Art Education and Transformational Learning

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Abstract

This paper presents qualities of art education experiences that lead to transformational learning and renewed civic engagement in communities. Using critical place-based pedagogy and elements of oral history practices, arts educators can situate art-making at the nexus of learning about self and learning about community. Since art education takes on the development of self identity and broader connection- and meaning-making as some of its multiple purposes, the learning environment is ripe for raising critical consciousness and fostering authentic learning. Two cases that exemplify the use of a critical place-based framework and oral history methods are presented, along with analysis that includes the importance of dialogue and authentic community engagement as precursors to the success of socially engaged art education. Lastly, constructionism is drawn on as a theory of learning that informs art education as well as the method of using portfolios as a form of assessment.

Art Education and Transformational Learning

The purpose of this paper stems from my desire to deepen my knowledge of the potential for art education to create meaningful impact in the lives of learners. Throughout my year at Peabody, I have read about and discussed the myriad challenges that learners experience in the face of racism, poverty, and issues of access to education and privileged ways of thinking and learning. I am an artist and a visual art teacher, which are two identities that I intend to inhabit and grow in forever. In order to marry what I have learned in my coursework at Peabody with my former and future professional career, I have delved into the literature to learn how working towards equity for learners might come in to play in an art education setting. In all of my coursework, there was no reading assigned about art education, save through the connection between art-making and makerspaces. My desire to choose this topic then, is threefold: to fill that void and to become abreast of the current and prominent literature on art education; to imagine ways in which I can apply broad messages that I learned in Peabody in the content areas of context, learner, curriculum, and assessment to my future practice; and to consider how art education has a unique potential for transformative outcomes for learners and for their broader communities. The goal of this paper is to unpack qualities of art education experiences that create "imaginative, open-minded, critically-thinking and responsible citizens" (Naidus, 2004, p. 207). First I will describe critical place-based pedagogy and constructivism, which are two concepts that inform my paper. I also write about the major purposes and outcomes of art education. Next, I describe and analyze two selected cases that illustrate socially engaged, cooperative art education programs and that exemplify the use of critical place-based pedagogies as a framework. Finally, I close with a discussion of appropriate forms of assessment and the

prevalence of variety in contexts and in the level of broader social impact for community based art education programs.

Conceptual Framework

Situating art education within critical place-based pedagogy affords opportunities for teachers, teaching artists, and learners to foreground and respond to local knowledge and desires (Graham, 2007; Gruenwald, 2003). I argue that this framework can help learners develop an art-making practice that is socially engaged and potentially transformational. Place-based education approaches seek to develop learners' understandings of themselves, connections to others, to their localities, and to the environment (Graham, 2007). The interdisciplinary nature of this framework enables authentic experiences that equip learners to take action in "regenerating human and natural communities" (Graham, 2007, p. 377).

Main characteristics of critical place-based pedagogy include: the importance of local narratives and attributes; multidisciplinary and experiential learning; "reinhabitation;" and the connection of place, self, and community (Gruenwald, 2003, p. 9). In addition to "reinhabitation," Gruenwald (2003) writes that "decolonization" is a major objective of critical-place based pedagogy (p. 9). This occurs as community members "identify and change ways of thinking that injure and exploit other people and places" (Gruenwald, 2003, p. 9). With this framework in mind, teachers or teaching artists can design education experiences and curricula that encourage "teachers and students to reinhabit their places, that is, to pursue the kind of social action that improves the social and ecological life of places, near and far, now and in the future" (Gruenwald, 2003, p. 7). As Orr (1992) writes, "good inhabitance is an art requiring detailed knowledge of a place, the capacity for observation, and a sense of care and rootedness" (as quoted in Gruenwald, 2003, p. 9).

I also draw on constructionism in order to inform my thinking about education and to ground it in a developed theory of learning. Throughout my coursework, perhaps the most relevant literature to art education was a paper on makerspaces. Sheridan et al. (2014) highlight the processes of ideation and design that bring an idea to life in reality as central elements of constructionism. This theory of learning builds on constructivism, in which knowledge is seen as actively constructed by learners (Sheridan et al., 2014). In constructionism, individuals learn through making shareable artifacts, which function as realized representations of the learners' understandings (Sheridan et al., 2014). In art-making, the learner must further interpret the ideas that are represented in the art objects, which provides additional opportunity to develop understandings and knowledge (Sheridan et al., 2014). Art education with a critical place-based framework extends this aspect of constructionism because it creates an opportunity for learners to share their thinking and art-making with others as they learn about and come to appreciate their communities.

