



Cultivate Belonging with the Arts

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HUMANITIES AND HUMAN FLOURISHING NEWSLETTER



Advancing the understanding, assessment, and cultivation of well-being by means of a deep and sustained collaboration between the arts, humanities, and social sciences

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Original Image: "A Portrait of Belonging" Digital Abstract (Jessica M. Barrière, 2021)

What is belonging, and why does it matter? While the social problems we face in the absence of belonging are complex, the human need to belong has long been regarded as rudimentary—akin to such necessities as air, food, water, and shelter.

Let that sink in for a moment.

From ancient philosophers to current-day researchers in the Positive Humanities, inquisitive minds have pondered the sense of belonging and worked to discover ways of cultivating this paramount to well-being and flourishing commodity. While as of yet there exists no ultimate formula for creating a sense of belonging, [emergent themes in social research](#) render salient features that describe experiences of belonging. These features include desired levels of social connection, friendship, group acceptance, respect, inclusion, perceived and actual social support, psychological safety, a sense of contributing, and finally, a belief in being noticed in one's absence.

A growing body of research demonstrates the value of arts engagement as a life-enhancing means to cultivate belonging in diverse populations and contexts, especially through art creation, music-making, and dance, illuminating novel pathways to a better tomorrow. This research is particularly critical as societies and institutions worldwide strive to cultivate stronger communities through impassioned cultures of inclusivity, social justice, psychological safety, and mattering amidst the ever-evolving, divisive nature of our digital age.

In Canada, art-making research introduced the [Open Studio concept](#), a community-based arts practice helping diverse communities cultivate belonging, inclusivity, mattering, and supportive social bonds through a safe space to develop skills, friendships, and a unique voice within the community. On the music front, [at-risk Australian youth participating in a 10-week drumming intervention program](#) increased self-esteem and prosocial behaviors, improved school attendance, and significantly reduced antisocial behavior incidents – findings that researchers hope will contribute to belonging by curbing incidents of school alienation. Lastly, a [school-based dance intervention](#) helped female migrant students adjusting to life in a new country connect with others, feel psychologically safe, more resilient, and engaged at a UK secondary school.

Recall a moment when you felt an authentic sense of belonging: what were you doing, with whom, and why? What emotions did you experience? Why was it significant? Compare this to belonging to, say, a grocery store loyalty club. Reflecting on the same questions, are these scenarios comparable? Why or why not? What might this reveal about the building blocks of authentic belonging? Try it out: practice cultivating authentic belonging by combining what you've learned with your favorite creative medium. Savor your creativity!

Belonging and the Arts in Research

In Kreutzmann, Zander, and Webstert's (2018) study, a story of multidimensional belonging takes center stage, enacted via a school-based dance program in Germany. In this uniquely operationalized quasi-experimental design, students experienced enhanced perceptions of their own classroom belonging, and actual belonging as seen through the eyes of their peers.

Belonging and the Arts in Practice

The Open Studio (OS) Movement is a form of community-based arts practice (CBA) strengthening Canadian communities through inclusivity, art therapy for all, publicly accessible community arts engagement in familiar spaces, non-judgment, and voluntary collaboration. Through offering opportunities for arts engagement in familiar spaces, CBA/OS aims to increase confidence

through skill acquisition, promote social cohesion among diverse community members, and enhance the exchange of ideas through an atmosphere of psychological safety.

HHF News

James Pawelski and Katherine Cotter will be editing a special issue on the Positive Humanities for The Journal of Positive Psychology. Further information, including submission information and guidelines, are available [here](#).

Upcoming Events

As part of the HHF colloquium series, we are hosting a series of conversations between scientists and practitioners on the arts, culture, and well-being. This spring, we will hear from innovators working in research institutions and cultural organizations on how engagement in visual arts and theater can promote well-being in individuals and communities. We welcome you to join us for these virtual events and to take part in these important exchanges.

- Wednesday, February 7, 2024 | 10:00am to 11:30pm ET – Nisha Sajnani (New York University) and Hod Orkibi (University of Haifa) will be discussing the development of the Jameel Arts & Health Lab, psychodrama, and well-being. More information and registration are available [here](#).

Couldn't make it to one of our past colloquia? Check out the recording on our [HHE YouTube Channel](#).

This newsletter was created by Jessica Barriere, Alina Spas, Katherine Cotter, Sarah Sidoti, James Pawelski, and Christa Mahlobo.

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