

“Active Citizenship is an Awesome Party!”

Creating In-Between Spaces for the School-Community-University Partnership

“I am so nervous!” Erica¹ shares her anxiety while practicing a small group dance. Only twenty minutes left until she will be on the stage with her friends for the community night. “Active citizenship is an awesome party/Citizens join together/Citizens help each other/.../Citizens make a dance/Out of chaos in our community/We make an agreement/Out of multiple ideas/When citizen make an agreement/Then they make chaos/An agreement of creating a welcoming community.” At the other side of the auditorium, Daniella is practicing her poetry about active citizenship with the help of a poet. With big smiles on their faces, community members explore the auditorium decorated with children’s clay art of pinch pot cups, plates, Empanadas, wind chimes, and balls. Sean, the project director, announces the beginning of the community night and almost 90 participants are excited to enjoy children’s dance performance and their reading out of poetry.

[Insert Image 1: dance preparation]

The ARTS Initiative: Imagining Active Citizenship through Art

In a partnership among teaching artists (TAs), teachers, and university faculty, the above format of community night is not uncommon. TAs and teachers co-teach artistic skills through afterschool program and children perform their learning in front of the audience. In the case of the ARTS (Aesthetic, Reflexive thoughts, & Sharing) initiative, 4th, 5th, and 6th graders in neighborhood schools demonstrate their artistic skills of dance, poetry, and clay art in front of their families, teachers, and community members. Typically, the ARTS initiative revisited art and

¹ All names are pseudonyms

the aesthetic, unquantifiable experience of imagining different communities to a pluralistic society. Art-based afterschool programs used to teach artistic skills by creating diverse, beautiful artifacts. In addition to the community need for teaching artistic skills, the ARtS initiative team designed a different role of art that advances democratic citizenship in the process of sustaining a healthy, supporting community. Pedagogically, the ARtS initiative team intended to promote children's imagination and to allow them to see the world in ways other than it may first appear to them. This openness towards possibility is a means to release the social imagination that is conceivable only if children are open to new ideas and are willing to share and revisit their existing values (Greene, 1995). the team added sufficient reflection and sharing time about the process and intention of making artifacts during the project. Children exchanged their lived, aesthetic experience in an open-ended way. The team creatively infused the difficult, abstract concept of active citizenship through the use of vivid metaphors, personal experience in making clay art, and by using bodily movement in small and large group activities during a 9-week after school program. I, as university faculty, initiated the project with financial and research support from a local art agency and his own university. The local art agency helped recruit TAs via its ListServe list. Urban Education Center at the University provided the list of schools needing the most, urgent support for art education. Community school coordinators and art teachers distributed information about this program and communicated with families to enroll children. Grounded in this infrastructure of partnership, the ARtS initiative was launched in the two school sites and a school auditorium.

This project started from my research question: how to promote social justice through art when the current test-driven learning environment limit the opportunities for open-ended inquiry and community engagement. Another major interest is related to creating and sustaining

supportive partnership among schools, community, and TAs. The supportive partnership is the key element for successful program implementation (Catapano & Gray, 2010). Literature has suggested strategies for advancing a constructive partnership between TAs and teachers. They include recognizing challenges in partnership, developing a common language for communication, sharing expertise, and respecting the “other” during the collaborative project (Burnaford, 2003; Lee, 2013; Wasserman, 2003). This paper presents the ways in which children develop a sense of constructive community and active citizenship through a collaborative partnership. Vivid descriptions of teaching-learning process will provide pedagogical implications when TAs and art educators collaboratively develop and implement an equity-oriented art education. I suggest pedagogical suggestions to develop equity-oriented inquiry through art, supported by more mutually beneficial relationship among partners.

Creating and Working through In-between Spaces

As a cultural geographer, Edward Soja (1996) articulates an in-between space, aka Thirdspace, imaging possibility going beyond an either-or binary. In in-between spaces, “[e]verything comes together in Thirdspace: . . . the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential. . . everyday life and unending history. Anything that fragments Thirdspace into separate specialized knowledges or exclusive domains destroys its meaning and openness (Soja, 1996, pp. 56-57). In this liminal space, conventional binary divisions are revisited and thus new ways of thinking emerge. I apply this notion of in-between space in designing and implementing the ARtS initiative as part of a university-school-community partnership. In this section, I examine in-between spaces that TA and educators rethink the meaning of art-based inquiry: (a) Skill, outcome based vs. reflection, process based,

(b) “packaged” curriculum vs. curriculum in the making, and (c) citizenship for the future vs. citizenship here and now.

