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Pearl and Murray Greenberg Award Lectures

*“...we must
approach each
other as people,
not as ages and
stages.”*

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Figure 1*Murray and Pearl Greenberg.*

The Pearl and Murray Greenberg Awards were established through a generous gift from Ken Greenberg and his wife, Clara Gerdes, to the National Art Education Association's Committee on Lifelong Learning. The recipients of these awards' focus on their contributions to the field of art education for post-secondary learners across the lifespan, including creative aging, community-based art education, and/or intergenerational arts learning. The Murray Greenberg Award specifically supports an emerging scholar (zero to four years beyond the completion of their graduate degree program thesis or dissertation) with \$1000. The Pearl Greenberg Award for Teaching and Research recognizes an artist/educator/researcher at the national level who has made distinguished contributions with \$2,500. This article includes excerpts from the 2023 acceptance speeches given during the Committee on Lifelong Learning Awards' Ceremony at the 2023 San Antonio Texas National Art Education Association Convention.

**Pearl and Murray Greenberg Award Recipient
Margaret A. Walker**

I greatly appreciate the Committee for Lifelong Learning in the Arts for the important work they do to ensure that all members of our community have access to the benefits of the arts throughout our lifetime. As I move closer to my golden years, I understand this work on a much more personal and practical level than I did as a young college graduate, teaching art in a K12 school to children. Studying art education in the early 90s, the work we did was singularly focused on K-12 children and their needs as growing artists - our responsibility for their artistic development ended at high school graduation.

But as I became ensconced in the community of coworkers and families of my students, I noticed a curious thing- the children were the artmakers, and the adults were the audience. It seemed that the opportunities to engage in the arts as creators diminished with age, and with that so did confidence in the art creation process. Without the confidence or accessible opportunities to create outside of their school art programs, most adults that I spoke with had not created art since their K12 art class. I believe that, because of the lack of opportunities for regular and sustained

artmaking in adults' lives, they become out of practice, and then self-critical, which leads to avoidance of making art- they become consumers instead of creators.



Students and faculty from UMD and Bowie U. celebrate the completion of a 200+ participant mural, 2017

Why is this a concern? Because we know there are benefits to artmaking that can improve and sustain our mental and physical lives, as well as our communities, that are essential to our wellbeing throughout our lives. Among other things:

Art making relieves stress and anxiety

Art making helps to stimulate our minds and to keep our brains active

Art making can contribute to a positive sense of self and wellbeing

And Art making can bring us together through opening lines of communication and building community- All such important things to nurture as we age.



Community in Hyattsville, MD installing a mural for a privacy fence for ArtWorksNow playspace, 2019

In thinking back to this early interest in lifelong learning in the arts, I recognize that I did not come to this revelation through some divine act. It may feel like that at times, when our 'aha' moments are fresh and new and our passion about a question is running hot, and we can't imagine why no one else has ever had this deep philosophical revelation before! But one of the benefits of being a lifelong learner is that we spend a lot of time in self-reflection and recognize the deeply seeded influences others have had on our mindsets and understandings, and -Yes- our brilliant revelations about adults as watchers instead of as doers.



Students, staff and faculty make prints for a community collage in the College of Education at UMD, 2024

My undergraduate art education professor, Dr. Randall Craig, was a lifelong sculptor, despite his responsibilities to publish or perish at a ‘Research One’ university. He worked side by side with us in the art ed studio, teaching us his relief sculpture process, all the while instilling in us the importance of MAKING throughout life. My student teaching mentor, Margie Eisenstein, regularly found ways to invite parents and colleagues into the art making process in her classroom, instilling in me the importance of adults and children collaborating on artmaking. And at Teachers College, the scholarship of Pearl Greenberg was integral to our studies, whether in a course about engaging in art discussions at museums, or dissecting curriculum and assessment, Dr. Greenberg’s work was a lens through which we considered the learning needs and styles of all learners, no matter their age.

Dr. Greenberg’s work became much more front and center in my own research practice in 2014 when, through luck of circumstance and geography, Dr. Pamela Lawton and I, along with a community arts director Melissa Green, combined forces to create my very first Community Based Art Education (CBAE) project. With my students at the University of Maryland and Pam’s students at the Corcoran College of Art, we worked with community members at Melissa’s art center in Washington DC, who ranged in age from elementary school to 92 to create massive woodblock prints based on the idea of Freedom. Until this project, my artmaking interactions with a wide range of ages was limited to PTA art collaborations - as a CBAE facilitator that summer, I believe I learned as much if not more than my students and other participants. Pam, of course, had been doing this sort of work for a while by this point, and forgave me my blunders, and supported me as I stumbled, and celebrated my successes. Just as I imagine Pearl did for Pam when she was the one starting out in this important work.



