



Transnational tomorrows today:

Graduate student futures
and imaginaries for art education

Guest Editors:
Anita Sinner, Kazuyo Nakamura
and Elly Yazdanpanah

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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.

CANADA

REFLECTING UPON COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY: THE SDGS, ART CARD GAMES AND STORYTELLING

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ABSTRACT

We were a team comprised of four graduate students: Manuela, Eija and myself from Concordia University, Canada, working in collaboration with Jiachen from Hiroshima University, Japan. During our first meeting, we excitingly went through our introductions and shared with each other our projects of interests in art education. We quickly found the UN Sustainable Development Goal we had in common which was #4: Quality Education. As community art education teachers, we can all agree with the importance of promoting equitable and inclusive quality education. Our teammate, Jiachen said that for her, 'Education is a way to do good things for each other, share information with each other and share knowledge with everyone in the world'. And with that premise, we began our collaboration, creating an art card game informed by Jiachen's dissertation research, and in the process, introducing images and play as a basis for storytelling.

KEYWORDS

collaboration; storytelling; art card games



Figure 1.

Jiung Jiachen, Hiroshima University, 2021.

CO-CREATING, IN CONVERSATION

In our first meeting, Jiachen shared a drawing she made to explain her position as an art educator (see Figure 1). This rendering of people represents teachers, students and by extensions, all our relations in our lives. The flowers are symbols of education and knowledge, and the different flowers correspond to different abilities we each possess. The pair of hands with coloured nails refers to diversity and equity between teachers from different world countries and their role in caring for all ways of teaching and learning. We were unanimously impressed with Jiachen's drawing and her art education philosophy, which set the tone for us to choose to work with the SDG - *Quality Education*. Jiachen also shared with us her doctorate project about a card game she designed for kids between the ages of 9 and 10 years old to introduce them to art. After a fun brainstorming session, we all thought it would be a great idea to take up Jiachen's idea of a card game for the Concordia University and Hiroshima University partnership art exhibition project.

We elaborated on a plan to create art cards using four words to illustrate our areas of interest concerning the SDG goal of *Quality Education*. The words we chose for our game were: fluid, entangled, caring and equilibrium. These words reveal our views of art. I chose the word 'fluid' because of my love of water and how it evokes images of going with the flow (see Figure 2). Jiachen chose the word 'equilibrium' for how it defines her role as a teacher. Eija chose 'entangled' and Manuela 'caring'; as these words illustrate their personal art practices. As Manuela said: 'Each word reflects aspects of our approaches to teaching and learning'.

As we develop our game based on 16 illustrations of the four chosen words, we discuss the potential for connections and explorations. Eija described the art card game experience as, 'What results are unique expressions of ourselves and our environments which we share and reinterpret through play'. Jiachen believes that 'The act of playful engagement can expand the definition of words beyond their literal meaning and stimulate an inclusive feeling of a diverse world'.

Our collaboration to create an art card game reminded me of the importance of playing games, as a process for learning. It brought me to reflect on the nature of play and on my journey as an athlete. I recall valuable life lessons gained by my commitment to playing sports, and I believe there is a creative likeness between playing team sports and making art that can be defined through observations and living inquiries. As Bruce Sheridan (2018) writes, 'Playful behaviour enhances the attributes important for creativity, which has been a powerful force in human evolution' (p. 1).



Figure 2.
Chantal Archambault, *Fluid Voyage* (pencil crayon), 2021.

INTRODUCTION TO PLAY: A PERSONAL THEORY ON OBSERVATION AND LIVING INQUIRIES

As a young teenager I stumbled upon team sports for the simple desire to play, the intrinsic satisfaction of learning, and the enjoyment of physical self-expression, and too, the nonverbal communication through play motivated my commitment to the game. I gravitated towards the visual arts for those same reasons. For me, both activities sparked my passion for creative exploration and encouraged me to seek to understand the wondrous potential of my inward impulses to self-realize.

Even though art is generally taught as an individual and stationary activity, the qualities of anticipation, responsiveness, concentration, and physical endurance are all part of belonging to a team in sports. Lessons learned in sports continue to inform my practice as an artist, researcher and teacher of visual art today.

What I lacked in verbal dialect in those days as a teen was balanced by profuse and continuous engagement in mental images. Through sports I learned about who I was, and in turn, I explored ideas I wanted to communicate through art making. Sometimes I did not know what I wanted to express until I illustrated it. I enjoyed the playfulness of getting lost in the creative zone, visually and physically. My images were visual words put together communicating my emotional state delivered by my unconscious mind (see Figure 3). Maybe I was, and still am, having a Dada moment. Phillip Prager (2013) explains that: 'Dada is characterized by an effervescent love of improvisation, curiosity, novelty and an unselfconscious exploration of the phenomenal world' (p. 239). I can see how art and sport underline play as a fundamental characteristic of self-expression.

