very little attention has been paid to the micro level – the actual ways in which Elders spend their time, hour after hour, day in day out. Until recently, that is. What is needed is a philosophy of creative ageing that embraces creative care as a way of living.

The creative artefacts and socially-constructed activities in this study reveal the understandings of individual Elders and their personal and collective realities. These activities, facilitated by a creative practitioner, reveal the power of the personal and collective imagination to distract, delight and empower people while living in their everyday conditions. When such activities are undertaken in aged care residences there is an improvement in well-being – a buzz in the air, a change of atmosphere and environment, a reduction in boredom, helplessness, and isolation. This change of environment is evident in improved communication and a strengthening of positive relationships among residents, family members, staff, and medical and allied health workers. Socially-constructed creative activities have an immediate positive impact on Elders and those around them, and consequently attitudes towards Elders and people living with dementia are improved.

When the narratives of Elders – whether verbal, written or non-verbal-physical—are considered within the contexts of the structures of which they are a part, coherent, naturally occurring stories with plots emerge. These stories contain a ‘meta-code’ of universal transcultural messages about the nature and value of shared reality, for example, sharing food, appreciating music and family, and places of natural beauty.

The thesis found that personal creative writing can be undertaken in many ways: using prompts to get started; or random free writing using the senses to trigger thoughts and observations; or embracing ordinary objects and events as artistic experiences; or appreciating solitude as a privilege and opportunity; or recording thoughts about love, beauty, death and suffering; or bringing together multiple sources to reflect on our own individual values. It is unfortunate that the sample of Elders who wrote commonplace books was small, despite considerable interest expressed by a much larger sample. This is attributed to the requirement of writing a book alone during isolation instead of being in a small group

as was initially intended. It also points to the problems that individuals seem to have in believing they are creative at all. However, regardless of circumstance or context, the thesis also found that there comes a time when writing is no longer appealing and that is when collaborative storytelling and creative conversations can come to the fore and cultivate dignity and choice.

While the Australian government's Quality Care Standards are a clear response to an awareness of violations of dignity and choice for people living in residential aged care, a number of frustrations continue to shape the daily lives of Australian Elders. The Quality Care Standards certainly articulate a set of principles with which to discuss the rights of Elders in their final years; however, there is limited discourse about the practical ways in which these principles can be translated into lived realities. Their effectiveness as a way of improving quality of life for Elders is still to be determined. Unfortunately, life in residential aged care consists of very few opportunities, possibilities, or choices for people to engage directly in playful creative activities and to do things that earn self-respect or the respect of others. The intergenerational participation in Experiment 1 was a practical way of producing playful experiences as exemplars of evidence for these Standards. Furthermore, it was found that when school students collaborated with Elders in aged care residents, their teacher, myself, was also meeting some of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.

### Creative care

This thesis reports that some aspects of creative care are happening in some aged care residential settings, but overall creative care has not yet entered the mainstream lexicon of 'best practice', despite a growing body of research showing that creative care is closely aligned with person-centred care and positive ageing movements. It is a long way from being embedded in systems of care and ordinary daily life. Instead, creative care is still largely relegated to the work of volunteers not professional specialists, and compliance regulations for volunteers in Australian aged care homes are onerous and act as a deterrent.

Creative Care programs, delivered by creative practitioners or trained staff and carers, work as a set of clear practical social vehicles which synthesise the stated priorities of dignity and

choice in the Aged Care Quality Standards with the values that have emerged from the positive ageing movement in cultural gerontology and health humanities. Creative Care is a way of honouring the human rights of Elders; it is a way of finding meaning and spirituality in ordinary things; and it is a way of being playful and having fun with others. Creative Care, as explored in this thesis, has three elements: first, it is a philosophy of creative aging that guides the expression and implementation of all care principles. Second, the regular daily application of creative care in aged care residential settings enriches the quality of life for Elders. Third, a practitioner's toolkit, based on the experiments in this thesis, and the work of others in the creative care movement, can be used to widen access by staff to better understand and deliver creative care to Elders. Creative care is not the opposite of clinical care, rather it is a way of combining principles from the world of arts practice with principles of nursing and clinical care practice. As Anne Basting (2020) asserts, it is an opportunity for practitioners in both fields to come together to create a new environment. Creative activity is something enjoyed, whereas living in aged care residences is something endured, a thing often forced upon a person, sometimes with great chagrin. When these two fields of practice come together, research has found that creative care is an opportunity for meaning making and healing. Creative care is a practical approach to daily living that is capable of synthesising the principles of dignity and choice and other human rights into a way of life. It provides socially constructed opportunities that not only facilitate self-respect and dignity but is also an approach that can become an agreement between people to imagine themselves a little differently. For creative care givers, a repertoire of creative activities and scaffolds is much needed: being attentive to the particular needs and desires of individuals will show that what may be gratifying for one might be insulting or boring for another. The need for creative care for Elders has grown from the knowledge that it is not enough to simply avoid shame or humiliation in aged care homes, rather, it is incumbent on aged care providers to cultivate an environment that enables Elders to enjoy self-respect and meaningful interaction with others.

Creative care comes in many forms, but three particular forms of word-based creative care have been investigated in this thesis: first is joint imaginative storytelling sessions as regular inclusive structured sessions for people with dementia hosted by a trained facilitator using pictures and question prompts. These sessions not only transform the physical environment into a lively place of laughter and playfulness but also enable Elders, many of whom have



suffered great loss, to reclaim an identity as 'story-teller'. Sessions produce an improvement in well-being; an improvement in communication between and among people; a strengthening in relations; they make positive contributions to affect; and improve attitudes towards ageing and people living with dementia. These sessions are also opportunities that lend themselves to intergenerationalism as they are opportunities for creative care that can accommodate the participation of children in all stages of schooling. Second is personal writing in a notebook or 'commonplace book', a beneficial way of making meaning from the immediate or remembered world, a means of keeping a creative record of thoughts as Elders move through the stages of ageing: young-old, old, and old-old. Personal writing for pleasure, undertaken regularly, can reduce feelings of loneliness, facilitate a sense of pride in one's memories, nurture appreciation and engagement with the natural physical world, everyday objects and events and interactions, and be a conversational prompt for family, friends, and others. It can be re-read and enjoyed repeatedly. Unfortunately, this part of the thesis was impacted by lengthy Covid-19 lockdowns and the social aspects of group writing were not able to be investigated. In social writing groups individuals who struggle to believe they are creative can be given the encouragement and confidence they need. This is an area for further research. Third is creative (conversation) workshops which are socially constructed regular inclusive discussions centred around a theme, where Elders can playfully converse, reminisce, listen, and respond to poetry, paint, paste and decorate to produce artefacts for discussing and sharing. These workshops reduce the sense of fear or negativity for participants, they trigger a sense of wonder and awe, and while the workshops are running the living environment is transformed. There is no physical change, of course, but the space is temporarily 'reclaimed' by residents as their own.

### The art of growing old

A philosophy of creative ageing embraces concepts of ageing from classic and contemporary literature, learning what it means to be old from those who have lived and written it, as something personal, unique and artistic. Living and ageing can be considered an artform in itself, and the 'woodsheds' of ordinary life are beautiful places; regular objects like cakes of soap and salt and pepper shakers can be appreciated in artistic ways. Indeed, creative activity, and creative engagement are at the centre of a philosophy of creative ageing. A philosophy

of creative ageing is informed by research in the academic fields of creative practice, grounded theory, cultural gerontology, narratology, and hermeneutics. Research in these disciplines directly engage the community being researched, and have found that the problematic notion of old age can be challenged. When stories, storytelling, and playfulness are embraced as 'daily medicine' we find ourselves walking through a 'forest of narratives', recognising that every act of seeing is a way of putting the world together in a certain way based on our own histories and cultural traditions. In this way a philosophy of creative ageing is as essential to ordinary daily life as food, shelter, and clean air.

Exhibition of the materials produced at creative gatherings is an essential part of the experience. Exhibitions give visibility and voice to residents and participants. Artefacts 'exhibited' in formal and informal ways, are extended opportunities to discuss the pieces, and provide topics of conversation among residents, staff, and visitors. They also function as 'training materials' for staff and family members, portraying the capabilities and contributions of Elders, showing that their thoughts and creativity are valuable, worthwhile, funny, bold, and insightful.

It is clear from the three experiments and the research literature framing them, that when creative care is practiced in aged care residences the wellbeing and quality of life of Elders is enriched, empathy for others increases and our knowledge about the world around us increases. Creative care may be a much-needed antidote to bureaucratised systems of care that deprive Elders of the opportunity to make decisions, and that relegate them to an existence of social irrelevance. Social irrelevance thrives in conditions where citizenship is removed, where substandard care forces pharmacological control of legitimate expressions of grief and protest, and where negative attitudes cultivate disempowerment, infantilization, stigmatisation, invalidation and experiences of hopelessness and depression. In contrast, a creative care approach that embraces socially constructed creative activities counters this with the practical expression of creativity, improving quality of life and reducing agitation and disruptive behaviours. With creative care, Elders and their families can participate in alternative discourses and avoid the 'social death' that often precedes physical death; in this way they can enjoy seeing themselves and others beyond the narrow parameters of measurable clinical psychometric properties that often characterise the daily lives of

residents in aged care homes. Thus, creative care is a practical approach to daily living that allows Elders to rethink and reimagine their place in particular social spaces, such as aged care homes.

### Future applications

The research in this thesis has been used to make a toolkit for nurses, care workers, allied health professionals, family members, teachers, volunteers, and others. Trained, skilful, creative practitioners are the best professionals to deliver, oversee, and train others to use the toolkit. In the hands of a skilful creative practitioner, ordinary things like personal writing, beautiful conversations, sensory activities, and joint imaginative storytelling, can produce organic corporeal and embodied experiences that contribute to a collective environment in which interrelations between individuals and managers in institutional social spaces are flexible and dynamic. Playful activities sharpen mental abilities and deepen our insights into our social capabilities. The research in this thesis and others has found that creative activities are an important element of wellness and an essential part of quality care. Despite this, creative practitioners are not currently considered an essential part of the allied health work force or in aged care residences nor as part of in-home support packages. Instead, this essential work is largely relegated to the domain of volunteers. The closest job description of a creative care practitioner in an aged care residence is that of Lifestyle Coordinator, and while there are some good examples of professionals who run vibrant programs, these are quite rare. One exception to this general rule is the Villa Maria aged care homes in Melbourne which provide Montessori programs, offering Elders a choice of activity through 'prepared environments' and carefully selected Montessori learning materials. This example shows that if staff are supported and have the time, creative activities can be adapted for use by all residents. Similarly, the creative activities researched here and contained in the toolkit are within everyone's reach.

