

#42

# Inclusion Invasion

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**Editorial**

Inclusion Invasion  
Manisha Sharma . . . . . 2

**Articles**

Monumental Impact: Honoring the Life and Legacy of Dr. Melanie Buffington  
Caitlin M. Black . . . . . 5

Creating Commons: Photovoice Philosophy in a Third Space  
Jason Cox and Lynne Hamer. . . . . 15

Pórtate Bien con la Maestra: How the Border Questions Quality in Art Education  
Heather Kaplan and Diane Golding. . . . . 29

Who Belongs in the Future: Afrofuturism, Art Education, and Alternative Narratives  
Emily Hogrefe-Ribeiro. . . . . 43

Whose Art Museum? Immersive Gaming as Irruption  
Jason Cox and Lillian Lewis. . . . . 52

Disrupting Art Museum Experiences: Interventions in a University Art Museum  
Carissa DiCindio. . . . . 64

Our Magnitude and Bond: An Ethics of Care for Art Museum Education  
Dana Kletchka. . . . . 73

# Editorial: Inclusion Invasion

**Manisha Sharma**  
University of North Texas

*Correspondence regarding this volume may be sent to the editor:*  
[jstaeditor@gmail.com](mailto:jstaeditor@gmail.com)

The call for this issue of JSTAE was written in 2021, in the thick of the pandemic. In it I noted that at the time, we— artists and art educators— were participants and witness to debates around access and choice— and limitations thereof— in issues of immigration, vaccination, gender, and the relationship between economics and environment, and that the rising volume of voices around these issues are largely about systemic structures of immunity and empowerment.

The questions framed in the call for manuscripts, for this issue, were in the spirit of unpacking how social institutions and their framing is experienced and challenged by art educators. They sought to elicit inquiry on how art and museum educators wield social theory to examine the current moment, which, at the time of the call, was one of immobility and pause for the entire world. This moment of pause is also, hopefully, a moment of introspection and reflection.

The articles in this issue demonstrate intervention into habitual institutional practice as a strategy of insistent disruption into mirrored perceptions of inclusion and invasion. Interventions into curricular norms problematize them and seek alternative futures. They activate art and craft otherwise than how they are normally intended, in the interests of addressing varied iterations of inequity across social systems.

Read in connection to each other across the issue, these authors demonstrate how effective art education makes space for students, teachers, and general publics to critically examine the past, current, and future roles of art in our social lives through understanding how systemic patterns define these social lives.

The pandemic brought about unity in its experience of bewilderment, vulnerability, and immobility. With it came the potential of examining how we define inclusion, and how we approach tackling what we consider as invasive.

Acknowledging the janus-face of activism as invasive or inclusive enables a making of space for polarized

views within the same dialogue. This approach of intervention, as opposed to attack, on ideologies and belief systems is conducive for debate which is essential for a healthy democracy and empathetic humanity.

**Caitlin Black** writes a tribute to the **Monumental Impact** of the legacy of Dr. Melanie Buffington's work on confederate monuments in public spaces of the United States. She suggests how the Monument Lab and its field trip guide might engage audiences in empathetic dialogue about the presence and impact of monuments as public art. As such, Black proposes an act of activism around social and political statements of temporal immobility amidst spatial mobility. Her manuscript, written in an accessible rhetoric illustrates the enactment of theorizations of whiteness, institutional memory, and counter-memory in the maintenance of hegemonic systems referencing the American Civil War.

**Jason Cox and Lynne Hamer**, like Black, refer to colonial social structures still present in today's educational systems and evident in the absence of disconnect from urban-dwelling students' lived experience. Framing their work within postcolonial theories of deculturation, third space, and hybridity, they offer the strategy of reality pedagogy enacted through PhotoVoice methods in the Teach Toledo program for teacher education, in **Creating Commons: Photovoice Philosophy in a Third Space**. In this pedagogy, pre-service teachers re-examine their beliefs and purposes as art educators in context of the lived realities of urban-dwelling students.

**In Pórtate bien con la maestra: How the Border Questions Quality in Art Education**, **Heather Kaplan and Diane Golding** question philosophical assumptions of truth underpinning aesthetic and political value judgements while setting curricular goals and assessments in makerspaces. They challenge blanket definitions of progressive

education and 'quality' work in the case of a culturally hybrid location at the US-Mexico border where ideologies of quality and progressiveness are not always in harmony with each other. In examining specific cultural experiences and practices at this site, they draw our attention to dissonances in systemic decision-making in STEAM education. Set in theories of post and de-colonialism, the article challenges ideas of a master-narrative built upon ideas of contamination rather than multiplicity, and calls for an intervention to unsettle and trouble settler narratives amidst the traces and erasures of other presences.

**Emily Hogrefe-Ribeiro** points out how the apparently settled directions of current systemic thinking is leading to unsettling realizations about the precarity of our future. Engaging ten white participants in a zoom-based speculative futurism activity, Hogrefe-Ribeiro directs an interrogation of white privilege and hegemonic power through confrontation with Afrofuturist artistic visions and representations. The article presents a case to imagine the future of art education through alternative narratives and counter-discourses while examining our own complicity in maintaining supremacist systems through established norms of reading race through visual culture.

**Jason Cox and Lillian Lewis** offer a pedagogical strategy for art museum education in the form of immersive game-playing. In their article, they introduce Mantles in the Museum, a game that confronts student/ audience discomfort of being in the museum, by role-playing as art critic choosing from one of five frameworks through which to view and discuss artworks. In the form of the game-design and invocation of Rancière's ignorant schoolmaster concept, the authors address the separate nature of institutional portrayals of art from the socio-cultural beliefs of museum professionals. This immersive experience, they claim, disrupts not only visitors' notions of art criticism and museum education, but also perceptions of insider/outsider binaries in feeling

at home within museum spaces and arts discourses, by creating a temporary community of inquiry.

**Carissa DiCindio** and her graduate students also invoke Rancière's concept of the ignorant schoolmaster in an intervention into museum education practices in their co-authored essay. DiCindio et al, disrupt expectations of a dominant curatorial voice in the experience of an exhibition by staging an intervention that highlights sensory experiences for visitors, in keeping with the theme of the artworks. This intervention exemplifies a socially engaged experience that brings to light the expectations and cues of the museum as institution vis a vis experiences and expectations of museum visitors from diverse backgrounds and interests. Embedded in this experience is scrutiny around (1) the disruptive moment of covid-19 which created a level of inaccessibility for museum educators and audiences alike, and (2) the institutional rules of an art museum in allowing certain types of engagement and activities, given considerations of insurance and liability both of the space and the artworks.

Finally, **Dana Kletchka** references feminist writings on love, ethics, and moral responsibility to consider both the impacts of the covid-19 pandemic on museum educators, and the possible responses to adjust to these in compassionate and wholesomely humane ways. Kletchka proposes that in keeping with feminist framings of care as relational, the institution and its professionals consider work and service through an interconnected lens of well-being, where the health of one is treated as inseparable from the well-being of the other, including the quality of service it allows to be offered to the public.

This issue was considerably delayed due to pandemic conditions, as well as my personal challenges and life changes in the past year. I acknowledge and give gratitude for the patience and resilience of authors, reviewers, and Associate Editor Dr. Carissa DiCindio, in the publication of volume 42.

I hope to provide implications for....art educators to (re)visit the scholarship of Dr. Buffington and to use Monument Lab's field trip guide as a tool for engaging students in critical thinking and meaningful conversations, considering and reimagining public art and public spaces.

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## **Monumental Impact: Honoring the Life & Legacy of Dr. Melanie Buffington**

**Caitlin M. Black**

Virginia Commonwealth University

**Abstract:** This article is intended to honor the impactful work of the late Dr. Melanie Buffington while introducing the work of Monument Lab. As I share my journey in recognizing the overlap with Dr. Buffington's work and the work of Monument Lab, I hope to provide implications for educators (specifically art educators) to recognize Monument Lab's field trip guide as a tool for engaging students in critical thinking and meaningful conversations, considering and reimagining public art and public spaces. Approaching topics including power, agency, social justice, racism, radical empathy, activism, and community, I encourage educators to recognize monuments as starting points for thoughtful and critical engagement with complex issues.

*Correspondence regarding this article may be sent to the author:  
[blackcm@vcu.edu](mailto:blackcm@vcu.edu)*



**Figure 1** – Photograph of The Lee Monument with graffiti spray paint stating “No Hero” taken by Dr. Melanie Buffington (Buffington & Waldner, 2012)

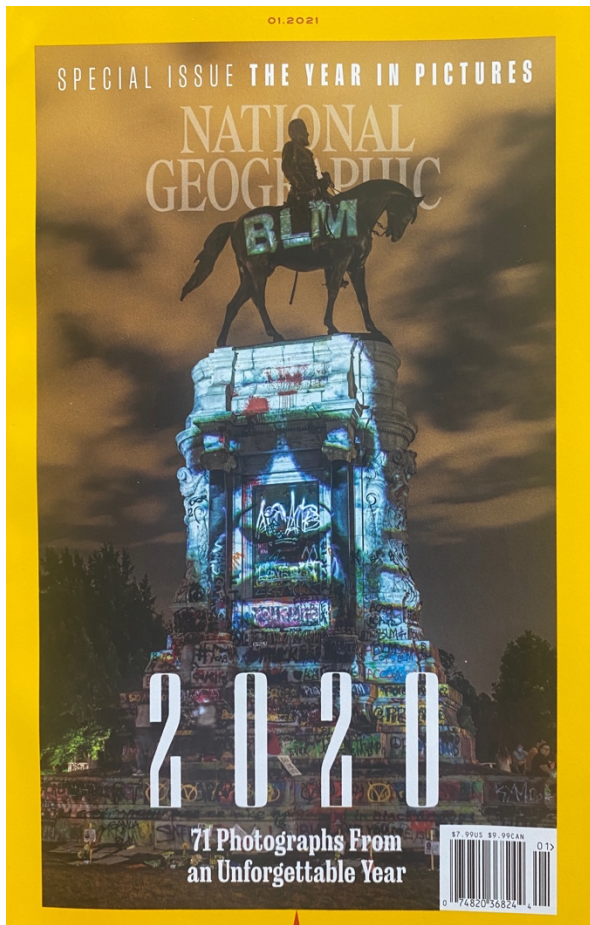
## Introduction

The events of 2020 provoked a reckoning with public art and overt symbolism of hatred, racism, colonialism, and white supremacy visible in communities both domestic and abroad. While scholars, activists, and artists have dedicated careers addressing these exact topics, 2020 sparked visible, transformative change. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) *Whose Heritage?* report, 94 Confederate monuments were removed in the year 2020, compared to only 58 in the previous four years combined (Black, 2022; SPLC, 2021). Further, of the reported 168 Confederate symbols renamed or removed from public spaces, 167 of those occurred following the death of George Floyd (SPLC, 2021). Confederate monuments were not all that came toppling down, protestors ignited the removal of problematic racist and colonial figures in public spaces throughout the world (Diaz et al., 2020).

In the field of art education, Dr. Melanie Buffington, was among the first to actively publish articles that specifically addressed issues surrounding

public monuments as well as suggestions for using them as teaching tools (Buffington, 2017, 2019a; Buffington & Waldner, 2011, 2012). Dr. Buffington’s research tackled topics traditionally sidestepped in classrooms, including the impact of public monuments, collective and counter memory, disrupting the dominant narrative, recognition of complex power structures, confronting Confederate monuments, and more (Buffington, 2014, 2017, 2019a; Buffington & Waldner, 2011, 2012). In 2015, she was awarded a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to provide workshops to teachers across the nation exploring symbols and memory of the Civil War, encouraging and guiding educators on ways to utilize monuments to facilitate lessons to address and critique inequities (Kane, 2015). A professor at Virginia Commonwealth University based in Richmond, Virginia, Dr. Buffington documented and wrote about graffiti intervening with the General Robert E. Lee Monument more than a decade ago. She noted, “I was surprised and excited to see that someone spray-painted ‘no hero’ on the base of the Lee Monument. Knowing that it was not likely to last long, I raced home to grab my camera so I could record the graffiti intervention (See Figure 1)” (Buffington & Waldner, 2012, p. 2). I wonder if she could imagine then the now iconic imagery of the monument that graced the cover of National Geographic’s January 2021 Special Issue (See Figure 2). I wish I could ask her, but in a year that was filled with so much loss, Dr. Buffington lost her battle to cancer on September 16th, 2020, after a nine-year struggle (The Ohio State University, 2020).





**Figure 2** – National Geographic January 2021 Special Issue Cover featuring The Lee Monument reclaimed in 2020, taken by photographer, Kris Graves

### Initial Discoveries

On the verge of the official declaration of the global pandemic, on Friday, March 6, 2020, I was teaching high school visual art when I received my letter of acceptance for the doctoral program at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). Interestingly, although at the time I was living approximately 3000 miles away in San Diego, California, I had two friends locally who originally hailed from the university's location. As I weighed my options, I asked my friends a number of questions, largely fearful that I would not fit in in this city that was once the capital of the Confederacy. The idea of living in a place where monuments to Confederate soldiers still lined the city's streets left me admittedly anxious; even as a white woman, I felt this place that contained outright symbolism of hate, racism, and **Black, C.M./Monumental Impact**

white supremacy was not a place I belonged. Yet, upon discovering the work of VCU professor, Dr. Melanie Buffington, my thoughts began to shift otherwise.

By the time I made the cross country move to Richmond, (a mere four months later) on July 9th, 2020, empty pedestals covered in graffiti were largely all that remained of the monuments I feared so deeply. As I drove down Monument Avenue for the first time, I witnessed construction crews cleaning up after the removal of the globe atop what was the Mathew Fontaine Maury monument. This statue of a Confederate soldier, prior to its July 2020 removal, had been in place for over 90 years (Richmond Times-Dispatch Staff, 2020). I pulled over at the only remaining monument of Confederate General Robert E. Lee, which was removed in September 2021 following a ruling by the Virginia State Supreme Court. Graffiti and projections had transformed the monument and the space was now informally referred to by community members as Marcus-David Peters Circle after a local Richmond man, a teacher and VCU graduate, who was murdered by police (See Figure 3). Upon my arrival, the circle was lively, with gardens, art, a basketball hoop, and activists (see Figure 4). The landscape of the city was changing in real time before my eyes.



**Figure 3** – A sign in front of The Lee Monument showing the reclaimed space informally named, Marcus David Peters Circle after a local Richmond teacher who was murdered by police



**Figure 4** – An image of Marcus David Peters Circle reclaimed with basketball hoop in Richmond, VA

### Seeking Meaning in Grief

When I met Dr. Buffington over a virtual graduate department Zoom gathering in August, she never mentioned her battle with cancer, and spoke eloquently on future research goals and interests. I was shocked when I received the heartbreaking news that she had passed away just one short month later. I made my first entry in my research journal that day. As I wept, it was my mother who encouraged me to attempt to find a glimmer of light amongst the darkness. Later that day, upon reflection, I wrote,

Maybe I am shedding tears so deeply for an individual I knew so briefly because this is a calling... Dr. Buffington made an incredible impact on the lives of so many. Perhaps, it is now my responsibility to ensure her legacy lives on and important work in the field of art education continues (C. Black, personal communication, September 16, 2020).

This article is intended to honor the impactful work of Dr. Buffington, in particular, where her research illuminates the complicated and often violent histories of Confederate monuments in the United States. Additionally, I make connections between Dr. Buffington's work and the work of Monument Lab, a not for profit public art and history studio based in my home town of Philadelphia. I hope to provide implications for educators (specifically art educators) to (re)visit the scholarship of Dr. Buffington and to use Monument Lab's field trip guide as a tool for engaging students in critical thinking and meaningful conversations, considering and reimagining public art and public spaces. Approaching topics including power, agency, social justice, racism, radical empathy, activism, and community, I encourage educators to use monuments as starting points for thoughtful and critical engagement with complex issues.

### Monumental Connections

Dr. Buffington (2019) underscored Hafeli's (2009) belief regarding the importance of acknowledging existing ideas and research in the field of art education (Buffington, 2019b). Throughout this article, I aim to weave connective threads between existing research and the work of Monument Lab. For the purposes of this article, I will adopt Monument Lab's definition of monument as "statements of power and presence in public space" (Farber & Lum, 2020, p. 6). For context, Monument Lab is a public art and history studio founded by two University of Pennsylvania professors, Paul Farber and Ken Lum, initially emerging from coursework and classroom conversations in 2012 (Monument Lab Studio, 2021). Based in the city of Philadelphia, Monument Lab "cultivates and facilitates critical conversations around the past, present, and future of monuments" (Monument Lab Studio, 2021). Working with artists, activists, educators, students, municipal agencies, and cultural institutions, Monument Lab focuses on participatory approaches to public engagement and collective memory while working to shift mindsets, discourse, and pedagogy related to public art, history, and space (Monument

Lab Studio, 2021). Further, Monument Lab adopts antiracist, de-colonial, feminist, queer, working-class, ecological, and other social justice perspectives to inform peoples' understandings of monuments (Monument Lab Studio, 2021). Through a variety of collaborative platforms and programming including workshops, fellowships, and exhibitions. Monument Lab seeks to make generational change in the ways art and history live in public (Monument Lab Studio, 2021).