Piecing together community woodblock plates for printing in Anacostia, DC 2014

It's been ten years since that first phenomenal woodblock project. When I call it massive, I'm not only referring to the process of hand carving 8 foot long wood blocks that were printed with a steam roller. And the local artist who joined. And the Printmaking professor, and the gallery director. And the student videography project that was created. And the poetry that was written and school children that showed up for a few of the sessions as credit for their art class at the nearby school. I am also referring to the multiple layers of community building and learning and connections that were made during the four weeks we worked together, as well as the Art making that reduced our stress, and stimulated our minds, and contributed to a positive sense of self and well-being, and that brought us together through opening lines of communication to build community. THAT was massive.

Since that first project, I have designed and facilitated many community-based art ed projects—none quite as massive as the first one, but always with the explicit intention of collaborating with participants from across the lifespan. Not only do CBAE projects offer opportunities for adults to MAKE without the pressure of critique and self-doubt that can accompany personal artmaking, but it brings together groups of people from different generations and backgrounds to engage in conversations and storytelling as they MAKE, approaching each other “as people, not as ages and stages” as Dr. Greenberg (2004) eloquently put it, and builds the strong foundation needed for communities and people to thrive. As a professor, this work is woven throughout with pre-service and practicing teachers, instilling in the newer generations the importance of creating opportunities to nurture MAKERS from ‘womb to tomb’ through community-based opportunities, to hopefully move our society away from simply consuming art, to creating it as well.



UMD and Bowie U. team install community designed posters- “Snapshots of our new normal”, Fall 2021

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Pearl and Murray Greenberg Award for Emerging Scholar Award Recipient Linda Helmick

I am currently an assistant teaching professor of art education at the University of Missouri. As a white, queer artist/researcher/teacher, I put therapeutic creative activity with equity, wellness, and inclusion at the heart of the work I do in my research and in the field with the teachers I work with. I want to thank the award committee for the opportunity to carry on the legacy that Pearl Greenberg, and her husband, Murray, have made possible through their generous gifts. Gifts such as these allow all of us to continue the work we love. As an art educator and researcher, my interest in art as therapeutic has led me to believe the act of visual storytelling has psychological and physical health benefits that writing alone cannot express. I hold that creating art connected to personal experience within groups improves people’s self-respect, has restorative value, develops creativity and changes the way one views their life. My connection to this topic is personal and heartfelt, demonstrating my commitments to teaching and learning, responsive design and artist/researcher presence as valuable, fluid and intuition driven. My work resides at the intersection of critical theory, visual arts pedagogy, and positive psychology within educational and community spaces to impact ways students, fellow teachers, and communities deal with trauma, isolation, anxiety, and difficult issues such as bias, cultural stereotypes, and racial injustices.

In my doctoral studies, a figure of the past deeply inspired my work. Frederica (Friedl) Dicker-Brandeis, (1898-1944) provided a linking bridge for me between art education and art therapy. Two summers ago, I received a research grant from the university that allowed me to travel to Prague and the former Nazi internment camp of Terezin where I spent a month investigating Dicker-Brandeis’ life, work, and experiences. Dicker-Brandeis, an often overlooked but talented cross-disciplinary artist of the early 20th century, left a legacy as a gifted art educator who understood and used the power of artmaking to bring hope to children imprisoned in the Nazi concentration camp of Terezin throughout the last years of her life. Born in Vienna, she studied at the Bauhaus school of art and later taught art to teachers and refugees. Her personal vision was to teach children to master art essentials through self-expression so she could open a loving space for them to feel empowered, make meaning, and feel a sense of freedom “amid dreadful oppression and daily horrors” (Wix, 2010, p. 19). By teaching children, while interred together in

the Nazi camp at Terezin to observe and experience their visual world through the expressive arts, she helped them live imaginatively under horrific conditions. In an interview, one of the children she taught said, “Everybody put us in boxes, [Dicker-Brandeis] took us out of them” (Makarova, 2001, p. 199). Her journey ended when she was sent to Auschwitz and, in a final act of bravery, she packed and hid two suitcases of the children’s artwork. These works now reside at the Jewish Museum in Prague and the Museum at Terezin.

As I was analyzing the data from this research, I found love. I found that love was at the center of Dicker-Brandeis’ passion for teaching art to the children imprisoned at Terezin. When I walked through those rooms and then studied the artwork she and the children made under those circumstances, it was obvious to me that love was in the room with them. Love was at the heart of their survival. Friedl, through her experience as an artist and art teacher, saw first-hand that meaningful creative artmaking could see them through. Could lift these young people, if only for moments at a time, out of the horrific circumstances they found themselves in. And if teaching art with love and passion could do that then, it certainly can do that now.

When I returned, I was invited to lead a professional development day for art teachers in my school district of Columbia, Missouri. I had former experience providing artmaking support for teachers online in 2020 (Helmick, 2022) when the pandemic required that we stay home, and I decided I would provide a meditative therapeutic artmaking workshop for them. In a meeting with the district’s superintendent, I asked what he thought teachers needed right now. He said love. They needed love. In this project I wondered if a meditative therapeutic artmaking professional development experience could give these teachers the love and support, they seem to be missing?