Purposes of Art Education

In considering the possible relationship between art education and critical place-based pedagogy, I found it necessary to find evidence in the literature for the importance of an art education in the first place. Further, as this is richly relevant to my future practice, I also wanted to read about the elements of high quality art education experiences according to scholars. Designers of art education experiences must consider the multiple purposes and outcomes that art-making can have, as well as the ways in which program directors, teachers, and learners each have a role as "decision makers" in the implementation of a program (Seidel et al., 2009).

One common aim of art education programs is to instill creative thinking and problem solving skills in learners. Winner et al. (2006) define eight "habits of mind" that are developed

through the study of and engagement with visual art. Since this paper focuses on learners as they engage in transformative art-making experiences in their communities, I will highlight the habits of mind that are relevant for all ages and that can be applied to this varying context. "Engage and persist" is perhaps the habit of mind that I have seen the most in my experience as an early childhood and museum art teacher. In an art-making experience, learners must choose to engage with the materials and art-making processes. Depending on their ages, they must also choose to work through any challenges that arise, whether they are related to fine-motor skills, craft, or concept. Teachers can motivate learners through encouragement and by helping students to focus and continue creating (Winner et al., 2006). More specifically, teachers can accomplish this by providing technical or procedural help, offering an idea that extends the learner's art-making, or engaging in conversation that inspires a new idea in the learner (King, 2017).

"Envision" is a habit of mind in which learners "generate images of possibilities" (Winner et al., 2006, p. 12). This is similar to what Dewhurst (2011) calls "translating," or critically thinking about the possible and best ways to communicate ideas in alternative forms (p. 372). While this habit typically relates to imagining visual elements, along with "engage and persist" it can be applied to real life situations outside visual art-making. As Greene (1995) eloquently wrote,

> Participatory involvement with the many forms of art can enable us to *see* more in our experience, to *hear* more on normally unheard frequencies, to *become conscious* of what daily routines have obscured, what habit and convention have suppressed…. When we see more and hear more… new avenues for choosing and for action may open in our experience; we may gain a sudden sense of new beginnings, that is, we may take an initiative in the light of possibility. (p. 123)

Greene's (1995) words illustrate the ways in which habits of mind that are practiced through art-making create awareness and inspiration in situations apart from the classroom. Lastly, "envision" can be applied to the National Research Council's (2012) analysis of cognitive abilities as they relate to 21st century skills: "envision" shares attributes with the NRC's emphasis on the originality and creativity that learners practice as they generate ideas through retrieval ability (p. 2-6).

"Stretch and explore" takes envisioning a step further. In art-making, learners must explore and experiment with art media and tools to find out how they can bring their envisioned idea to life. This creates an atmosphere in which learners are free to take risks and over time, both become braver and also learn to "capitalize" on mistakes to turn them into what many art teachers call happy accidents (Winner et al., 2006, p. 15). While Winner et al. (2006) state that these habits of mind likely transfer to endeavors outside art-making, they do acknowledge that this is only a hypothesis. I contend, however, that in socially engaged or activist art education, it is clear that these habits of mind prove useful in authentic and transformational learning that reaches beyond the art classroom.

Related to these habits of mind, Seidel et al. (2009) describe fostering the ability to make connections as one major purpose of arts education: "Because the arts take life and the world as their subject, they connect directly to many aspects of human culture and experience, and exploring these connections provides fertile ground for developing students' capacity for connection-making" (Seidel et al., 2009, p. 19). Along with "translating," Dewhurst (2011) also identifies "connecting" as an important process that learners engage in while creating socially engaged works of art (p. 367). Dewhurst (2011) writes that beginning with learners' lived experiences creates the foundation for thinking about social and political issues. Dewhurst

(2011) provides an example in which a student connects "who he is, what he cares about, and his sense of purpose" as he describes his background (p. 369).