A philosophy of creative ageing and the creative-practice research model presented here now warrants replication and implementation. A future project might involve investigations of how creative care programs can be rolled out in aged care homes and how aged care staff can receive professional development in this area. Partnerships between peak bodies,

professional associations and funding bodies that are committed to creative care may result in visible differences to the quality of life of Elders living in aged care residences. Creative care can not only transform living environments but is a social vehicle which, when prioritised and well-funded, brings about new competencies for Elders, enriches their sense of community, dignity, and choice, and increases experiences of enjoyment fun and playfulness. When a creative care approach to ageing is used, a new environment, a new atmosphere is created. No longer 'death's waiting room', the community areas and bedrooms of aged care residences can be transformed into lively places of creativity, sensorial exploration, and sharing. When creative care is practiced experiences of surprise, pleasure, anticipation, understanding, strength, and poise can assist people to flourish. When all stakeholders, Elders and their families and friends, care workers, managers and owners, medical clinical and allied staff, and registration bodies embrace a philosophy of creative ageing with socially constructed creative activities at its core, then a new, happier environment emerges.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Email from Volunteer Coordinator at Aged Care Residence regarding request to visit and deliver creative care

CE redacted

Thu, Apr 15,  
11:24 AM  
2021

To me

Hi Pauline, We have made a kind of program for you for the coming Monday. When you arrive, you can go to the administration office, after you have been checked in with the concierge. The manager in the office (Elle) will introduce you to a carer who will help you with the groups. First you will see the 4 following residents for the story telling group: J, P,C, & K.

After this you can stay in the art studio to play the violin. The following residents are very interested in music, the carers will bring some of them to you, so they can listen ☺

#### **BERNARD HOUSE**

- KC.loves musicals and concerts but is palliating. Perhaps a violin in her room one-to-one
- D. loves classical, opera and sing-a-long
- B. likes piano
- P. likes playing the clarinet and loves classical music
- R. likes dancing and music
- M. likes classical

#### **O'DWYER HOUSE**

- S. likes music piano, dancing and singing
- T. would like music
- A. likes Classical music
- G. played classical piano
- J. likes classical music
- M.likes classical
- L. likes piano and music

#### **FERGUSON HOUSE**

- E. likes choir, piano, classical
- M. played piano likes singing with family
- J. likes classical

#### **MILLS HOUSE**

- J. likes piano, classical
- R. likes Bach, hymns, guitars, classical

#### **DANE HOUSE**

- P.likes classical, dancing
- B. likes classical, dancing
- H. likes classical and guitar
- P. likes musicals
- S. likes old time music

#### **TURNER HOUSE**

- R. likes quiet soft music classical
- T. played the piano

I hope you will have a great time, please let me know how you did go. MJ will join you as another volunteer from next Monday the 26<sup>th</sup>.

Kind regards,





**TimeSlips™**

**Pauline Griffiths**

**Is a TimeSlips Certified Facilitator**

[www.timeslips.org](http://www.timeslips.org)





## **Outback; Out the back; In the bush; The importance of learning in the bush; I'll be glad when this is over!**

by storytellers of Southern Cross Care, Boake Place; Garran: J, L, B, and B.



An old lady is in the picture and the boy is singing. It is Lorina and Patrick. They are in the barn, camping, in a tent and playing music. A bedroom is off to the side.

Lorina and Patrick can hear:  
Music,  
Someone talking, giving lessons, the teacher  
Who is speaking to all of the children in the different areas.  
The children have to answer back, answer the questions.

Patrick sits on a bucket, speaking into the microphone, listening to *School of the Air*. Just before this, he had to arrange to connect up to his school, and Lorina may

have just cleaned the dishes. She had to finish what she was doing.  
'She's a mother!' says Jean. That says it all, doesn't it?

Some tea towels are beside them.  
And an old refrigerator, with one of those handles, and a Holden car label, is behind them. A clock is on top of the fridge. Lorina is nursing a baby and mending something.

They sit on old-fashioned chairs  
And there is a TV antenna/aerial to hear the cricket or the football.  
Some pots and a toaster are nearby.  
And an amplifier  
And a photograph of a gentleman in a plastic cap to keep off the rain, looking over a mason wall made of stones, enjoying the seaside and the cliffs down below.

After this, when school is finished, the wireless will be turned off.  
Lorina will put her things down and bring in the clothes hanging outside.  
And then they'll have a meal!

2 July 2019, Assisted by Pauline, Jenine, Vicki



## Love, I love you, or My best friend

Storytellers: Jean, Bonnie, Breda, Mavis, Laurie...

Outside the back door of an old house in England  
 Is a dog and Grandma Joan.  
 It's not a rich house, and just an ordinary lady who has a dog:  
 She loves him, he loves her.  
 Grandma has just been out, around the corner – not too far away because she is still in her slippers. But she is home now.

Her dog is called 'Fatty' or 'Sheila' and they really love each other  
 But it's not puppy love.  
 In fact, they've been together for a long time  
 Perhaps 15 years  
 Too long – but no, it's never too long with a dog.  
 Both are middle-aged now  
 (Grandma Joan was ten when she first had a dog.)

Fatty Sheila is not a working dog  
 His coat feels smooth  
 And he's overweight from sharing all of Grandma's food.

He can smell everything!  
 Every person has a different smell, and he knows it.  
 He always knows where Grandma Joan is and will come and get her.

Fatty Sheila loves:  
 Exercise,  
 Water in a bowl,  
 And pushing the ball into Grandma Joan's lap.  
 It's just a shame that he is too big to fit in a Gopher.



## Relaxation: relaxing after two beers

Storytellers: J, B, B, M, L, and B.

It's 11 o'clock and they are sunning themselves.

It is Laurie, Breda and one other.  
 They are in a shed somewhere, or the dressing rooms for a public bath,  
 Or on a deck looking out onto the ocean.

They are country people who have come to visit the ocean.

Breda is totally relaxed, turned so that she gets the sun.

They are having a lovely time, grateful for the bus that got them there early so they could get good seats looking out to the ocean.

Laurie has lit a cigarette. 'Fish can't smoke in the ocean so why should you?' Breda says to him. Breda has left her children at home and is sitting in the sun, having a lovely time.

She looks like she might have a head-ache but she can't, because she is laughing too much.

They hear themselves laughing because they have been asked for an opinion and they're cynical, sceptical. Also, Laurie has just told them a yarn, a good yarn. And a chair has just collapsed so they are laughing about that too.

Laughing, totally relaxed.

'I can't believe it!' they say.

'This is ridiculous,' they say.

'Let's go out for a beer,' they say.

They smell the ocean, hear the sea and look far too comfortable to ever get up. And just look at those two men. They'll bang their heads together, if they are not careful!



### **Today's our day; Good onya, that's right! Saturday arvo; Happy day at the football**

Storytellers: Bonnie, Jean, Breda and Laurie

It's Saturday afternoon at the local fields.

They're mates - here to see the game.

In an empty paddock to have a game.

They all have handicaps and work together in sheltered workshops like Waratah, making bread boxes.

A goal at the football has just been scored.

Their side has just scored a goal.

I see beer.

They have a few drinks in their hands

And beer cans are in the bin, so there's been plenty of drinking.

They're having a great time

Collingwood followers.

"Collingwood forever!"

"Good on you!"

They're cheering and clapping, enjoying themselves.

Someone got six!

The goal posts show they are playing Rugby League  
A post is coming out of the house.

One man has jumped out of his chair.  
We can smell the field, lovely grass, the trees, plenty of booze and the cows in the next paddock.

Afterwards, they'll settle down after their kick.  
He's really letting them know he's happy – he'll go into town and have another beer.  
The other fella is having a laugh and a sip of the bottle. What's he drinking?  
He might have a whiskey – I'd say it's coke!

Assisted by Pauline, J and V.



## Two boys on a beach, or Bad luck

Storytellers: J, B, B, M, L and B

Two boys who get on reasonably well are eating ice-cream.  
Mum gave them the money.  
They're at a playground at the top of a beach, where the grass has grown.

They might be twins  
Although one is light, one is dark.  
And one has a knot of hair on his head.  
These boys can speak with ice-cream in their mouths  
And slurp ice-cream  
And hear birds  
And other peculiar sounds.

Their swimming togs are on and they'll go for a swim soon.  
But one is eating too fast and has something in his hand.  
The other has a bigger ice-cream. Bad luck.  
Or is it a Nutella sandwich?

Next is a swim.

Appendix 4: TimeSlips Master Trainer's comments about a story produced in a session at Southern Cross Care

## **Outback; Out the back; In the bush; The importance of learning in the bush; I'll be glad when this is over!**

by storytellers of SCC ACT J, L, B, and B.



An old lady is in the picture and the boy is singing. (“What song would you like to say he might be singing?” If it’s a familiar song, try having the group sing it) It is Larina and Patrick. They are in the barn, camping, in a tent and playing music. (Again, what music?) A bedroom is off to the side.

Larina and Patrick can hear:

Music,

Someone talking, giving lessons (??), the teacher

Who is speaking to all of the children in the different areas.

The children have to answer back, answer the questions. (What would like to say the teacher is saying to the children? Children’s responses?)

Patrick sits on a bucket, speaking into the microphone, listening to *School of the Air*. (Yes! Nice specific detail!) Just before this, he had to arrange to connect up to his school, and Lorina may have just cleaned the dishes. She had to finish what she was doing. 'She's a mother!' That says it all, doesn't it?

Some tea towels are beside them  
And an old refrigerator, with one of those large handles, and a Holden car label, is behind them. A clock sits on top of the fridge.  
Larina is nursing a baby and mending and mending an old dress.

They sit on old-fashioned chairs  
And there is a TV antenna/arial to hear the cricket or the football.  
Some pots and a toaster are nearby.  
And an amplifier  
And a photograph of a gentleman in a plastic cap to keep off the rain, looking over a mason wall made of stones, enjoying the seaside and the cliffs down below.

After this, when school is finished, the wireless will be turned off.  
Lorina will put her things down and bring in the clothes hanging outside.  
And then they'll have a meal! (What will they have to eat?)

