



# Transnational tomorrows today:

Graduate student futures  
and imaginaries for art education

Guest Editors:  
Anita Sinner, Kazuyo Nakamura  
and Elly Yazdanpanah

UNESCO OBSERVATORY  
MULTI-DISCIPLINARY eJOURNAL IN THE ARTS

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## ABOUT THE e-JOURNAL

The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal promotes multi-disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.

Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.

# EDITORIAL

## TRANSNATIONAL TOMORROWS TODAY: GRADUATE STUDENT FUTURES AND IMAGINARIES FOR ART EDUCATION

### AUTHORS

Anita Sinner<sup>1</sup>, Kazuyo Nakamura<sup>2</sup> and Elly Yazdanpanah<sup>1</sup>

On the cusp of UNESCO's International Arts Education Week in May, our special issue brings together graduate student voices connecting three learning sites in Japan, Canada and Iran, to explore why the potential of teaching for tomorrow lies in how higher education today embraces shifts in horizons of transnational awareness with, in and through the arts. Our three sites were 'host nations' for courses in the Fall of 2021 that brought together students joining online (and from many locations beyond), making our community of practice diversified, inclusive, accessible, and part of ever-growing multiple networks of relations. In this collection we activate conversations with members of the next generation, our emerging scholars, to reimagine educative futures by forging new collaborations that promote greater cultural diversity, intercultural dialogues and social inclusion and cohesion with responsiveness and awareness. We respectfully invite you to join us on this venture.

The form of this special issue is situated in artwork scholarship, and the articulation of a triptych installation (Sinner 2010) as the architecture for these conversations. This collection can be received as three domains, geographically assembled and thematically joined; or, learning clusters rooted in Japan, Canada and Iran may be read sequentially, out-of-order, in-relation to one another, or beyond these locations, with readers entering at any point within the special issue. In this way, we attend to historical and contemporary

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contexts that inform meaning-making in research, and inform the reading of research too, as a way to teach about integrative and distinct socio-cultural activities of learning as processes, practices and products of inquiry.

With expansive worldviews coming together, we share in the interrelatedness of dispositions concerning sustainability as a richly textured and nuanced understanding that preoccupies graduate students at this juncture. Emerging scholars assembling via Japan bridge a host of conversations across diverse global perspectives – for example Chinese art education – to share a practice of exchanging ideas grounded in peace education; adapting innovative design approaches and reforms; and attending to the revitalisation of teacher education, among their priorities. Views from the Canadian congregation extend internationally, and return again to the local, to culminate in the dynamics of ‘and’, where art education operates in tandem with urgent social, environmental, and policy issues to highlight experimental pedagogic pivots in response to ever more complex entanglements of learning and teaching. An infusion of connective conversations at the heart of citizenries and publics call us to Iran, and by extension to neighbouring Afghanistan and beyond, as a vital commitment to ‘becoming transnational’ as expressed in the desires to sustain, to embody sustainability, and to propose sustaining praxes for tomorrow.

The structural integrity of the issue is further strengthened by that which binds the triptych together, the spaces between, in this case, visual interludes. Interludes span visual essays and virtual exhibitions that were part of the unfolding of this project, emphasizing the theory-practice nexus and attending to the properties of art as research with aesthetic sensitivity. Interludes also function to activate linkages across our learning clusters, correlating authors, ideas, places and moments shared in relation, jointly setting the stage for principles of glocal engagement to be artfully expressed.

As an ensemble of artwork scholarship, our embrace of ‘translanguaging’ in art education extends the interstitial spaces where Japanese, Chinese, English and Farsi (and in the shared networks of relations among our students, Mandarin, French, Spanish and more) are expressed

visually, textually and performatively, not bound by language, place or socio-cultural boundaries (see Garcia & Kleyen 2016). Instead, our expressions of translinguaging reside in the braiding of all elements and principles expressed that attest to local and global qualities, values, beliefs and characteristics. In the process, we open thinking-with emergent proficiencies that push learning and teaching to different pedagogic dimensions by virtue of interactive events (see also Infante & Licona 2021).

The content of this special issue is the result of our co-curricular planning as an editorial team, which draws on our three distinct research trajectories and our shared convergences, with a pulse of becoming-other, embracing liminality and relational understandings in the moment of our collective encounter. Our backstory as a team builds on the experience of previous international partnerships (see Nakamura & Sinner in press; Nakamura et al. under review), where the nucleus for short-term collaborative online learning between Hiroshima and Concordia evolved from an initial pilot to become a more robust inquiry predicated on the lens of the United Nation's Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs) – a key tenet for teaching at both Hiroshima and Concordia as signature universities. The crux of this practice was already in place in Yazdanpanah's teaching at Concordia, and in collaboration with private post-secondary learning institutions in Iran (Yazdanpanah & Farkhak in press), which extend these initiatives to bring another worldview to this conversation. Our practices, together with our physical proximity, are surprisingly comparative. For instance, there is approximately 10,000 kilometers between Hiroshima and Montreal; 9500 kilometers between Montreal and Tehran; and another 7000 kilometers between Tehran and Hiroshima. With the unexpected continuation of the pandemic, our actual distances became a pedagogic fold of time and space, and our classes came together to form constellations with organic and fluid movements that in turn express our process of curating conversations in this special issue. The moment of teaching our courses brought together international teams via Hiroshima-Montreal and Montreal-Iran as learning conduits to undertake inquiry questions. Despite the challenges of different academic semesters and different stages in graduate programs for students,

students took up the challenges presented with remarkable openness and receptivity, and forged vibrant, energetic and unconventional compositions in response. This timely collaboration was an opportunity for us to further develop diversified immersive learning activities and we continue to build upon this initiative as part of our teaching today.