### Field Trip Guide

In July 2020, amid widespread protests, monuments and statues came toppling down as citizens took to the streets to express opposition to the long-standing public symbols reflecting "racist and unjust legacies" (Farber & Lum, 2020, p. 9). Concurrently, Monument Lab launched a free downloadable "Field Trip" activity guide (see Figure 5) to encourage the investigation and exploration of monuments through critical and curious questioning of their locations and histories (Monument Lab Studio, 2021). Through hands-on activities and inquiry, the guide provides opportunities for the reimagining of existing monuments as well as space to propose ideas for monuments of the future. Thoughtfully posed questions seek to prompt the interrogation of public spaces and public art while highlighting contested narratives, dissenting histories, and dominant power structures. The 10-page guide is approachable and could be easily adapted for use with students in nearly any grade level. The guide is seamlessly scaffolded and serves as an excellent resource for educators looking to introduce students to a variety of topics and concepts including observation, design, urban planning, public space, public art, history, social justice, and activism. Furthermore, since the guide was released during the global Covid-19 pandemic, there are suggestions for using the guide in both outdoor and online settings, providing opportunities for engagement regardless of whether students are in person, virtual, or hybrid participants in the educational environment. The guide could be used by students individually or collaboratively.

**Black, C.M./Monumental Impact**

I recommend a combination of the two – allowing students to develop their own ideas as well as share and discuss their thoughts with others.

Ultimately, the guide seeks to shift perspectives and raise considerations for creating public spaces and monuments that are more inclusive. While designed with younger audience accessibility in mind, I would argue this guide could serve as a valuable learning tool with virtually any age level within communities. The Monument Lab field trip guide encourages more than surface level historical or artistic exploration of public art and monuments – the when, where and how – by guiding participants through intersections of context, contestation, and community voices, supporting students through research-based dialogues in and through public art.



**Figure 5** – The Monument Lab Field Trip guide in front of Marcus David Peters Circle in Richmond, VA

## Educational Connections

In many ways the Monument Lab field trip guide is intentionally designed to draw attention to historical vantage points and the power of the imagination when considering alternate histories and issues of absence and erasure, particularly in the realm of public art and monuments. Greene (1995) promoted these concepts in what she referred to as aesthetic experience and aesthetic education, noting educators' obligation "to find ways of enabling the young to find their voices, to open their spaces, [and] reclaim their histories" (p. 120). Greene (1995) called for creative thinking, imaginative awareness, and consciousness encounters with art to tap future possibilities. These notions were additionally echoed by Bolin (2009) who noted "thoughtful and grounded speculations and wonderings of the imagination are profitable motivators...in initiating and carrying out lively and meaningful investigations of the past" (p. 111). American author, professor, feminist, activist, bell hooks (2009), posits the "imagination is one of the most powerful modes of resistance that oppressed and exploited folks can and do use" (p. 61). hooks (2009) additionally points to the significance of collective imagination in providing the creative energy that will lead "to new thought and more engaging ways of knowing" (p. 62).

Within the context of art education, scholars have drawn attention to the need for the critical examination of dynamics of power and privilege especially when interrogating the normalization of whiteness and other hegemonic structures as dominant (Acuff, 2018; Buffington, 2014; Knight, 2006; Kraehe & Acuff, 2015; Link, 2019). Acuff (2018) states, "arts education cannot continue business as usual, addressing social justice issues and developing initiatives to advance diversity and equity, without recognizing white supremacy as an ideological construct as well as an objective condition that reinforces hegemony" (p. 531). Noting the need for "actively anti-racist" curriculum, Link (2019) notes, "we cannot shield our students from a world built on inequity, but we can provide them the tools to disrupt, challenge, and unravel it in their own hearts and communities" (p. 25).

**Black, C.M./Monumental Impact**

Dr. Buffington (2017) recognized, "groups, public or private, with significant political and economic power are usually the ones who commission public art to tell stories that reinforce their power in complementary fashion, often ignoring or glossing over views, creating a single hegemonic narrative" (p. 54). She saw works of public art, especially monuments, as starting points for engaging students in meaningful and authentic learning experiences (Buffington, 2017, 2019a; Buffington & Waldner, 2011, 2012). Ozment (2018) emphasized, "Monumental art demands responsive pedagogies that encourage critical reflection and inspire positive change" (p. 298). Dr. Buffington looked to the work of Ladson-Billings (2006) and Crenshaw (1991) specifically pointing to Critical Race Theory "as a tool to help investigate intersections of place, race, community, and other facets in public spaces" (Buffington, 2017, p. 54; Buffington, 2014, p. 11). Paraphrasing Dixson & Rousseau (2005), Kraehe (2015) underscores the importance of counter-narratives in providing students opportunities to rethink institutional norms and policies and provide fertile ground in which justice-oriented change can begin to take root" (p. 202).

Other scholars have also notably pointed to monuments as means through which to guide students in the examination of dissenting histories and power relationships, as well as intellectual analysis and interpretation of designs with aims of enhancing social justice (Binder, 2017; Mooreng & Twala, 2014; Urmacher & Tinkler, 2008; Waters & Russell, 2013). Buta and Esche (2019) argue that the consideration of monuments and the culture of monuments "could prove one of the most productive avenues for introducing decolonial critique into public discourse" (p. 447). Yet, in the field of art education, it was Dr. Buffington that notably introduced monuments as modes to encounter issues of collective memory, counter memory, systemic racism, power, and reimagination explicitly to the field of art education (Buffington, 2014, 2017, 2019a; Buffington & Waldner, 2011, 2012).

## Continuous Revelations

While the aforementioned connections between the work of Dr. Buffington and Monument Lab may seem obvious, more subtle parallels gradually revealed themselves. Delving further into the work of Monument Lab, I noticed direct associations with artists featured in Dr. Buffington's published work as well as connections to her theoretical approaches, especially related to critical feminist pedagogy. For example, in July 2007, Dr. Buffington published an instructional resource in *Art Education* calling upon educators to introduce students to the work of artist, Tyree Guyton, exploring "concepts of art, community, change, and renewal" (p. 26).

Dr. Buffington (2007) highlighted how Guyton's work encouraged conversations "about difficult issues including politics, racism, religion, poverty, homelessness, and consumption" (p. 26). Additionally, she provided suggestions for discussion questions, artmaking activities, and assessment. Ten years later, in 2017, as part of a citywide exhibition, Monument Lab: Philadelphia featured a collaborative installation by Tyree Guyton titled, *THE TIMES* (Farber & Lum, 2020, p.67-74). *THE TIMES* was created "as a monument to reframing our awareness of this moment in history" (Monument Lab Studio, 2021). According to Farber and Lum (2020), "*THE TIMES* mediates on the ways in which time and money are intertwined cruelly for the poor" (p. 20). Featuring "community painted images of giant clocks affixed to the brick façade of an empty warehouse" Guyton provides critical commentary on "the time capitalism imposes on the poor [as] unceasing and compulsory" (Farber & Lum, 2020, p. 21). However, Tyree Guyton was not the only Monument Lab collaborator whose work clearly intertwined with the work of Dr. Buffington.

Sonya Clark, an artist Dr. Buffington referenced in both 2017 and 2019 articles, created a prototype monument as part of *A Call to Peace* - a public art and history exhibition co-curated by Monument Lab and New Arts Justice (Monument Lab Studio, 2021). Dr. Buffington referenced Sonya Clark's work as an artist for educators to introduce when confronting Confederate monuments and symbolism such as the

**Black, C.M./Monumental Impact**

Confederate flag with students. Dr. Buffington (2017) referred to Clark's 2010 piece titled, *Black Hair Flag*, in which "she used black fiber and stitched the stars and stripes of the U.S. flag on top of the Confederate flag in a manner to allow both to be visible" (p. 55). Dr. Buffington (2017) described Sonya Clark's artistic engagement with themes of identity and hope through her art (p. 55). Additionally, Dr. Buffington referenced Clark's *Unraveling* piece on multiple occasions, an interactive work in which "Sonya Clark works with gallery visitors to literally unravel a Confederate flag, thread by thread, using only their hands" (Buffington, 2019a, p. 18). For Monument Lab, Sonya Clark "reproduced multiple and monumental replicas" of the Confederate truce flag, a rarely known artifact, which is a white flag of surrender that was flown as a sign of defeat by Robert E. Lee's troops at the end of the Civil War (Monument Lab Studio, 2021). According to Monument Lab (2021), Clark sought to "re-introduce the flag into contemporary consciousness" as well as "reckon with unsolved legacies of the Civil War memory" (Monument Lab Studio, 2021). As I viewed the intricate threads of Sonya Clark's work, I was prompted to reflect further on the connective threads between Monument Lab and the work of Dr. Buffington.

Though not always explicitly stated, Dr. Buffington often approached research grounded in critical feminist pedagogy (Buffington et al., 2017, p. 46). Through this approach Dr. Buffington sought to interrogate "the imbalances of power" as well as "make more transparent the intersections of oppression" (Buffington et al., 2017, p. 46). Similarly, Monument Lab promotes the questioning of historical narratives and records that center the patriarchal experience. As specified by Farber & Lum (2020) Monument Lab is "interested in issues of embodiment and the ambivalence that is part of any construction of symbolic unity as well as negated or unacknowledged histories that have been evacuated from the monument and yet remain palpable as an absence" (p. 16). In the confronting history portion of the field trip guide, Monument Lab proposes a series of questions including whether communities

contain monuments dedicated to non-white people, monuments dedicated to women, and monuments dedicated to indigenous people or honoring indigenous lands. Through spotlighting absence, the guide seeks to expose “willful structuring that produces and reproduces the conditions of patriarchal society” (Farber & Lum, 2020, p. 18). These notions subtly intertwine and connect with concepts present in many of Dr. Buffington’s contributions to the field.

No words could adequately honor the prolific scholar that was Dr. Melanie Buffington. As educators we seek to inspire, and although Dr. Buffington’s passing was untimely, her impact was profound. While I am deeply saddened that I will not have the opportunity to work with her, I am eternally grateful for her innumerable contributions to the field, and particularly for her research which undoubtedly remains relevant and far-reaching. In her first time as editor of the *Journal of Social Theory in Art Education*, Dr. Buffington (2016) described how social theories “are well suited to help us study, critique, understand, and possibly change divides” (Buffington, 2016, p. 2). She pointed to collaboration as a space of possibility and hope for the future (Buffington, 2016). Additionally, she spoke about the power of overarching ideas in creating meaningful connections to advance social justice (Buffington & Muth, 2011). Monument Lab’s field trip guide beautifully encapsulates Dr. Buffington’s pedagogical approach to monuments and public art; art education and social theory. I hope educators will embrace both her research and the guide as tools to spark student curiosity and challenge learners to critically engage with the world around them.

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*Teach Hometown* employs aspects of Emdin's (2016) *reality pedagogy*, which employs students' lived realities in everyday teaching. We model this to our students—future teachers—so they may do so in their future classrooms in P-12 education

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## Creating Commons: Photovoice Philosophy in a Third Space

**Jason M. Cox & Lynne Hamer**

University of Toledo

**Abstract:** *Teach Toledo* is an initiative using community assets to confront systemic racism's impact on teacher education programs and facilitate *hybridity* via provision of a *third space* (Bhaba, 1994). "Creating commons" relies on physical and temporal provision of a third space and refers to the creative act of fashioning and communicating a common purpose, i.e., a common philosophy of education. In their first semester, diverse student cohort members use their lived experience as the basis for their individual and shared urban educational philosophies, coordinated in a first-year horizontally and vertically integrated curriculum including written compositions and a PhotoVoice project. A shared philosophy of possibility for urban education helps create a communal expectation that functions as a philosophical third space. The collective philosophy reflects students' lived experiences and their intention to create hopeful, joyful, and kind public P-12 schools and universities. Curricular initiatives to create shared, relevant philosophy can be foundational to urban reform initiatives, but to succeed, initiatives require material support for both individual students and institutional structures.

*Correspondence regarding this article may be sent to the authors: [jarmec@gmail.com](mailto:jarmec@gmail.com), and [lynne.hamer@utoledo.edu](mailto:lynne.hamer@utoledo.edu)*

U.S. urban school districts are damaged by economic and political forces that push toward a globalized, Eurocentric, privatized, market-driven culture, described as neoliberal (Saunders, 2010; deMarrais et al., 2019), and their curriculum and pedagogy are conventionally irrelevant to the reality of urban-dwelling students (Emdin, 2016). A largely black and brown student population learns to keep its place through what Spring (2016) described as *deculturalization*: “the educational process of destroying a people’s culture (cultural genocide) and replacing it with a new culture” (p. 5). Deculturalization occurs via both the curriculum that is taught and the inherent biases of the white, middle-class, non-urban-dwelling teaching force (Toldson, 2008; Villegas et al., 2012). The problem is sustained by faculty and preservice teachers in traditional teacher education programs continuing to be predominantly white, middle-class, and suburban or rural (Feistritz et al., 2011; Policy and Program Studies Service, 2016; Taie, S., & Goldring, 2017). Achieving diversity, equity, and cultural relevance in teacher education and the teaching profession requires consistent, collective examination of the purposes of schooling, the roles of teachers and students, and the curriculum necessary to achieve the purpose (Oakes et al., 2018) toward a planned and purposeful disruption of business as usual in teacher education. The twin problems of deculturalization and an unrepresentative, culturally irrelevant teaching force will persist until colleges of education make it a priority to diversify—students, faculty, curriculum, and pedagogy.

Art educators have worked to disrupt deculturalization by emphasizing the need to appreciate community assets. Moje et al. (2004) emphasized the need to recognize that “teachers and students bring different instructional, home, and community knowledge bases and discourses to bear on classroom texts” (p. 41), and to use these resources. Hutzler, Bastos, & Cosier (2012) called for art educators to recognize students’ cultural capitals and to blur the boundaries between the stakeholders, with student-led creation of learning environments and community-oriented arts integration. Hutzler (2012) noted that “schools

serving working- and middle-class urban populations are often places where various cultures come together, presenting unique possibilities for multicultural education through collaborative learning and community building” (p. 96). Daniel (2005) and Guimarães (2012) both argued for student investigations through the arts that emphasize the everyday experience of the students, because doing so highlights areas of overlap between the students and contributed to the development of a community-based pedagogy. In terms of purpose, Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr (2001) called for recognizing “beliefs, values, and patterns that give meaning and structure to life,” while Bodilly, Augustine, Zakaras (2008) invoked education focused “on refining perception and discrimination; developing imagination, mutual sympathy, and the capacity for wonder and awe; and developing the deep understanding that is critical to all learning.” Outside of art education, Emdin (2016) coined similar work as *reality pedagogy*, emphasizing the need for all teachers to “understand the oppression ... youth experience, the spaces they inhabit, and the ways these phenomena affect what happens in social settings like traditional classrooms” (p. 9). Emdin conceptualized specific pedagogical techniques, including *co-teaching*, where teachers would “be humble enough to become students of their students—especially the students who have been most harmed, and will benefit most from a teacher listening to their experiences” (Emdin, 2020, para. 9). Including student and community knowledge in art education and teacher education has thus been well explored, and our work constitutes an intervention to bring diverse students into classrooms with the goal of contributing to diversifying the teaching workforce and articulating a shared educational philosophy for it, using these pedagogical approaches.

Such work, however, requires a space within which it can grow to reach its fullest potential. Bhaba (1994) theorized *third space* as “a place of intervention, in the here and now” where oppressors and the oppressed can create new possibilities together (p. xx). Third space connotes creativity, a place where “strategies of representation or

empowerment come to be formulated in the competing claims of community" (Bhaba, 1994, p. xx). Rochielle and Carpenter (2015) emphasized the artistic aspect of third space as "a site of learning formed when educational, artistic, creative, and other cultural practices intersect and move outside traditional paradigms and norms" (p. 131). Collaboration within third space results in what Bhaba (1994) identified as *hybridity*: the new cultural forms and expressions that result from collaboration, drawing on multiple cultures of participants, in third spaces and characterized by transformative power (pp. 37-38). We envision *Teach Toledo* as a third space—a place of collaborative possibility in which we, as white faculty members in a predominantly white institution, can work with students of color from an economically depressed urban community to challenge systemic racism and to work actively for change.

### ***Teach Toledo***

The work described in this paper took place at the University of Toledo, where both authors are faculty with appointments in the college of education and co-coordinate the *Teach Toledo* initiative. UToledo is a metropolitan public research university which at the time of this study served approximately 20,000 students. UToledo's mission includes that students become "part of a diverse community of leaders committed to improving the human condition in the region and the world." Congruent with this mission, *Teach Toledo* addresses the need for diversifying the teaching workforce by supporting the development of a racially and ethnically diverse, working class, urban-dwelling cadre of teachers and by creating space for collective development of a shared, culturally-relevant philosophy of teaching in urban neighborhoods. *Teach Toledo* recruits residents of urban neighborhoods, with experience working in urban schools, as already having the necessary cultural competence to teach in urban schools because they have grown up and chosen to live and work in urban neighborhoods.

The mission specific to *Teach Toledo*, "supporting Toledo's citizens to become tomorrow's teachers,"

Cox, J.M., Hamer, L. /Creating commons

responds to the need for contextualized teacher education (Matsko & Hammerness, 2014) that prepares teachers for the particular schools in which they will teach—in our case, our city's schools. A contextualized approach prepares teachers for the characteristics and key problem of urban schools, as described by Chou and Tozer (2008): "cultural heterogeneity, in terms of racial and ethnic diversity, paired with high poverty, in ethnically- and economically-segregated institutions, and coupled with the lack of urban cultural capital among the primarily white, middle class teaching force and student resistance to resultant demeaning experiences" (p. 10). At the time of the study, students in the teacher education pipeline at University of Toledo were 82% white, non-Hispanic (Teacher Counts By District, 2017, p. 110), Through focused recruitment through the public school system and library system, combined with a 22% discount on tuition offered by UToledo as part of the Workplace Credit Program (since discontinued), cohort I of *Teach Toledo* achieved much greater diversity than the existing teacher population and the teacher education pipeline. Cohort I (n=19) had 16% Latino students compared to 0% in the comparable on-campus program, and 58% Black/African American students compared to 0% in the comparable on-campus program (n=12).