2 July 2019. Assisted by Pauline, J, and V.

Appendix 5: How to host an Intergenerational TimeSlip story telling session, from a powerpoint presentation given by the Researcher at the ACT English Teachers' Association 31 October 2019

4.00	Welcome in Hall	
4.05	<b>TimeSlips Storytelling – an imaginative way of ‘co-creating’ stories:</b> <i>TimeSlip</i> story telling began in 2009 in the USA as a creative writing program for people with memory loss. Today it is used by schools in special projects for English students; intergenerational collaborative creative writing; and as a means of educational outreach with the community. This workshop shows how TimeSlip storytelling can be used in secondary school English programs. Pauline Griffiths (Westbourne Grammar School, Victoria).	
4.20	<b>Years 11-12 Room</b>	<b>Years 7-10</b>
4.25	<b>The Writer Who Encourages Year 11-12 Students to Read:</b> At a time when fewer students appear to be reading prescribed texts, there's one writer – perhaps the most awarded writer in the history of magazine writing – whose work students devour. Who is he? What are his stories? And why is his work enhancing both the essays and creative writing of senior students? CB (Uni of Canberra Senior Secondary Coll, Lake G.)	<b>Navigating the Digital World:</b> A critical literacy unit in which students investigated how and why people interact with websites. Students developed their understanding of how websites communicate ideas and express points of view in multimodal formats. They constructed their own websites, experimenting with multimodal elements to communicate ideas and information. AS (Amaroo School)
4.40	<b>Perspectives of Evil:</b> Our English T Unit 4 Perspectives of Good and Evil incorporates texts such as Lance Morrow's <i>Evil</i> , a TED talk by Phillip Zimbardo, <i>Night and Fog</i> (documentary about Auschwitz) and students' choice of Helen Garner's <i>Joe Cinque's Consolation</i> , Elie Wiesel's <i>Night</i> and Cormac McCarthy's <i>The Road</i> . This session will focus on <i>The Road</i> . NM (Mackillop College)	<b>The English Textual Concepts, Shakespeare and the Creative Task:</b> This session will share how the English Textual Concepts of Representation, Theme, and Literary Value were incorporated in a Shakespeare unit for year 8. PG and AH (Mt Stromlo High School)
4.55	<b>The Unreliable Narrator: Cultivating Critical Thinking in the Classroom:</b> Unreliable narrators are compelling story tellers. By evaluating narrators and their perspectives, students can look deeply into a text and make links between textual evidence and messages about human nature. RR(Canberra College)	<b>Get them Writing:</b> Strategies used in the Learning Support classroom to encourage and develop writing. The strategies can be used in any classroom and include a strong focus on low stakes writing, focussed vocabulary strategies, and using mentor sentences. AI(Mt Stromlo High School)
5.10	<b>Reflections/Social Media</b>	
5.15	<b>Celebrating Canberra - Year 12 Essential English Unit 4: Local and Global:</b> Students research interesting places and events from their own city and prove it isn't such a boring place after all! JS (Hawker College)	<b>A Short Walk Around the Block:</b> This session will share ideas about blocking in Hitchcock's "Vertigo" and in "The Giver" which is based on the young adult dystopian novel by Lois Lowry. JJ (Covenant College)
5.30	<b>Representing Self through Texts</b> (English Unit 2): How we can use short texts to explore how representations of people can change depending on the text type, purpose and intended audience? The strategies would work with any short text and could be applied in senior high school or for year 11 students undertaking English Unit 2. MM (Dickson College)	<b>Super Sexy Satirical Posters</b> *Disclaimer: <i>There is nothing sexy about the posters shown. This is just to get you to attend as, apparently, sex sells.</i> What's in a poster? A poster by any other name would smell like paper. How can we get students to be innovative with such an old-school, boring, potentially low cognitive poster task? Answer: Satire! JC (Amaroo School)
5.45	<b>A Calendar of Tales:</b> Using Neil Gaiman's short stories as a common text for Unit 1 English will be explored in this session. JB and V T-Brown (Hawker College)	<b>Student Agency through Provocations and Learning Intentions:</b> This session explores how teachers can use provocations and learning intentions to increase student agency and understanding in the English classroom. LT (Mt Stromlo High School)
6.00	<b>Networking</b>	

## How you do it



Contact your nearest aged care home and use the magic words 'intergenerational collaborative storytelling'



Arrange approval from executive teachers (in my case, six!)



Complete School Risk Assessment requirements



Assemble your kit. Choose one of your class periods before before or after lunch so you have extra.



Walk or bus to the nursing home. Conduct the session. Walk or bus back to school.



Book in three or four sessions so that everyone can become comfortable and get to know each other and be sensational storytellers.



If you're supa-clever there will be no cost and no cover required.



A perfect, practical out of the classroom English program



## Shorts: Tools, Texts and Strategies

31 October 2019



Appendix 6: Intergenerational Storytelling Booklet (Permission to publish first names was given by participants in the Participant Information and Consent Form – Appendix 8)

Appendix 6: Intergenerational Storytelling booklet launch program

## **Intergenerational Story-telling Workshops**



***Born we quickly age***

***Gratitude, attitude, love***

***Cool minds never die***

-Sehaj, Yr 9

Note – Cover Only  
For full Booklet refer to  
the separate document  
sent to examiners with  
the thesis.



**Pauline Griffiths PhD**



# **Creative Care Toolkit for use in aged care homes & hospitals**

**The Basics**

Note – Cover Only  
For full Booklet refer to  
the separate document  
sent to examiners with  
the thesis.



## Appendix 8: Letter of Invitation and Participant Information Form

### Participant Information Form

#### Project Title

*Praising Ordinary Lives: creativity and quality of life for Australian Elders*

#### Researcher

Dr Pauline Griffiths

Centre for Creative and Cultural Research, Faculty of Arts & Design

Ph: 0402 019 209

E: paulinegriffiths29@gmail.com

E: [u888631@uni.canberra.edu.au](mailto:u888631@uni.canberra.edu.au)

#### Supervisor

Distinguished Professor Jen Webb

Ph: 6201 2321

E: jen.webb@canberra.edu.au

#### Project Aims

1. To investigate uses of personal writing, and collaborative storytelling by Australian elders.
2. To investigate social uses of personal creative writing workshops.
3. To investigate uses of inter-generationalism in collaborative storytelling in Australian aged care homes.

#### Expected benefits of the project

1. New knowledge about how Australian elders use personal and creative writing, and collaborative storytelling to enhance wellbeing and engage with their communities.
2. A toolkit of creative writing practices, suitable for delivery in person-centre aged care environments.
3. New knowledge for the academic field of cultural gerontology.

#### General Outline of the Project

The project comprises three parts, with an exhibition of works at the conclusion of the project. Participants may

choose which part(s) of the project best suits their needs:

- **Parts 1** comprises volunteer participants who make their own 'commonplace book'.
- **Part 2** consists of volunteer participants who attend regular creative writing workshops hosted by the West Melbourne Baptist Community Centre.
- **Part 3** comprises volunteer participants who are residents of the Hazeldean Transition Care Unit in Williamstown, and the Dousta Gala Aged Care home in Kensington and participate in regular collaborative storytelling workshops.
- **The Exhibition** comprises the display and celebration of commonplace books, stories and other materials, to be held at the University of Canberra and/or the West Melbourne Baptist Community Centre at the end of 2021.

#### Part 1: Keeping a Commonplace Book

A commonplace book has been defined variously as ‘an annotated personal anthology’, ‘a project worked on daily weekly or randomly over the course of years or’, or a ‘sort of autobiography.’

To keep a commonplace book, participants use a blank diary to record regular personal writing for pleasure (or drawing, cutting/pasting – any form of expression) about commonplace elements of their daily lives. They may use headings as writing prompts; or emulate aspects of other commonplace books; or invent a new way. Books may be ‘paper and pencil’ or digital using free software such as *lifecraft* (<https://www.lifecraft.com>)

## **Part 2: ‘Room for Writing’ Workshops**

This consists of 4 x 1-hour writing sessions. Volunteer participants write freely in a safe supportive environment using a range of prompts to produce pieces they may share to keep private. Creative writing activities will include free writing, scrapbooking, origami booklets, ‘pillow books’ and ‘commonplace books.’ There will be a short survey at the beginning of the course, and a reflective questionnaire at the end of each writing session. Similar programs have been found to produce improvements in wellbeing and physical health. Participants can withdraw at any stage.

## **Part 3: Intergenerational TimeSlip Storytelling (for aged care residents, carers and staff)**

This consists of 4 x 1-hour small group workshops following the TimeSlip storytelling method (Anne Davies 2009 and 2020). Small groups of secondary students also participate. A short questionnaire is given to participants at the beginning of the first session and at the end of the final session. Participants may withdraw at any stage.

### **Participant Involvement**

Participants in the research will be asked to:

1. Keep a commonplace book (Part 1), or
2. Attend ‘Room for Writing’ workshops (Part 2), or
3. Attend Story-telling Workshops (Part 3), and
4. Contribute to an exhibition (in whatever way, or to whatever extent suits the participant).

Participation is completely voluntary, and participants may, without any penalty, decline to take part, or withdraw at any time without explanation.

### **Confidentiality**

Only the researcher/s will have access to the individual information provided by participants. Privacy and confidentiality will be assured at all times. The research outcomes may be presented at conferences and written up for publication. However, in all these publications, the privacy and confidentiality of individuals will be protected.

### **Anonymity**

All reports and publications of the research will contain no information that can identify any individual, and all information will be kept in the strictest confidence.

## Data Storage

The information collected will be stored securely on a password protected computer throughout the project, and then stored at the University of Canberra for the required five-year period, after which it will be destroyed according to university protocols.

## Ethics Committee Clearance

The project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Canberra (HREC – 1665).

## Queries and Concerns

Queries or concerns regarding the research can be directed to the researcher and/or supervisor. Their contact details are at the top of this form. You can also contact the University of Canberra's Research Ethics & Integrity Unit: via phone 02 6206 3916, or email [humanethicscommittee@canberra.edu.au](mailto:humanethicscommittee@canberra.edu.au).

## Consent Form

### Project Title

*Praising Ordinary Lives: creativity and quality of life for Australian elders*

### Consent Statement

I have read and understood the information about the research. I am not aware of any condition that would prevent my participation, and I agree to participate in this project. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my participation in the research. All questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

Please indicate whether you agree to participate in each of the following parts of the research (please indicate which parts you agree to by putting a cross in the relevant box):

- Complete an initial questionnaire.
- Complete a questionnaire at the end of program.
- Participate in an audio-recorded interview with the researcher.

You can do all or none of these and/or change your mind about any of them at any time.

Name.....

Signature.....

Date .....

A summary of the research report can be forwarded to you when published. If you would like to receive a copy of the report, please include your mailing (or email) address below.

Name.....

Address.....