Skill, outcome based vs. reflection, process based

During our initial curriculum develop hours, all TAs showed their concerns about completing the project within 6 hours. Mainly because of the limited funding, the ARtS team should develop afterschool activities in a 9-week format. It composed of biweekly sessions (3:30-4:30 pm on Tuesday and Thursday; 60 minutes per section). Each art genre was covered during a 3-week period. A total of 18 sessions were provided for children, and a community night was the finale of the program by displaying children’s artwork and celebrating their achievement with the community members. Chloe, a dancer, concerned the most. She could not teach a mastery level of performance within 6 hours. While fully acknowledging the dilemmas, the team spent a good amount of time to share the purpose of running this aesthetic-infused afterschool program. Sean highlighted the ways in which children consider democratic values while working on art projects. The team did not lower down the expectation of teaching a high artistic skill. Yet, we focused on reflecting children’s thoughts regarding democratic citizenship and community.

Coping with the challenges of the limited time, the ARtS team invented a different format of dance performance during the community night. The team decided to elaborate the process of choreographing and children’s thoughts about their performance. The ARtS team has videotaped multiple moments that children were learning locomotions, level changes, and repetitions during dance activities. The audience was able to see individual, small group, and whole group performance and participated in the learning process indirectly. Below is the vignette of dance performance during the community night. The ARtS children lined up on the stage to share their

dance performance on their concept of active citizenship individually and collaboratively. The dance performance started from Chloe's explanation of the overarching inquiry question—that is, how to represent active citizenship with movement. Followed by Chloe's introduction, children took turns to represent their gestures. Erica bended down and made a circle gesture with hands in the air. Sue sat down and pretended to grab something with both hands. Paige moved both hands in the air as if catching something. Gia created a large circle with both hands in the air. Betty crossed hands in front making an x shape. At the end, the dancer, Chloe, added anecdotes of each movement. Chloe articulated the process to develop each gesture during the dance activities.

Chloe: When we had trouble trying to think about [active citizenship], one child said, “Well I don't know what a gesture is for active citizenship.” I said, “Okay, describe active citizenship” Then I got really quiet and I watched. And what she did was “well it's like you know you bring people up and put them in your heart.” But she didn't even realize she was doing the gesture. So I said “a-ha, authentic gesture!” So that's how these [gestures] happened; it was just through conversation and watching and trying to pull out the authentic gestures that just naturally happen when you talk about a certain subject.

After sharing this background information of gestures, Chloe and Sean approached to each child and let them perform again with their gestures. Chloe visited each child's gesture and interpreted the meaning of them with the help of children's explanation. The gestures represented a heart for sharing, a pride for school community by representing a school mascot, cougar, shaking hands, and celebrating collaboration with sparkles. Drawing on this articulation, Chloe explained the major artistic skills that children incorporated into their movement, including locomotion, repetition, and level change. While combining both performance and learning progress, the

dancer and children reduced the pressure and anxiety of performing dances as a fixed format. Furthermore, showing the progress of learning was a big turning point to interact with parents and community members. The ARtS team revisited the value of process and effort when educational success is limited to outcomes measured by standardized test scores. During this sharing process of children's aesthetic experience, we defined learning from a different angle—namely, open-ended inquiry through art has a crucial value in learning.

Ready-made curriculum vs. curriculum in the making,

The partnership among TAs and teachers provided a great opportunity to improvise curriculum depending on children's learning progress and time management. Although the ARtS was run with the format of afterschool program, the team designed established goals informed by disciplinary standards. For example, in poetry writing, we articulated an English Language Arts standard of identifying how art is used to inform or change beliefs, values, or behaviors of an individual or society. A university professor, Sean, organized six hours professional development throughout the project for TAs and teachers in order to articulate the philosophy of the ARtS as well as to collaboratively develop curriculum. The team had great discussion during PD in regards to understanding children's backgrounds, incorporating children's culture in art activities, and sharing ideas about transdisciplinary curriculum activities among clay art, dance, and poetry.

The team, most notably, discussed the importance of valuing cultural assets in that the two elementary schools were ethnically and racially affluent communities (i.e., 98% and 59% students of color). Incorporating funds of knowledge in class activities was one of the key success points in our effective teaching (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). During professional development, the team discussed the ways in which we could interweave Hispanic culture with

making pottery and deciding the themes of artifacts. Artists and teachers figured out that a small group activity would encourage students to participate actively while minimizing peer pressure. Also, we decided to create a musical instrument that looks like an empanada out of clay. Owing to this collaboration among TAs and teachers, we witness that children combined their activity with actual lived experience. During the empanada activity, a couple of students refers to their experience with clay and tortilla dough.

Sean (Professor): So what does the clay feel like?

Angelica: mushy

Rachael (Clay artist): At first the clay was really hard and square, but now that it is in a circle it is feeling softer.

Erica: It is like tortilla dough.

Rachael: Exactly, but it is a little firmer than tortilla dough isn't it?

Erica: My grandma, she makes the tortillas from Mexico and they are good.