Beyond focused recruitment for diversity, the commons was achieved through location and scheduling. *Teach Toledo* cohort students took all their classes together during their first two years—at first in a public middle school building, which felt familiar and was easily accessible, and later in a designated classroom at the university, in a building that had easy parking.

*Teach Toledo* is a two-year course of study culminating in an earned Associate of Arts degree. However, all Associate degree coursework on the plan of study also is acceptable on the four-year Bachelor of Education, Intervention Specialist (special education) degree plan of study, in order to avoid "losing credits" in the transfer from one degree program to another. This allows students options: to continue seamlessly beyond the *Teach Toledo* two-year program for their B.Ed. and state teaching

licensure; to bank their credits toward the four-year teaching degree if their coursework were disrupted; or to use the completed Associate degree toward enhancing earning potential in other fields. Having to choose one licensure area for the plan of study, we chose special education as it is the licensure most in demand locally and nationally. However, we advised students that if they wanted to pursue a different teaching degree and certification, we would help them determine changes to their specific plans.

The Associate degree plan of study focused on the urban teaching career and allowing for integration of coursework, both horizontally across the four courses per semester in which students enrolled, and vertically from semester to semester in the four-semester sequence. We selected all coursework not only to match B.Ed. requirements but also to provide foundation for teaching in urban settings. For example, students took African civilization and African American culture courses for their humanities credits, as global, non-Eurocentric knowledge is especially important in (though not limited to) urban schools with high numbers of African Americans. In addition, the cohort model facilitated integrating curriculum across courses, as in the focus of this article, the courses *Introduction to Education* and *Composition I*, taken in fall 2017 being horizontally integrated and paired for vertical integration with *Art Education for the Pre-Primary and Primary Student* in spring 2018. In this way, the cohort model supported work by the students on a creative, common, reality-based philosophy of education.

The combination of philosophical and visual investigations created a third space for learning and producing knowledge—which transversed home and school and brought students’ lived realities including racism and equity issues into school spaces. *Teach Toledo* is a third space *physically*, in the location of classes in community spaces; *temporally*, with a special schedule and plan of study; and, as is the focus of this article, *philosophically*, with creation of a purpose of urban schooling based in the realities of the urban-dwelling, future teachers, but brought into the academic world, in words and photographs, through course assignments and scholarly

presentation. This third space accommodates Emdin’s (2016) instruction that to begin to practice reality pedagogy, urban teachers must experience their students’ physical places—their neighborhoods and homes. Teachers can then begin to understand students’ emotional spaces—the meaning they make and their feelings. Our pedagogical practices also foregrounded students’ understandings and built up student voices (cf. Emdin’s (2016) cogenerative dialogue) through the integration of student thoughts and ideas into the curriculum, the facilitation of students’ expression of ideas, and the inclusion of students’ critiques of inequitable social practices. Third space, hybridity, and reality pedagogy frame our work creating opportunities for students to bring visual images of places and to explain their desires and goals, the spaces of education.

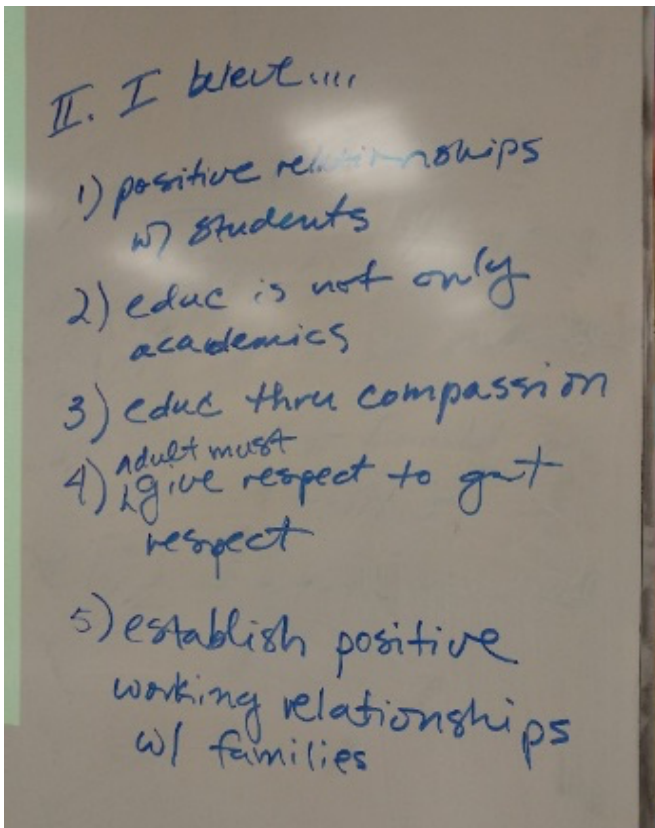
We matriculated two cohorts—cohort I in fall 2017 and cohort II in fall 2019; however, in this article, we discuss only cohort I, as completion and presentation of the shared philosophy was interrupted for cohort II by the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Here, we describe our collaboration with the first cohort of the *Teach Toledo* program to create a shared educational philosophy, phrased as a collective belief drawn from individual philosophies; illustrated on a personal level through PhotoVoice (Wang & Burris, 1997); and presented publicly at an academic conference. We asked ourselves, in designing the curriculum and pedagogy, as well as reflecting on its results: How can faculty and students develop a shared philosophy of possibility for urban P-12 education and for teacher education?

### **PhotoVoice philosophy in a third space**

In their first year of *Teach Toledo* students were assigned a yearlong project: to write individual philosophies of education, illustrate them with photos from their own experiences and observations, and finally to distill these, through thematic analysis, into one illustrated, group philosophy of education that provided a rich representation of their third space. Students developed ideas in *Introduction to Education* and writing skills in *Composition I* in fall

semester, and conducted a PhotoVoice-style documentary project from *Art Education for the Pre-Primary and Primary Student* in the following spring semester.

The written philosophy of education assignment encompassed a progression from a student's personal philosophy into a communal philosophy accomplished through *Composition I* and *Introduction to Education*. To fulfill a composition assignment and using content from the intro class, students each wrote their own essay inspired by the classic *This I Believe* series (<https://thisibelieve.org/>). On the due date, each student selected a key passage from their individual composition to read aloud to the group. Their peers analyzed the passages as they were presented, noting what stood out as the main ideas and identifying *beliefs* and *purposes* as expressed by the author. As a class, they listed these as exemplars under the categories of belief and purpose (see figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Example of data analysis of individual philosophy statements according to category of beliefs

The cohort then worked together to compare individuals' beliefs and purposes to identify and code themes. Next, referring to the thematic analysis, the group drafted a shared statement that built on parts of the individuals' statements, drafting to make sure all identified beliefs and purposes were included. They repeatedly revised the statement for sentence structure, punctuation, clarity, and logic. Finally, from the integrated the themes, they produced their *Cohort Philosophy of Teaching and Learning*, which read as follows:

We believe that our purpose as educators in urban schools is to create and maintain positive relationships between students, teachers, and families by working from the circumstances students experience in contemporary urban neighborhoods, and teaching with compassion and affection, with the belief that all students are teachable and all need to learn practical life skills while at the same time all are exposed to and held to high academic standards.

This cohort philosophy was the culminating assignment for the first semester, and students carried the philosophy with them into their second semester of classes.

In the second semester, students took *Art Education for the Pre-Primary/Primary Child*. In one assignment, they went back to their individual teaching philosophies as thematic guides for a PhotoVoice (Wang & Burris, 1997) study, in which they documented their lives in the communities where they lived and worked. PhotoVoice is a method of community-based participatory research that combines photography and social action to enable a person or a community – especially those who are historically marginalized—to express themselves (Becker [2001] and Kress [2006] in Zenkov & Sheridan, 2012). Participants express their perspective or that of their communities by photographing scenes that highlight research themes. The photographs are collaboratively interpreted through group discussions between artists and researchers, and narratives can be developed to highlight a particular theme. These narratives are then used to promote a dialogue and to facilitate change. In the art education course,

students first explored how representative methods like PhotoVoice have been used to tell stories of people who had been unseen and ignored. Examples included artists like Gordon Parks who depicted African American culture (Gordon Parks Foundation, n.d.), as well as researchers like Smith (2015), who worked to deconstruct stereotypes of Muslim women, and Zenkov and Sheridan (2012), who worked with students to represent the city in the "Through Students' Eyes" project. We also considered the various citizens who used their cellphones to document the Baltimore uprising in 2015. The students then documented the communities in which they lived and worked, with the assignment that they each curate at least ten images that related to their personal philosophies of education. The class discussed each other's photo collections for both their aesthetic effectiveness and their reflection of the student's philosophy. Using this feedback, each participant selected the "top three" images they had taken that related to a key paragraph from their philosophy.

Beyond course requirements, students chose whether to participate in creating a PhotoVoice illustrated group philosophy to present at the Ecojustice and Education Conference, an international event hosted annually by Eastern Michigan University: Of the seventeen students in the cohort, eleven participated as co-authors and eight as presenters. Individual students developed their own parts of the photojournalistic presentation, with feedback from the group. They helped select and format the excerpts and photos to be included in the presentation, and they rehearsed the presentation and revised it, ultimately arranging individuals' statements and photos to mirror the cohort's philosophy, which provided the framework for the final presentation. Each presenter chose three of their own PhotoVoice images to illustrate aspects of their individual philosophies. These images were displayed during the presentation of the paper, in which each author read a key piece of their philosophy and participated in a lively discussion of their work.

## Emergent Philosophies: Representation and Analysis

The emergent individual philosophies of the students mirrored and defined what they articulated as a shared philosophy. Furthermore, their words and especially their images demonstrated how their philosophy was grounded in their individual and shared realities, providing context for understanding the shared philosophy's core concepts in a way that highlighted their specific purposes in becoming urban educators. Here, we present a text version of the students' oral conference presentation, which they organized according to the three clauses of their cohort philosophy (stated above). Our representation includes the students' individual, verbatim statements, and a selection of images from those that they presented (figures 2-5). We have added to the text to identify speakers and to indicate the flow of topics, which was more apparent in the live presentation than in the static text. edited to provide description of the presentation features. We then analyze their work, drawing upon *a priori* concepts from reality pedagogy as well as noting emergent themes, i.e., the students' insights and emphases based on their unique experiences.

### **1. We believe that our purpose as educators in urban schools is to create and maintain positive relationships between students, teachers, and families....**

Student 1 began discussion of this first section by emphasizing the relationship of teacher to students, saying:

I believe that teachers need to develop, maintain, and achieve a positive relationship with all children, while providing them with quality education. Teachers that know what a child has against them should be adaptive in their teaching. It is my belief that "a happy child is a receptive child." This is where reality pedagogy comes into play. I believe establishing a healthy relationship begins with not only the child but also the family.

Student 2 extended the need for relationships into homes and communities:

I believe that the connection between the community and teachers are key in a successful school environment. Incorporating the parents in the school life of the students will allow the parents to see what their children are learning and understand how they are being taught. Parents are the ones that motivate their children to learn and working with the school system allows the children to see that their parents and teachers do care about their education and want them to prosper in their lives. "Education is for improving the lives of others and for leaving your community and world better than you found it" (Edelman, 2001). This I believe.

Student 3 concluded the first section with their elaboration on the relationship of teacher-student and how it extends into the community:

I believe teaching is an art.... An art that is designing and developing the knowledge between the instructor and student. The purpose of education is to gain knowledge throughout every aspect of life. To know all. The more you know the further in life you can succeed. Schooling does not stop at the schoolhouse doors.

**2. ... We do this by working from the circumstances students experience in contemporary urban neighborhoods and teaching with compassion and affection....**

Student 4 began elaboration of the second section focused on the students' circumstances, declaring the ethical responsibility of the teacher and emphasized their own, current commitment to fulfilling that responsibility:

This I believe: that children should be provided with an equal education in a happy, self-expressive environment. Children come from very different backgrounds and deserve to feel safe at school. As a future educator, I believe that they should feel safe and loved. I have the advantage right now, being a paraprofessional, to practice these qualities.



**Figure 2:** "This is my child and my partner's child, they equally have wonderful teachers that make them feel safe at school." (Student 4, 2018, photovoice)

Student 5 further developed the teacher's ethical responsibility to acknowledge and build from children's circumstances:

I believe that teachers should remember why they became a teacher. They should always ask themselves, "Why did I want to be a teacher in the first place?" Teachers should have a mission statement and remember that mission statement every day. Children are open books who love to learn and have fun learning. Teachers should acknowledge that and remember that. I believe that children are our future. We should nurture and teach them as much as we possibly can. I believe we should give them as much assistance as needed. Children are different and they all have different needs.

Student 6 called on teachers to recognize and respond to their students' realities and how they affect their students' classroom experience:

I believe that as educators, we should learn that students are people and have issues just like we do. Some of their situations are greater than ours, but we don't see it or acknowledge them. We tend to think that students should sit up, pay attention, and be quiet in the classroom. The reality is that most of them have their heads down, they are daydreaming, or talking to a peer close to them. I think Emdin (2016) said it best by saying, "Reality pedagogy does not draw its cues for teaching from "classroom experts" ....it focuses on teaching and learning as it is successfully practiced within communities physically outside of, and oftentimes beyond, the school."



**Figure 3:** "We tend to think that students should sit up, pay attention, and be quiet in the classroom" (Student 6, 2018, photovoice)

Student 7 turned the emphasis to teaching with affection and compassion:

Yes, I want my students to get good grades and receive honors. I would love to say my class scored in the top on their state tests. I want to

Cox, J.M., Hamer, L. /Creating commons

see them involved in community programs and excel at sports. What really matters to me is making sure each and every one of my students feel valued, supported, and cared for by individuals in their school.... The purpose of education is to gift our students with something new that will stick with them as they move on in life. This can be achieved if compassion is always a factor in how I relate to my students. I believe that my students are my family, too, and with everything I am, I will treat them this way. Student 8 concluded this section emphasizing the awesomeness of taking on these responsibilities as a profession:

A teacher's job does not end when he or she leaves the classroom. When you become a teacher, you are taking an oath to dedicate your life to the young lives of the students who look up to you. Teachers hold such a valuable role in our society because we are role models for our future generations and we get the privilege of practicing this every day. It is our responsibility to mold today's youth into tomorrow's men and women.

**3. ...Our belief is that all students are teachable and all need to learn practical life skills, while at the same time all are exposed and held to high academic standards.**

In beginning section 3, Student 9 turned attention to developing pedagogy to reach all children:

I believe as a teacher, I am responsible to inspire every child to do their best to learn. Every child learns in a different way. All children deserve a quality education regardless of public or private school. As a teacher, I will design a way to incorporate a teaching style that helps the student to learn by being a role model. If the student isn't retaining the information, it is the teacher's responsibility to find different techniques to ensure the student is gaining the knowledge.

Student 10 identified specific content that students need for success in their worlds:

I believe education is not solely academic, but also mentally by teaching students skills needed in order to survive everyday life. Life skills are



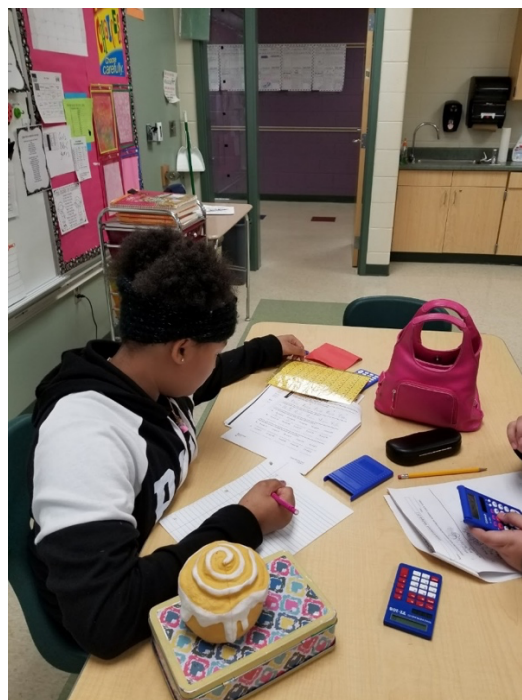
skills that is necessary or desirable for full participation in everyday life such as tying your shoes, driving a car, counting money, swimming and using a computer just to name a few. Life skills help us to accomplish our ambitions and live to our full potential.



**Figure 4:** "This is the area in my classroom where the students take a break from academics" (Student 10, 2018, photovoice)

Finally, Student 11 emphasized that teachers should teach all students equitably:

I believe that students learn in many different ways and all students are teachable no matter the disability. I believe that the littlest accomplishments like just eating in the cafeteria for autism is an accomplishment for our students. We should not take the simplest of tasks for granted or overlook them. This is why I think teacher should teach more than just academics to all students with or without disabilities. We need to teach students valuable life and social skills. All students have potential and the ability to learn no matter what their disabilities and it is our job as an educator to help them.



