

### **JAAH 13.3 Guest Editorial**

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#### **Abstract**

This introduction to ‘Well-making and making-well: craft, design, and everyday creativity for health and well-being’ outlines some of the background, thinking, and research that underpins well-making as a concept and approach. Entangled in everyday lived experiences of health and creativity, well-making is concerned with the changes that can happen when people make things together, paying attention to the processes, places, people, and materials involved. Well-making is applied and engaged research which, more often than not, involves working collaboratively with stakeholder partners and community groups. The editors of this special issue argue that, while well-making is a concept/approach in process, the articles here and related research help us better understand the principles that underpin this work, enabling more productive outcomes when we make together and helping to evidence the beneficial impact of such research.

#### **Keywords**

well-making, social design, community engagement, participatory research, material practice, co-production, collaboration, everyday creativity

Welcome to this special issue of the *Journal of Applied Arts & Health (JAAH)* on ‘Well-making and making-well: craft, design, and everyday creativity for health and well-being’ The guest editors have worked together for many years to develop the concept of ‘well-making’, an innovative, holistic research approach to creativity, health, and well-being. Outputs to date include United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI) funded projects, networks, and conferences such as ‘Art as Research in Learning and Teaching’ at the University of Wolverhampton convened by Ross Prior (2016), book chapters, journal articles, and workshops (many of which are cited in this special issue) and two reports (Gant et al. 2018; Hackney et al. 2018). Our common interest is in using creative making, in all its forms, as an engagement tool to work with communities on co-designing change for good. We are

curious about how the processes and spaces of everyday making with all their attendant social, sensory, material, spatial, and skill-based properties and associations can increase well-being and improve health, and we welcome this opportunity to open dialogue with practitioners and theorists of art-based research.

The health benefits of everyday creativity have been increasingly recognised and evidenced in recent years alongside more established fields of art, design, and craft for health (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts Health and Wellbeing 2017). Located in design and craft practice, co-production, participatory research, and community engagement, the articles here draw on extant research to consider the many ways in which creative making – well-making – contributes to well-being in community settings and the generation of beneficial social and environmental impact. Collectively they build a nuanced understanding of the value of engaged making: the processes, places, spaces, experiences, connections, and communities of making, as well as the art produced.

Shaun McNiff defines art-based research as a ‘systematic use of artistic process as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researcher and the people that they involve in their studies’ (2008: 29). For the most part, the research considered here involves collaborative acts of everyday creativity with people who, while often highly skilled and extremely creative, would neither consider themselves artists nor researchers. Yet, when working with researchers using co-production methods on projects located in the spaces and places they habitually occupy, we found that participants start to think as creatives *and* researchers, producing ‘real world’ research that is integral to their concerns, conditions, and aspirations. The editorial team for this special issue hope that our approach to well-making as a collaborative, collective, creative, embedded, and engaged research method is a useful addition to the field of art-based research.

In the context of increased pressures on government funding there is an urgency to this work of engaged making as a tool for supporting community health and well-being. The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent economic crisis have exposed endemic inequalities in housing, health, social services, the National Health Service (NHS) and social care in the UK. This has resulted in calls for fundamental structural change to shape society around the values of ‘universal care’ (The Care Manifesto 2020), something that underpins thinking about well-making here. Above all, well-making research is applied research. Its diverse *makerly* perspectives, which range from crafting with a ‘small c’ by hobbyists tinkering in the garden shed to design thinking about the built environment, and knitting groups, are undertaken with communities in and of place. Operating on a small or large scale, as an introspective mindful

activity or a practical-means to functional-ends that involves multi-skilled teams, its methods pay attention to the experiential, embodied, and affective aspects of making.

### **Guest editorial perspectives on well-making:**

To further expand understandings of well-making and show how the concept is entangled with everyday lived experiences of health and creativity, the editors will each give a brief account from their own perspectives. This is followed by a list of principles of well-making synthesized from our research to date. This is by no means definitive but intended as a starting point for discussion, and for *JAAH* readers to develop, extend, and amend from their own professional and personal experience. As a concept and an approach, well-making is very much a work-in-progress – fluid, responsive, flexible, and contingent – something we believe to be integral to its value.

### ***Mah Rana***

Mah Rana draws on her knowledge of well-making as everyday creativity which practically and emotionally shaped the dementia care that she provided for her mother (Rana and Hackney 2018). More recently, she has shifted her professional creative practice into lived experience research by undertaking a Ph.D. in psychology. She uses well-making as a creative research method to explore how daughters make meaning from their experience of crafting with a mother who has dementia (Rana and Smith 2020). Rana aims to make voices of lived experience more visible in health research and health policy.

