

HYFLEX PANDEMIC RESEARCH: LIVING WITH CORONAVIRUS

November 6 | 1:00-2:30pm EDT | 10:00-11:30am PDT



Panelists

Karen Keifer-Boyd (moderator), Alice Wexler, Doug Blandy, Flávia Bastos, and Jennifer (Eisenhauer) Richardson

Discussant & Breakout Summarizers

Mary Haefali, Zena Tredinnick-Kirby, Burçak Gezerğlu, Melissa Leaym-Fernandez, Eunkyung Hwang, Eunjin Kim, Izzy Healy

Faced with the reality of a tri-fold pandemic of the coronavirus, racial injustice, and economic insecurities, there are possibilities for deep systemic change toward racial, gender, economic, and disability justice. Each panelist spoke about experiences of abrupt shifts to research in process, challenges of research while physical distancing, and research visions, three days after the 2020 US presidential election, during uncertain, unprecedented, and unanticipated pandemic times. What follows is an overview of the panel presentations and summaries of break-out room sessions. Contributors to the essay include the panelists, discussant and breakout summarizers.

Alice Wexler: Since the Global Pandemic I have learned that my research needs to recognize the following:

- 1) Interlocking injustices need to be addressed in their complexity. For example, sustainability depends on overcoming the disproportionate effect of ecological devastation in disenfranchised countries and communities, and the related inequities of health care, education and economy in marginalized populations.
- 2) There is no middle ground, only justice and equity, or injustice and inequity.
- 3) The responsibility of every citizen is not to take up space but to make the space you're in more just, equitable and sustainable.
- 4) The uncontrolled trafficking of false ideas, untruths, all these have shaken our democracy.

- 5) Realizing that incremental change doesn't work. Human beings tend to repeat history. For example, how the US acts in a pandemic is being recycled from the 1918 pandemic, where many of the injustices, false information, lack of leadership, were rampant.

So, I ask where and how can art education research be effective in dismantling injustice? First, since I believe research begins with honesty, it requires the researcher's own accountability. I have confronted the fact that I didn't believe that my multiple invisible and chronic illness merited the category of disability, since so many others in this category live with more serious illness. Lacking the support that the disability community would have afforded me, created a disservice in my personal and professional life, and in my research. The reason for this reflection is partly that, since the pandemic, I have had more intimate connections among colleagues because we are all included in a single threat, as a collective trauma, which turns out to have multiple origins. The digging away at the surface of what we have understood to be knowledge generation and production, as Dipti Desai discussed last month at this conference, has produced an awakening of our colonial heritage and its inherent racist and ableist practices that have normalized how we teach and research as art educators. How do we dismantle white privilege? What does an anti-racist/ableist art education research look like? I imagine that it would be an interdependent, relational and collaborative process. We can't account for all the influences in our lives, both human and more-than-human, so how can we claim sole authorship? What are the limitations of one mind, how much can it know?

The pandemic has caused self-reflection for many of us. How we have been operating, how we do things, our assumptions about ourselves and others. I am confronting my identity as a white, female researcher with an invisible disability, and the shaky terrain posed by my research in colonialism, Indigeneity and autism as a non-autistic from a colonial country. Why am I drawn to such research? I learned over the past year that co-authorship is mandatory. We can't speak for the other no matter how equitable we believe we might be. I learned from writing two books solo about autistic and Indigenous reality, that I need partners who live the reality of being autistic or Indigenous.

Working on a book proposal with Estee Klar, who identifies as autistic and her autistic son Adam Wolfond, Estee has invited me into a process of research and writing that emerges through discussion. I am aware that I and many non-autists have been writing to a neurotypical audience, which reinforces neurotypicality and its architectures. Klar asks "what is the value of recognition if it requires us to change or explain ourselves?" What kind of art education might think with neurodiversity?" "How does relationship and collaboration support conditions for neurodiversity?" (2020, Doctoral dissertation, p. 137).