Research suggests that while professional development is key in teacher progress and well-being, conventional professional development is not geared to the needs of art educators (Conway et al., 2005). The teachers who participated in this project told me that this was the only arts-based professional development they had experienced in their careers. Most professional “activities do not emphasize development of art teachers as professionals in their field... often contribut[ing] to the feeling of marginalization and alienation art teachers feel within their schools” (Willcox, 2017, p.18). In this research, these teachers expressed the need for support, feelings of emotional exhaustion, lack of balance in their lives due to heavy work loads, and difficulty in finding community as they are often the only art teacher in their schools. As teachers have had to adapt to particularly brutal difficult circumstances due to the pandemic, levels of stress have been and still are exceptionally high. Health concerns, loss of family and friends through social isolation and even death, and adapting to hybrid, synchronous, and asynchronous instruction has been unprecedented.

For this project, I met with 12 secondary art educators for a 4-hour professional development session of meditation, art making, and sharing. My intention was for art to become a vehicle for expression and communication. After introductions, I handed out watercolor paper and placed watercolors, water, and brushes in the center of the tables. I asked them to choose any colors they were drawn to and make colorful blots that covered the paper. When they were ready, they were to fold the paper in half and then open it to create ink blot like shapes. After this creative play, we set these aside to dry.



Figure 1 Starting the ink blots

While our work was drying, I asked that we place ourselves in relaxed and comfortable positions so I could lead us through a visual meditation. Once we were in a relaxed position, together we took three deep breaths, and then closed our eyes while I led the meditation.

After the meditation and a short reflective sharing of our experiences, I placed drawing and painting materials on the table in place of the watercolors. I asked that they look at their inkblots, think about the meditation and feelings that might have come up, and use the art materials to explore and draw out what they could find in the shapes. One teacher retrieved sewing supplies from her bag and soon, multiple participants were sewing into their artwork.

The teachers worked and talked with each other about problems and struggles at school with students and administrators. They also caught up personally with each other and talked about their personal lives, both struggles and accomplishments. I could feel that they wanted to build community with each other and were glad to be in this space together with a reason to make art. When our time together was in danger of running out, I asked if each of them would hold up their work and talk about what they made and experienced.

One teacher reflected:

While I was meditating, my mind wandered to the usual things that fill my life: my daughters, my students, and my role as a wife, mother, and teacher. When I reflected on the ink stain I created prior to meditating, I couldn't help but see the matching dark circles at the top of the paper as "power



Figure 3 Power Puns

puns" (a pigtail type hairstyle I use on my girls). I constantly strive to be a figure of strength for both my children and students. I work to show balance between finding beauty in what I do not have control over and managing with pride the things I can control. Integrating my true self into my artwork, my teaching, my parenting, isn't always easy, but it's vital for my longevity. For some time now, I have really tried to emphasize the process of making art as being more important than the product. I want both my children and students to know that it's okay to take risk, learn from mistakes, persevere, reflect on progress, share knowledge, and express feelings. Participating in art making teaches all of these, plus more.



Figure 2 Artmaking in Community

Another said:

This was a needed break from the stressors of teaching and life. Things have been so difficult, and I do not take the time to clear my head from the external and create. Having this opportunity gave me permission to take time and slow down and be with my thoughts and express feelings. It let me just feel and be and go into a different part of myself that I do not often get to visit. The process from start to finish encouraged this freedom, connecting to others, connecting to self, exploring through the visual language of color, line, shape, form texture and value, then reconnecting with others through our artwork and stories. No stress of getting it “right”, it was open and free, and at the same time complex and deeply meaningful.



Figure 4 Completed ink Blot

Another reflected:



Figure 5 Completed ink blot

This experience reinforced that I do not take enough time to create, but honestly, I don't know how I would find the time. Teaching and raising a family do not leave a lot of time but mostly it doesn't leave me with a lot of creative energy. I dedicate a lot of my creative energy to my own children and my students. I also give a lot of *physical* energy to my children and my students. I am mentally and physically exhausted at the end of the day. When I am forced to attend a PD in which artmaking is the purpose, I am always grateful because I must do it. I am being asked to set aside everything else going on in my life and make art. It is lovely. I feel rejuvenated.

I hear this many times. Folks I work with know the benefits of making art, and relaxing into the creative activity, but they do not make time for it on their own. I will hear them say that they use their commitment to me research as an excuse to make art.

In the space of the workshop, each of these teachers welcomed the opportunity to take off their daily armor and feel restored and rested. They found space for safety among other art teachers where they could discuss, affirm, and support each other. This helped them understand that they were not alone and that their struggles were not personal problems but shared with the other teachers around them. Creating a supportive space with meditation, artmaking experiences, and reflection provided openings to acknowledge their emotional exhaustion, and sharing stories about the meditation and the artwork enabled each of them to feel supported and understood.

I hope in the future to continue this work, not only with art teachers, but all teachers, and inspire others to support teachers in this way. Ways we share and support teachers trickles down into the classroom and influences the ways teachers support their students.

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