Art and sport are possibility spaces in the making.

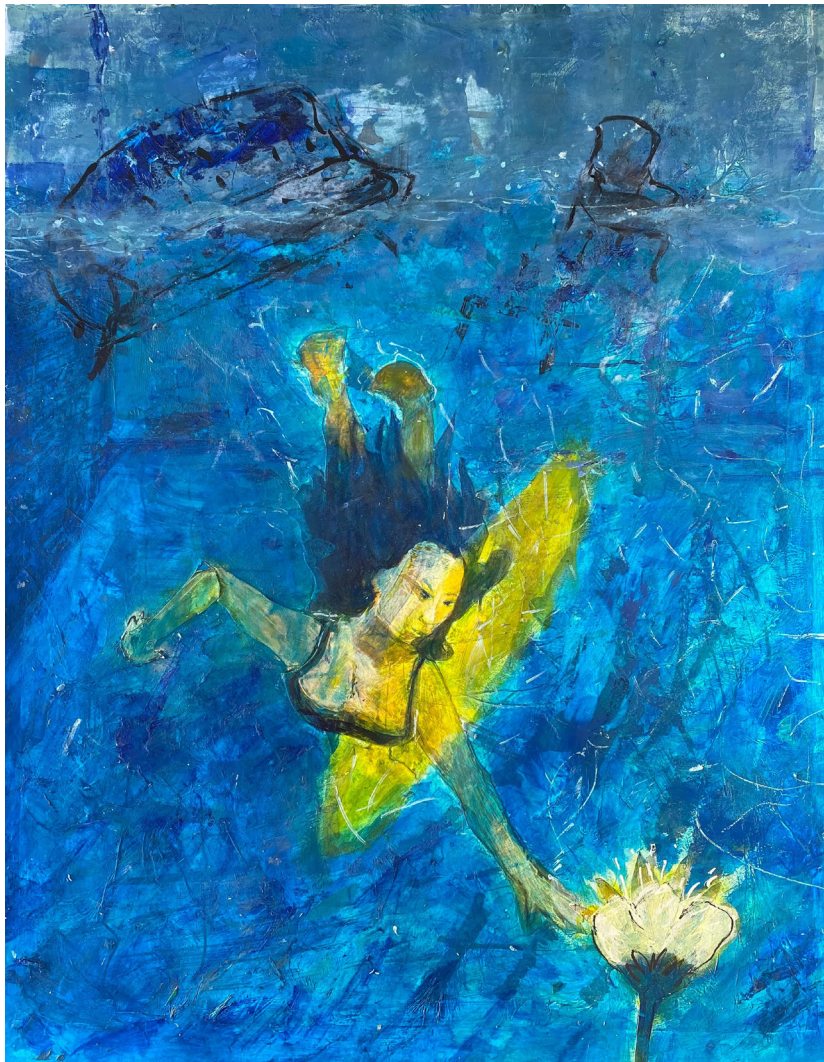


Figure 3.
Chantal Archambault, *Feeling Depth* (acrylic mixed media), 2021.

There are deeper aspects I developed while furthering my pursuit of play in the field of athletics and these aspects inevitably affected my position and personal engagement as an art educator. There were and are intrinsic powers of observation and living inquiries in play and at play. Let me explain:

It's 7:30 in the morning, I'm sitting in eight crew boat rowing on the Rivière-des-Prairies, and we're coming to the end of a gruelling training session that started at dawn. I clearly remember the ah-ha moment I had that morning. While rowing intervals on our way back to the rowing club, I was unconsciously repeating this mantra in my head: 'I can't do this, I'm so tired, I can't do this, I'm so tired' at the same time I was looking at my

oar hitting the water, out of sync and dispelling less water than the rest of my crew mates. I suddenly realized how my disparaging thoughts directly affected my body's energy output.

This moment proved to be a critical pedagogic insight, and it happened because of play.

What I observed that morning was the beginning of an awareness to my mental creative power and an ongoing process of inner voice inquiries, or self-reflective praxis, to guide my thinking, making and doing. Through the magic of play, I was learning without knowing I was learning, until suddenly, a moment of insight. Carolina Blatt-Gross (2017) confirms my revelation in her article about how the body and brain work in conjunction throughout the process of learning, as a result of interplay between the two (p. 54).