This connection making is tied to the "cultivation of imagination," in which learners digest complex information as it connects to themselves, the world around them, and their creations (Seidel, et al., 2009, p. 20). Through this process, learners can practice self expression and develop as individuals, which are two additional purposes of arts education that Seidel et al. (2009) uncover in their research. Congdon (1993) makes the claim that developing a sense of identity can be a "healing force in a community" as individuals build personal and cultural connections to a place over time (p. 21). The arts offer learners multiple ways to be and express themselves, and they can also be empowered to change the ways in which others view them and their personal stories (Seidel et al., 2009). Students can come to view themselves as having something to offer, as having the "credibility and ability" to impact society, and as community members with compassion and empathy for others (Seidel et al., 2009, p. 26). Two additional purposes of art education that connect Seidel et al. (2009) research with critical place-based pedagogy are to "provide ways of pursuing understanding of the world," and to "help students engage with community, civic, and social issues" (p. 17).

With these cognitive, social, and emotional facets of arts education experiences in mind, in the following section I shift to focus on characteristics of programs that leverage these qualities to affect change in the communities where they exist.

Cases

While there are many different ways to approach socially engaged art education, the two examples that I have selected specifically rely on the importance of place; the creation of dialogue in order to both "conserve" and "transform" (Gruenwald, 2003, p. 10); and the

significance of prolonged, multidisciplinary engagement within the community. Both of these cases incorporate elements of oral history methods, with which learners can investigate the relationship between their communities and broader historical narratives (Gruenwald, Koppelman, & Elam, 2007). Through the creation of oral histories, interviewers symbolically promise that "what is heard will be incorporated into public memory and acted on in some way, that it will make a difference" (Pollock, 2006, p. 88). Dewhurst (2011) offers "questioning" as a third process that learners engage in as they create what she calls "social justice art" (p. 370). Through questioning, learners can challenge dominant narratives and construct or uncover counter narratives within their communities.

The Listening School

The Listening School (Mural Arts Philadelphia) is a mobile art cart that includes a painting and drawing studio and a mini-audio recording booth. It is a collaboration between Mural Arts Philadelphia and Bartram's Garden, and is led by artist Katie Bachler for the creative placemaking initiative called Southwest Roots. Funded in August 2015 by a creative placemaking grant from ArtPlace America, Southwest Roots "connects the needs and interests of nearby residents to the cultural and natural assets of Bartram's Garden, the oldest botanical garden in the U.S." (Mural Arts Philadelphia).

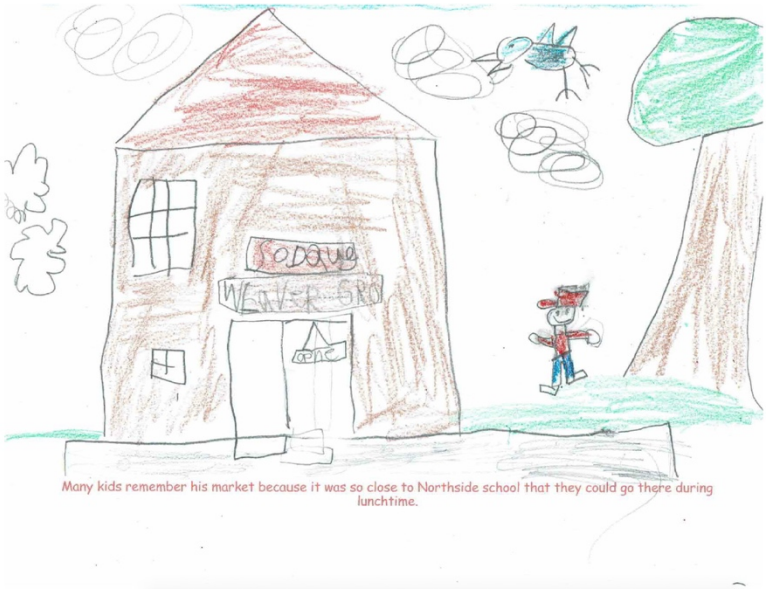
Bachler worked with a small group of high school students to investigate the meanings of place and home (Schultz, 2016). They considered these themes as they took the cart around the Southwest Philadelphia neighborhood and practiced listening and asking questions with locals. The project was born after a new trail was planned for the area that would bring an increasing number of people from around Philadelphia. The Listening School's collaborators wanted to facilitate the creation of a record of the neighborhood before those changes occurred.