**Figure 5:** "A student working on math problem using a calculator as an intervention if needed" (Student 11, 2018, photovoice)

Thematic analysis of the students' presentation, with excerpts of their personal philosophies and images from their PhotoVoice elaborating their cohort's group philosophy, both supports the theoretical validity of efforts in culturally relevant pedagogy and reality pedagogy and suggests the usefulness of the frameworks for describing what students need. The students emphasized that teaching ought to 1) address emotional needs, 2) use cultural diversity to frame understanding, 3) be critically responsive, and 4) utilize pedagogical foundations that meet the cognitive needs of students. Within these broad a priori principles, students' specific concerns were unique. These principles did not all receive equal emphasis from every student philosophy, which reflected their author's own needs as educators and context as community leaders, but the cohort philosophy integrated the concepts that matter the most into the communal identity students chose to present.

The first clause of the cohort group philosophy expresses the students' desire to address emotional needs: "*We believe that our purpose as educators in urban schools is to create and maintain positive relationships between students, teachers, and*

*families.*" Themes for this principle included the idea of the educator as mentor and a guide, rather than as a delivery system for educational content; the necessity for students to feel safe in order to be able to learn, and the elimination of the division between home and school lives so that teachers understand the context of students and students are nurtured in every environment. Student 8 expressed this concept as follows: "A teacher's job does not end when he or she leaves the classroom. When you become a teacher you are taking an oath to dedicate your life to the young lives of the students who look up to you." Student 4's image (figure 2) of the children from their blended family walking into the distance underscored the necessity of balancing supervision with room for exploration and growth, both in the classroom and beyond. In their caption for their photo, student 4 noted that their children "equally have wonderful teachers that make them feel safe at school."

The idea that cultural diversity frames understanding was expressed in the second clause of the cohort group philosophy: "*We do this by working from the circumstances students experience in contemporary urban neighborhoods and teaching with compassion and affection.*" This principle explored themes of duality between an individual student and the collective voices of their communities, the value of cultural identities, and the pursuit of liberatory opportunities through education. Student 3 summed this up elegantly: "We can't forget about our students. We must listen to them when they tell us how they want to learn." Student 6's image (figure 3) features faded blue, whiteboard instructions to "Take your seats & wait for directions" as background to rows of rigid desks and chairs. In their caption, student 6 critiques the devaluing of student voice and identity, lamenting, "We tend to think that students should sit up, pay attention, and be quiet."

The third phrase of the cohort group philosophy points to the students' desire to be critically responsive: "*Our belief is that all students are teachable and all need to learn practical life skills.*" Here students evoked themes of teaching that is social-action oriented, a teaching practice that is self-aware and reflective, and the idea of the teacher

as a facilitator of knowledge instead of its guardian. Student 6 provided a context to frame that idea when he said, "I try to be the example to them, showing them how a black man should conduct themselves. Most of them don't have a male figure in their lives and it's a hard task to fill that void." Student 10's image (figure 4) depicts a substantial area of a classroom, with six soft seats and a rug—enough room for many students to gather. While student 10 captioned the photo simply as "where the students take a break from academics," it is in that break from teacher-directed knowledge acquisition that students create common understanding. The break area is their commons.

The idea that pedagogical foundations meet cognitive needs was expressed in the final phrase of the cohort group philosophy: "... *while at the same time all are exposed to and held to high academic standards.*" This final principle covered how the cohort believed that knowledge is individually constructed, the importance of knowledge of students for educational institutions, the benefit of high expectations, and the utility of a continual process of assessment and reorientation. Student 1 used her lived experience to express these ideas as, "I have seen in the classrooms, and come to the realization that a child that is hungry, tired, and has issues from home, these things will ultimately have an adverse effect in their retention of knowledge." Student 11's image (figure 5) shows two students with access to accommodations for their academic work, with the background of an open door. This establishes them as learners rather than inmates. Student 11's commentary emphasized "a calculator as an intervention if needed."

The students' PhotoVoice images contributed concrete grounding of their verbalized beliefs in the physical features of their worlds. The images remind us that educational philosophy is not an abstraction but is as substantial as the boards of a river walk, the surfaces of rigid desk/chairs, the squishiness of comfy corners, and the pink purses students carry to class. Whereas often educational philosophy is seen as an extra, non-essential nicety in contrast to the skills and materials of a methods class, PhotoVoicing their educational philosophies embodied these

future teachers' ideas, depicting exactly where their commitments were grounded in their realities and in their children's and students' realities.

### Discussion

We conclude that a shared philosophy of possibility for urban education helps create a communal expectation that functions as a philosophical third space that mirrors the physical third spaces students and faculty are working to create. The students in cohort I of *Teach Toledo* brought their own experiences in urban classrooms as former students and as current paraprofessionals and parents into coursework at the university, and transformed them through written and photographic art into a strong philosophy that reflects the urgency and groundedness of their professional commitment.

We believe the core strength of *Teach Toledo* is not simply the diversity of participants and the attention to curriculum, but rather the pedagogy of integrating both academic content and academic participants (students and faculty) in order to build a community together. *Teach Toledo* is, therefore, multicultural education in both theory and practice in the it was (i) grounded in students' lives; (ii) provided a critical lens; (iii) established a safe environment; (iv) incited investigations of bias; (v) presented justice for all as a goal; (vi) allowed participatory and experiential involvement; (vii) and is "hopeful, joyful, kind, visionary, affirming, activist, academically rigorous, integrated, culturally sensitive, and utilize(s) community resources" (Stuhr Ballengee-Morris, and Daniel, 2008). The collective philosophy crafted by our students reflects their experience that through working together they are creating the kinds of hopeful, joyful, and kind public spaces within public P-12 schools and universities that are essential to revitalizing our urban communities.

However, hope and joy require institutionalized support to be sustained. Bhaba's concept of third space has been criticized for its lack of attention to historical and material conditions. Bhandari (2022), for example, concluded that Bhaba's notion of third space and hybridity might help for the psychological and spiritual liberation such as the decolonization of

the mind. However, it ignores the material conditions and the role of ideology that structures the exploitative relationships between the colonizer and the colonized . . . [and fails adequately to account for] the unequal access to opportunities and resources" . . . [resulting in reification of] discourses of their inherent superiority against the inferiority of the colonized people and their culture. (p. 179)

Sadly, the condition of *Teach Toledo's* third space at the time of this writing demonstrates the veracity of the critique, and we can identify specific historical and material conditions that contributed to its failures. Most of cohort I, the students who created the philosophy featured in this article, did not become certified classroom teachers. Eight of the cohort's original 15 completed the two-year Associate's degree. The students' material conditions were the greatest challenge: Cohort I received a 22% tuition reduction, courtesy of a university program that gave this reduction for courses taught off campus, and all received Pell grants, but tuition and fees still caused hardships. Of the eight students achieving the Associate degree, half decided that due to financial, work, and family requirements, rather than go onto campus to pursue the Bachelor's degree, they needed to stop.

Historical conditions were relevant: Four of the students attempted to continue into professional education, which at that time required passing the Praxis I "basic" skills test of reading, writing, and math, a nationally-used assessment that was adopted as part of the neoliberalism arising in the 1980s. The Praxis skills tests were widely used despite the mass of research (e.g., Henry et al., 2013; Nettles et al., 2011) showing it did not predict teaching success and it did mitigate against people of color and from lower socioeconomic statuses getting into the teaching profession. In that historical context, two of the students passed all three sections of the Praxis I and were admitted to the professional education program; however, financial challenges and family responsibilities prevented their pursuing the degree. One cohort member continued as a non-education major, completed a Bachelor's of Arts, became a classroom teacher with an alternative

license through the state, and continued for a Master's degree.

Structural conditions have also affected the current state of the *Teach Toledo* initiative. Cohort II numbers decreased when the university ended the off-campus tuition credit. Cohort II students were largely successful in their first semester, but they were derailed by another historical condition: the onset of Covid-19 and wholesale move to online classes starting in their second semester and continuing into what would have been their second year. Online coursework did not suit their learning needs and increased financial and family responsibilities were not conducive to paying tuition nor to having time for coursework.

Working across colleges to schedule coursework and build shared understandings among faculty, *Teach Toledo* requires minimal additional university resources as it collaborates with the local public schools and library systems to reach out to non-traditional, first-generation students from marginalized urban communities. The program appeals especially to those already working as paraprofessionals (teaching assistants) in the schools, who are in many ways already teaching but with lower salaries and less influence than they could have as licensed teachers. However, despite efficiencies and enthusiasm, and though the university still has *Teach Toledo* on its website, it has not found the capacity to resume cohorts post-pandemic, as the initiative does require resources to assure courses are scheduled when cohorts can attend. Judged by these results, the students appear to have failed to master the university's superior culture, and the initiative appears to have been futile. However, creating the third space and its pedagogy of purpose rooted in the students' material realities was successful, as attention to the words and images they produced, and the purpose they embodied, reveals. We contend that the creation and presentation was valuable in showing how it could be done and in making audible and visible a philosophy grounded in future teachers' lived urban experience. It is important for us to present these results in order for all to see the power, insight, compassion, and commitment of the students who, due to historical

**Cox, J.M., Hamer, L. /**Creating commons

and material conditions, did not become the teachers we need. Perhaps cohort I's words and images will inspire material investment for future cohorts.

In conclusion, initiatives such as *Teach Toledo* are viable, practical ways to address urban education needs and that co-created understanding, artistic expression, and public presentation of a shared philosophy should be foundational to such initiatives, but they must receive material support to sustain both individual students and institutional structures. The co-created cohort philosophy, grounded in the realities of the students as concretized through PhotoVoice demonstrates the value of bringing students with lived urban experience into teacher education and the passion and commitment for teaching that they would bring, if supported to the degree needed to complete licensure requirements. We need initiatives like *Teach Toledo* to provide the third space necessary to humanize both P-12 and higher education to support locally dedicated preservice teachers to develop philosophies and pedagogies that represent their lived experiences and push back against the status quo.

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We consider the Mexican colloquialism “Pórtate bien con la maestra”: the desired educational disposition that school children, first and foremost, comport themselves toward the teacher along with progressive art education as competing cultural notions of quality that produce contrasting educational technologies and complicated notions of belonging, invasion, and settlement.

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## **Pórtate bien con la maestra: How the Border Questions Quality in Art Education**

**Heather Kaplan**

University of Texas at El Paso

**Diane Golding**

University of Texas at El Paso

**Abstract:** This paper troubles and retells the story of quality art education in a STEAM makerspace in an elementary school along the U.S.-Mexico border. Through questioning quality, we embrace the multivalent nature of belonging and the complexity of teaching art and researching with, among, and about others. Boundaries, borders, and belonging are explored through sites of conflicting quality. We consider the Mexican colloquialism “Pórtate bien con la maestra” along with progressive art education as competing notions of quality that produce contrasting educational technologies and complicated notions of belonging, invasion, and settlement.

*Correspondence regarding this article may be sent to the authors:*  
[hgkaplan@utep.edu](mailto:hgkaplan@utep.edu) and [degolding@utep.edu](mailto:degolding@utep.edu)

“What seems to underlie the ‘problem with quality’ is a sense and an unease that what has been approached as an essentially technical issue of expert knowledge and measure may, in fact, be a philosophical issue of value and dispute. Rather than discovering the truth, and with it certainty, we encounter multiple perspectives and ambivalence.” (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007, p. 6)

## Introduction

This paper troubles and retells the story of quality art education in a STEAM makerspace in an elementary school along the U.S.-Mexico border. Through questioning quality, we embrace the multivalent nature of belonging and the complexity of teaching art and researching with, among, and about others. Boundaries, borders, and belonging are explored through sites of conflicting quality. The complexity of their intersections are examined in the hopes of painting a richer picture and developing deeper understandings that embrace the dynamism of the children, the people, the community, the school, the school district, and the region. Like Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (2007) proffer above, we embrace the problem of quality as an issue of aesthetics and politics in which value, judgement, and power coalesce to produce educational knowledge and curricular instrumentality. With this in mind, we consider the Mexican colloquialism ‘Pórtate bien con la maestra’: the desired educational disposition that school children, first and foremost, comport themselves toward the teacher along with progressive art education as competing cultural notions of quality that produce contrasting educational technologies and complicated notions of belonging, invasion, and settlement. We examine these seemingly antagonistic methods and philosophies of education and art education in order to uncover a layered history of colonialist educational interventions in which we implicate ourselves and which ultimately led us to question our own notions of quality, our status as invited interventionists, and the notions of intersection, contact, exposure, and

collaboration as functions of power, culture, and history.

The autoethnographic and ethnographic research (Berger, 2001) and content described in this paper is one aspect of a larger study involving young children’s experiences and explorations in a researcher created makerspace. This paper addresses differing, adult notions of quality (those of the researchers and the classroom teachers) expressed during the study. As a pilot our study was limited to one school year. During that time, we spent one day a week working with two pre-k and three kindergarten classes to explore the possibility of makerspace curriculum and experiences as part of the school day. After observing marked differences in adult notions of quality curriculum between members of the research team and the teachers, we formulated the following questions: What examples of quality and expertise (and connected assumptions of truth) did we encounter, experience, and/or reproduce during our first year piloting a STEAM-based curriculum in a university supported early childhood makerlab in a local elementary school? How do these experiences inform our thinking (now) about research, curriculum, quality, and context?

We begin the paper describing the layered historical and cultural contexts of the border. We discuss how some of the narratives that construct these contexts are vociferously carried forward while others wither or echo only as a faint trace or palimpsest. We include a discussion of the processes (or apparatuses) of settler colonialism that produce master narratives of nationhood (while displacing others) which is especially cogent for contending with the cultural and historical context of the border and American West (and its lore). We then describe our researcher positionalities pointed by our own concepts of quality. We juxtapose these notions of quality with a third to affirm that all concepts of quality are cultural constructed, even those of progressive early childhood art education. We then turn to Anzaldúa’s (1987/ 2012; Yarbrow-Bejarano, 1994) theorization of the border as a space of multiplicity, contamination, and complexity and create possibilities for concomitant, competing



notions of quality. Finally, we describe case study evidence where we encountered the educational compartment to a certain notion or performance of quality "pórtate bien con la maestra" during our research and educational intervention implementing makerspace experiences for pre-kindergarten and kindergarten children.

## The Many Backgrounds of the Border

### Intersecting Trace and Master Narratives

The research described in this paper occurred at the intersections of many invasions and settlements in education and art education along the U.S. Mexico border. An entanglement of histories, language, and culture, the border is a palimpsest recording and transferring some stories imperfectly and partially through trace while others, often those that are more recent or of those with more power or privilege, are disseminated widely and with clarity. Palimpsest implies both reiterative writing and erasure practice or "layer(ing) of rewritten text" (Powell, 2008, p. 6) and "a metaphor for the reinscription and legibility of discourses situated within institutional power structures" (Powell, 2008, p. 7). These trace and fractional narratives interrupt or intersect louder master narratives on the border, and create a site of relationality, of invasion, and of contamination. Below is an incomplete but hopefully illuminative description of the research site and the cultural and historical background that complicates the space.

Less than a mile from the school site flowed the Rio Grande River, the life waters for the Manso, Suma, Piro and Tigua Indian tribes who settled the El Paso areas more than four hundred years ago. Their culture and lands were torn from them with the invasion of white settlers (Valerio-Jimenez, 2012). Spanish explorers first arrived in the area in 1581 and were met graciously by the Suma people with an abundance of local foods and delicacies for the visitors. This encounter was the first of several before the arrival of Don Juan de Oñate, who was not an explorer but a conqueror intent on converting indigenous people to Christianity. The ensuing

conflicts over the next century and a half caused a dispersing of many of the natives in the El Paso region, let alone the death of thousands in the upheavals. Those who remained learned the teachings of the missionaries and the Spanish language (El Paso Missions, n.d.).

Dominant discourse of deficit interventionists might characterize the school as a high poverty predominantly Hispanic elementary school. The study site, an elementary school located in the middle of a field dotted with mesquite and desert brush on the fringe of a rural village, served a demographic of approximately 400 prekindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade students. Ninety-seven percent of students were Hispanic, 84% come from low socio-economic backgrounds, and more than 50% were English language learners (Murphy & Daniel, 2019). Poverty levels were high; 61% of the school's students qualified for free lunch at school and 24% were eligible for reduced charge for lunch (Elementary School Profile, 2020-2021).

Despite the bilingual nature of the El Paso/Ciudad Juarez or Paso Del Norte region, English predominated as the preferred language of instruction in most El Paso schools (Perrillo, 2022). Both Spanish and English are European languages that proliferated throughout North America during Colonialism. Despite this, English was favored in El Paso schools largely due to Texas's proprietorship over El Paso education and El Paso belonging on the American side of the border. This preference for English revealed an important contextual layer of the border – a global bias toward language of the global north. In North America, English and French (spoken in the United States of America and Canada) are often privileged over Spanish which is spoken in Mexico and many countries in South America. Unlike years past where border schools prohibited Spanish (Christophersen, 2019; Kohl, 1995; Yarbrow-Bejarano, 1994) and like many other schools in the El Paso area, the school promoted bilingual education and moved from a deficit model to a dual language approach. However, like many schools, there was a shortage of materials and resources to support Spanish instruction.

