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Journal Theme: Connections

“Connections knitted together through creative activity are central to our wellbeing and manifest in many forms. They offer a sense of belonging, security, and validation, and are built on trust, vulnerability, and communication, allowing us to feel understood and valued.”

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This issue of the International Journal of Lifelong Learning in Art Education is inspired by the theme of connections. Connections in this context can be described as personal, cultural, or contextual and refers to personal encounters between fellow humans, in the context of the cultural universe, through creative imaginings by means of artmaking in support of self or social transformation. Connections knitted together through creative activity are central to our wellbeing and manifest in many forms. They offer a sense of belonging, security, and validation, and are built on trust, vulnerability, and communication, allowing us to feel understood and valued. They also give rise to empathy, a key aspect of relating to others' emotions and experiences, as we share joys, challenges, and mutual support. Through human connections, shared goals, and creative resilience, we are reminded that we thrive when we are engaged with and supported by others. As the authors in this issue will suggest, creative art engagement can be an effective tool of self-care and care for and with others in uncertain times. Artmaking provides opportunities to explore polarities such as vulnerability and safety, uncertainty and predictability, as well as isolation and connection. It has the power to reduce the gap between polarities through exploring relevant themes, offering an outlet for people to express and regulate emotion, increase relaxation, decrease anxiety, provide social support, and overcome trauma. Moreover, the effectiveness of artmaking also manifests cognitive behavior improvements, such as providing problem-solving skills, as well as externalizing and making sense of complex layers of thoughts in a non-threatening way (Choudhry et al., 2020). In this way, artmaking can be seen as a silver lining of hope and expression that connects us to each other, the earth, and the universe. In this issue, we will learn about the work of Dr. Margaret A. Walker and Dr. Linda Helmick who earned the Pearl and Murry Greenburg awards that recognize exceptional contributions to the field of art education and are made possible by the generosity of the Greenburg family. Then we will dive into the ways our authors considered the role connections has played regarding artmaking, creative activity, and lifelong learning.

Reference

Choudhry, R., MPP, Keane, C. (2020). *Art Therapy During A Mental Health Crisis: Coronavirus Pandemic Impact Report*. AMERICAN ART THERAPY ASSOCIATION.

Dr. Margaret A. Walker writes that her inspiration lies

Dr. Linda Helmick received the Murray Greenberg Award for Emerging Scholar in Lifelong Learning. Dr. Helmick explores ways art education might offer a more loving and healing space for connection within our arts communities. She connects therapeutic arts creative activity with equity, wellness, and inclusion to the heart of the work she does in her research and in the field with the teachers she works with.

In a beautiful visual essay, Dr. Steve Willis introduces us to two Acoma female Elders and Clan Grandmothers through his visual experiences of connection with Mother Earth, the teachings of these elders, and the art of ceramics. In this essay, Dr Willis asks us to embrace the wisdom of our ancestors whose voices can be felt in the kindness of our hearts and the strength of our family connections.

Drs. Samantha Goss and Libba Willcox illustrate through visual collaborative autoethnography the impact of making and maintaining consistent meaningful connections in sustaining their personal and professional well-being. As early career faculty, they share their struggles and difficulties, and ritualized practices they followed for renewal that was successful, sustainable, and applicable to the reader.

Dr. Kelly Gross embraces the concept of crip time as a valuable framework in the context of intergenerational engagement during an artist residency at a children's museum. Dr. Gross describes crip time as a framework for flexible differentiated planning for those who experience time and space differently due to disabilities or personal health challenges. These adaptations allowed for meaningful connections, through artmaking, across generations to be made.

In a powerful reflective visual essay, Cynthia van Frank explores love, loss and memory through her connection with her mother and seeks to preserve these memories through a series of heartfelt paintings. These paintings serve as a reminder of the realities of Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia as well as a tribute to her mother's experiences as a Holocaust survivor. This essay is a profound visual landscape of their journey together.

Researchers/artists Pooja Lalwani, Sujal Manohar, and Jessica Kay Ruhle from Duke University offer insights through their study of the program *Reflections* at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University. They describe ways museums could connect with a broader community by providing activities for people with dementia. The *Reflections* program also afforded intergenerational connections between program participants and students who were tour guides or performers. The authors found that this program, whether in person, hybrid, or virtual, offered a powerful model that could improve the quality of life for people with dementia regardless of location or physical barriers.

Dr. Liz Langdon connected with her neighbor, who is experiencing Alzheimer's disease, through the artmaking practice of coloring pages. In this article, Dr. Langdon examines her previously held dis-like for coloring pages and challenges her own personal struggle to display them in a gallery setting in order to share and amplify her friend's story.