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Editorial

Anita Jensen
Wenche Torrissen

Welcome to this double issue of the *Nordic Journal of Arts, Culture and Health* (NJACH). The journal is now in its third year, and in these years we have seen an increasing awareness of the value of art (in all its forms) to support human flourishing, health, and wellbeing. At the same time, the field of arts and health has gained strength and confidence and we have also witnessed more critical discourses than previously, which is a sign of a healthy and robust field in the making, understanding critique as essential for development. As this issue demonstrates, NJACH takes an active part in this growth, providing an arena for the dissemination of research, critical discussions and reviews of recent conferences and newly published books.

The first article in this issue considers the potential value of Arts on Referral (AoR). In the qualitative study “‘No one forced anybody to do anything – and yet everybody painted’: Experiences of Arts on Referral, a Focus Group Study”, Paula Bergman, Inger Jansson and Pia Bülow describe how AoR promotes health by offering a place of belonging free from demands but still with opportunities to challenge oneself and explore new skills. Their findings suggest that AoR can be helpful in improving mental wellbeing and feelings of belonging.

The second article, by Ingrid Femdal, Eva Bjørg Antonsen, Bruce Burton and Margret Lepp, explores mental healthcare students’ experiences of participating in warm-up exercises through drama workshops. The qualitative study “Drama for Building a Learning Environment in Advanced Mental Health Education through Creative Warm-up Activities” shows that the use of warm-up activities can be particularly valuable in encouraging participants to experiment creatively and spontaneously with different roles encountered in their clinical work.

The potential of knowledge concerts is discussed in the third article by Eva Bojner Horwitz, Karin Rehnqvist, Walter Osika, David Thyrén, Louise Åberg, Jan Kowalski and Töres Theorell. The article, “Embodied Learning via a Knowledge Concert: An exploratory Intervention Study”, evaluates the emotional and cognitive effects of a knowledge concert on the attending audience. The study shows that the innovative concept of knowledge concerts can be used to stimulate emotional activity and reflection, especially related to difficult and sensitive topics, in ways that promote health and learning.

In the fourth article, “‘The Elder Tree’: An evaluation of Creative Writing Groups for Older People”, Theodore Stickleby, Michael Craig Watson, Ada Hui, Alessandro Bosco,

Blandine French and Basharat Hussain assess the effectiveness of a creative-writing programme for older people. This mixed-methods study, following a total of 190 people, found that professionally led creative writing groups for older people can prove beneficial in terms of self-expression and wellbeing, bringing joy, personal achievement and social benefits to older people.

“Re-conceptualizing the Gap as a Potential Space of Becoming: Exploring Aesthetic Experiences with People Living with Dementia” is the fifth article in this issue. Here Lilli Mittner, Karoline Dalby and Rikke Gørgens Gjørsum describe how co-creative art practices can involve people living with dementia as active citizens; exploring how reciprocal aesthetic experiences from two residential care homes in Northern Norway can broaden a narrow biomedical understanding of dementia using a qualitative approach. Through aesthetic-based research and sensory ethnography the authors conclude that the gap between individual abilities and social requirements can elicit creativity, producing for new ways of coexisting in the world that has implications for health and wellbeing.

In the final research article in this issue, Knut Ivar Bjørlykhaug, Rose-Marie Bank and Bengt Karlsson explore how arts-based methods can enhance our understanding of social support in mental health care. In the article, “Eksistensielle stormar, toreskyer og hus med rolege hav: Ei vitskapeleg og poetisk utforsking av sosial støtte i psykisk helsearbeid [Existential Storms, Thunderclouds and Houses with Calm Seas: A Scientific and Poetic Exploration of Social Support in Mental Health Work]”, the authors use poetry both as an analytical tool and as a way of presenting results, and find that poetry can provide a new language for understanding the complex and existential dimensions of social support in mental health care.

Our ‘Notes from the field’ section reflects the diversity of the arts and health field. In the visual essay, “Educating Well: A Keynote on a Future Paradigm for Applied Arts and Health in Education”, Ross Prior and Louise Fenton propose that the artist-educator-researcher has much to gain from more fully understanding art as research, positioning art as the topic, process and outcome of research. The second contribution is from Nina Berntzen Osland, who reflects on the power of music to heal in the complex landscape of rehabilitation. In the third article in this section, Åsa Hillingseter Løyning, Wenche Torrissen and Vibeke Stølen reflect on clowning in dementia care with particular emphasis on the development of digital clowning during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the final article in this section, Lilli Mittner and Rikke Gørgens Gjørsum report on a research project and a situated art intervention where people living with dementia, artists and researchers co-create as part of a public art festival.

In the reviews section, we present reviews of recent books and conferences in the field. Tim Joss has reviewed *Culture is bad for you* by Orian Brook, Dave O’Brien and Mark Taylor, Hillary Moss has reviewed *Can Music Make You Sick? Measuring the price of musical ambition* by Sally Anne Gross and George Musgrave, and Stephen Clift has reviewed *The Routledge Companion to Health Humanities*. In addition, Liisa Laitinen has reviewed two digital Nordic Arts & Health Research Network Seminars and Alexandra Coulter and Julia Puebla Fortier have reviewed the third Culture, Health and Wellbeing International Conference, which was delivered online by Arts & Health South West (UK) in June 2021. The focus of this conference, which brought together over 500 participants from 30 countries, was: Inequality, Power and Sustainability.

As we have seen, the majority of the research articles and notes in this issue have emerged from the Nordic region, bringing together a wealth of perspectives on innovative, creative practices and research in the north. At the same time, important international perspectives

and research are represented, emphasising the universal dimensions of art as an important health resource. Altogether, then, the articles, arts practices, multidimensional research methodologies, network meetings, conference report and book reviews give us great insights into the power of art to challenge, inspire, teach, beautify, humanise, and promote health across the world. As editors of the *Nordic Journal of Arts, Culture and Health* we are encouraged by the rich diversity of this issue and we are pleased to announce that from 2022 the journal will publish articles continuously instead of twice annually. Our hope is that this will contribute to even more dynamic and up-to-date discussion of the arts and health field as it is developing throughout the world.