## A Background of Settler Colonialism

White settler colonialism is a term utilized by many North American and Australasian scholars to help explain the apparatus, practices, and policy that have systematically removed indigenous peoples from the lands they once inhabited and exercised their own forms of sovereignty through. According to Tuck, McKensie, and McCoy (2014), "settler colonialism is a form of colonization in which outsiders come to land inhabited by indigenous peoples and claim it as their new home" (p. 6). Nxumalo (2015) explains that settler colonialism can also be understood as "ongoing complex, multiple and continually shifting processes of control, erasures, and genocidal displacement of indigenous peoples" (p. 641).

In the United States this term is frequently used to discuss the ways in which nationhood displaced Native Americans and normalized Americanism as those born within the boundaries of America and American law. It helps post colonial studies to deconstruct widely held and often unexamined ideological notions like Manifest Destiny and American progress that constitute a dominant narrative of our national history and influence our American identity. As part of this reconceptualized view of American history and identity, the notion of settler colonialism can help to elucidate the layered historical, cultural context of the border. While dominant discourses describe (white) European movement west as innocuous, postcolonialism refutes this and lends the pretext to view the border as a construction and one that is often contested. Not only do these conceptions help us to understand the regional, cultural context of our research, but they may also help us to theorize notions of power, prestige, expertise, and quality at work in our relationships and research. According to Taylor and Pacini-Ketchabaw (2015), "in settler colonial societies, the seemingly unremarkable, everyday business-as-usual of early childhood education remains inadvertently (albeit often unknowingly) entangled in the social and ecological legacies of colonialism" (p. 1). We find the term white settler colonialism to be both useful and problematic in the

context of the border, and, ultimately, this framework is in the background of our thinking helping to uncover how knowledge, expertise, and quality function to promote certain voices, practices, and peoples and to displace or dominate others. Yet the term is not uncomplicated, especially in its tendency toward creating a definitive, totalizing narrative of history, identity, and culture which the border resists. And yet we find ideas of settlement, belonging, and ownership that go along with these narratives of history, identity, and culture quite useful for thinking with in terms of the border, borderlands, and border people.

Unlike other art education approaches that call for or proffer a postcolonial or anti-colonial approach to art education (Bae-Dimitriadis, 2020; Ballengee-Morris et al., 2010), this paper acknowledges the difficult space of curriculum instrumentality and binary or ameliorative research or curriculum approaches on the border where identity and culture are constructed of colonist and colonized where past colonization has erased a "true" native sense and left a space of complexity, contamination, and ambiguity. Because of this we, like Wolfgang and Sions (2021), were unable to connect our practice "explicitly ... to restitution of indigenous rights" (p. 90). Within this space, it is difficult to distinguish what technologies are postcolonial or anti-colonial from colonial technologies, and it is difficult to embrace or advocate for these kinds of binaries when the traces of the colonial past are very much acculturated or an accepted part of the present cultures and identities for good or for bad. Alexander and Sharma's (2013) conception of post-colonial hybridization where "identity is formed from influences from more than one location, usually drawing upon dual influences of the colonizer and the colonized" (p. 88) might nearest describe the border's colonial layering and contamination. Notions like trace, resistance, and contamination or hybridity were quite cogent in our research and quite cogent in forming our understanding of layered palimpsests of past and present curriculum and institutional technologies.

## Our Background: Who We Are

We are two members of a five-person research team formed to implement interventionist educational research through a STEAM early childhood makerspace in a local elementary school. The first researcher Heather a white, woman of partial Jewish ethnicity who relocated to the area two years before the commencement of the project, is an art teacher educator and early childhood education researcher who serves at a HSI (Hispanic-serving institution) on the U.S.-Mexico border. The second researcher Diane a Mexican-American born in the Southwest and grew up in the El Paso borderland region. She has familial roots both in Mexico and in the U.S., and a big part of her childhood years were spent crossing the border with her family to buy groceries, have haircuts, and fill the car up with gasoline. Diane attended schools in El Paso, Texas and earned her undergraduate and master's degree at the local university and her doctorate in Education at a university in California. Diane served as a Pre-K – 5 teacher in the borderland and now is a teacher educator and early childhood, teacher, and women in STEM researcher at the same local university. Below are our narratives of quality which are offered in conjunction with a third narrative of quality, the research team's narrative, which is contextualized within the practices and literature of early childhood art education, art education and makerspace. Our (researcher) narratives hang in the tradition of autoethnographic narrative positioning (Berger, 2001, p. 507) and while they each affect a different tone; they both work to uncover our positionality and to illustrate different perspectives important to the research problem. We have juxtaposed our narratives with the more traditional academic approach of literature review and consider this practice a kind of storytelling or a specific method that produces a narrative of quality. Purposefully we have juxtaposed these research traditions in order to illustrate differences in tone, sense of authority, and to highlight different conventions and methods. We have adopted the use of competing narratives as a way of making plain qualitative differences in

research and writing technologies and apparatus and how these methods produce knowledge, power, and academic authority across and within circles of knowledge. Likewise, these competing narratives illustrate conventions of quality that we experienced and observed during the intervention.

## Narratives of Quality

### *Diane's Narratives of Quality*

Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) described cultural behavior expectations on the borderland that “focus[ed] on kinship relationships. The welfare of the family, the community, and the tribe is more important than the welfare of the individual” (p. 18). Children are commonly admonished ‘*pórtate bien con la maestra*,’ loosely translated to ‘behave with the teacher’ as they go to school.

Hispanic parents' behavior expectations are deeply engrained in the knowledge that their children, as the minority, must learn to maneuver within and around the rules of the dominant settler colonial culture (Zayas & Solari, 1994). However, Hispanic families (like mine) also value “obedience, rule following, and conformity in the classroom” (Okagaski & Sternberg, 1993; Ortiz-Colon, 1985, as cited in Zayas & Solari, 1994, p. 203). Being obedient signifies not talking in the classroom, quietly working, and following directions. In other words, do as the teacher says. These expectations contrast with what white teachers value as classroom behavior and what Delpit (1998 & 2006) was trying to create in her own classroom: “independence, verbal expressiveness; and self-directed activities” (Okagaski & Sternberg, 1993; Ortiz-Colon, 1985, as cited in Zayas & Solari, 1994, p. 203). As researchers and teachers interacted and collaborated, it became clear that the teachers held firmly to the *portarse bien* (carry yourself well) belief of children's behavior. Likewise, for me, a Hispanic researcher, this expectation felt right and familiar. Familiar because this was my experience as a first-generation student in the U.S. education system. I was taught that I not only represented myself in the public school system, the local elementary school and in the

classroom, but also my whole family and their reputation. Carrying myself well meant that I obeyed the rules, listened, and sat quietly in my seat; what some teachers, and all of my family, would consider a model student. My parents' endeavor, particularly my mother's, with respect to our (mine and my brothers' and sister's) upbringing, was to ensure that we were bien educados, well-educated as citizens, in school and elsewhere. This included teaching self-regulation, good manners, obedience and respect, to name a few (Bridges et al., 2012). Part of the message received was art is messy and building things using common household things could be unorderly and cause a lack of composure. While being neat and composed are good ways of being or carrying on, there seemed no room for much else. The reminder for this training was the admonishment "pórtate bien con la maestra".

For me, a Hispanic researcher, the child of a Hispanic immigrant, being born in the borderland did not bring automatic belongingness and my perspective is shared as a glimpse into what it is to be a product of borderland birth and schooling as a Hispanic, child of a mestiza whose father and brothers stole across border lines to sweat in fields, to send much needed money back home. Discrimination against the "other or otherness" (Martinez, 2015, p. 154) is still alive and well some thirty years after Anzaldua's writings and helps us to understand the stronghold of the colonial-held definition and indoctrination of what a good student is and what is good education.

My experience resonates with Anzaldua's definition of the borderlands – "a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary where the prohibited, the forbidden and los atravesados (crossers) reside in a place of discomfort as they negotiate between the conflicting forces in such margins" (Aigner-Varoz, 2000, p. 49, translation added). The borderland is also a space to think of otherness as a place to grow and create a different way of being. The struggle to deprogram from colonialism, for the Hispanic researcher, has been an arduous task that has taken years of acknowledging and embracing what a good student is, separate

from the powerful influence of settler colonialism and its effects on the education of borderland students. But stepping into the school and the classroom research site reminded me of all that my mother admonished as I stepped into my first-grade classroom – "pórtate bien", carry myself well, behave because you represented the family, but there was more to it than family reputation. There is the history of my mother's people, my people. My ancestors tell the story of the Spanish conquest and later the French occupation of Mexico – a nation dominated and indoctrinated into the settler colonialism that set the tone for those words, portarse bien. Anzaldua's (1987) reflections of what it means to be Mexican-American in the borderland means being different or other, somehow not fitting in either the Mexican or American culture, a delicate and sometimes painfully narrow journey, a path she likened to "a thin edge of barbed wire" (p. 3). Otherism is understood even if never explicitly articulated and that understanding continues to be saddled on those born to mestizos on the borderland even if their firstborn cry is on U.S. soil. Borderland mestizos learn to move between two cultures and the intersectionality of those cultures, including and perhaps especially, behavior expectations without truly identifying with either side of the border.

### **Narratives of Quality in Early Childhood Art Education, Art Education, Makerspace Education, and those of the Research Team**

Specific to this study that focused on pre-k and kindergarten art and makerspace interventions are early childhood art education philosophies and approaches. In the UK, Canada, and United States lead researchers in the field of early childhood art education often advocate for certain notions of quality that could be characterized as reconceptualized, progressive, post-developmental, largely child centered, and inclusive of children's and family's agency and voice (Cinquemani, 2014; Kalin & Kind, 2006; Kind, 2014; McClure, 2013; McClure et al., 2017; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2017; Park, 2021; Sakr, 2017; Schulte, 2015; Sunday, 2015, 2018; Thompson, 2015; Trafi-Prats, 2017; Kaplan, 2019).

While these voices and approaches are multiple and varied, they are largely monolithic in their rejection of learning models, educational practices, and research approaches commonly expressed within the larger fields of education and early childhood education that uphold deep connections to developmental psychology (Thompson, 2017), the positivistic scientific model of study and verification (Lather, 2017, p. 14), and the modernist colonial project of progress. These reconceptualized notions of quality in early childhood art education have helped to shape the larger project of art education and align with aspects of engineering education. Curricular commonalities between art and engineering education are found particularly in makerspaces, early childhood makerspaces, and within the engineering design process (Golding & Kaplan, 2021). Both art education and engineering education tend to focus on or privilege certain approaches and desired learning outcomes or practiced learning attributes. These tend toward notions of creativity, initiative taking, exploration, or what might be considered learner agency. Each of these could be considered an educational technology or a “technology of production, which permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things” (Foucault, 1988, p.18).

We, along with the other researchers on the team, view the project of art education and education as in line with progressive education-constructivist or constructionist. To varying degrees, we identified with early childhood art education reconceptualized notion of early childhood education. What this meant in practice was that we outwardly advocated for a constructionist approach to education in our makerspace in which learning was holistic, meaning that STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math) as well as literacy were practiced as emerging within project-based or problem-based experiential, explorative learning. The two major threads of constructionism and STEAM represented the research team’s progressive positioning toward a particular notion of best practices that involved a privileging of a certain kind of pedagogy and educational philosophy over others. Constructionism is a project-based, child-

centered approach that advocates for “experiential learning where students engage in exploration, create things that are personally meaningful, and share them with others” (Griffin, 2019, p. 234). Sheridan (2020) claims, “studio art education can be thought of as a prototype of constructionist learning” explaining that, “in studio art classes, students are typically engaged ...on the construction of an artifact in response to open-ended prompts” (p. 323). Furthermore, our understanding of the makerspace as STEAM as opposed to STEM led our belief in a holistic approach to makerspaces in which the ARTS visual and language arts (Spanish and English) were as much a part of the experience as other subjects, and we discussed the function of separating out activities and outcomes by subject or discipline as an adult driven function of schooling and developmentalism.

We prioritized active, play-based, or exploratory learning including empirical unfoldings, practices, and mindsets representative of art, science, technology, and mathematics, and child-centered problem solving and critical thinking, over representational or rote-type learning. Despite what we say later about progressive art education as a technological apparatus, we very much believe in what contemporary progressive art education and early childhood art education have to offer students. We believe that the cognitive attributes and attitudinal dispositions exercised through discursive, constructivist and constructionist art education practices are important for American children and should be available to all children especially those on the margins.

We believed that quality early childhood education should be situated and responsive, that children should be able to learn through hands-on constructionist approaches (Papert & Harel, 1991) or that students should learn through provocative, materials-rich, explorative activities, that their learning should build off what they know and who they are, and that structural understandings are learned through fluency. In other words, ideas and thoughts unfold through practices, process, and material explorations. This also meant that we valued the products of this type of instruction over

other products. In both makerspace and art studio practices these products often take the form of acumen, attributes, or “general cognitive and attitudinal dispositions” (Hetland et al., 2013, p. 7). This means that, in studio arts and makerspaces, student characteristics or behaviors are cultivated rather than specific objects of learning. The studio habits of mind (Hetland et al., 2007, 2013; Hogan et al., 2018), the six C’s of positive technological development in early childhood makerspaces<sup>1</sup> (Bers et al., 2018; Bers, 2021), and the engineering process (Lachapelle & Cunningham, 2007) replace student’s demonstration or possession of specific objects of content with the enactment of processes and the performance of desired dispositions. They define what it means to “portarse bien” or to carry oneself well or behave a certain way. These curriculum technologies no longer promulgate notions of quality in terms what students know (epistemology) rather these apparatuses produce notions of ontological quality – they dictate what are in and of themselves desirable qualities within a student (or identity or culture). They define quality and how one might “portarse bien”.

### Heather’s Narrative of Quality

For the Hispanic art educators in my (Heather’s) teacher education program, their entanglement with whiteness and colonialism transgresses any dualistic notions of social justice I may have learned or experienced in terms of whiteness’s relation to blackness (which in and of itself is complex). As frontera they defy easy categories of belonging, of settlement. Racial identification as white may contradict feelings of belonging with newer racialized terms like Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), Spanish/English fluency may vary, and cultures within the ethnic category Hispanic may differ greatly depending on homeland. Conversely, my identity as white, despite my Jewish ethnicity, is

(relatively) uncomplicated especially along the context of the border where my whiteness goes unquestioned. Yet I am certain that because of my Jewish ethnic identity, I can locate academic technologies of progressive education along a timeline where a similar social and political apparatus of progressive education befell Jewish, Irish, and Italian immigrants at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These educational technologies were intended to lift, better, and to assimilate masses of fresh immigrants, in much the same way that contemporary progressive educational technologies intend. Despite believing deeply that all children should have the opportunities that art and makerspace technologies offer, I am untethered enough from the context and yet invested enough in the project and the people it serves to see the ways that it is both a service and disservice to this group.

Moreover, I am largely unhappy with and exasperated by the interventionist approach that unfolded as our research methodology. It made plain just how powerful my role as outsider, as white settler, as conquistador is within the educational system, which to me is deeply unsettling. That we, strangers, are taken at our face value as expert, as “la maestra”, and that we need not observe, participate in, or even consult the cultural customs of the school, district, or region before not only conducting a research project but also implementing curricular interventions undermines my sense of quality research and reveals layers of recurring white supremacy.

As the teachers pushed back against our progressive notions of quality, I came to see that I do not belong and yet I am granted access, invited in. I can see how my power works, and I see that doors are open to me because I am the ultimate “la maestra.” I am the institution, and I am white, academic, and an authority. I can also see how my missteps, because even as they are powerful, can harm. Beyond the educational intervention, we

attributes. The six behaviors that children engage in during makerspace experiences that characterize this broader development include: collaboration, communication, community building, content creation, creativity, and choices of conduct.

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<sup>1</sup> The six C’s of positive technological development in early childhood look beyond traditional products of makerspace activity to proffer that experiential learning in makerspaces promotes the development of holistic

offered little more to the school than its association with the university, which to them is status, and means quite a lot. It is authority, it is the structure of institutional power, and it is white.

Furthermore, my displacement or status as a nomadic academic elite means that I have no institutional memory of the border, no enduring sense of belonging to the language, place, or culture and more importantly, I have not experienced the governmentality of “*pórtate bien con la maestra*”. I have only experienced its instrumentality through the role of invader and outsider. Through this internalized governmentality subjects not only reproduce certain knowledge, but specific ontologies of power and subjectivity are also produced. For Diane and those students for whom I might encourage resistance, the role of “*la maestra*” is doubly wrought for they are both invader and invaded, conquistador and conquered. As troubled as I am by it, I am only one, I am not doubled, and I constantly question the quality of our educational approaches, technologies, and apparatus.

Throughout this paper we use the colloquialism, “*pórtate bien con la maestra*” to characterize and think with acculturated practices that imply colonial control and domination, particularly those that privilege white, English-speaking practices or a comportment toward family marked by tempered behavior, docility, or a reference to discipline. We would be remiss, however, to gloss over the term’s implied sociability or connection or comportment to others. This is particularly important considering critiques of capitalist individualistic character. Within the verb “*pórtarse*” which means to behave is the notion of how carrying oneself is a reflection or relation to others. Likewise, *pórtate* and *pórtarse* derive from the Latin *portar* translates as ‘to hold’, ‘to carry’, or ‘to bear.’ Implied here is a sense of strength or ability to endure, allow, or experience possibly in the face of adversity.