## Appendix 9: Reasons we write

from Margaret Atwood's *Negotiating with the Dead* (2002)

To record the world as it is;  
To set down the past before it is all forgotten;  
To excavate the past *because* it has been forgotten  
To satisfy our desire for revenge  
Because to write is to take risks and it is only when taking risks  
that we know we are alive  
To produce order out of chaos  
To delight and instruct;  
To please ourselves;  
To express ourselves;  
To express ourselves beautifully;  
To create a perfect work of art;  
To reward the virtuous and punish the guilty;  
To hold a mirror up to nature;  
To hold a mirror up to the reader;  
To paint a portrait of society and its ills;  
To express the unexpressed life of the masses;  
To name the hitherto unnamed;  
To defend the human spirit and human integrity and honour;  
To thumb our noses at death;  
To make money;  
To show the bastards;  
because to create is to be human;  
because to create is Godlike;  
To say a new word;  
To say a new thing;  
To create a national consciousness;  
or a national conscience;  
To justify our failures;  
To make ourselves appear more interesting than we actually are;  
To attract the love of another;  
To rectify the imperfections of a miserable childhood;  
To thwart our parents;  
To spin a fascinating tale;  
To amuse and please;

To pass the time;  
To serve art;  
To serve the Collective Unconscious;  
To serve History;  
To justify the ways of God toward man;  
To create a recreational boudoir;  
To subvert the establishment;  
To demonstrate that whatever is, is right;  
To experiment with new forms of perception;  
To search for understanding;  
To cope with depression;  
We write for our children;  
To make a name that would survive death;  
To defend a minority group or oppressed class;  
To speak for those who cannot speak for themselves;  
To expose appalling wrongs or atrocities;  
To record the times through which we have lived;  
To bear witness to horrifying events we have survived;  
To speak for the dead;  
To celebrate life in all its complexity;  
To praise the universe;  
To allow for the possibility of hope and redemption;  
To act out antisocial behaviour;  
To master a craft;  
Because stories take hold of us and don't let go;

Appendix 10: Extract from commonplace book writer 1



The chaos of the world  
Need not have any power over me

St. Peter says -  
Lead an ordered life  
And keep our love for  
one another at  
Full Strength

Be open to Simplicity  
Leave Behind Complexity



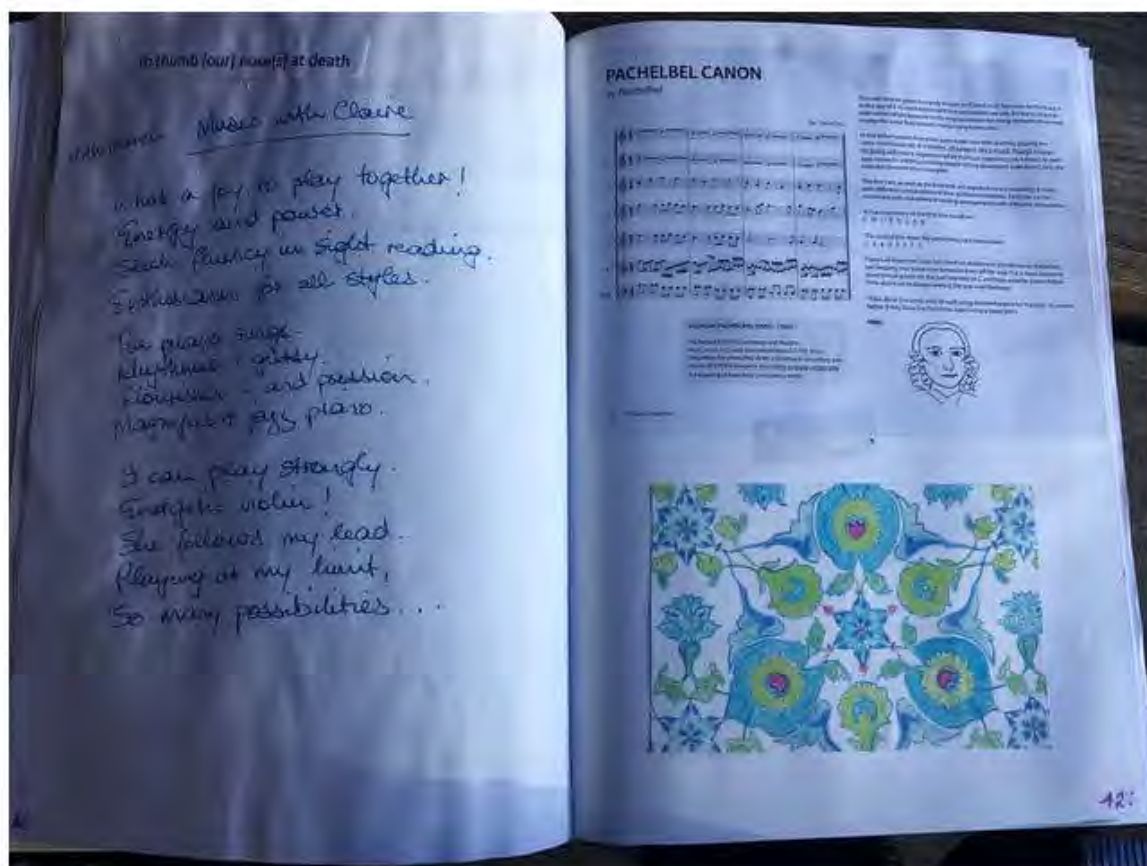
We cannot sit & chat with you,  
The way we'd like to do,  
So brew yourself a cup of tea,  
We'll think of you, you think of us.

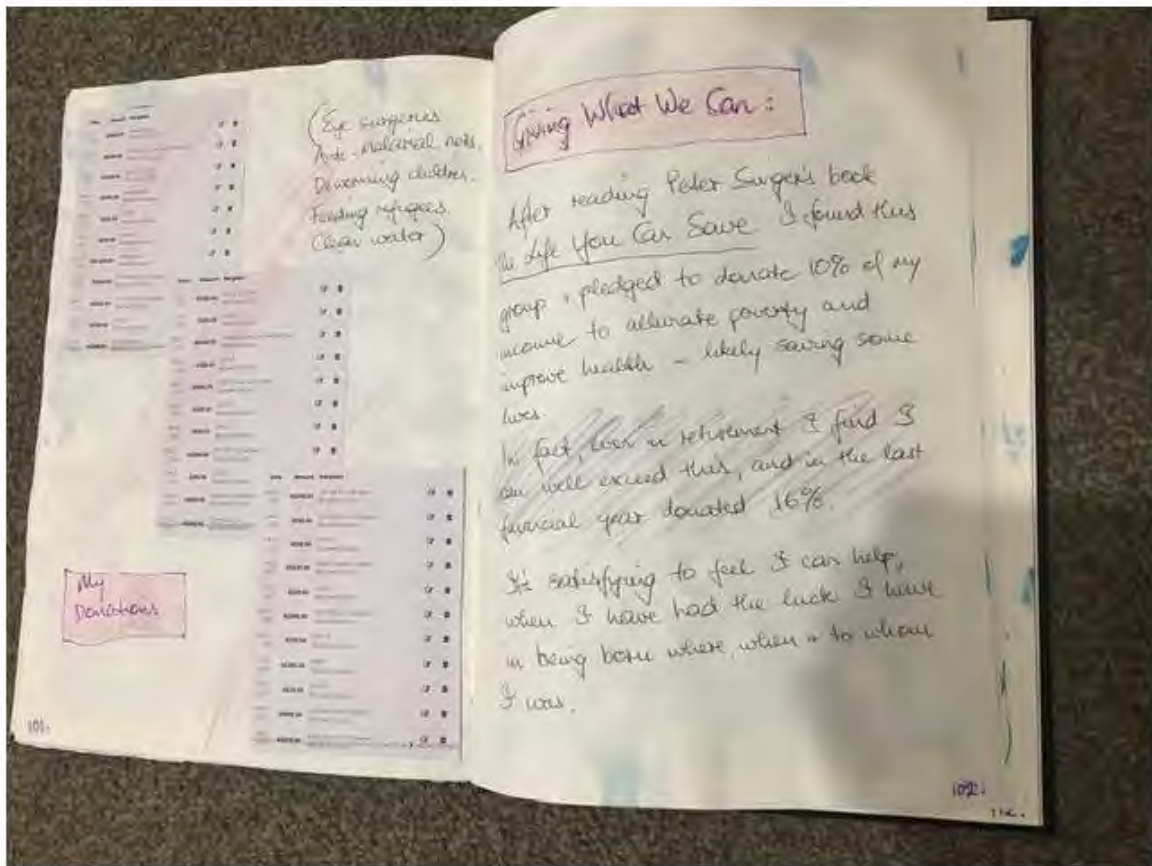
20  
Lisa

Another surprise and thrill when I found  
this in my letter box!  
This is 2021. And all the Lockdowns  
we're having. So it was very thoughtful of Lucy  
to get this to me. Thanks Lisa!!

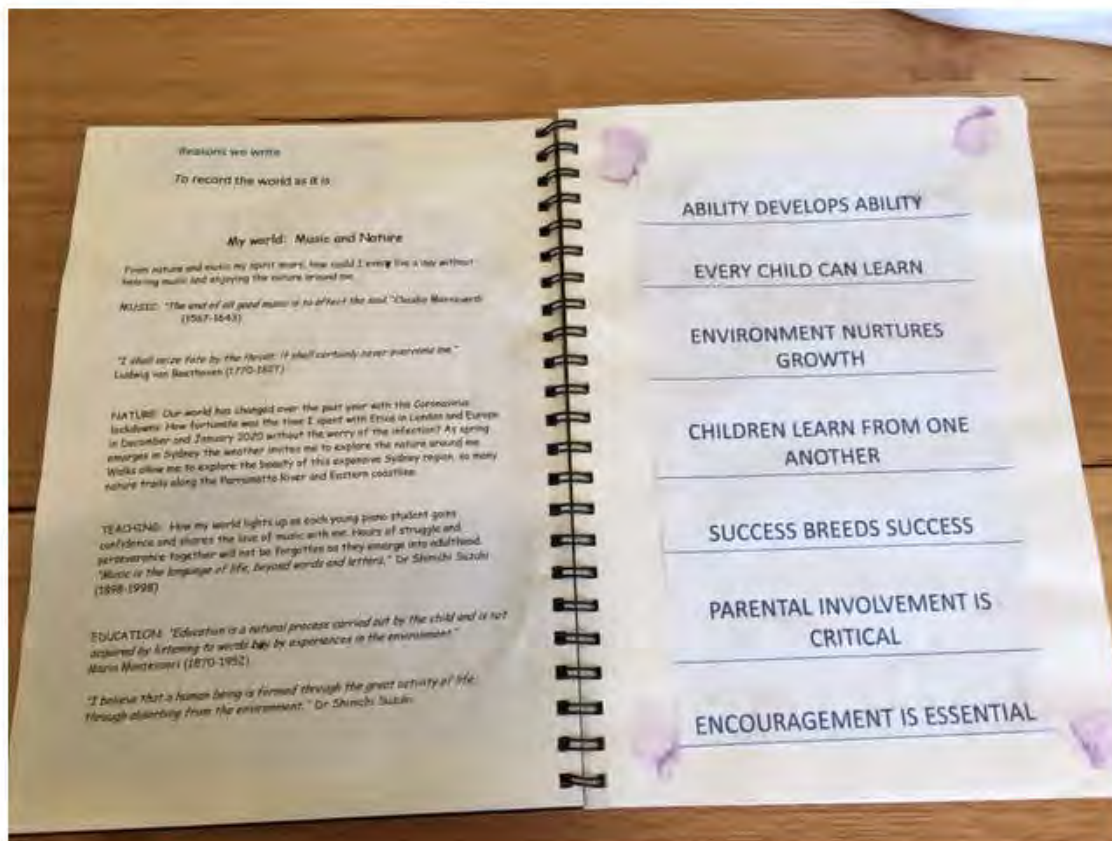


Appendix 11: Extract Commonplace book writer 2





Appendix 12: Extracts from Commonplace book Writer 3







Appendix 13: Beautiful Questions from the Creativity Centre on [www.timeslips.org](http://www.timeslips.org)

Use these questions as conversation prompts. Adapt as needed, turn them into stories and poems, use them as topics for painting, cutting, and pasting and so on. Each question may lead to an interesting conversation in many directions.