In terms of the purpose of art making, if art is relational then it's not about the object, as Dipti said. The pre-requisite for anti-racist, anti-ableist art must be about the production of relationships and collaboration. A quote by Dipti at this conference is worth repeating: "Artistic organizing is grounded in collective art making, which is a process of learning to work across differences in order to be effective and shift the balance of power in our society."

Doug Blandy: I did not expect that the 2020 Presidential election would be this close. Trump's presidency, 2020 generally and this election campaign have been violent and psychologically

brutal. In my home state of Oregon, I have witnessed the federal incursion into Portland and unprecedented voter intimidation. In 2016 I could believe that those voting for Trump were not fully cognizant of what he would bring to his presidency, the United States (US) and international relationships. I cannot turn away from the fact that during this election that nearly 50% of my our fellow citizens cast a ballot for a candidate without a platform who is racist, sexist, anti-science, takes no responsibility and shows no remorse for the hundreds of thousands of COVID-19 deaths, disproportionately killing people of color, people experiencing disabilities and older adults as well as the huge number of people who will live, possibly for the rest of their lives, with debilitating and life threatening conditions resulting from contracting the virus.

Associated with my research agenda is examining the relationship between civic engagement and art education. In this regard I am witnessing extraordinary acts of civic courage. I continue to examine how ordinary people are using the arts to embrace their civic power. This is particularly evident within Black Lives Matter and its allies. Taking Portland, Oregon, as a case, I am collecting zines documenting protester's experiences there. Also of interest to me is the work of the approximately 15 artists participating in the *Wall of Artists* during the ongoing protests. Also of interest is the plethora of wall art and performance during the protests in Portland and Eugene.

My research associated with art and civic engagement is considering such examples within the context of participatory or democratic design with its emphasis on collaboration, empathy, shared language and shared knowledge. I am also looking to the field of Folklore, with its emphasis on examining the relationship between individuals, community, and shared expressive culture for strategies that can assist in bridging the divides currently rending the US.

A current multiyear research project is focusing on the academic and professional field of creative aging. This field is growing dramatically as the aging baby boomer population, of which I am a part, expects a high quality of life during a period of time that commonly spans three or four decades. My co-researchers on this project are Patricia Lambert at the University of Oregon (UO) and Margaret Wzermerski from The Ohio State University. Also assisting is Rosemarie Oakman, a graduate of the Managing Nonprofit Master's with an emphasis on Cultural Leadership at the UO.

Despite the enormous potential of the arts to engage older adults in educational, enrichment, and therapeutic programs, a limited number of resources exist to support cultural organizations, artists, and healthcare institutions in designing and implementing arts in health and arts for wellness programs for this population group. Similarly, the lack of research on arts participation and cultural engagement for people over the age of 60 is striking, given the size and economic/political power of this demographic group.

My co-researchers and I see our investigations associated with creative aging as being radically altered by COVID-19. COVID-19 is significantly influencing the lives of older adults and their ability to participate in arts and culturally based programs. The Center for Disease Control reports that 80% of COVID-19 related deaths in the US are people 65 years of age and older. Those of us in this age group are advised to severely limit our social interactions. However, studies are showing that this is resulting in feelings of vulnerability and isolation. Evidence is beginning to emerge suggesting that the near future will bring calls for new models for senior

living and exploring the role of technology in assisting older adults to pursue their creative interests.

Associated with my research are case studies of what is being offered to older adults in the midst of COVID-19. One such case study is associated with the UO Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art's (JSMA) *Reflections and Connections Program* for people experiencing memory loss.

Experiencing Alzheimer's disease, dementia, or other forms of memory loss can be stigmatizing, isolating, and disempowering. For several years this program was offered face to face at the museum. If *Reflections and Connections* was to continue, the program needed to move from the museum's galleries and studio spaces to the virtual environment. Zoom was chosen because of its relative ease of use, synchronous capabilities, and universal availability to the UO community. Offering *Reflections and Connections* online allowed participants to continue learning about art within a mutually supportive social environment. In making this unforeseen transition to Zoom, the facilitators of the UO program quickly learned that there were no published guides or literature about how to shift art education programming for people experiencing memory loss to an online environment.