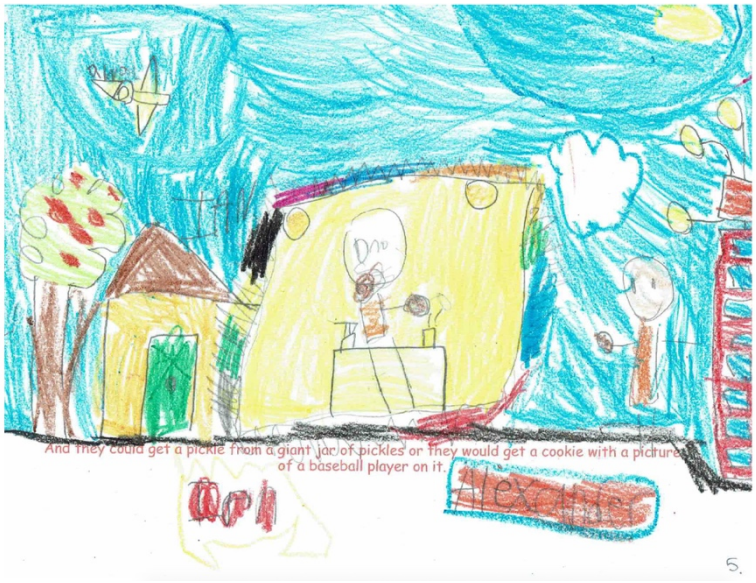
Through use of the Listening School, participants shared songs, poetry, and stories, as well as created paintings and maps about their home. Gruenwald (2003) writes that it is helpful for learners to build empathy first in their home or school, then in the neighborhood, broader community, and beyond. Map-making is one learning experience that builds this broadening empathy and encourages learners to consider multiple perspectives (Gruenwald, 2003). In an interview, Bachler stated, "conversation is healing, as is listening and being open and vulnerable to other truths" (Schultz, 2016). The Listening School is a "platform for local ideas to emerge, for collecting shared needs and desires in the place, and revealing truths about how people relate" to the neighborhood (Schultz, 2016).