Our philosophical approach is deliberately provocative, extending beyond the status quo methods of teaching in higher education to chart another panorama of pedagogic possibilities. Informed by Rancière's (1991) notion of intellectual emancipation as a starting point, we opted to set parameters only, with each transnational collaborative team of students determining their arts-based experiment and collectively deciding what they wished to learn. Our 'not knowing' as teachers was an obligation, as was the pedagogic purpose to encourage artful activations as a habit of mind. Adapting Rancière's universal teaching approach was an effort to create spaces for students to become conscious of their intellectual equality. As Biesta (2013) suggests, the risk of education and educational creativity through such action is a core ethic of practice that in this case informs our invitation to graduate students to envision art education futures.

Our introductory points were broad, and intended as a 'worlding practice' to explore relationality with people, places, spaces and objects as artists, researchers and teachers (Haraway 2016). Teams undertook projects to inquire into aspects, issues, topics and questions relating to the promise of art education. We offered a host of resources to explore suggested themes, including but not limited to: teacher identity and the SDGs; walking with public art as sustainable pedagogy; challenges and opportunities for international art education; virtual propositions for the SDGs and social action; comparative practices as sustainability; and 21st century skills and art education. The topics required further independent research for idea generation, and from this inquiry, each team devised a collaborative art project as well as individual responses. In the spirit of accessibility, their art practices were open-ended, and contingent on their interests, inclusive of original works, collages sourced in the Creative Commons, digital video and more dynamic modes of expression.

And so we began. Because of time zone differences, and in some cases more than three countries represented in a group, teams were required to organise virtual meetings outside of regular classes based on their small group schedules. Students immediately encountered language differences, and the expectations around English were quickly decentred, even though English remained the common medium of exchange. Students were urged to find resolutions 'with your teacher hat on' and ultimately discovered a host of new platforms and options to transcend traditional communications. Different cultural protocols and historical knowledges about locations quickly came to the fore, and again students were encouraged to encounter challenges by problem-solving as teachers. Admittedly, these constraints did cause some discomfort, however as instructors, we felt that the value of tensionality outweighed our intervention. We remained in the background.

With each team co-creating a collaborative artwork, Hiroshima and Iran prepared virtual exhibitions, and we moved to the next iteration of the project, preparing an essay that attends to the ideas, feelings, and responses that were evoked artistically, conceptually and in terms of materiality in the process. For individual essays, students could build on the collaborative team project, or undertake a question of interest to them to facilitate international dialogue, with attention to theoretical propositions, methodological dispositions and practice-based deliberations. Possible questions were offered to encourage imaginaries: How does art education activate 21st century skills? In what ways do we teach the SDGs in art education? Why do the SDGs matter to artists, researchers and teachers? How do we facilitate sustainability? How do we open up pedagogic anticipation? Topics were discussed one-to-one for idea generation and consultation in our courses, rather than for direction on how to proceed.

The opportunity to bring professional academic skill development into the context of our graduate courses was also a key mentorship goal for this project. We introduced the peer-review process and modelled academic protocols by exchanging papers with our counterparts. Again, discomfort prevailed in shifting from student to reviewer in the moment, particularly when graduate students considered how to construct a response that was



encouraging and yet evaluative, with recommendations for revision to a peer. And just as with an actual journal submission, course essays were revised before final papers were submitted. This process of drafting work-in-progress was intended to establish the rigour of quality scholarship and an ethic of practice that will help support our future scholars with meaningful competencies that are generative of form and content. In hindsight, the workload and the expectations were well beyond what students had previously encountered, yet it was perhaps a realistic introduction to the reality of an academic life. After courses were complete and final marks assigned, students were welcome to submit to the special issue. This was not a course requirement, and the numbers of students in each location who took the opportunity to seek publication varied. We invited essays and visual interludes, with the expectations of this journal in mind in terms of formatting, images, permissions and more. And so another round of editing began. As co-editors, we entered this phase as a curatorial practice, balancing collaboration with artful practices within academic research by attending to the distinctions of diverse cultures of research across our three domains. We remain keenly sensitive to the intensity of the act of public engagement for our students as a vital and necessary turn in our teaching and learning for the future.

And to the credit to those who persevered through what was a demanding and advanced set of protocols, the resulting special issue is a remarkably refined series of conversations, exquisitely woven with the scope of ideas we encountered in the moment, and interwoven with the honouring of colleagues, demonstrating time and again how thinking and creative expression is an ongoing pollination, and how we are all continually branching outward in wonderfully entangled relational conversations. This is the beauty of learning together.

Extending the thinking-making-doing of our graduate students, we continue to contemplate more questions for future iterations of our collaborative international learning partnerships: What if this project was required to oscillate between languages? Could we try this assignment in Japanese or Farsi, and could English speakers undertake such a challenge, both students and faculty? If we undertook virtual workshops led by

artist-teachers, rather than hosting open-ended activities, how would this work resonate with students? How might we embrace the risks of learning differently, that is, can we learn to fail?

Our invitation to graduate students to contribute to an evolving knowledge commons in this way began with living inquiry, and morphed into new pedagogic potentials across different contexts of teaching and learning in the moment. Join with us in sharing and celebrating graduate student futures for art education. Their responsiveness is an embodiment of our imaginaries for sustainability and for transnational tomorrows today.

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