As a case study, transitioning *Reflections and Connections* to the online environment demonstrates possibilities for maintaining cultural access and social engagement to people at risk for experiencing increased isolation due to stay at home orders and social distancing. Within the fields of cultural programming, museum education, and creative aging, there is a need for updated resources that provide guidance on program design, implementation, and evaluation as arts access for the memory loss community transitions from face to face to the virtual environment.

Flávia Bastos: In November 2016 the National Endowment of the Arts and the Kennedy Center organized the Future of the Arts and Creativity in America Convening held immediately after Donald Trump's election as the 45th President of the United States. More than 200 artists, leaders, and creative thinkers explored the driving question of: "What must be done to ensure that all Americans who want to engage in creative endeavors can do so through their work and daily lives?" Despite the uplifting topic, the atmosphere was somber. Participants grappled, often through tears, with the potential impact of a Trump presidency on the arts. We feared not only for the future of the arts, but also American democracy.

As we meet today [November 6, 2020], we are in the middle of a contested election that underscores deep divisions in society. Challenging the legitimacy of a democratic election concerns me because I grew up during Brazil's military dictatorship (1964-1985); an authoritarian regime that relied on abusive policing, curtailing of civil liberties, censorship of the media and the arts, and government sponsored propaganda disseminating *alternative facts* to stay in power. Witnessing similar strategies employed in the United States led me to envision a project that explores the role art education can play in promoting citizenship. "Who is American Today?" seeks to develop the technological abilities of High School students toward activating voice, agency, and dialogue as a means to counter the effects of Trump's post-truth era and nurture democracy.

Young people are often alienated and disenfranchised from politics because they “are not defined in our society as political subjects, let alone as political agents” (Buckingham, 2000, p. 219). Teachers must “find ways of establishing the relevance of politics by connecting the ‘micro-politics’ of personal experience with the ‘macro-politics’ of the public sphere” (p. 221). “Who is American Today?” asked students to use digital storytelling to express their lived experiences, connecting media making and creative activities with social, political, and civic goals (Locktoon, Greene, Casey, Raby, & Vickress, 2014). Unsurprisingly, analysis of students’ digital stories and interviews confirmed that the divisions that are evident in American society are reflected in the perspectives of students. However, these early findings were also encouraging of the potential of digital making practices to promote critical reflection, activating students’ perspectives on issues of personal, social, cultural, and political significance. Students were challenged, engaged, and surprised to use digital tools as a means to articulate and circulate their own stories. Replacing initial resistance with the excitement of finding voice, the project facilitated dialogue across difference and offered insights on the impact of national politics into students’ lives. Issues such as immigration, racism, discrimination, the American dream, economic opportunity, and the pandemic were featured prominently. Moreover, particularly during first months of the pandemic, access to the project’s website (<https://www.whoisamerican.com/>) increased because it provided a resource for virtual learning strategies, including a lesson plan template and a platform for engaging students in dialogue across the country.

This project offers a reminder of the need for research that is derived from practice aims at the pursuit of the common good. Art education researchers and practitioners have an important role in sustaining and energizing our democracy. We expect that by encouraging students to critically and creatively participate in their communities as cultural producers in their own right, art education can empower emerging voices to influence the future of our democracy. In closing, these selected quotes from students participating in the project illuminate the opportunities residing within art education and other affinity disciplines to promote youth’s development as political agents and transformative citizens.