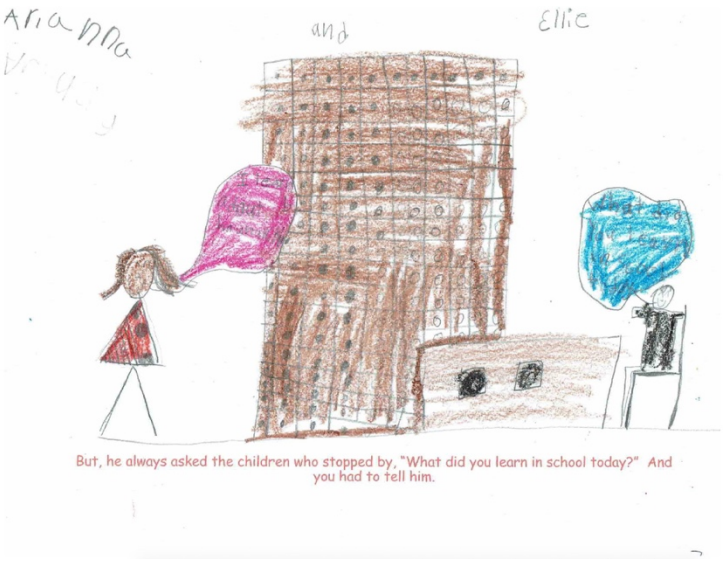
The Chronicles of Northside

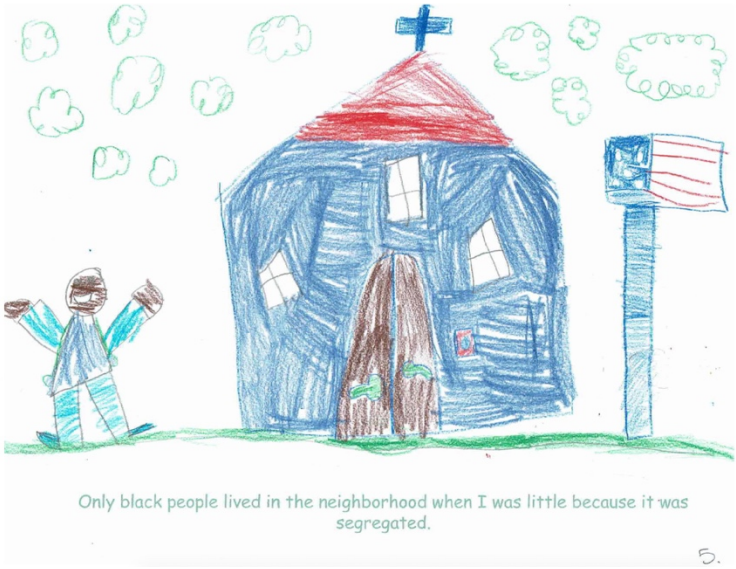
The Chronicles of Northside (Marian Cheek Jackson Center) is a collection of storybook illustrations that first graders at Northside Elementary created in collaboration with the Marian Cheek Jackson Center for Saving and Making History [MCJC] in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The project is part of a larger curriculum that includes three parts: learning about Chapel Hill's role in the Civil Rights movement, practicing the methods of collecting oral histories, and visiting the pillars of the Northside community such as historic churches, community centers, and businesses. After a walking tour of the neighborhood, the first graders illustrated picture books with a goal of honoring the lives and stories from historic Northside. The purpose of the tour is to give students an experience that helps them "think about and feel the importance of home, schools, businesses, and churches to making the Northside community strong" (Marian Cheek Jackson Center). In Images 1-4, the student work demonstrates excerpts of a lesson in which learners connected place-based histories with broader issues: the illustrations are based on selections from MCJC's Oral History Trust.

Images 1-4: Student work examples from The Chronicles of Northside (used with permission).









The narrative drawing that first graders engaged in is taken a step further for older students that experience education workshops with MCJC. Chapel Hill High School students listened to and transcribed some of the stories from the center's Oral History Trust, then responded to the histories through visual art-making. Students focused on an emotion or theme from the oral histories, or sometimes created art based on a prompt that was derived from the histories. Both the first grade and high school art projects provide examples of a critical place-based framework being applied to the art-making process.

Case Analysis

Dialogue Among Learners

A crucial aspect of art education experiences that have social impact is the element of dialogue, which was evident in both cases as collaborators learned about the people that interacted with the Listening School, and as elders shared stories that would be interpreted by first graders or high schoolers. Naidus (2004) wrote that in creating socially engaged art education programming, she gives "a lot of status and time to personal experience as it connects to art, politics, and ethics" (p. 218). Gruenwald (2003) calls attention to the problem of considering what ought to be conserved as educators plan for the ways in which they might design transformational learning experiences. I argue that Gruenwald (2003) makes room for the power of art-making and the critical dialogue that it can invoke as he proposes the mission to "specifically name those aspects of cultural, ecological, and community life that should be conserved, renewed, or revitalized" (p. 10).

The artist Joseph Beuys said, "Communication occurs in reciprocity: it must never be a one-way flow from the teacher to the taught. The teacher takes equally from the taught" (Finkelpearl, 2013, p. 29). In fact, before even setting the goal of social impact, high quality art classrooms (or any high quality learning environment) depend on the establishment of a positive and trustworthy community. Learners must feel respected so that they can be free to experiment and explore, "both as artists and as people" (Seidel et al., 2009, p. 38). Forms of dialogue that frequently occur in art education settings include "raising questions, offering ideas, considering others' ideas, expressing feelings, sharing work, engaging in constructive critique, and reflection on processes and projects" (Seidel et al., 2009, p. 40).

Expanding on this preexistent community atmosphere, art education experiences that seek social and civic learning can draw inspiration from Freire's theory of dialogue. When an art educator, or teaching artist works with a group of people in a community, she must truly come to understand the community's perspectives through genuine dialogue (Allen, 2007, p. 68). Museum educator David Henry said, "As an art educator, I am aware that if I want my students to have an open mind, I too need to maintain an open mind. In order to be a good teacher, you need to be a good learner. This requires, first of all, being a good listener" (Finkelpearl, 2013, p. 100). Finkelpearl (2013) quotes Grant Kester's argument for dialogue-based art, calling readers to move past art as object and recognize the "open-ended liberatory possibility in the process of communication that the artwork catalyzes" (p.47). Freire (1970) writes that the oppressor works in solidarity with the oppressed only when "he stops making pious, sentimental, and individualistic gestures and risks an act of love… To affirm that men and women are persons and as persons should be free, and yet to do nothing tangible to make this affirmation a reality, is a farce" (p. 31).