**Rana:** For me, the distinctive feature of well-making through everyday creativity is that it helps to safeguard and stabilise mental health and well-being, meeting needs, creating opportunities, helping to address inequity, and providing equity of access for all. As such, well-making is both a marker of democracy and a political act. Those facilitating well-making projects and workshops must be aware of the political context in which healthcare operates in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. Professional hierarchies of knowledge and authority, if not managed sensitively and empathetically, can be divisive and territorial, symbols of a silo mentality that fosters insularity whilst denying agency and independence for others. Well-making, in my view, is the antithesis of so-called expert culture and authoritative detachment. People with lived experience of health issues can offer invaluable grass-root knowledge and insight, and a nuanced understanding of what are often complex situations where many factors come into play. Well-making can harness this experiential

knowledge to co-design and co-produce initiatives that are meaningful, impactful, and sustainable for those involved, to challenge health inequalities and strengthen equity of access for all.

### ***Nick Gant***

Nick Gant *makes research*; placing making front and centre of projects that seek to co-produce objects, spaces, and places that are about making as an (activist's) agent for change. The research group he founded (Community21.org n.d.) has delivered projects that materialise all kinds of community concerns and highlight making as a transformative force in health and social care settings as a medium to enact social engagement and cohesion and as *social-fabric* that supports more sustainable and just neighbourhoods. These making methods help us better understand how different places and spaces can be formulated for making (well) and indeed for researching well-making. Making as research manifests through and within non-textual means (artefacts, objects, products, spaces) and seeks to utilise and develop *material literacy* (Gant 2017) that better communicates and translates new knowledge within civic settings with communities that (hopefully) benefit most.

**Gant:** The global maker-space landscape is as diverse as the activities involved. Maker culture readily embraces community building, social engagement, and collaboration in a cultural consciousness that seeks to communally engage with and address issues of social and/or environmental justice, reuse and recycling, access, and inclusivity. Ranging from 'stitch-and-bitch' clubs in pubs and village halls, for instance – to maker-spaces in former factories, banks or failed high street shops (the Stoneham Bakehouse for instance), and Fab-Labs such as the Fab City Network in shiny new university campuses and tech-start-up-centres – all of which deliver outcomes and experience that we might consider as contributing to well-being. But how many of these spaces explicitly promote or understand the implications for health? Can they openly promote health as a benefit or even provide a formal basis for social prescribing - or could this result in stigmatisation and deter participation? Making-well may be tacitly embodied in the act of carving a cup from found wood, embroidering a quilt from recycled blankets for hospitalised babies, or building a duelling robot from a former electric wheelchair, but can we further extract, transfer, elevate, and amplify these benefits and provide an evidence base for application? If making is 'alive and well' then do we even need to intervene, analyse and/or mess with it? I am left with more questions than answers.

### ***Katie Hill***

Katie Hill reflects that, throughout her life, making has been integral to regulating and promoting her own well-being, particularly at times of crisis. It has also become a central feature of her research and social design practice, often working directly with community participants to make social and environmental changes in their lives and neighbourhoods.

**Hill:** Following a traumatic bereavement in my early twenties, I made a lot of practical items for myself, and sent packages of wool and knitting needles to relatives to support their well-being. In the first month of the COVID-19 pandemic I crocheted three blankets whilst working online on video calls – my hands busy making outside of the view of the webcam. An adult diagnosis of neurodiversity has helped make sense of my need for busy hands to quieten my mind and relax my body. Working in academia for over 20 years with educational and third sector organisations has enabled me to employ making as a community engagement tool and research method – bringing this lifelong need to be making into my professional work (Graham et al. 2015). I have been motivated by a drive to develop design approaches for complex social and environmental problems that expand beyond traditional boundaries of the design industry – a field of practice known as social design. Concepts of well-making and the well-makerspace contribute to this project of re-designing design by aligning making with well-being and acknowledging the potential impacts of collaborative (and individual) making as a design method for social and environmental change for good.

### ***Fiona Hackney***

The health benefits of everyday creativity have been increasingly recognised and evidenced in recent years. After years living with family members struggling with mental health – from disordered eating to depression and anxiety and, more recently, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the context of COVID-19 – Fiona Hackney has realised the benefits of creativity on a personal level and as a researcher on practice-based projects with collaborators and community crafts groups

**Hackney:** Trained as an artist and taught to knit by my grandmother (an inveterate knitter), the well-being benefits of visual and material making have been a constant presence in my life. I have been lucky enough to receive funding for a series of projects working with community groups to better understand the value of creative making for physical and mental

health, building community assets and agencies, and embedding pro-environmental thinking in our relationship with clothes. This has resulted in new approaches such as the CARE method of co-creative, collaborative, reflective making (Hackney et al. 2018), and ideas about community and amateur making as a form of quiet activism (Hackney et al. 2020).