Everyone wants change, everyone thinks that they have the best idea of what America should be. America and its ideals are constantly being played a massive game of tug-o-war. There are millions of opinions on what America should be.- AMANDA, Provo High School (2019)

Our government consists of people who have never been repressed, scared for their life—they don’t know how it feels to be forgotten in healthcare, not able to marry, to get killed because of their race.- CAMERON, Provo High School (2017)

America is a land of opportunity if you are a Caucasian man or woman who has enough money. America is a country built on top of the bones of the people who the land originally belonged to who are now forgotten and disrespected.- ABIGAIL, Provo High School (2019)

There are great things in America, but also bad things. We call ourselves the greatest country in the world, but we have to prove it.- CASEY, Miami Valley School (2020)

I have never seen America as not diverse, but I have a new appreciation for this diversity after completing this project.- ELLIE, Miami Valley School (2020)

I have never done something like this before. I have done class projects before, but I have never been able to express my opinion before.- ALEXA, Miami Valley School (2020)

Jennifer (Eisenhauer) Richardson: Poetics, a Pandemic, and What Can Writing Do?

Why write a poem during a pandemic? Why read and listen to poems at this moment? How do we articulate poetics in a moment of isolation, injustice, protest, and as we mourn? How can this inform how we understand writing, artistic practice, and our future scholarship? In my current work, I consider this question at the intersection of contemporary poetic practice, pedagogy, poetic inquiry, and post-qualitative inquiry.

Poetics, as theory and philosophy, is found in our attempts to articulate the purpose and practice of poetry. As Rachel Blau DuPlessis (2019) describes, poetics is “tucked in essays, letters, interviews, manifestos: in comments on other people’s work...in casual emails” (p. 13). In addition, the circulation of poems on social media adds to a discussion of poetics today. Before this pandemic, Langston Hughes' poem, "Let America be America Again," trended after Trump’s election and reappeared throughout his presidency. After George Floyd's murder, Pulitzer-Prize winning poet Jericho Brown's poem, “Bullet Points,” which speaks to racism and violence, widely circulated. Other poems capture experiences of time during quarantine, parenting, and popular culture. Numerous opportunities exist online for students and the general public to write, post, and discuss poems. In Alameda, Gene Kahane hangs poems from trees in his neighborhood that respond to current events. Poems are shared over a phone with a dying friend. After the time of this AERI presentation, Amanda Gorman’s poem, “The Hill We Climb,” at Vice-President Kamala Harris’ and President Biden’s inauguration resonated with a nation in pain.

During the fall semester in the midst of Covid-19, I taught a graduate-level seminar on re-imagining scholarly writing for students across the University. In this course, they considered questions about qualitative research, creative writing, and artistic practice. The students’ exploration of these questions was not simply to mentor future arts-based researchers but rather to enable students to arrive at new thoughts and new vantages for understanding their relationship with writing and their research methodologies, and study design. Students read academic discussions that explore questions and concepts surrounding arts-based research and academic writing practice while also reading the work of poets, creative nonfiction writers, cross-genre authors, and more. The course engaged with these authors' work to explore larger questions about what writing does and what various forms “do.”

These questions about what writing does and how it informs future research are relevant to discussions of post-qualitative inquiry, including understanding writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson & Adams St. Pierre, 2018) and writing as a way of thinking and not simply re-presenting (Delyser, 2010). In the end, students had to consider what it means to write at

the intersection of their lives, the world, their disciplinary structures and expectations, and their content as scholars, artists, and writers living in this moment and in the future.

To write a poem during Covid-19 moves beyond simplified frames about expression and representation and toward understandings of poetry as a lived theoretical and philosophical practice. Carl Leggo's description of what poetry "does" draws attention to multiple possibilities "mak[ing] the world in words" as a "site for a dwelling, for holding, for stopping," for responding, for unity, for creating textual spaces (as cited in Faulkner, 2020, pp. 11-12).

Poet Ross Gay responded to an interviewer from *Vanity Fair* writing about the increased interest in poetry during Covid-19.