### **Troubling Quality: Reconceptualization through Mestiza/Border Multiplicity**

Reconceptualized notions of early childhood education question the larger narrative of Modernist

truth and, through this dispute, entrenched notions of quality. Reconceptualists like Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (2007) describe the quantitative research practice of normalizing and standardizing quality through positivistic and quantitative research methods designed to institutionalize judgment. They claim that despite how prevalent this practice has become in the Modernist project, quality is nonetheless a notion that resists the decontextualized and totalizing efforts of enlightenment capitalists. Rather, they claim, quality is a function of judgment which is an aesthetic and philosophical pursuit that is very much fractured, multiple, diverse, and contingent. The underlying assumption in this reconceptualized and postmodern perspective is that knowledge, expertise, and quality are notions that, despite the Modernist project to codify, normalize, and delimit, are context based, cultural, and situational. According to Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (2007) notions of quality education are “philosophical issue(s) of value and dispute” that produce “multiple perspectives and ambivalence” (p. 6). We can see the breakdown of these master narratives of quality in the work of authors like Delpit (2006) who question the appropriateness of reconceptualized progressive education for all children while lamenting the homogeneity of curricular approaches.

Delpit’s (2006) concerns stem from her own privileged (institutionally white) progressive education which she finds to be at odds with her own empirical understandings of black children’s reading and writing performances and the relayed anecdotal understandings of other black educators. Ultimately, Delpit (2006) examines how white notions of quality education may ultimately be at odds with the needs and culture of black students who seem to be at least misidentified and misunderstood by largely white progressive educators and at worst entirely absent, invisible, and oppressed by this system of omission.

### **The Complicated Multiplicity of New Mestiza Curriculum**

Like Delpit (1998, 2006), Anzaldúa (1987) carries (*pórtate bien con la maestra*) a sensibility, “*la*

facultad" or "a kind of survival tactic that people caught between the worlds, unknowingly cultivate" (pp. 60-61) that reveals a honing or development of specialized, cultural understanding or strategy that must be attended to for survival and therefore before all other knowledge. In other words, both authors attend to the kind of cultural, racialized, or ethnic knowledge that is fundamental to surviving white technologies. Yet Anzaldúa's ideas push past binaries that might settle out an educational technology that trains students in the behavioral ways of the "culture of power" (Delpit, 1998, p. 282) or delivers 'skills' "demanded by the mainstream" (Delpit, 2006, p. 18). Rather, Anzaldúa offers another way to think curriculum and to think quality. Within the Mestiza are many conceptions of self, many identities, many cultures held together in contrast, contamination, and complexity. Rather than declare border curricula and border notions of quality entirely at odds with white progressive notions of quality; the border seems to hold space for the possibility of many conceptions and performances or carryings (pórtarse) of quality. With this possibility in mind, we revisit our conceptions of quality in the border makerspace.

### **The "Invited" Intervention**

Originally, our research project and curricular intervention was designed as a Reggio-inspired and child-centered makerspace. We, as both an early childhood art education researcher and an early childhood engineering education researcher, understood the project's conception and ultimately the programming it produced to be an amalgamation of an early childhood art studio and an early childhood makerspace. We programmed interventions in two makerspace classrooms and for two separate age groups, pre-k and kindergarten. Though the researchers asked for teacher volunteers to participate with their classes in the makerspace activities, it was later discovered that the pre-kindergarten teacher and kindergarten teachers were voluntold, a sign that there would be obstacles to overcome simply with buy-in to the project.

Even though we were invited we entered the school as interventionists, meaning that we presumed that the school was "in need" of our expertise and that we were able to offer unique opportunities to students that they would not have experienced without our intervention. This kind of thinking is common in early childhood education notions of care and education where children, according to Moss et al. (2000), are often viewed as "in need". However, within a reconceptualized framework this notion of "in need" has been examined by Moss et al. (2000) and has been reconsidered in favor of an image of the child as capable and competent. Looking back, this interventionist approach may have been more enticing to administration and other powerful stakeholders because it promised tangible and (what was believed to be) beneficial outcomes, but as researchers, we realized that this approach and the rhetoric that supported it failed to ask research questions that would have made a successful educational intervention possible. Within this deficit narrative, the University was seen as possessing a kind of expertise and resources not housed within the school. As researchers we failed to examine or to understand that we needed the site in order to perform as academics and experts more than the site needed us, and we were complicit in constructing the school's narrative of need while denying our own. Our research and the research team were seen as doing good for the school and no one questioned the authority of our expertise despite other localized, community-based expertise that existed within the school, teachers, students, and parents. It is also important to note that we may have been granted access to the site, to the children, and to provide STEAM education because children in the border are often viewed doubly in need, first as children and second as a minoritized group (see description of school population above).

As we interacted and invited the three kindergarten teachers to participate in both our programmed weekly makerspace activities and to utilize the makerspace classroom and its wealth of materials and additional instructional space on their own and, as they were able to, we were met with



varying enactments of “*pórtate bien*”. We had hoped that all the teachers would not only be comfortable as participants in the project, but that they might also be co-participants possessing a shared understanding of or even modeling a certain educational comportment of experimentation, agency, and exploration. However, the behavioral research expectation of co-participant was met with varying degree of resistance, meaning that the teachers already possessed standards of quality educational behavior (which translated to research behavior) or their own notions of *pórtarse bien* within their educational context that was somewhat at odds with and acting simultaneously as we conducted the intervention. One teacher even more than the others, seemed to have assimilated the notion of “*pórtarse bien*”. When we discussed the project with her to gauge her comfort with enabling her class’s participation, she expressed deep concern about her performance claiming, ‘I am not sure if this is right’ or ‘am I doing this right?’ This statement simultaneously revealed our power as “*la maestra*” or the educational institution of power and her confusion about how one might begin to participate in unfamiliar and evolving practices of progressive white educational quality.

As researchers, we noted instances where “*portarse*” and “*pórtate bien*” seemed to reverberate in the culture and curriculum of the school. And we believed (erroneously) that our job as researchers was an interventionist one- something that is quite common in educational research and art education- the idea that some remedy or some technology must be applied or that schools and education need us to identify a problem and to produce a technology or apparatus to address that necessity. In spite of this implied role as interventionist, the school’s (i.e. teacher’s) resistance to our technologies forced us to rethink our methods and ultimately our notions of quality. It made plain at least two layers of curricular and institutional technologies and revealed their similarities where we as researchers had assumed they were entirely different.

Rather, as border researchers, our struggles to provide quality art education reveal an important aspect of the border that we knew but took for

granted that there is no singular way of being or educational approach. Initially we viewed the teacher’s difficulty, confusion, and resistance to our progressive art education apparatus as incommensurable: we believed that only one “best” approach was desirable (which of course was ours). We both experienced frustration with the conflict that our understandings created. Heather’s discontent stemmed from the sense that contact constituted trespass and the act of perpetually re-inscribing white power structures. Diane’s stemmed from self-experienced wounds of acculturation and domination traced, reenacted, and maintained in the school’s and teacher’s performance of “*pórtarse bien con la maestra*”. What we came to see was that, despite our less-than-ideal research approach, we were mistaken to believe that any one notion of quality befits the border. Rather we came to understand and look for the many possible intersections, contaminations, and hybrids, even those that seem antagonist, that constitute the multivalent character of knowing and being on the border.

## Conclusion

Education is a technology of settlement, and for that matter, so is art education. It upholds and promotes certain approaches, values, and outcomes. None of which is truer than another, but which is the product of an aesthetic and a politic. This paper explores notions of what quality art education looks like on the border through two researchers’ experience programming early childhood art education through studio and makerspace explorations. Each confronts their conceptions of quality, identity, and belonging through the lens of white settler colonialism to uncover the ways that educational technologies and apparatuses reproduce subjects who echo a certain aesthetic and politic. Ultimately, these apparatuses produce academic subjects within a system that reproduces certain power structures and reifies long wrought inequities. Finally, the juxtaposition of two representations of quality leads to a deeper understanding of identity, culture, and curriculum on the border, one where

competing ways of knowing and being constitute a border space of potential, hybridity, contamination, and multiplicity. Ultimately, this multivalent, borderlands notion of quality questions the larger utility or supremacy of recognized notions of quality within progressive art education.

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In this paper, I discuss the Art and Afrofuturism art experience, which asked a group of white participants to grapple with the complicated, exclusionary power systems that scaffold how we see and describe the future through discussion, visual analysis of a contemporary work of art and a collage artmaking project.

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## Who Belongs in the Future: Afrofuturism, Art Education, and Alternative Narratives

**Emily Hogrefe-Ribeiro**

University of Georgia

**Abstract:** This paper describes an art and Afrofuturism art experience that took place during the summer of 2020. Led by an art museum educator, the virtual experience was held over Zoom with a group of ten white adults. The art experience focused on alternative narratives and introduced participants to Afrofuturism as contemporary artistic practice and pedagogical approach. A critical multiculturalism theoretical framework informed the experience, and participants analyzed Afrofuturist art and representations in mass media to interrogate the ways that whiteness influences conceptions of the future in western culture and their own lives. Participants built on what they learned to create collages where they imagined more equitable futures developed from the Afrofuturist themes discussed in the experience.

*Correspondence regarding this article may be sent to the author:*  
[EHOGREFE@uga.edu](mailto:EHOGREFE@uga.edu)

I loved putting my mind in a place of envisioning a positive future without the limits of practicality or likeliness or the challenges of existing structures. And I loved seeing different examples of how Black artists have visualized this.

— Beatrice Mora, Art and Afrofuturism participant

The future seems unrelentingly visible in contemporary discourse. It snaked through the social and political unrest in the United States during the summer of 2020, as massive numbers of protestors took to the streets demanding a different future and an end to racial violence. It shapes scientific dialogue into warning as humans careen towards a hotter, more unstable future in the face of climate change, and it lingers over our everyday during a pandemic, especially in a country seemingly dead-set on making choices that portend evolving economic and social disasters in a not-so-distant future. The future is made and unmade in the present, and what that future looks like depends on who is telling the story. Artists have always depicted the future with imagination, hope, and maybe even a little trepidation.

Critical multiculturalism asks art educators to reconsider the media, language, and aesthetics that we present to students in a way that critiques and invests in alternative ways of knowing and understanding (Acuff, 2015; Knight, 2006). The theory asks us to confront how our work impacts the future. Afrofuturism is a conceptual and pedagogical approach for applying a critical multicultural theoretical framework. As Acuff (2020) explains, “Afrofuturism is about the utopian formulation of a possible model of something that does not yet exist. Re-envisioning semantics in our future art curriculum is key to transgressing repressive social norms and power systems” (p. 20). Having researched Afrofuturism in discussion with artist Wangechi Mutu’s collages for my art history master’s thesis, I was inspired by Acuff’s adaptation of Afrofuturism as

a pedagogy, and I approached this lesson as a way to re-envision my curriculum and teaching practices with Afrofuturism, through the theoretical lens of critical multiculturalism.

When I completed this project, I managed the school and teacher programs at the Georgia Museum of Art, the state museum of Georgia and the University of Georgia campus museum.

I am a white, female museum educator and doctoral student who works primarily with Black and Brown K-12 students. My interest in critical multiculturalism and museum education initially came from my desire to create relevant, critical school programming within the museum. Acuff and Evans (2014) describe critical multiculturalism in art museums as creating “counter-discursive spaces” that destabilize the institutional to break apart ossified and entrenched dominant ideologies and systems of power (p. xxviii). I am always looking for ways to problematize the white, western metanarratives portrayed in art museum galleries, putting critical multiculturalism theory to work in the art museum.

Because this Art and Afrofuturism project was completed during the summer of 2020, I had limited access to participants, and I worked with a group of adult, white, female learners. These participants reflect the identities of art museum repeat-visitors, volunteer docents and most museum educators in the United States, and I wanted to know how critical multiculturalism theory might inform programming for this audience. I wondered if it might be possible to teach about contemporary Afrofuturist art—not just to teach about Afrofuturism—but to use its themes and works of art to challenge whiteness, what Spillane (2015) describes as “white power, knowledge and privilege” (p.57) and prioritize alternative ways of knowing. How could I teach a lesson that used art and visual culture to get white participants to interrogate their own beliefs and develop answers to challenging questions like: How does race impact how we understand our pasts and the future? How do Black contemporary artists use art to address current and historical social inequity

through the lens of Afrofuturism? Why is it important for Black artists to imagine an Afrofuture? How can we use Afrofuturism to analyze current events? What does an equitable speculative future look like for each of us?

In this paper, I discuss the Art and Afrofuturism art experience, or lesson, which asked a group of white participants to grapple with the complicated, exclusionary power systems that scaffold how we see and describe the future through discussion, visual analysis of a contemporary work of art and a collage artmaking project. The program was an organized group who were interested in participating in the experience. Based in Afrofuturism, the art experience discussed the central topics of race, utopia, liberation, and justice with a group of ten white adults. The art experience explored ways in which personal conceptions of the past and future and cultural narratives are coded as white by looking at the way participants had the privilege of framing those ideas without race. Each element of the lesson unpacked and emphasized the need for Black artists to imagine alternative spaces. Building a critical multicultural understanding of these issues, the group examined the ways that Afrofuturist art imagines a different future while drawing attention to the social inequity of the present and the past. As expressed in the beginning quote from a participant reflection, the artmaking project made space for learners to use artmaking to articulate their own equitable, utopian futures based in alternative ways of knowing. It also inspired surprising discussions and realizations from all the participants—including me as the facilitator.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Critical multiculturalism grounded all aspects of the art experience. Critical multiculturalism is an educational theory that finds its roots in Critical Race Theory. A critical multiculturalism framework destabilizes systemic inequity and dominant power structures (Acuff, 2013). The need for critical multiculturalism arose from the term

“multiculturalism” morphing from a transformative pedagogy to an overused and desaturated buzzword. bell hook’s *Teaching to Transgress* (1994) describes multiculturalism as the global acceptance of decentering the west which compels educators to focus on the issue of voice: “Who speaks? Who listens? And why?” (p. 40). Multicultural education theory was created to provide all students, regardless of race, gender or class, an equal opportunity to learn. Over time, “multiculturalism” mutated into a word used for political correctness. The multicultural education framework has been misappropriated, and its powerful ideas desaturated into a mainstream framework that doesn’t threaten “the way things are” and that continues a deracialized discourse, perpetuating the inequalities the theory was created to address. In art education, over time multiculturalism came to signal a benevolent inclusivity that does not critique, or even address, power systems but instead perpetuates harmful, negligent narratives through an embrace of neutrality and an emphasis on cultural tolerance that include the dangers of reinforcing stereotypes and cultural appropriation.

The alternative framework of critical multiculturalism re-centers the complex work of analyzing oppression, institutionalized power structures and the subjugation of non-dominant cultural knowledge and voices (Acuff, 2013; 2015). The theory specifically identifies race as the locus for these intersecting power dynamics and seeks to pull apart hegemonic narratives and combat subjugation. Critical multiculturalism eschews universalized narratives and embraces personal narrative to position cultural difference within these larger systemic contexts. Its activist origins ask educators to center a wider array of voices and critique the unequal systems that have silenced and erased those perspectives. Critical multiculturalism directs educators to ask different questions including: Is this true? Who says so? Who benefits most when people believe it is true? How are we taught to accept that it is true? What are different ways of looking at the problem? (Acuff, 2018). I situated the Art and

Afrofuturism art experience within these guiding questions.

Through discussion, art analysis, and artmaking, the lesson inhabited a (virtual) critically multicultural space of constructive confrontation and critical interrogation (hooks, 1994). The lesson challenged and subverted the group's preconceived cultural assumptions about ideas of the past and the future in a way that critiques power (Acuff, 2015). It helped learners identify for themselves the ways that hegemonic and White supremacist knowledge dominates their understandings of the future. Critical multiculturalism further informed the experience in the artmaking project. A collage activity focused on personal narrative and experience, then invited learners to visualize and articulate their own version of a disrupted future that exists outside the dominant power structures.

Afrofuturism, a term created by cultural critic Mark Dery (1994) in "Black to the Future," provided the central pedagogical tool for the experience. Afrofuturism imagines a future where Black people are transformed from the racial, social, and economic violence of the past and present to live in futures that value Black existence and African diasporic culture (Acuff, 2020). It is a critically multicultural pedagogy that "disrupt(s) universalized knowledge and counter(s) normalized narratives" (Acuff, 2015, p. 33). By reimagining technology, identity, and liberation, Afrofuturism posits a future where "Black identity does not have to be negotiated with awful stereotypes, a dystopian view of the race, and abysmal sense of powerlessness, or a reckoning of hardened realities;" it instead declares that "fatalism is not a synonym for blackness" (Womack, 2013, p. 9). Afrofuturism reframes dominant discussions about the future and contemporary art to encompass a lived experience beyond existing structures. By adopting this lens, the Art and Afrofuturism lesson asked participants to learn and to think about a future outside traditional narratives.

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<sup>1</sup> All images of Abu Simbel in this article from Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Margaret Fisher Fund, which grants permission for scholarly use

Acuff (2020) explains that "Afrofuturism requires art teachers to rethink the media that they cover in their art curriculum. A future art curriculum cannot be led by Western ideals" (p. 19). This maxim dictated how I chose components for the art experience. Content in each section incorporated and prioritized Black voices. Multimedia clips from the movie "Malcolm X" and an interview with former First Lady Michelle Obama encouraged participants to draw their insights and distinctions directly from lived experiences described by Black people. The work of art we discussed, [Ellen Gallagher's Abu Simbel \(Figure 1\)](#)<sup>1</sup>, itself exemplifies a rethinking of Western ideals. Gallagher, a contemporary Black American female artist, completed the work by performing an artistic intervention on a photogravure of Abu Simbel that she found at the Freud Museum in London (Harvard Museums, n.d.). She manipulated a Western representation of an ancient African location, reinterpreting it with racial,



historical, and futurist iconography.  
Figure 1: Abu Simbel, by Ellen Gallagher. Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Margaret Fisher Fund.