What are your favourite foods and tastes?  
What question would you like to ask a child today?  
What does courage mean to you?  
What are the games of your childhood?  
What do you put up with?  
What do you treasure?  
What gift would you give the next generation?  
What are the sounds of childhood? What are the sounds around you now?  
What does justice look like?  
What do you wish for?  
If you could have a superpower, what would it be?  
If your food could talk, what would it say?  
What gift would you like to give a new mother?  
What gift would you like to give a new father?  
What makes someone a good friend?  
What colours make you happy?

And for quieter moments looking out the window:

What do you see?  
What do you hear?  
What do you feel?  
What do you think that tree is thinking?  
If the tree could talk, what might it say?  
(Basting 2020: 87)

Many more are on the website (listed above) or in Anne Basting (2020) *Creative Care*, New York, Harper One.



## Appendix 14: Running Sheet / Reflection of Oranges and Lemons Workshop

### Oranges and Lemons Creative Workshop

Today was the first creative workshop at HC. I worked with another volunteer Meryl; we really hit it off. Christa, the Volunteer Coordinator, introduced us to staff and residents and helped put a couple of tables together. We were off!

I set up the table with a bright cloth and on it I put: a half dozen fresh oranges and lemons, some talking/writing prompts, some paints with brushes and water bottles, glue sticks, coloured paper, stickers, pictures to cut out, and scissors. When residents asked, what are we doing here? What's going on, I said 'we're just having fun! We can do whatever we want! Someone laughed, and said, let's make a mess!'

We sat around a table full of goodies: Graham, Dennis, Elise, Melva, Ted, Meryl, and myself.

I handed out the orange and lemon sheet prompts. Melva and Dennis picked up a paintbrush right away. Graham knew a song about oranges and lemons (fortunately I'd anticipated and had the lyrics on hand – we sang it. (Lyrics attached.) For an hour and 15 minutes we talked, alternating between spontaneous stories about ourselves and the creative prompts to use as conversation starters. There was a lot of laughter, Ted's favourite saying was 'wake me up when it's all over' and Elise said she is going to marry Dennis because he is so smart (Dennis did two years of medical school in Sri Lanka and has a son and daughter who are medical doctors. Dennis has lost his sight but has a mobile phone which rings often, and will have a go at painting if it's on offer).

We talked about lemon trees, good lemon recipes, Sundays, trips to London, favourite pets, and sang old songs beginning with 'Oranges and Lemons'.

After an hour, we had to go. There was a sense of energy among the group and reluctance to finish the session. 'When are you coming back?' we were asked. 'Next week,' we replied. Meryl and I then packed everything up and, like magicians who had momentarily transformed a dark pit into a magical swimming hole, we said goodbye.



## Appendix 15: Materials for Creative Workshop – Oranges and Lemons

### Poems

Orange  
by Wendy Cope

At lunchtime I bought a huge orange—  
The size of it made us all laugh.  
I peeled it and shared it with Robert and Dave—  
They got quarters and I had a half.

And that orange, it made me so happy,  
As ordinary things often do  
Just lately. The shopping. A walk in the park.  
This is peace and contentment. It's new.  
The rest of the day was quite easy.  
I did all the jobs on my list  
And enjoyed them and had some time over.  
I love you. I'm glad I exist.

#### Oranges and Lemons

Oranges and lemons,  
Say the bells of St. Clement's.

You owe me five farthings,  
Say the bells of St. Martin's.

When will you pay me?  
Say the bells of Old Bailey.

When I grow rich,  
Say the bells of Shoreditch.

When will that be?  
Say the bells of Stepney.

#### Oranges

BY ROISIN KELLY

I'll choose for myself next time  
who I'll reach out and take  
as mine, in the way  
I might stand at a fruit stall

having decided  
to ignore the apples  
the mangoes and the kiwis  
but hold my hands above

a pile of oranges  
as if to warm my skin  
before a fire.  
Not only have I chosen

oranges, but I'll also choose  
which orange — I'll test  
a few for firmness

#### MYSTERIES, YES

Truly, we live with mysteries too marvelous  
to be understood.

How grass can be nourishing in the  
mouths of the lambs.  
How rivers and stones are forever  
in allegiance with gravity  
while we ourselves dream of rising.

How two hands touch and the bonds will  
never be broken.

How people come, from delight or the  
scars of damage,  
to the comfort of a poem.

Let me keep my distance, always, from those  
who think they have the answers.

Let me keep company always with those who say  
"Look!" and laugh in astonishment,  
and bow their heads.

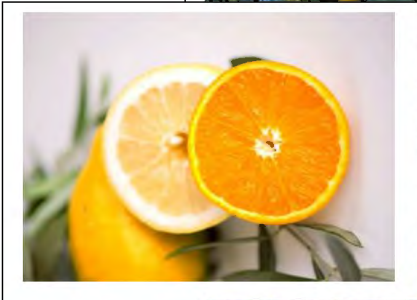
—Mary Oliver

#### GARY SOTO

##### ORANGES

The first time I walked  
With a girl, I was twelve,  
Cold, and weighted down  
With two oranges in my jacket.  
December. Frost cracking  
Beneath my steps, my breath  
Before me, then gone,  
As I walked toward  
Her house, the one whose  
Porchlight burned yellow  
Night and day, in any weather.  
A dog barked at me, until  
She came out pulling  
At her gloves, face bright  
With rouge. I smiled,  
Touched her shoulder, and led  
Her down the street, across  
A used car lot and a line  
Of newly planted trees,  
Until we were breathing  
Before a drug store. We  
Entered, the tiny bell  
Bringing a saleslady  
Down a narrow aisle of goods.  
I turned to the candies  
Tiered like bleachers,  
And asked what she wanted—  
Light in her eyes, a smile  
Starting at the corners  
Of her mouth. I fingered  
A nickel in my pocket,  
And when she lifted a chocolate  
That cost a dime,

## Images



You'll feel warm  
between my palms  
and I'll cup you like  
a handful of holy water.

A vision will come to me  
of your exotic land: the sun  
you swelled under  
the tree you grew from.

A drift of white blossoms  
from the orange tree  
will settle in my hair  
and I'll know.

This is how I will choose  
you: by feeling you  
smelling you, by slipping  
you into my coat.

Maybe then I'll climb  
the hill, look down  
on the town we live in  
with sunlight on my face

and a miniature sun  
burning a hole in my pocket.  
Thirsty, I'll suck the juice  
from it. From you.

When I walk away  
I'll leave behind a trail  
of lamp-bright rind.

## Music

**LEMON TREE**

*Moderately*

When I was just a lad of ten my  
day she left without a word, she  
me, lie, sun. "Come here and take a les- sun from the love  
a girl in the dark she left be- hind, I knew

When I was just a lad of ten, my father said to me  
"Come here and take a lesson from the lovely lemon tree"  
"Don't put your faith in love, my boy" my father said to me  
"I fear you'll find that love is like the lovely lemon tree"  
Lemon tree, very pretty, and the lemon flower is sweet  
But the fruit of the poor lemon is impossible to eat  
Lemon tree, very pretty, and the lemon flower is sweet  
But the fruit of the poor lemon is impossible to eat  
One day beneath the lemon tree, my love and I did lie  
A girl so sweet that when she smiled, the stars rose in the  
sky  
We passed that summer lost in love, beneath the lemon  
tree  
The music of her laughter hid my father's words from me  
Lemon tree, very pretty, and the lemon flower is sweet  
But the fruit of the poor lemon is impossible to eat  
Lemon tree, very pretty, and the lemon flower is sweet  
But the fruit of the poor lemon is impossible to eat  
One day she left without a word, she took away the sun  
And in the dark she left behind, I knew what she had done  
She left me for another, it's a common tale but true  
A sadder man, but wiser now, I sing these words to you  
Lemon tree, very pretty, and the lemon flower is sweet  
But the fruit of the poor lemon is impossible to eat  
Lemon tree, very pretty, and the lemon flower is sweet  
But the fruit of the poor lemon is impossible to eat