Why are poems circulating at this moment?"..."Because they are necessary. Like Audre Lorde says, poetry is not a luxury. They circulate in moments of need, and moments of need are not necessarily moments of trouble. Moments of need are also moments of joy. ... People haven't said, 'Could you write a poem for this moment?' More people have said, 'We need a poem.'" (Weir, 2020)

Therefore, in thinking about poetics during a pandemic, we consider the relationship between form, body, identity, and space; poetry and philosophy; the way a poem can function at the level of sensation and not representation, create rather than re-present; and, ultimately, we learn from taking time to reflect on the complexity of what a form can "do." This line of inquiry is relevant for researchers whose work is framed and formed in multiple ways. From the circulation of tweets, to Pulitzer prize winning collections, to our pedagogies, to academic publications, we arrive at new considerations about the relevance of poetics to post-pandemic scholarship, artistic practice, and teaching.

Karen Keifer-Boyd: Online is not social distancing. Online is physical distancing. Yet calling out loudly from our homes at a specific time, filling windows with art, and virtual happy hours are some of the ways as social beings we feel each other. We use what we have around us in the place we are sheltering at physical distance from each other. Since I mentor many grad students' and their research, I hold individual meetings via zoom with each and numerous emails or shared documents before and after meetings. Probably most of us have experienced an uptick in emails and zoom meetings, and redoing, redoing, revisioning, revisioning to make art education research anew.

I feel, and hear from others, who feel the toll in what is called "affective labor," which is work that a person does to suppress their feelings to create calm in others. We have done this before as educators through global, national, university-wide, and personal crises. It helps to name, recognize, reward, and compensate our affective labor. Extensions granted to each other on due dates are some of the necessary alterations—as we need time to address how we feel and recognize what we need to do for all of our well-being.

What does it mean to mentor graduate research in 2020? Research requires focus, and the extreme circumstances of a pandemic, economic insecurities, climate crises, and rise of White

supremacy are intense, charged with uncertainties about human rights, safety, access, health, life, and death. To mentor graduate research today, I find I need to work more than ever before to acknowledge and calm, that is, to perform affective labor.

Care for one another is deeper than the mess of our current situation. Democracy is caring for each other. Democracy is fierce love for one another, and the courage to do so. Courage is having heart. En-Courage each other. EnCOURAGEMENT may be the best we can do. Inhale, exhale, laugh together.

Those who are currently forming their thesis, dissertation, or grant research proposals are building in hyflex pandemic research conditions, recognizing we will be living with the coronavirus for many months, if not years ahead.

Environmental disruption from colonialist resource extraction practices and the rise of industrial agriculture have produced viral conditions for viruses to transfer from animals and survive on human hosts. Destruction of biodiversity creates the conditions for new viruses and diseases like COVID-19.

Not only do we need to develop hyflex research designs in which we plan for conducting research in a time of physical distancing but we also need to rethink what is important to research given the urgent need to address the impact of the coronavirus on well-being and the conditions that enable biodiversity destruction and White Supremacy, which are “interlocking injustices” a tenet that Alice Wexler raised in her introductory commentary on this panel.

Discussion: What follows is a summary of responses during two breakout room session to the following questions: How does the current situation (pandemic, US presidential election, climate crisis impacts, rise of White Supremacy, racial injustice, uncertainty, etc.) impact your research? What are some of the challenges you are experiencing in your own research given the current situation, and how are you or will you address the challenges?

Disruption, uncertainty, and isolation were reiterated concerns. Researchers may need to learn or develop new methodologies to pursue their research goals. Without informal conversations and interactions among students and faculties, isolation deepens, generation of ideas lessens, motivation decreases, and stress increases. While some can pause or slow down their research, others are not in economic or career secure positions to pause their research. Many women have paused their research and career due to the need to work from home without childcare support. There is too much change too quickly resulting in too many hours at a computer, which may produce hand and eye strain, back pain, and depression. Coupled with isolation is privacy invasion. Do we put a virtual background on, turn our video off, do we want the virtual world we live in now to see our private spaces? Further, losing access to research participants hinders or stops research projects. Suspended research is not only about the matter of the researcher's accomplishment, but also the matter of erasure of marginalized people in our society. It can mute research that is about the need for social justice for marginalized people. In conclusion, the discussions demonstrated that the pandemic situation has largely impacted art education scholars' research and raised the importance of care ethics and the need for institutional support.