### **Principles of well-making:**

- **Material making as embodied research:** discovering and developing the affordances of self and others through making practices and processes;
- **Slow making:** appreciating new temporalities through often repetitive processes of crafting/making;
- **Lived experience and agency:** making as a political act that voices the lived experience of health inequalities;
- **Co-creation as empowerment:** the value of collective making to build supportive communities to beneficially impact society and the environment;
- **Located-making:** identities embedded in and forged through and across communities of place and space;
- **Connected making:** across diverse communities of practice, culture, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, heritage, and religious belief;

- **Making and storytelling:** paying attention to the reciprocal and responsive relationship between making, listening, and telling and hearing the ‘voice’ of making.

### **The sequence of articles:**

The articles in this special issue contribute to thinking about well-making by viewing it through a range of theoretical perspectives, but always located in the hands-on experience of making. It begins with ‘Well-making in social design – opening the potential for makerspaces in social design projects’, a reflection on the well-being aspects of making that emerged from two participatory art projects facilitated by social design practitioner-researchers Nick Gant and Katie Hill. Gant and Hill argue that knowledge about making for well-being (well-making) should be explicitly designed into the generation of all social, public, and professional makerspaces, including makerspaces that operate within social design projects. This is followed by an article by Fiona Hackney and Lynne Settrington, ‘Crafting with a purpose: how the “work” of the workshop makes, promotes, and embodies wellbeing’. Considering *makerly* practice in conjunction with the context in which making takes place, Hackney and Settrington examine the relationship between the workshop as method/methodology and the ‘work’ (knowledge) that emerges from it through two community arts textile projects. They argue that thinking about the workshop as a holding form and/or bloom space and paying attention to the stories told and artefacts (knowledge objects) made in workshops is vital to understanding how well-making operates. In “‘You go away happier in your heart’”: the generativity of a women’s community learning jewellery-making group’ Lydia Lewis reports on her ethnographic research undertaken with an older women’s adult community learning jewellery-making group. Lewis identifies two interrelated themes: creative agency and shared learning, and the social generativity of the group, which promote mental well-being through making as a regenerative process. Mary Loveday, in contrast, interrogates the role of nostalgia in making for well-being in ‘The role of nostalgia in making for well-being’. Thinking about nostalgia as a unique way of knowing within art-based research, Loveday proposes its potential for future well-making projects. Finally, taking a materials approach in ‘Restorative fashion: collaborative research, benign design and the healing powers of the mutuba tree’, Kirsten Scott, Jonathan Butler, Karen Spurgin, and Prabhuraj Venkatraman conclude the longer articles. They demonstrate how the integration of art-based research with indigenous knowledge, and innovative antimicrobial textile fashion

design and production, creates new opportunities for using endangered textile processes to improve human and environmental health and well-being.

The 'Notes from the Field' section invites authors to reflect on personal and professional experiences of well-making and to comment on current developments on research in practice. Mah Rana champions the value of embedding voices of lived experience in the co-creation of policy and research to develop local and national opportunities for well-making in 'Well-making: understanding what works from lived experience'. In 'Remaking, Hope and Wellness through On-line Connectivity', Emma Collins offers insights into the fast-moving world of digital technology as a mediator for mass-participatory making. She argues that digital and analogue making/crafting communities must operate symbiotically to support meaningful personal and planetary health and well-being. Jayne Howard, Director of Arts Well in Cornwall, United Kingdom, offers a personal reflection on how a small arts and health organisation responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by focusing on hyper-local expertise and co-creation to build well-making into daily life in "*Creativity is good for you*" – responding to the needs of our communities after COVID-19'. Practical examples of engagement in well-making are equally evident in the photo-essay 'Not knowing as well-making: creativity, addiction recovery, and clay', in which Joanne Mills visualises her experience of facilitating an addiction recovery group working with words and clay to produce poetry and ceramics. Mills highlights the value of risk and jeopardy in the ceramic process, proposing that it serves as a material metaphor for the risk experienced in recovery. Finally, an interview with the academic, artist, and educator Angela Maddock who talks with Fiona Hackney about her work applying textile thinking to health care. Maddock's insights about textile making as an impactful transformative act, both physically and psychologically, serves as a useful conclusion to the special issue as she defines well-making as a mode of affectual agency that is materialized through doing, contributing, building, and bringing things together as we attach to and connect with ourselves and others.

The articles in this special issue show how well-making can offer safe spaces for co-operative thinking about change for good, promote critical reflection, give voice to those who are rarely heard, and build health agencies through acts of material and symbolic reciprocity, connection, sharing, and learning by doing in ways that involve the body *and* the mind. As guest editors, we hope that this special issue goes some way to developing future discussions about how we can build a better understanding of the value of creative making as an embodied, located, socially engaged health practice, which operates as a component of and in dialogue with art-based research.

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