While much of the literature references art as a "tool for consciousness raising and as a way to invite others to share their stories," other authors caution that while this is only one end of the spectrum, it can (but does not have to) weigh down the transformational potential of art, instead creating superficial experiences in a community (Naidus, 2004, p. 194). While the goal is to create tangible effects in a community, this type of work requires the art-making to "unfold in ways that lie, quite deliberately, outside the artist's original control or intention" (Finkelpearl, 2013, p. 116). There is an element of unpredictability present in terms of both the nature of the experience and the tangible impact, because the socially engaged art program depends on the participants and their readiness, interest, and willingness to engage in genuine dialogue and to

take that "risk" that Freire describes (1970, p. 31). In both of the cases I presented, educators designed experiences that focus on community perspectives and histories, showing their prioritization of dialogue and place-based pedagogy and setting the stage for transformational learning.

Authentic Engagement in the Community

The success and quality of the learning in socially engaged art education experiences depends on authentic engagement with participants and a nuanced understanding of the community. This is likely achieved through the teacher or teaching artist's prolonged engagement within the particular community. Artist Ernesto Pujol said that collaborative art education projects should not attempt to stand alone, but should instead take on multidisciplinary approaches that provide communities with opportunity for meaningful change (Finkelpearl, 2013). As an example of this partnership, MCJC is a "hub of creative historical activity," always busy with the work of collecting and archiving hundreds of interviews and artifacts alongside locals of all ages (Pollock, 2010, p. 463). MCJC also supports community organizing efforts, collaborative arts programs, and health and food ministries (Pollock, 2010). The Listening School is similarly situated in an organization that has created multiple partnerships with the neighborhood. These range from murals that lift up local histories to restorative justice initiatives with youth to the creation of community gardens.

Art educators that use critical place-based frameworks should seek long term partnerships with community stakeholders, as opposed to the creation of experiences that are "one-shot deals or hit-and-run interventions" (Finkelpearl, 2013, p. 110). This quote highlights the challenges and risks of community based art initiatives that are superficial. Dewhurst (2010) describes features of art education programs that facilitate the creation of art that impacts injustices, but

also acknowledges that similar programs might "inadvertently perpetuate inequality" (p. 7). Art educators must consider the relationship between arts programs "jump-starting neighborhood renewal" versus contributing to gentrification and displacement (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010, p. 6; Ley, 2003). On the one hand, "arts and cultural participants are more likely to be civically engaged in their communities," and on the other, arts projects can "serve to cover up the symptoms" of injustice and obscure broader systemic and institutionalized forms of oppression (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010, p. 7; Dewhurst, 2011, p. 370).

To ensure that art programs which involve the local community do not contribute solely to the growth of economic capital without educational outcomes or social impact, Naidus (2004) suggests the incorporation of a "bridge person" so that artists do not exploit aspects of the particular place such as people's talent or stories (p. 200). The quality of socially engaged art education programs "depends on a fine-grained understanding" of the relationship between the intended learning goals, the implementation, and the context in which it unfolds (Seidel et al., 2009, p. 23). I submit that critical place-based frameworks and the use of oral history are powerful ways for educators to begin or continue developing this nuanced understanding as they design and implement curriculum.

Discussion

Spectrum of Impact

In my review of the literature, there were several different labels for the type of art education experiences I wanted to explore, such as socially cooperative, relational, or participatory (Finkelpearl, 2013). Authors acknowledged that these types of projects come to fruition on a spectrum, with some outcomes "on the milder side" as learners "recognize the interconnectedness of their lives," and some having more powerful impact as learners come to

understand the consequential nature of art alongside their own "power and responsibility to affect the community and society at large" through it (Seidel et al., 2009, p. 24). The art education experiences that I am interested in learning about and participating in are, as museum educator David Henry said, "about reinserting citizenship into art making. They reintegrate art into society as cultural expression rather than as strictly personal gesture" (Finkelpearl, 2013, p. 98). "Students can and should make informed choices about interpreting history, critiquing art, and creating works which do have consequences in our world. If we teach our students that art exists apart from life and history we miseducate; we also disempower them from making change" (Congdon, 1993, p. 29). Finkelpearl (2013) claims that there are "trivial and profound projects throughout the spectrum," and for this reason I did not focus on the labels of such art education experiences.