In addition, Afrofuturist pedagogical elements encouraged students to "develop their futures *through* art curriculum" (Acuff, 2020, p. 15). The art



experience encouraged this by creating space for revision and adaptation in participants' collage making as they continued to engage with Afrofuturist theory and aesthetics. With the art project, any inclination to create work that engaged with stereotypically "African" imagery or motifs was discouraged, and participants were reminded they were not creating Afrofuturist works of art. Instead, participants were invited to make art that adopted the Afrofuturist language of possibility, liberation, and justice to represent a future that rejects cultural subjugation, White supremacy, and heteropatriarchy in our society.

### Project Description

The Art and Afrofuturism art experience was developed based on my experience as a museum educator. It emphasized close looking at a single work of art and encouraged personal and collective meaning-making through a dialogic style of learning. The lesson took two and a half hours and engaged a White audience of mostly women in their 20s and 30s. This community of college-educated adult learners benefits from social and cultural privilege. The group had various levels of visual literacy—with some being experienced in discussing art in a group or class and others being unfamiliar with the practice. Despite this, all the participants are regular to semi-regular museum visitors. In relation to the concepts the lesson would introduce, most of the group felt comfortable with social justice terms and ideas. Some participants had heard of Afrofuturism, and a few were completely new to the idea.

The overall goal of the art experience was to develop critical multicultural understanding and promote cross-cultural dialogue and learning. It introduced the learners to Afrofuturist theory, pedagogy, and art. The experience took place on a zoom call that I led by sharing my computer screen because of the COVID-19 pandemic. I adapted a virtual tour format (based on current, evolving best practices) that the Georgia Museum of Art and other museums were using due to social distancing

requirements. The virtual tour used a presentation of images of artwork and other media to prompt close-looking, discussion and other engagement with works of art. Participants provided their own materials for collage making, and I created a Powerpoint presentation for our lesson. The participants were engaged learners and active listeners, and the experience helped them contextualize current events and challenge their assumptions about conceptions of the future.

A writing prompt followed by group discussion where participants described their past and futures in 5-10 words introduced the art experience. The writing activity rooted the lesson in personal experience. Some common themes in participants' reflections were sunshine, snacks, loving pasts, teenage angst in the past, and hope or concern for the future. These ideas did not explicitly or implicitly relate to race. The next step of the discussion introduced clips from *Malcolm X* and an interview with Michelle Obama. In each clip, Blackness plays an integral role in each person's understanding of the past and how other (white) people dictate or describe their futures for them. *Malcolm X* reflects on being told that he couldn't be a lawyer because he's Black, and Michelle Obama describes a guidance counselor who made assumptions about her race and socioeconomic background and told her she "wasn't Princeton material" (CBS This Morning, 2018).

After we watched these clips, I asked participants to draw a distinction between our discussion of our pasts and the life experiences described in the video. I worked to get the group to tease out the differences between their white understanding of the future and the explicitly raced descriptions of the future dictated to Black people in the *Malcolm X* and Michelle Obama interview clips. This got the group to consider how "knowledge of the dominant power is normalized, and consequently universalized" (Acuff, 2013, p. 220). This discussion primed the group to begin exploring alternative cultural knowledge in the clip from the film *Black Panther*.

Next, we watched and discussed aesthetic and conceptual choices in a scene from *Black Panther*—

an Afrofuturist film (Ryzik, 2018; Staff, 2018). The film reimagines traditional African architecture and clothing in a way that projects African cultural heritage powerfully into the future. During this discussion, participants compiled a series of observations about how *Black Panther* imagined an imaginary present in a different way from the prior videos and their own initial descriptions. Participants noted that the film suggested an independent future of imaginary spaces that weren't necessarily new but that did challenge established racial, societal, and natural hierarchies: only Black characters were present, each character greeted each other with respect despite class, the ruler was female, and despite clear technological advancement in the visualization of Wakanda, it seemed to prioritize and respect the natural world.

This analysis of mass media transitioned into a close-looking discussion of Ellen Gallagher's *Abu Simbel*. I introduced the work using the inquiry-based teaching method Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) (Housen, Yenawine, & Brookshire, 2018). This learner-directed teaching strategy invites participants to make observations and connections for themselves instead of adopting the "banking style of education" (Freire, 1970). The participants developed a complex understanding of the work by finding answers to a series of three open-ended, repeating questions.<sup>2</sup> The group considered what they had learned about Afrofuturism as they made observations about the work, and they didn't ask for context or additional information because they were deeply invested in figuring out what was going on together. One overarching analysis developed by the end of the VTS exercise: participants noted parallels between alien abduction and the slave trade, and they surmised that the work of art was reimagining the existence of Black people in America as a result of slavery.

To introduce more context into the discussion, I centered the conversation with a description from

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<sup>2</sup> The three VTS curriculum questions are: what's going on in this picture?; what do you see that makes you say that?; what more can we find?

Gallagher, who explains her work as "a tricked-out, multi-directional flow from Freud to ancient Egypt to Sun Ra to George Clinton" (Harvard Museums, n.d.). At this point I departed from a strict version of VTS and provided background information on visual elements of the work that they had repeatedly wondered about and played a trailer for *Space is the Place*, a blaxploitation film that inspired much of the work. By layering information into our discussion after participants had already analyzed the work themselves, I was able to emphasize an element of Afrofuturism that our discussion had previously overlooked—that the idea builds from visual and conceptual representations of the past. It is not just a reimagining of the past or just a utopian look forward. Almost everyone who participated noted that element as something new they learned about Afrofuturism.

After finishing up our analysis, I asked participants to begin working on a collage that pulled themes from our discussion of Afrofuturism into their works of art. I reiterated that we were not making Afrofuturist artwork. Instead, we were centering alternative narratives and representational strategies as a group of White artmakers. The collage activity encouraged learners to work like artists as they developed their renderings of an equitable speculative future. I then paused our collaging to start a discussion on the recent uprisings and protests including Black Lives Matter and the Defund the Police movements, connecting our exploration of art and artmaking to immediately relevant topics. After a thoughtful, critical discussion, participants went back to artmaking, revising their works of art based on a discussion of current events. After 40 minutes, everyone shared their collages and detailed what elements of Afrofuturism were reflected in their works of art.

## Project Findings

I always thought of Afrofuturism as simply an imagination of a future without whiteness or the white lens. But I learned that it does draw on the past and focuses on injustice and oppression, which made me realize that Afrofuturism is the antithesis of Black erasure.

— Sam Busa, Art and Afrofuturism participant

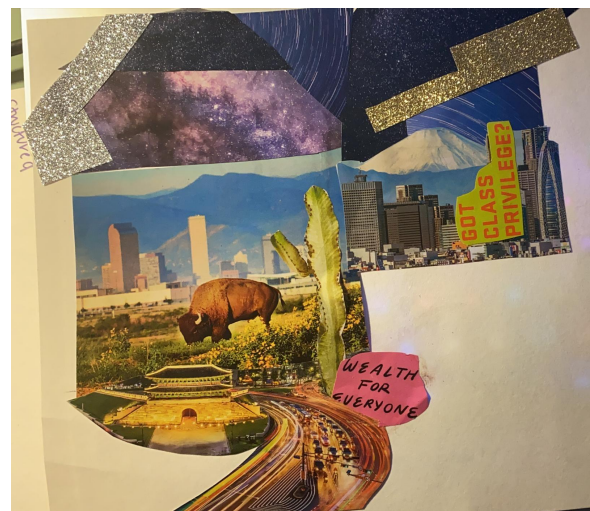
The most surprising and satisfying element of this lesson happened when one of the participants challenged an assumption that I made about the Black Lives Matter protests and activist movements. I gave participants about 20 minutes to work on their collages initially, and then I stopped them and showed some images of the current protests and asked how we might view Black Lives Matter through an Afrofuturist lens. After thinking about it for a few moments, one of the participants remarked that they didn't think the protests were Afrofuturist at all. They stated that the activism is directed towards white people, and Black people asking for the very basic request of not being murdered. There didn't seem to be anything emancipatory or liberating or separately and powerfully Black in asking for the bare minimum consideration as human beings.

Others chimed in that they agreed with the point, and I asked if anyone else had a different perspective. One person felt like the cultural reckoning created by the protest and movements were making space for Black joy and Black lives not constrained or represented solely by oppression, and that felt relevant. Someone else mentioned that the greater societal awareness and acceptance of the need for strictly Black spaces aligned with Afrofuturist ideas. Another participant pointed out that the BLM movement was demanding an end to inherited violence and generational trauma, echoing the Afrofuturist theme of referencing and then re-imagining the past for the future.

While I planned on introducing current events to get the participants to reconsider their collages and think more critically about Afrofuturism, the conversation did not go in the direction I originally

anticipated. I thought participants would feel compelled to layer in elements of current events into their collages. This did not occur, but the final discussion exemplified the Afrofuturist art educational strategy of working through the curriculum, which ultimately impacted the themes of their collages. For example, many focused the artmaking on representations of interiority—joy, space to grow—as a manifestation of the realizations they had during the art experience. The questions participants asked were beyond those that I could have anticipated as I planned the experience—the questions emerged through the lesson and had a profound impact on everyone involved in the art experience. Participants developed new tools to analyze and contextualize current events with the future in mind. In addition, the group did the work of challenging the existing power structures that demanded the need for protests as well as unpacking the goals and impact of the movements as well.

Participants were able to articulate and center a Black future, activating critical multicultural theory as they confronted the way their previous ideation of the future circulated around the axis of Whiteness. This transformation was apparent in their collages. One participant went back to their original list of words for the future and built a collage by rethinking each term using their newly developed Afrofuturist lens. Another included a call to action and structural changes in their representations (Figure 2). The collage features elements of text that reference



privilege and wealth—calling into question who inherits these things and who does not. The participant used overlapping images of stars and the sky to indicate a different future filled with possibility, noting that she wanted the top of the collage to juxtapose the busy city scenes of the bottom to show something yet undiscovered.

Figure 2: Final collage from Art and Afrofuturism participant



Figure 3: Final collage from Art and Afrofuturism participant

One participant focused on alternative ways of knowing that relate to the earth (Figure 3). Their collage focused on generative power that exists outside of human hierarchies and systems of oppression and emphasized BIPOC traditions of land stewardship and conservation that are crucial for their imagined future. The participant overlaid images of vegetables with hand-drawn leaves, emphasizing growth and the blooming of something new. To reorient a magazine cut-out showing groupings of people, the participants colored in their bodies with pencil so their identities were confusing, emphasizing those who have been erased from their history, but also hinting at a shared commitment to the future.

### Conclusion

In this paper, I have discussed an Art and Afrofuturism art experience that explored alternative narratives. The two-and-a-half-hour lesson was informed by critical multiculturalism theory and introduced participants to Afrofuturism through mass media depictions and artistic representations. The critical multiculturalism theoretical framework worked to challenge the expectation that the future is white in Western culture and asked participants to create a collage illustrating a more equitable future developed from the Afrofuturist themes discussed. In a post-lesson evaluation, participants reported finding the experience impactful and eye opening. It confronted their ways of seeing the world, inspired a critical examination of current events, and offered the group space to think of a future that is something different. In the same way that I was re-envisioning the curriculum, the participants were re-envisioning their futures. The Art and Afrofuturism art experience created a “counter-discursive space” that challenged established systems of understanding race and visual culture. The discussions participants had that challenged their unexamined ideologies are crucially important for white educators working with BIPOC students to also have. In addition, providing anyone space to consider and create alternative, equitable futures offers a powerful opportunity for tumultuous times.

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Mantles in the Museum functionally disrupts the binary of museum insider and outsider as it is a group pedagogical experience that is not sanctioned or controlled by the museum yet does not violate any official rules provided to visitors to the museum. The disruptive aspect of the game can invite museum insiders to become immersed in the pedagogical experience of game play.

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## Whose Art Museum?: Immersive Gaming as Irruption

**Jason Cox**  
University of Toledo

**Lillian Lewis**  
Virginia Commonwealth University

**Abstract:** This paper introduces Mantles in the Museum, an immersive game that helps ameliorate student discomfort in art museums and to support discourse in, through, and around art museums. Within the game the students take on the roles of critics who use one of five interpretive frameworks, often differing from the student's own, to select works from a real museum to go to an international exhibition. Assuming these roles empowers students to be in the museum and to assess the works, students are given leave to engage in a vigorous critique process and to examine the art-world from a new perspective.

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Correspondence regarding this article may be sent to the author: [jarmec@gmail.com](mailto:jarmec@gmail.com) and [lewisl8@vcu.edu](mailto:lewisl8@vcu.edu)

## Introduction: Why would I talk about art?



Figure 1: Two players discuss a painting.

*She stands in front of an abstract expressionist painting, hoping she will not be required to speak about the work. She feels no enthusiasm for talking about a painting from 1950 made by a white man that seems to lack clear subject matter. "What did the instructor tell us about responding to non-representational artworks?" she wondered. Her mouth feels dry, and her palms are clammy with nervous perspiration. She wants to enjoy her first art museum visit, but it is challenging.*

When art educators bring secondary and undergraduate students to art museums, they often find students hesitate to engage in discussion about the works they see there. This paper introduces *Mantles in the Museum*, an immersive game that the authors designed to help ameliorate our students' discomfort in art museums and to support discourse in, through, and around art museums. Our racially diverse undergraduate students attend two public universities in two upper midwest post-industrial cities. They were raised in predominantly working class and lower middle-class households and over a third are first generation college students. Most of our students had not voluntarily visited an art

museum. Knowing this about our students, the authors examined existing research studying multiple dimensions of student hesitation and discomfort in art museums prior to designing *Mantles in the Museum*. Through our literature review we found these hesitations can arise from students' lack of knowledge about art, art museums, or the unspoken social etiquette of art museums (Christidou, 2016; Leahy, 2012). Students may also be experiencing psychological discomfort in art museums due to the differential in power between "visitors" and institutional insiders (including their teachers). Other sources of psychological discomfort can include physical or mechanical surveillance, the hospitality of front of house, educators or other museum employees, wayfinding signage, architecture that bears the "burden of nostalgia, dignity, and stuffiness" (Hein 2000, p. 19). Another important source of hesitation may be the students' increasing awareness of and concerns about art museums' exhibition and collecting practices. These practices have roots in western colonization, and, in many cases, art museums continue to exhibit artifacts and artworks acquired through colonization or whose content celebrates colonization (Jung, 2014). Despite these hesitations, art educators bring students to art museums with an expectation that their students will gain deeper or more meaningful connections to works of art. This expectation is often a forgone conclusion that does not account for the aforementioned facets of students' hesitations to discuss art and is predicated on socially conditioned assumptions that artifacts, works of art, and the institutions themselves have inherent universal cultural value to society.

A growing number of art museum staff and museum scholars are actively working to raise institutional awareness of the colonial and capitalist visual logics that form the bedrock of collection, exhibition, education, and public programming practices (Carlisle Kletchka, 2018; Murawski, 2014; Porter, 2014; Shanks, 2021). These museologists challenge assumptions about art museums' universal cultural value. These challenges to traditional

practices have been iterated through a noticeable increase in collection accessions of works by underrepresented national artists and international artists. Art museums have begun to acknowledge the difficult matter of deaccession or repatriation of artifacts and artworks with problematic histories or provenance indicating theft by colonizing groups. Some contemporary art museums circumvent the difficulties of navigating collections by becoming non-collecting institutions. Most of these non-collecting institutions and some collecting institutions have revised their curatorial practices to respond to public interest in making legible connections between exhibitions and the sociocultural milieu from which they arise and histories that inform or resist them. Museum educators can also lead the charge for institutional change. Art museum educators have broadened their approaches to teaching to extend learning beyond the expert monologue centered on an object. Dialogic and interactive learning has become commonplace in art museums (Christidou, 2013; Falk, 2009, Hubbard, 2007; Simon, 2010). Public programs in some art museums have also reflected a growing awareness of the importance to lay bare the colonial and capitalist aspects of the history and functions of art museums (Kundu & Kalin, 2018) through their efforts to host programs that are accessible to people outside traditional working hours, have no cost barrier, intentionally include accommodations for people with disabilities, and address topics that have broader social importance beyond highlighting aspects of an exhibition alone. This internal critique of histories and current practices in art museums by museologists as well as critiques from external scholars may result in institutional changes to collecting and preservation practices, curatorial processes, the aims and outcomes of education, and the potentials and limitations of public programming. However, this critique is often, as Shanks (2021) states, "not against the colonial and capitalist logics that undergird such museums. Rather...critique is directed towards visibility as such, which has created

and reifies these logics" (p. 61). Thus, internally driven critique does not repair colonizing history, but may interrupt museological practices in ways that can provide new models for people to view works of art.