[Insert Image 2: clay art]

The ARtS initiative was open to curriculum as the activities move on. Right before and after the class activity, professor, classroom teacher, and TAs briefly revisited their activity of the day and consider the optimal way to facilitate children's learning. Sean and Chloe reflected on the goal of the ARtS and checked in the progress of children's learning during dance activities.

Sean: Opening possibilities in education is the purpose of art, right? We try to open possibilities not closing our imagination. That's what I push hard for this curriculum development. What if we forget about the fixed lesson plan and see how kids are really enjoying the process? Then kids really appreciate other person's opinion.

Chloe: Right. Yes!

Sean: I hope that you are okay with this kind of flexibility.

Chloe: I love it. I love it. This is wonderful...I think we've changed what we're planning on doing [in both schools], based on where the lesson was going. We change the activities, not change the objectives.

Sean: We have a very clear goal of how to address the issue of community and active citizenship. It's premade as you mentioned ... somewhat fixed objectives, right?

Chloe: Yes, but how to get there can be open...

This conversation articulates the importance of being “flexible” in curriculum development—that is curriculum in-the-making (Miller, 2005). I highlight the importance of open-endedness of curriculum development in the standardized curriculum movement. Teacher and TA professionalism are diminished within the culture of “package-curriculum.” Within this culture, TAs and teachers become the consumers of “ready” made packets to them rather than they take professional roles in designing curriculum for children. The ARtS initiative worked through these tensions of standardized movement in learning and emphasizing teaching artist professionalism in developing curriculum.

Citizenship for the future vs. citizenship here and now

The traditional civic education in social studies highlights governance, civic responsibilities, and civic rights. The ARtS initiative created a space to discuss active citizenship and community founded upon sharing multiple perspectives and visualizing unimagined space in thinking about active citizenship and community. Throughout the activities of poetry, clay art, and dancing, the children released their imagination about community and active citizenship within the community. During the poetry class, for example, children expressed their

understanding of active citizenship with the metaphors of a tree, an awesome party, a summer school, and a nutrition to care for the community. I use Daniella's poetry "Active Citizenship is an Awesome Party!" as the process in which children wrote poetry with the support of a TA, a teacher, and a professor.

Some children, including Daniella, know well about a poem yet they have not actually written any poem with their choice. The pressure of keeping the rhyme and certain rules hindered them from being freely express their feelings and thoughts about ideas. Most notably, when the ARtS initiative requested write a poem with the theme of active citizenship within a community, children confronted with the "writer's block." When students did not feel comfortable about writing a poem, the team decided to have in-depth conversation with children. We put efforts to explain what a metaphor is from their perspectives. The below excerpt demonstrates the ways in which Daniella, a fifth grader, completes her poetry.

Daniella had difficulty in writing a poem, let alone being engaged in the activity. She is extremely active in sharing ideas. Children started the poetry activity from selecting relevant images from magazines and newspapers in order to conceptualize their understanding of active citizenship. Daniella completed her collage project as shown in Figure 3 [Insert Figure 3 here]. Based on Daniella's initial ideas, Christen, a teacher, and Sean facilitated Daniella to describe her ideas about active citizenship with metaphors. I share a brief snapshot about the process in which Daniella made a connection between active citizenship and awesome party.

Christen: When you think of active citizenship, what's the first thing that pops into your mind? There's no right or wrong answer. What's the first thing that popped up in your head?

Daniella: I don't know ... 'Active citizenship is a party' ... that's all I know.

Christen: OK, so elaborate on that. How is it a party?

Daniella: Because people are joined to go together, like that?

Sean: This is a great idea. I have a suggestion for you. Do you know what an adjective is?

Daniella: I don't know.

Sean: Adjective is a word that decorates a noun. What is a noun?

Daniella: Person, place and thing.

Sean: Right. I can say... 'a beautiful flower' ... 'flower' is a noun and 'beautiful' is an adjective. You have a noun here, a 'party'. What kind of adjective do you want to include?

Daniella: Awesome?

Sean: Why is 'awesome party'? ... I like that. 'Active citizenship is an awesome party.'

Can you fill it out?

As seen in the conversation, the initial conversation started when Christen encouraged a brainstorm for writing down Daniella's images about active citizenship. Daniella created her collage project by listing some words, including "let's connect" and "the party ever about citizen." Sean and Christen supported Daniella to include more adjectives in her poetry and she included "awesome" is depicting her version of party. Daniella worked on this poetry for other two days with the support of poet, Christen, and Sean. After multiple revisions, she completed her poetry project.