Mary Hafeli: It would be foolish of me to present any decisive conclusions in light of this provocative, engaging, and delightfully spontaneous dialogue we have all been part of for the last hour and a half. So, I have ditched a more traditional, prepared discussant response and instead offer some insights in real time that I hope will simply and productively pause this conversation for now. I am sure all of us will continue to think about and, more importantly, act on the ideas of our panelists, in our own ways, in the days and months ahead.

But first, enormous thanks to Karen Keifer-Boyd for her foresight and vision. Six months ago, when the AERI sessions were in the planning stage, Karen knew that this kind of panel and this particular thematic focus would be needed especially today—three days after the election. We are indeed struggling with a triple pandemic of the coronavirus, racial and social injustice, and economic and political uncertainties. And as we have learned from our panelists, there are substantive real-life, research-based projects underway that illustrate what it might mean to work as researchers and teachers toward racial, gender, economic, and disability justice.

Alice Wexler set the stage for actualizing these kinds of projects with five realizations—that injustices are complex and intertwined, that there is no middle ground between injustice and justice, that as humans we are responsible for equity within the spaces we inhabit, that truth is the lifeblood of democracy, and that change for justice ultimately is an all or nothing enterprise.

As a guard against the problematic notion of sole authorship in light of our many beyond-self influences as researchers, Alice calls for a recontextualization of collaborative research. Providing examples of what this can look like, Doug Blandy describes several justice-oriented collaborative projects that feature a participatory or democratic design, with empathy, language, and knowledge that are shared among participants—from Black Lives Matter activists to older adults aging creatively. Reflecting on her experiences growing up during Brazil’s military dictatorship and on our own contested presidential election in the US, Flávia Bastos describes a project that shows us how digital storytelling can be a catalyst in promoting teens’ voice, agency, and dialogue about citizenship, in the face of our current post-truth era. She reminds us that students’ digital making practices, by inviting their deeply moving personal stories and views, can spark active, critical reflection. Jennifer (Eisenhauer) Richardson amplifies this theme of voice-to-action through her portrait of teaching students to write poetry during the time of Covid-19. She highlights the function of making poems as more than creating forms for expression—suggesting that the real understandings of poetry have to do with living with and through it as theoretical and philosophical practice.

Finally—again, to pause for now—Karen Keifer-Boyd helps us not to forget that our ongoing work of hyflex research and teaching and mentoring research is taking place during a time of great personal disruption and uncertainty. We know this, of course. How can we not? But as Karen points out, the “affective labor” we do to make sure everyone else is able to thrive can be exhausting. For Karen, this kind of care for one another, this “fierce love,” *is* democracy.

A recording of the panel presentations is available at <https://tinyurl.com/aerihyflex>

References

- DuPlessis, R. B. (2019). Statement on poetics: Pleasures, polemics, practices, stakes. In J. Heuving & T. Williams (Eds.), *Inciting poetics: thinking and writing poetry* (pp. 13–38). University of New Mexico Press.
- Delyser, D., & McDowell, L. (2010). Writing qualitative geography. In S. Herber, S. Aitken & M. Crang (Eds.), *The sage handbook of qualitative geography* (pp. 341–358). SAGE.
- Faulkner, S. L. (2020). *Poetic inquiry: Craft, method and practice*. Routledge.
- Richardson, L., & Adams St. Pierre, E. (2018). Writing: A method of inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 818–837). SAGE.
- Weir, K. (2020, April 30). *Why poetry is having a moment amid the global quarantine*.
<https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2020/04/why-poetry-is-having-a-moment-amid-the-global-quarantine>