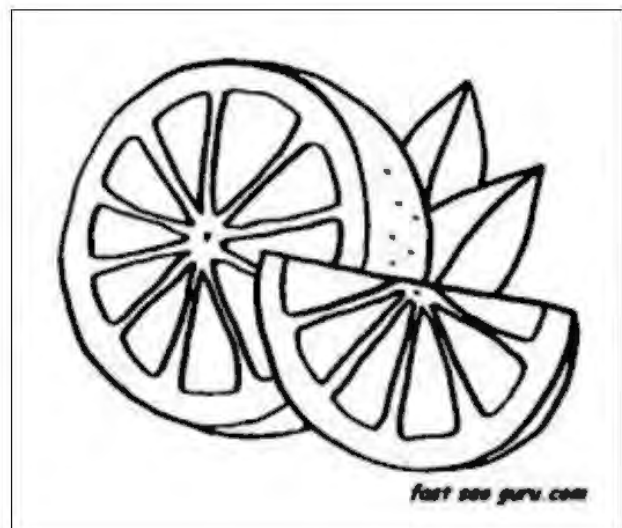
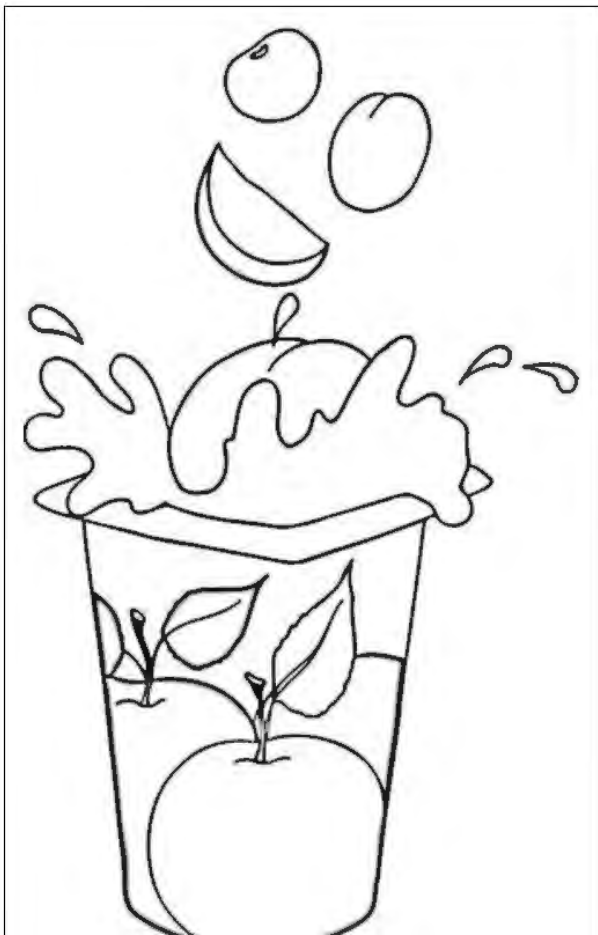
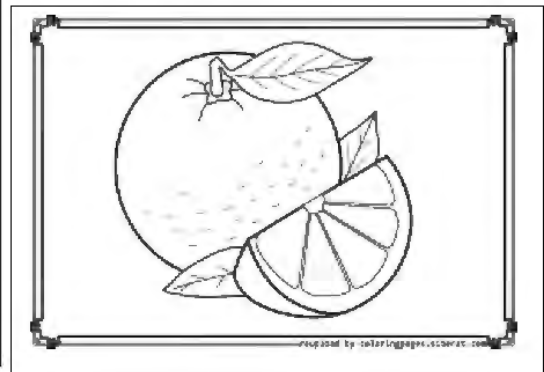
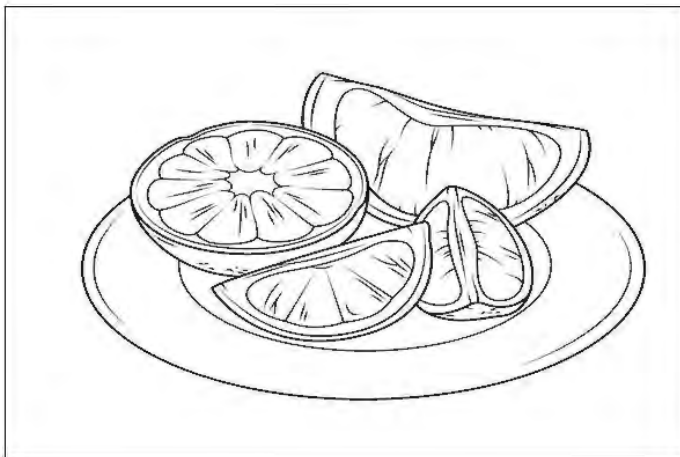
# Oranges and Lemons

Nursery rhyme

Oranges and lemons Say the bells of St. Clements I owe you five farthings Say the bells of St. Martin. When will you pay me? Say the bells of Old Bailey When I grow rich Say the bells of Shrove -itch. Here comes a cart - die Woe light you to bed. And here comes a cart - per to chop off your head!

bohemian.com

## Things to paint/colour



## Wall display



## More resources

<https://images.app.goo.gl/CmKHAAREnQbQ7xWD6>

<https://images.app.goo.gl/BGBDNiV1bJB23wL47>

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NDIS Quality  
and Safeguards  
Commission

# CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION

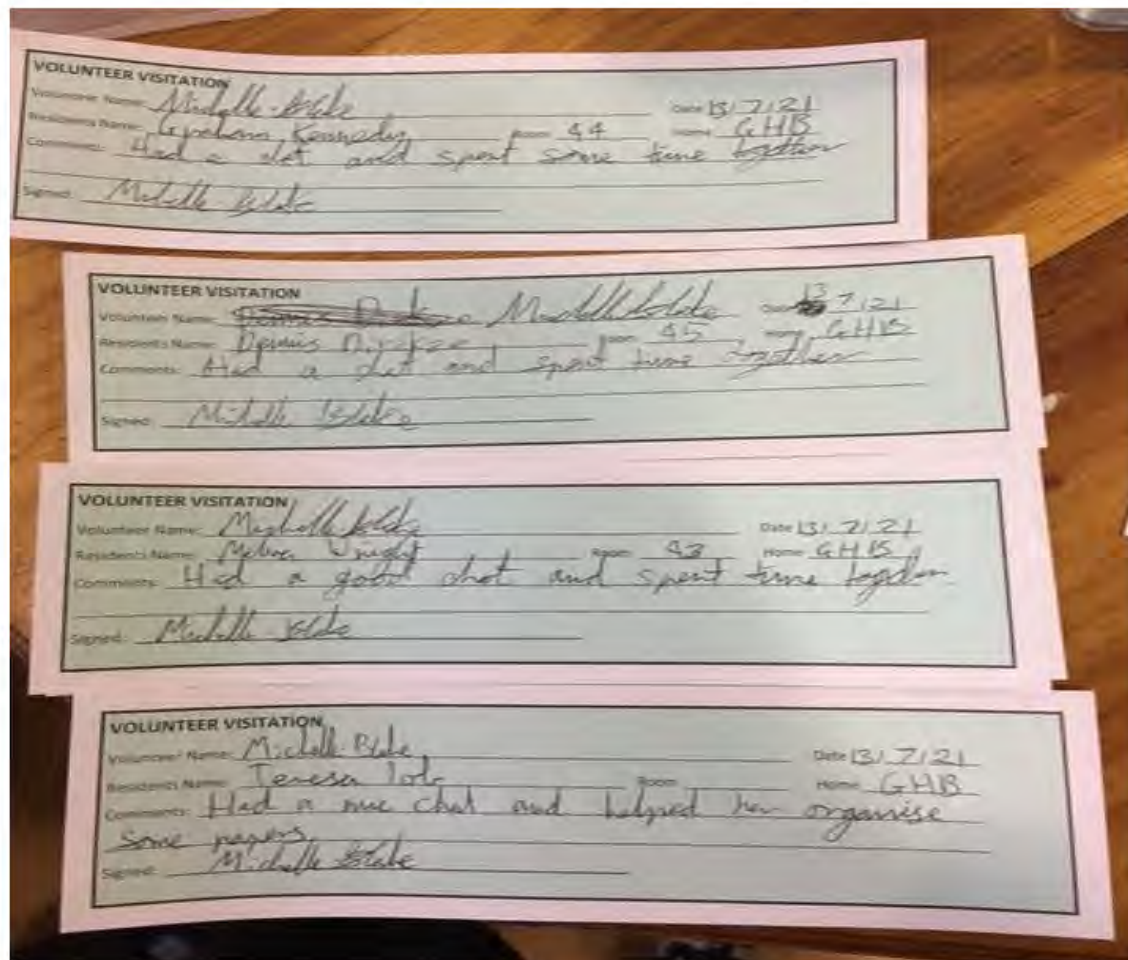
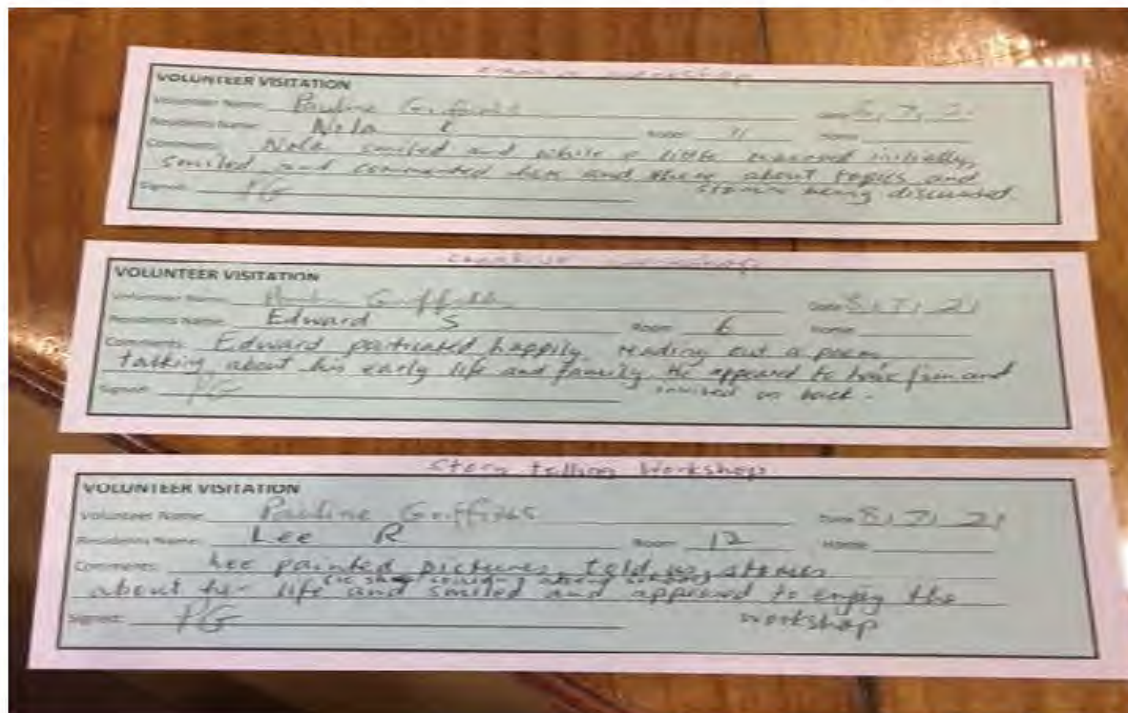
Awarded to  
Pauline Griffiths

In recognition of your completion of  
'Quality, Safety and You' - NDIS Worker Orientation Module

Date of completion  
April 1, 2021



Appendix 17: Notes on Residents (permission to publish was given in Participant Information and Consent Form – Appendix 8)





## Praising Ordinary Lives Exhibition

UC Hospital Foyer, (dates tba) February 2022

This is the great hope: that if enough people learn the techniques, creative care might be poured like water into care systems themselves and change the way we understand and deliver care. (Basting 2020: 133)

### **Concept Map**

What difference does creative activity make to our lives in later years? This exhibition features the results of three creative experiments from the *Praising Ordinary Lives* project conducted by Dr Pauline Griffiths from the Centre of Creative and Cultural Research, University of Canberra.

It is an exhibition of artefacts that explores what it means to grow old and live our later years. It contains creative materials made by people aged over 65 – residents of aged care homes, and people living with dementia – that convey their experience of aging. It shows what can happen when people write commonplace books; or participate in creative workshops; or join an imaginative storytelling group. Find out how enlivened we can all feel, regardless of our circumstances, when we are writing for pleasure; or playing with creative materials to tell and share stories; or inventing new stories with others.