Daniella successfully explicated her understanding of active citizenship with a fun, engaging metaphor, "an awesome party." Daniella provides the complicated dynamics in a community comprised of joy, agreement and disagreement, and even a chaos. Daniella provides the complicated dynamics in a community comprised of joy, agreement and disagreement, and

even a chaos. Dewey (1929) constantly reminds of educators that education is not for the future but for the present. Children are not the target to educating for the future. Children's concern for here and now is invaluable in discussing the meaning of active citizenship. In a short poetry format, Daniella did her best to elaborate her immediate concerns in which she experience in her community, such as the homeless issue, arranging agreement, and inclusive, not exclusive, party for all citizens. Drawing from Deweyan philosophy, the ARtS initiative team listened carefully what children bring in classroom every day. The ARtS initiative provides the possibility to advance children's understanding of community and their roles in the community while reminding them of citizenship not distant from them but are very close to their daily lived experience. Children have explored innovative, engaging ways to interpret democratic citizenship through art.

Towards Creating in-between Space in Art-based Inquiry

“My favorite part of the entire project is that you can express your minds and feelings and no one will actually judge you. It's a really great program to actually get to know people and know how they think and how their minds actually set” (Alexa, 5th grader).

At the end of the community night, the participants had chance to share their thoughts again about the process and the outcomes of the ARtS initiative. Alexa highlighted the value of accepting different ideas without judgement. Active citizenship is not far from children's daily experience. Respecting others is the starting point to consider what democratic citizenship means. Art activities and sufficient sharing time motivated children and TAs to keep open-minded in dealing with diverse ideas. TAs and educators eagerly look for innovative, engaging curriculum and its implementation. Vivid examples of children learning in the paper provides pedagogical suggestions guided by major principles, including process-oriented, reflection-

based, and partnership of sharing. Greene (1995) passionately articulated the role of aesthetic experience as providing “opportunities for perspective, for perceiving alternative ways of transcending and of being in the world, for refusing the automatism” (p. 142). By sharing their aesthetic experience during the ARTS activities, children once again reject their taken-for-grantedness about “success” and “failure” controlled by the outcomes exclusively. They imagined other sides of realities in learning that the progress is highly appreciated in accepting multiple perspectives and recognizing diverse cultural standing points. I postulate that equity-oriented pedagogy starts from this acceptance and respect about differences and the ARTS initiative created such space. Reflecting on this successful implementation of the ARTS, I suggest three important implementation for successful art-based inquiry.

- (1) ***Connecting art and aesthetic experience with equity issues***: The ARTS initiative demonstrated that art and aesthetic experience are salient pedagogical strategies in teaching equity in an urban context. Art is powerful to make children engage in learning. Art also enables children to perceive other people’s lives from different angles that we are familiar or not familiar with. Art can be operated as the axis to explore the meaning of community, active citizenship, and equity. TAs, art educators, and community members are crucial resources to encourage conversation about these urgent issues. The current literature articulates that art provides crucial tools to examine the issues of equity, social justice, and community (Quinn, Ploof, & Hochtritt, 2012). By providing both theoretical and pedagogical strategies for an aesthetic-inspired afterschool program, the ARTS initiative provides the possibility not only to promote ownership of their learning in art, but also to visit the values of safe, supportive community and their active roles in the community.

(2) ***Developing a safe learning environment for sharing multiple perspectives:*** During the project, TAs and educators highlighted the power of sharing children's reflexive thoughts, opening them to other individuals' different thoughts. The ARtS initiative created a safe and comfortable space for open-ended inquiry. The team reminded the children that there are no right or wrong answers in expressing their ideas. By sharing multiple perspectives, children were able to imagine a different community through the power of arts. As indicated earlier, Alexis values the ARtS as a safe net sharing her ideas without being judged. This open-ended inquiry offers opportunities to share different ideas drawing from different cultural standing points. Furthermore, within this safe learning environment, the ARtS children felt a sense of strong community through art in that everyone was welcome, and everyone honored all of their points of view (Shiller, 2013). Successful afterschool programs provide the opportunity for children really to enjoy their artifacts with their friends and families as "official" artists in a public space such as a local gallery.

(3) ***Creating common language for a university-school-community partnership:*** I suggest to explore an in-between space where TAs, teachers, and other community members innovatively create to optimize children's learning experience. Lee (2013) argues that collaborative partnership between teachers and TAs actually underscore thinking process rather than concentrating on an end product. Influenced by Greene's philosophy, Burnaford (2003) suggests creating a common language between teachers and TAs for promoting a constructive partnership. During the ARtS initiative, the team created the common language for communication: namely, working "through" tensions. As Soja (1996) explicates, we imagine the alterative in-between space—

space where no fixed, stable definition about collaboration or partnership exists. This incomplete space is always in flux and decisions are made provisionally while respecting multiple perspectives, different ideas, and differentiated approaches to children, education, and art. In examining this in-between space and coining a common language, I recognize the importance of “not stopping” communication among teachers, TA, and community members throughout the project. Throughout the project, sharing children’s learning was an important component in continuing communication and sustaining this partnership. This is a great opportunity to remind of the program goals as well as understanding children’s standpoints before “adults” makes a decision on behalf of them.

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