After years of competing in rowing I needed to get out of the boat and stretch my legs. This is when I learned to play rugby at McGill University. Ken Dryden, a legendary hockey goaltender for the Montreal Canadiens, wrote in his book *The Game* that: 'Offense, by its nature, must be unpredictable. It may evolve out of earlier pattern and understanding, but its ultimate act is individual creation' (Dryden 2013: 256). This statement inspired me as a rugby player. During games, I paid attention to my inner dialogue of inquiries: 'How can we get through their defence? What play would create an opening?' Through my inner living inquiries, I learned to be a creative player and together with my teammates, we learned to adapt and make changes, playing off of each other. Attentive to our body language, we connected and responded to our actions, weaving spontaneous creative plays on the rugby pitch. I find that my self-reflective praxis as an athlete is very similar to Geraldine Burke, an art educator with an immersive teaching philosophy and practice. What started as an intuitive approach to art making and teaching transformed her into an academic practitioner. She says in her PhD dissertation: 'As a pracademic, I respond with equal force to the physical, emotional and contextual stimuli in my field of operation and seek to disclose and amplify the creative freedom that exists in this space' (Burke 2018: 118).

A PLAYFUL PROPOSITION

I believe a storytelling game played with art cards can evoke the same spontaneous connections and creative actions produced in playing a rugby match. My proposition is that there is a playful creative parallel between game playing and art making. Through observation and living inquiries, both activities combined can lead to an unpredictable creative process. Tapping into the imagination, staying in the unknown, walking into it playfully, attentive to each other's connecting prompts await a true and unlearned reaction: an authentic expression. Through play, I am being and becoming in that same moment of creation. As Susan Wright says: 'While drawing, children combine everyday experiences with imagination in a projective-reflective state. This provide a safe "space" for an "authoring of self" and for perspective-taking in relation to others (Wright 2019: 1).

COLLABORATIVE ART MAKING AND SDG'S ART CARD GAME

Taken from my own experience in community art education, I realized that play and playfulness is an important pedagogic prompt for spontaneous learning and creating beyond assumed limiting skills. In a practicum (stage) at an elementary school in Quebec, I taught a class of grade nine to draw imaginary animals.

'We can't do that! How are we going to that?' said the children. I suggested they each draw three different body parts of their favourite animals on separate pieces of paper. Once this was done, I collected all the children's drawings and separated them into three containers of heads, torsos and appendages. The children randomly picked from the containers three body parts and equipped with a large piece of paper, scissors and glue, they assemble the body parts someone else made, to create imaginary beasts.

The experience was a playful beginning for the children to collaboratively explore art making and it served as a way to breakdown creative barriers. Based on this example, a creative game with art cards is an ideal extension, and can be included in any learning environment, especially as a way to introduce the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Imagine what creative solutions we could collaboratively come to, while playing a game of art cards based on SDG's relevant to the community? What if, as a result of creating art cards and inventing a new game each time, a collaborative urban eco-art project came to life? Amelie Lemieux and Virginie Theriault say: 'While eco-art is not necessarily political, it has a potential to drive educational awareness about environmental issues, and it is typically led by eco-artists who value public pedagogy as well as relationality between humans and nonhumans' (Lemieux & Theriault 2012: 4). Does this approach not give an opportunity to think outside the art box, in a posthumanistic way? We need to value creativity to develop smarter, well balanced, wholesome human beings (and maybe eco-artists) in service of the Earth. With the UN Sustainable Development Goals, we have to use all avenues possible, even playful ones, to attend to our beautiful planet's needs.

THE PEDAGOGICAL POTENTIAL OF WALKING AND CREATING ART CARDS INSPIRED BY THE SDGS

How can we lead art students in playful games of storytelling based on observations and living inquiries from local surroundings and different medias? As artists, searching for images that reflect the status of the SDGs opens new avenues. In this case, walking is meant to offer a new way of looking at a neighbourhood and its agglomeration of community structures such as public art, green spaces, urban wildlife, paths, roads, buildings, schools, bridges, canals, industrial spaces, markets and other components of the city, but also to question their purpose. What do the neighbourhood walks reveal about the Goal #11; *Sustainable Cities and Communities* or Goal #15; *Life on Land*?

As art students in collaboration between Hiroshima and Montreal, we were informed and moved by our shared visual entourage when walking our local communities (see Figure 4). The images collected were transposed onto art cards, which in turn became illustrations of walking discoveries and embodiment of art, but they also tell a story to each viewer.