The art programs that I have researched might take place in a variety of contexts including museums, art schools, community centers, libraries, or aftercare programs. Over the past several decades, the presence of arts programs in schools has dwindled due to budget constraints, the prioritization of subjects that are included in standardized testing, and the reduction of resources and time provided to art classes (Bodilly, Augustine, & Zakaras, 2008). The resulting scarcity of art education that children receive has inspired a coalition of organizations that advocate for and provide art education opportunities outside of schools (Bodilly et al., 2008). This lack of access to art experiences raises issues of access and equity. Who will participate in out of school art enrichment? Who will have their voice included in community based projects? These issues directly relate to where a program might fall on the spectrum of impact, which can therefore be influenced by the presence of authentic engagement within the community.

Assessment

I encountered debate within the literature surrounding the notion of assessment for art education endeavors that address social issues. While some artists and teachers stressed the importance of teaching craft and technique, and working towards professional, complete works of art, others admonished these goals as overemphasized. Seidel et al. (2009) write that it is a complex task to attempt assessment of an education design with multiple purposes. The authors conclude that while technique and craft are important aspects of art education, meaning-making ought to be foregrounded (Seidel et al., 2009). Yet according to Weiss, "to say categorically that teaching the formal…elements and principles of the arts is dead is to deny students the tools and techniques that will help them express their views in the contemporary world. It is to throw out a whole set of approaches, tools, and frameworks" that learners could use as they construct meaning in cooperative, socially engaged art experiences (as cited in Seidel et al., 2009, p. 21). Sheridan et al. (2014) references metarepresentational competence, which is "the understanding of how tools support communicating an idea, when to invoke certain tools, and for what purpose" (p. 508). This form of competence requires aptitude in and knowledge of art tools and processes, thus making the instruction of process and craft a necessary part of the curriculum that ought to be assessed so that teachers can facilitate the growth and development of learners' proficiency.

One way to assess learning in light of art education's multiple purposes is to track learners' work as they move between reflection, dialogue, art-making, and activism. Portfolios and journaling are two methods of assessment that I argue are helpful as educators make judgments regarding the learning goals and quality of their instruction or overall design of the educational experience. Madeja (2004) writes that journal portfolios provide a space for students

to react to educational content through language. This gives educators insight into the development of "habits of mind" related to art-making (Winner et al., 2006). Additionally, portfolios of student work can be created in order to assess both the meaning-making that occurred as well as the development of craft and technique over time. This is carried out differently depending on the age of the learner, with the teacher having to collect the data for younger students. Older students can have a more active role in the creation of their portfolios, truly making visible their conceptual development when the works of art are accompanied by journaling or more formal artist statements. Learning goals are reinforced as students reflect, analyze, interpret, and judge their experience with art-making through the process of creating a portfolio, thus introducing another shareable artifact (Madeja, 2004; Sheridan et al., 2014).

Reflection

Lastly, a major limitation of this paper is the sole focus on visual art. The purposes and benefits of art education as they relate to consequential learning hold true for other arts such as music, poetry, or theater, which presents an exciting opportunity and possible necessity for collaboration with teaching artists of other disciplines as I move forward with this work in my career.

Through this research of the literature and in looking for case examples, I came across many helpful books and websites that uncovered a field of art education populated by passionate educators and artists. I will continue looking for examples of this work that can inform my teaching practice, and I also look forward to reaching out to some of the educators that I learned about through my research. I hope to observe art programs that adopt a critical place-based framework, and eventually when I have put roots down in a city, I hope to engage in the design and implementation of socially engaged art education programming myself. Until then, the

Highlander Research and Education Center has hosted a Children's Justice Camp in past summers, and I plan to reach out to ask if I can observe this camp or similar youth programming.

> Made aware of ourselves as questioners, as meaning makers, as persons engaged in constructing and reconstructing realities with those around us, we may communicate to students the notion that reality is multiple perspectives and that the construction of it is never complete, that there is always more. (Greene, 1995, p. 131)

The arts have a unique potential to broaden learners' understandings of the world, culture, social patterns, and history (Finkelpearl, 2013). I aim to design educational experiences in which learners "actively engage with the real world," and become prepared to "assertively ask their own questions" (Finkelpearl, 2013 p. 108).

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