### **4 events**

1 x Exhibition Launch	Weekday	TBA
2 x Open sessions:	Weekday	2:00-4:00pm
	Weekend	2:00-4:00pm
1 x Professional Learning Workshop for staff	Weekday	TBA

### **Layout**

In a horseshoe arrangement there are three groups (display clusters) of exhibits. Each cluster contains a table and two large posterboards on wheels. First group is Commonplace Books – creative writing/self-care for **'young old age'**. Second group is Creative Workshops – creative care for **'old age'**. Third group is Imaginative storytelling sessions, a form of creative care and inter-generationalism for **'old old age'**. Tables will be covered in gingham tablecloths.

- Table 1 Commonplace books: information and visual material about this medium displayed on posterboards; examples of historic and more recent commonplace books, as well as books made by participants, displayed on tables, along with white gloves for viewers to use
- Table 2 Creative workshops: information about the experiment, and examples of stories and paintings produced by participants, displayed on posterboards. The 'tool kit' for these workshops, and other examples of participant outputs, displayed on tables
- Table 3 Imaginative storytelling sessions: information about the experiment, examples of stories and booklets produced by participants, the 'toolkit' for these workshops, and examples of intergenerational participation in the sessions.

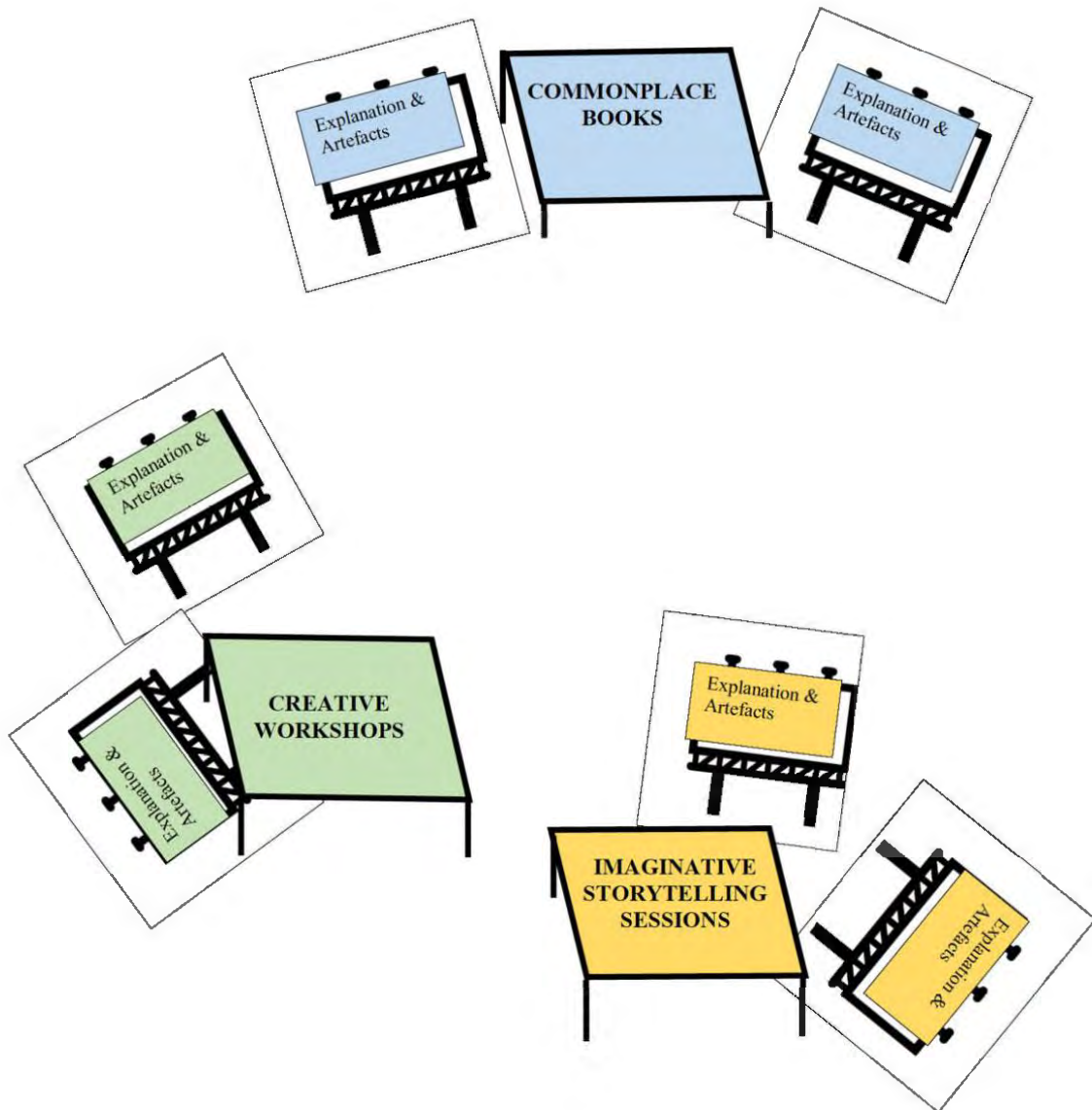
The audience is able to wander around each table, in and between the large posterboards and with white gloves can examine artefacts on table. An observer will be located at each of the three tables to ensure artefacts and all exhibit pieces are protected.

The layout will be enticing, lively, colourful and playful. After seeing the exhibition, I want viewers to feel, 'Wow, I [or we] can do this in our aged care facility. What a lot of fun!'

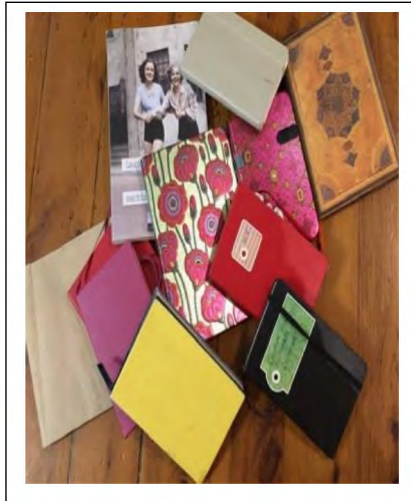
***Thoughts about Launch***

- Piano and violin background music playing the songs often requested by participants of the creative workshops.
- Speeches
- Commonplace book guest speakers

# CREATIVE WORKSHOPS



## Examples of artefacts for Table 1 Commonplace Books display



"I'm growing old. It isn't nice but it's interesting."  
August Strindberg

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Email or phone me for a chat, and I'll send you a commonplace book.

---

(Dr) Prudence Griffiths  
Centre for Creative and Cultural Research, University of Canberra  
prudence.griffiths@ucon.edu.au  
0422 553 329

This is part of a research PhD project. Open in or out.  
Ethics Approval: 2022



Commonplace books are enjoying a revival. Write one for yourself or your family; write it alone or with friends in a group.

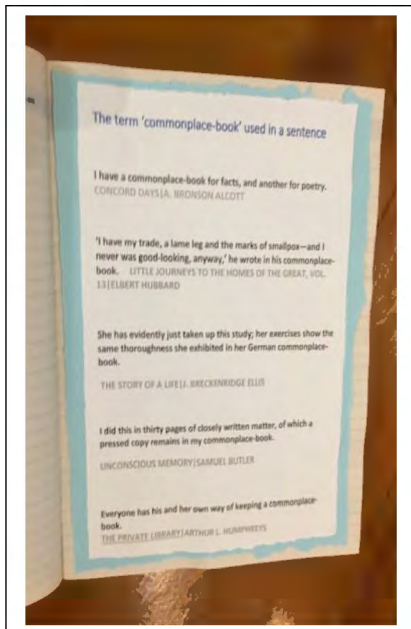
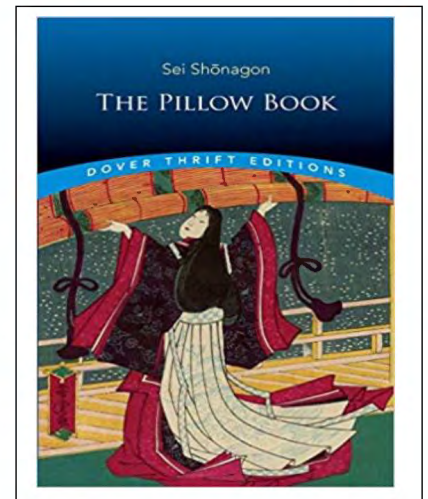
**What is a commonplace book?**

Part diary, part scrapbook, part memoir, part reading journal. It can be whatever you want it to be as long as you enjoy doing it. Write in an old-fashioned book or repurpose a digital format.

A place to keep special quotes, memories, recipes, ideas, poems, photos, anything.

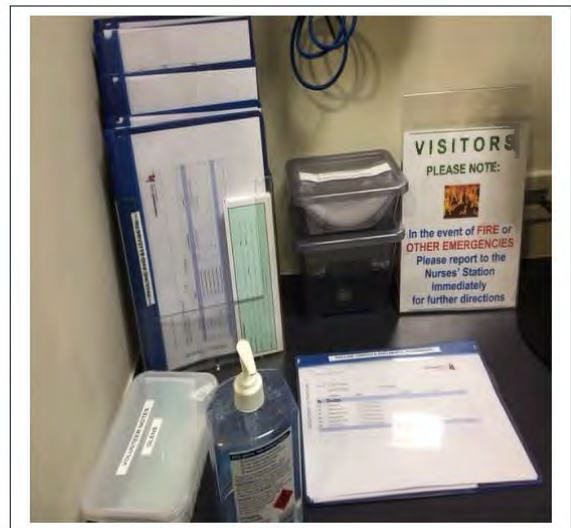
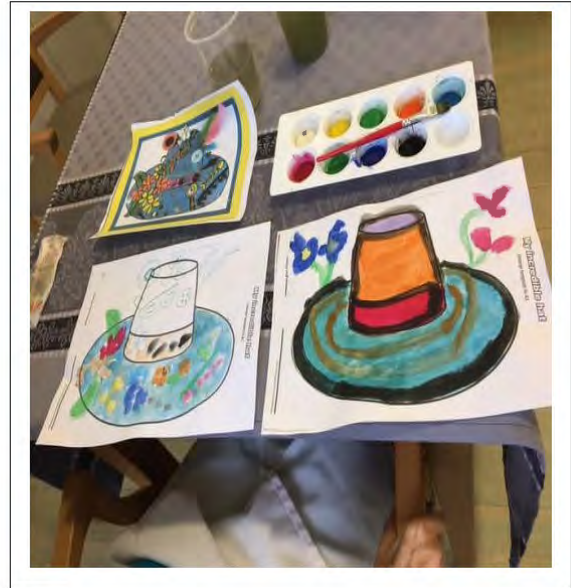
A place for your everyday thoughts, feelings, rights, wrongs, needs, desires, moods, insights. Goes well with morning tea!