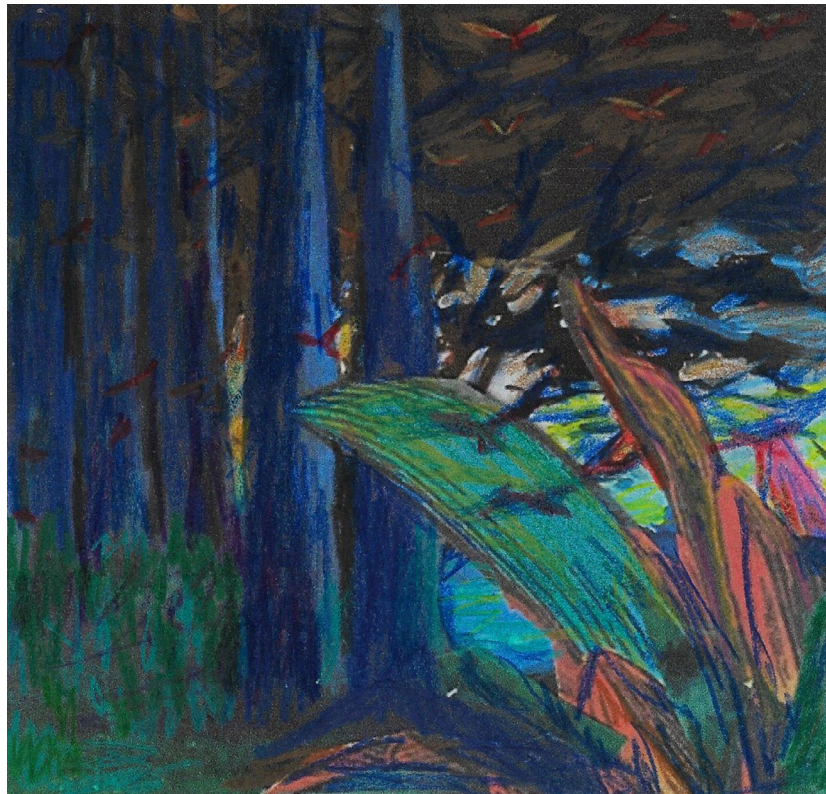


Figure 4.

Chantal Archambault, *Artcard – Magic Forest* (collage and pencil crayons), 2021.

In this way, art cards can reflect the fluidity or resistance encountered while walking through the community matrix, questioning both the ancestral foundations and evolutions of the city. Probing for materiality and inspiration, art allows us to make smart human beings that reflect, relate and feel compassion, and at the same time mirror, respond, construct meanings and make kin with the surroundings, human and non-human (see Figure 5). Michael Marker talks of the nature of place and that: 'Much Indigenous thought radiates from an invocation of a sentient topography, a land that is aware of human presence' (Marker 2018:1). Such more-than-human inquiry can lead to looking at the interconnectedness between elements encountered on a walk – plants, animals, humans and spaces.

As teachers, guiding the learning process with different points of entry using the SDGs, and formulating propositions and questions to engage the curiosity of learners to investigate their communities more fully, can begin in the making of art cards. In collaboration, we may share and reflect on the



Figure 5.
Chantal Archambault, *The Foxes' Hunt* (mixed media acrylic), 2020.

findings, and discuss ideas in an effort to adopt positions concerning the SDGs to eventually tell a collective story. Playing a team sport is for me much like our art card game. I feel there is an untapped potential to facilitate different learning experiences by bringing together previously divergent ideas, in effect, the idea is to 'embrace the event as a teachable moment, where learning happens by participating; it is a non-linear and rhizomatic process' (Sinner 2021: 3).

As an art teacher and artist, I appreciate that when we play the game with art cards, we learn about each other's graphic intentions and perspectives, deepening our connections and creating new meanings. Once

we know each other's position towards certain ideas, principles and beliefs, we can tell different stories, differently. This is where researching the SDGs to create an art card game becomes interesting. For example: What could be a new narrative for the future, outside of the inherited and learned social models? Can we share stories that are peaceful and inclusive? Can we create stories that respect human and non-human rights, the SDGs and Earth?

The art card game offers an ongoing and evolving journey into such creativity. Creating art cards captures self-realisation; the 'being' part of the process, while playing the game encapsulates the 'becoming' part of, in relation to each other's perspectives and imagination. One art card evokes an idea which links to another art card and another story avenue. The story unfolds through improvised play. Donna Haraway says that 'The best thinking is done as storytelling' (Haraway 2017). New stories could move all of us to take creative social action locally in our neighbourhoods, which is the ultimate goal globally, especially if it is concerning the SDGs.

CONCLUSION

The process of making art cards, playing and storytelling, gave birth to observations, living inquiries, learning and taking action, which for me, are very similar to playing sports. The pedagogy of the art card game and storytelling is an organic process constantly evolving and growing. Through storytelling about the SDGs, opinions are voiced from a more-than-human perspective (see Figure 6). The art card game allows for different ways of seeing things. Ryohei Oshima, a graduate student and colleague at Hiroshima University, who also happens to have competed in rowing, wrote in a class exercise peer-review: 'In the process of making art cards, we can rethink our immediate environment. Also, in the process of playing with cards, we can touch other people's stories and empathize with them'. Teaching art education is first a personal journey exploring positionality, and as we relate with each other in collaborative play, we are becoming new humans, creating new communities and eventually creating a new Earth. Art thus becomes a vector for play, progress and transformation.



Figure 6.

Chantal Archambault, *Walk New Ground* (mixed media), 2020.

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