Commonplace books are great for: retirees; folks writing their way through pandemics and other big events; playful people; folks seeking a new hobby.

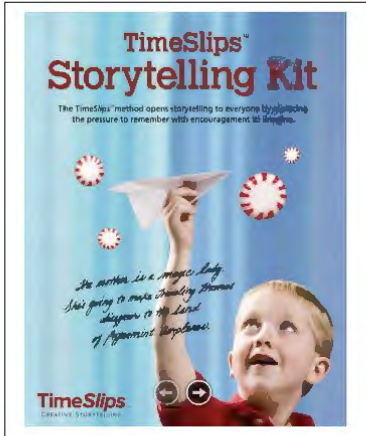




Examples of artefacts for Table 2 Creative Workshops display (Permission to display photo given by participant in the Participant Information and Consent Form – Appendix 8)

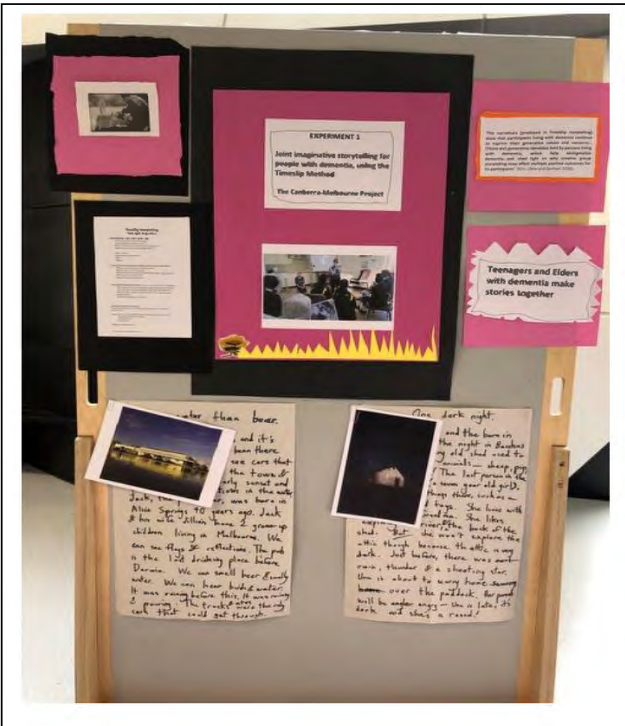


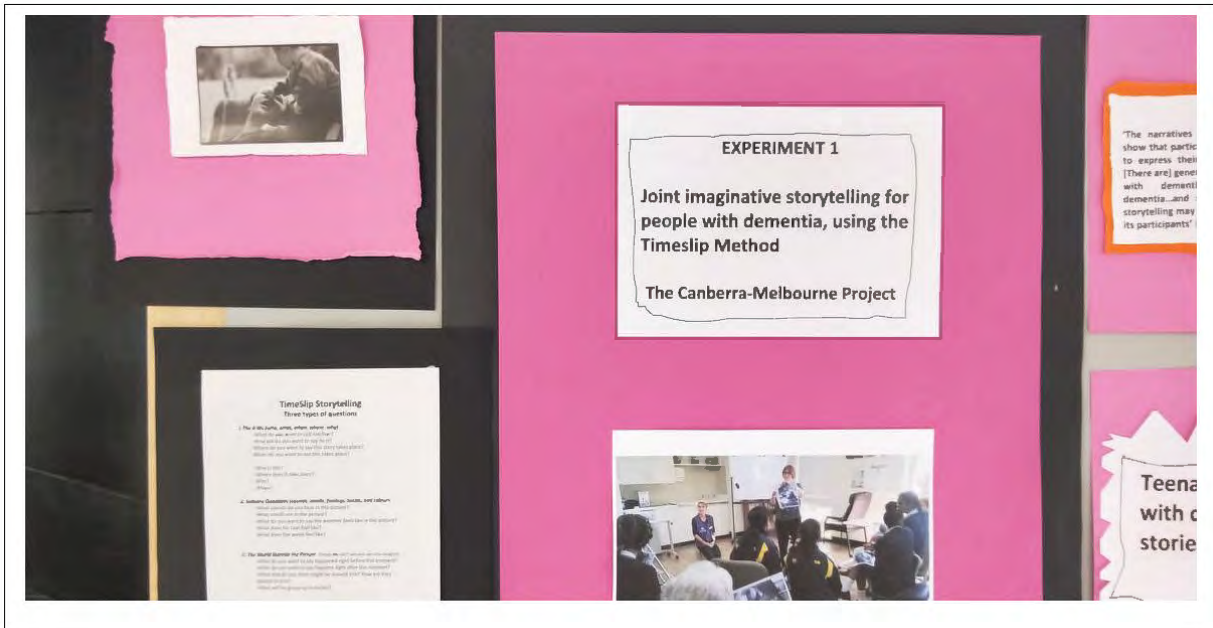
Examples of artefacts for Table 3 Imaginative Storytelling Sessions display

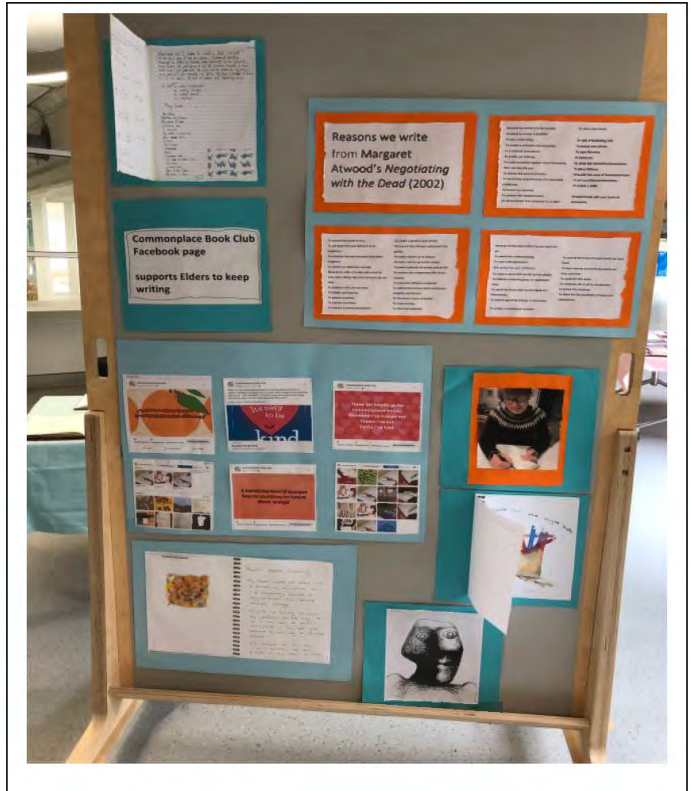


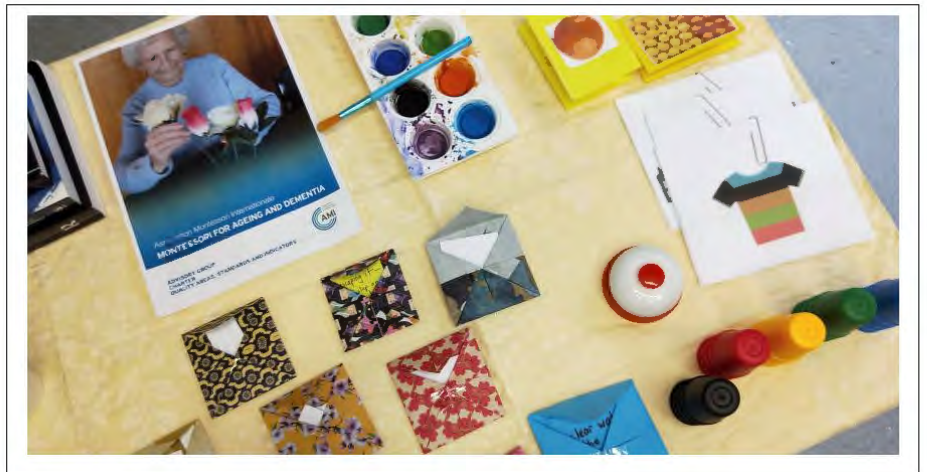
Appendix 19: Photos from Exhibition at University of Canberra 4/2/2022

Film of event available at [https://youtu.be/xH6YQ7RaP\\_g](https://youtu.be/xH6YQ7RaP_g)





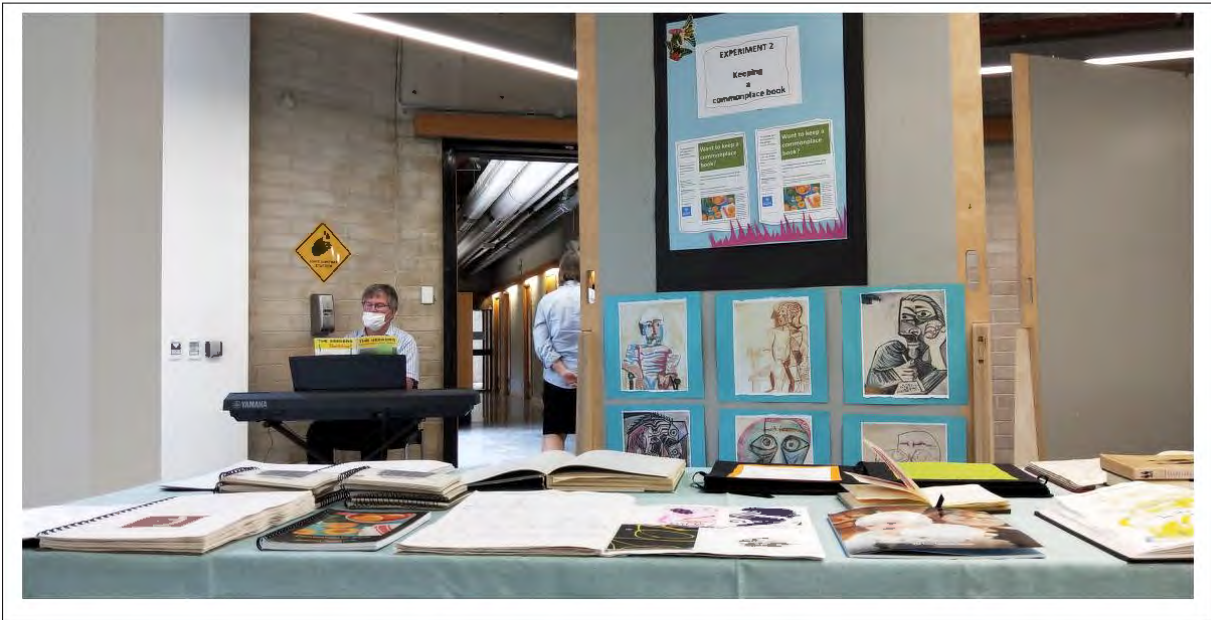














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