The authors acknowledge these critiques and changes are worthwhile and may result in a wider array of people finding new connections with objects within these transformed art museums. As Choi (2016) states, "By acknowledging that subject/object/space in the museum is contingent and relational, we move away from reductive binaries to open up creative approaches to regard the displayed artworks as objects having imminent agency" (p. 80). Nonetheless, internal changes to art museums to date have been inconsistent and cannot immediately overcome the historical and ideological gravity art museums have come to represent. As such, the authors worked together for more than two years to develop and pilot a pedagogical tool that assists students in learning to engage in art criticism discourse in the art museum. Rather than echoing the work of museum educators, we approached the development of this pedagogical tool with an outsider's viewpoint in mind. We solicited input from our undergraduate students about the reasons they had been hesitant to talk about works of art or reluctant to visit art museums. Creating a disturbance to institutional insider expectations of typical art museum visitor behavior was also intentionally built into our pedagogical tool, both to empower students to share their perspectives and to address their concerns. The conversations we had with our undergraduate students about their ambivalence towards art museums or art criticism had a few common threads. Undergraduate students said they had infrequently been in art museums, often only as elementary school students, and frequently in short, docent-led tours that were not open-ended or conversational. Undergraduate students also expressed that they felt many of the artworks displayed in museums are either not works they could relate to personally or works that represent ideologies or cultures that they perceive to



conflict with their own histories and identities. With these conversations in mind, the authors reviewed research about pedagogical tools developed outside art museum settings. We drew from research in emancipatory pedagogies, game studies, process drama, and social theory to create Mantles in the Museum. Mantles in the Museum is an immersive game designed for undergraduate students to engage in art criticism in an enjoyable yet critical way while also problematizing assumptions some students had about art museums. Simultaneously, Mantles in the Museum functionally disrupts the binary of museum insider and outsider as it is a group pedagogical experience that is not sanctioned or controlled by the museum yet does not violate any official rules provided to visitors to the museum. The disruptive aspect of the game can invite museum insiders to become immersed in the pedagogical experience of game play. The fluidity of Mantles in the Museum is not a matter of coincidence, rather, it is an intentional aspect of the game.

The term immersive game, according to Murray (2017), is a metaphor derived from the physical experience of being submerged in water. Players seek the same feeling from a psychologically immersive experience that we do from a plunge in water: the sensation of being surrounded by a completely different reality. Mantles in the Museum facilitates another reality where meaningful discourse about works of art can happen without the same social risks of extemporaneous speaking. The game supports social learning for students who have limited prior knowledge of art history and art criticism as well as students with more experience with analyzing works of art.

## Immersive Games in Education



Figure 2: Players wearing a variety of costume elements during the game

*The jacket and accessories felt comfortable but different than her everyday clothes. They helped her imagine herself as F. Mavi, a scholar who wouldn't see just simple shapes and colors in the piece she was looking at but would be able to analyze the work using language that crossed barriers of time and space. While she had struggled to connect to expressionist works in previous classes, she knew that today she could be their champion. At least, for as long as the game lasted.*

Educational immersive games do not just simulate specific interactions, but also disrupt assumptions through the collaborative creation of an imagined reality that suspends everyday routines,

rules, and expectations. Play scholar Mary Flanagan (2010) tells us that playing immersive games and creating art spills over into our lives as experiential acts that abstract everyday actions into defamiliarized instruments. Through engagement with these instruments as a fantasy-self "other", Jason Cox (2015) holds that a player in an immersive game can envision a different standpoint (gender, ethnicity, sexuality) as a human possibility (Greene, 1995). As Martin Andresen (2012), a scholar on educational roleplaying, says in the educational *Bringing fiction alive* (p. 17), "Putting yourself in the mindset of another character, trying to see the world through their eyes, will often change your view and make you think differently, also on the topics of the real world." This engagement with a fantasy-self constitutes an act of *embodied arts-based inquiry* (Leavy, 2015).

Patricia Leavy's attributes for embodied arts-based inquiry include a key attribute that we took as our focus in developing the game: that practitioners are simultaneously a medium, an artwork, and researchers. Mantles in the Museum players exemplify this when they develop a costumed character, engage in semi-structured discourse, and gather and analyze data about works of art through interactions with other players and careful observations. Immersive games as embodied arts-based inquiry also allows players to reflect on the relationship between the beliefs of their performed character identities and their actual lives. As Eliot Eisner (2008) claims, "experiencing a situation in a form that allows you to walk in the shoes of another is to know one aspect of it" (p.6), meaning that the players are given the opportunity to perceive, understand, and value these counter-narratives. In presenting the potential of emergent counter-narratives, which is to say narratives that challenge established views with those that are inclusive and socially just (Desai 2010, in Whitehead 2012), it is important to note that playing a person from a different culture, race, or background in a game does not equate to a complete understanding of what it is like to live someone else's life, but rather that it

makes a space for relating to situations that are outside of a player's quotidian experience. According to Ayers (2004), the players enter with *knowledge, information, and experiences* that are specific to their identity, and because the character only exists as a simulacrum of these traits, they cannot know something that the player does not. However, they can switch to a different "frame" (Goffman, 1974) than the player's own, which may suggest different perceptions and reactions to situations. It is the tension between the player's primary frame and the assumed frame of their character that may generate a counter-narrative "to make visible that which dominant institutions render invisible" (Desai 2020).

The juxtapositions between personal narratives and the assumed counter-narratives provoke introspection and personal development that supports community building and enhances the potential of systemic change. In the words of Maxine Greene (1995) if "we can see our givens as contingencies, then we may have an opportunity to posit alternative ways of living and valuing and to make choices" (p.23). The emergent counter-narratives are interrogated by the players in a temporary *community of inquiry* that lasts for as long as the game does. According to Rita Irwin (2004) communities of inquiry act as a "site for weaving the personal and societal aspects of our lives together, helping us make sense of our lives and the lives of others" (p. 80) that disrupt our preconceptions to forge and reforge the meanings that emerge through their interaction.

The experience of interactions in immersive games is akin to John Dewey's (1934) "vital experience", an "interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events" (p. 246) that in this case encompasses both the quotidian and imagined realities of the players. This form of vital experience is interpreted through a cycle of inception, development, and fulfillment, and it does not limit the outcomes of the experience to those decided upon by the organizers prior to participant interaction, as is the practice for some educational role-play scenarios (Nickerson, 2008). In "Role-

playing games in arts, research and education” (2014), Cox says that role-playing facilitates “exploring and evoking unfamiliar ideas and emotions, including an understanding that identity is a shifting and intertextual construct” (p.383.) This shift in identity is central to the experience of Mantles in the Museum.

Equally essential however is the context in which play occurs during Mantles in the Museum, which is to say within a real-life museum. By juxtaposing a fantasy narrative over the frame of the museum, the game grants its players the opportunity to critique the structures that contain the works as well as the works themselves. As Miguel Sicart (2014) says in his book *Play Matters*, “Play appropriates events, structures, and institutions to mock them and trivialize them, or make them deadly serious. The carnival of the Middle Ages, with its capacity to subvert conventions and institutions in a suspension of time and power, was a symptom of freedom. Carnavalesque play takes control of the world and gives it to the players for them to explore, challenge, or subvert” (p. 3-4.) In this sense the museum becomes a true playground (Sicart, 2014, p.52), defined by the tension between the authority it holds in our world and the influence the players have over it within the narrative of Mantles in the Museum.

The distance that exists between the actual and diegetic authority of the players and the characters in Mantles in the Museum does not completely collapse during play, because the assumed experience of the latter is not integrated into the identity of the former. Effectively a player assumes the position of being both a student and that student’s “ignorant master”, a construct that according to Rancière (2004) is not defined by what they know but by their capacity to direct their students into the unknown. It should be noted that Rancière is suspicious of role-swapping in the arts, and that his suspicion is based on the forced diffusion of individual perspectives into a uniform and communal whole and on the basis that it lacks the disruptive potential that he feels art should embody (Rancière, 2004, Lewis, 2013). However he also

recognizes that spectating is an active process of interpretation, which within Mantles in the Museum is disrupted by dialog, inquiry, and reflection (Freire, 2005) and by encounters with works of art (Greene, 1995). This intertextuality combines with the game studies concept of “first person audience” (Sandberg, 2004), allowing for a view both from the player’s own eyes and those of the character’s whose actions they dictate. The character’s diegetic permission to do things the player would not gives them an “alibi” (Montola, 2010) to do as Lewis (2013) suggests for the democratizations of education: to rupture “conventional distributions of who can speak and think, what can be seen, and, finally, what can be heard” within a museum.

### Overview of the Game

*She and her classmate hit an impasse while they were in character. Where F. Mavi preferred tightly structured works, E. Karaka insisted that any work they sent to the exhibition had to create an emotionally moving experience. Fortunately, after some discussion they were able to agree that the Yayoi Kusama installation Infinity Mirror would satisfy them both.*

The background narrative structure that underpins Mantles in the Museum is that a group of art critics has been invited to a museum gala where they must together decide on three objects from the collection to send to an international exhibit hosted by The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Students use a character template to develop an art critic character for game play. Each art critic character template embraces an interpretive frameworks (Barrett, 2012) for evaluating and understanding art that guides their understanding and assessment of an artwork, and influences the kinds of work they will support for exhibition.

This game is designed for at least five players, takes about two hours to play, and requires the full game booklet and Mantle Character Cards, which can be downloaded for free at (website address).

Familiarity with some art vocabulary is useful because it gives the characters shared terminology, but an in-depth knowledge of the arts is not required to play. Players are also expected to do some light research about their interpretive framework before the game, and will ideally have at least one costume item (such as a special hat or coat) to help them separate their character's identity from their own. One person must act as The facilitator (typically the instructor), who organizes play, describes the game to players, and orchestrates the character-creation, in-character play, and debriefing sessions.

Facilitators may also play a character, generally from the Institutional framework. Mantles in the Museum is ideally played in an art museum with a diverse collection of pieces. Educators may choose to coordinate with an art museum so employees know you intend to play an immersive game with your students. The game can be played in other spaces, such as an art studio, as long as the space can be divided into at least three different areas. Additionally, the space requires no less than ten artworks to be on display in each of the three areas. You will also need a comfortable location to debrief in after the role-played portion of the game.

Most interactions in this game happen through a discourse between two or three characters, in which they describe their response to a work of art and the reasoning behind their response. This discourse develops shared understandings of the Interpretive Frameworks and how they might be applied by different people to different artworks. Players are reminded in the rules and by the facilitator that the purpose of the game discourse isn't to belittle a person, work of art, or ideas, but to consider how art is understood and valued from several different perspectives. People are more important than the game, and if at some point the interactions become more stressful than a player is comfortable with, they may opt out of the game. Opting out should not be challenged by the other players or the facilitator, though players may need to complete an alternative assignment if this is a formally assessed educational experience.

## Playing Mantles in the Museum

In this section we provide a description of how Mantles and the Museum is played and the underlying pedagogical and philosophical framework that supports it. The full game and character cards are available for free download at:

### Character Creation: Assuming the Mantle –



Figure 3: An example of a character card.

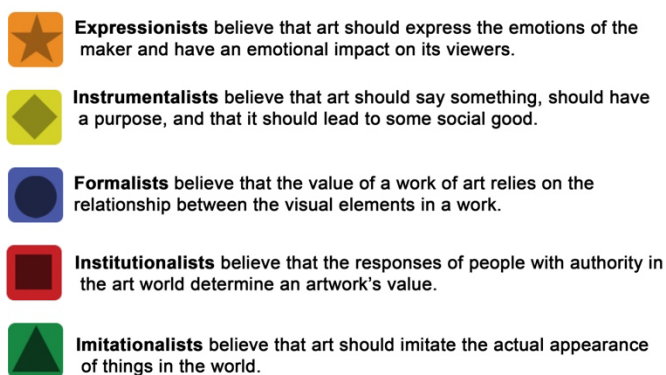


Figure 4: An example of the aesthetic framework card.

Before playing the game, players select a Character Card. The Character Cards provide a starting point for players to develop their character using one of the five Interpretive Frameworks: Expressionist, Formalist, Imitationalist, Institutionalist, and Instrumentalist. There are three color-coded cards per framework for players to choose to develop with a total of fifteen character starters from which to choose. The front of the card includes a character's first initial, last name, and occupation. The character's backstory is on the reverse of the card and provides cues on how they might express their Interpretive Framework.

The character details of the card provide several important effects. Firstly, they locate the Interpretive Framework within a specific context as opposed to a homogenous generalized one- the reasons two Formalists may have for selecting or rejecting a particular work may vary considerably. Secondly, they provide an anchor that allows the player to begin to develop an internal logic for the character, one that they can understand even if they do not necessarily agree with it. Lastly, according to ethnographer Gary Alan Fine (1983) it creates the foundation for a "dynamic social system" (p.80) wherein player agency is responsive not just to the structure of the game, but to external circumstance, and thus provides a "caricature" of extra-diegetic social lives that symbolize what is "real" through simplification and exaggeration (Coleman 1968, cited in Fine, 1983, p.7).

## In-Character: The Gala –

Mantles in the Museum takes place over three rounds of about half an hour each in three different galleries within the art museum. At the end of each round, one piece in that space is selected to be sent to the UNESCO exhibition. At the beginning of each round, facilitators identify a "Gathering Area", where all characters begin the round. In the first room, facilitators say "Welcome! Tonight we've been asked to select three works from the Museum to travel to UNESCO's upcoming International Exhibition. This represents a fantastic opportunity for us to get to know and learn from one another! I'm going to start with [indicating a work], but I hope to have a chance to talk to everyone tonight!" The Facilitator moves to the indicated work and begins a conversation with at least one character.

Players then seek out works to have conversations about in groups of no more than three people. At the end of a conversation, they mark one of the experience boxes on their name tags that matches the Interpretive Framework of one other character in the conversation. Players continue choosing works to have conversations around until all their experience boxes are full, at which point they go to The Gathering Area.

Once the characters have returned to The Gathering Area, the Facilitator calls for nominations for works. Once the nominations are in, the Facilitator calls for one person to make a thirty second pitch for each work and another to present any important counterpoints. The characters vote on which piece they will send. After the piece is chosen, they move to the next gallery and begin again. After characters have made their final determinations in each round for the UNESCO exhibition, facilitators review the choices and thank everyone.

The structure of critique and discourse in Mantles in the Museum serves both systemic and diegetic purposes. Because players advance the round by filling in the experience boxes they will encounter several different perspectives during the round, while

limiting the number of participants in a given conversation to three ensures that everyone will have a chance to speak without taking a longer amount of time than is practical in a round. Since the game requires a minimum of five players, there will always be space for at least two conversations to occur concurrently. This also serves diegetic purposes because if an instructor is playing in the game, they cannot be a part of every discussion, regardless of the role that they are in. Through the cycle of independent conversations and group discourse the players co-create what Lewis (2013) conceives as a “weird fiction”, a thing that “exists where and when it should not according to the logical distribution of things within a given order,” (p.66) by empowering students (rather than art insiders) to dictate what does and does not have worth within the museum.

### **The Debrief: Let’s Talk About It –**

In a Debrief, players begin to make sense of their emotions, transition from the game back to “real life”, and potential problems between players are addressed (Stark, 2014). The debrief takes place in a safe, comfortable space. Facilitators ask players to take a minute without talking to reflect on their experience. Facilitators then ask questions about what players learned about the different frameworks and from their characters about interacting with art. In addition to the reflective questions above, they may also ask:

- *Did your view of a work of art change?*
- *How did the way you think about other perspectives on works of art change?*
- *What is one thing about your character that you admire?*
- *What is one thing about you that you think your character would admire?*
- *In what ways (if any) has playing the game changed the way you think about the museum?*

Game designer Erik Fatland (as cited in Nilsen, Stark, & Lindahl, 2013) defines the debrief as “a tool

to foster an open, trusting, supportive culture among players”, and outlines its three primary goals: to validate each player’s experience; to translate the immediate experience and emotions into “lasting memories, reflections, and learning”; and to identify personal challenges a player experienced and to take steps towards solving them (p.15). Player experiences that are shared during The Debrief thus can be simultaneously an aesthetic experience, an opportunity for growth, and a vehicle through which they affect and are affected by the world. This potential is highlighted by Rancière’s (2004) claim that “everywhere there are starting points and turning points from which we learn new things, if we first dismiss the presupposition of distance, second the distribution of the roles, and third the borders between territories.” In The Debrief, players are provided the space to reevaluate their roles both in the context of the game and beyond as well as reconsidering physical and conceptual borders. These reevaluations can be emancipatory starting points or turning points for players as they consider art and art criticism.

### **Conclusion**

The authors created Mantles in the Museum to provide an accessible, meaningful, and dynamic resource to help young adults engage in art criticism in art museums. We set out to create a game that art educators could use, adapt, and incorporate into their teaching practices, and that empowers students to approach art criticism of contemporary works, abstract works, and works with political or cultural subject matter that they may otherwise have avoided. While the authors developed Mantles in the Museum primarily for young adults in secondary and undergraduate art education and art appreciation courses, the game has been played by adults of all ages in art museum settings during play testing with positive feedback from players. Mantles in the Museum was developed so it could be adapted for undergraduate and graduate art history or studio courses as well as being adaptable for art galleries

and community art organizations. Anecdotal feedback indeed indicates that players feel more comfortable with visiting art museums on their own following game play. The comfort secondary and undergraduate students experienced visiting art museums independently following game play suggests that players with prior familiarity with art museums and art criticism could also experience turning points in their critical examinations of art and art institutions following game play.

Relatedly, an emergent strength of the game however has been the increased capacity the authors have observed in their own students to lead the conversations that *Mantles in the Museum* provokes. This applies to conversations around art, as was originally intended by the authors, but also around the systems that govern how, where, and when we talk about art and the institutions that perpetuate them. When art education is reduced to explication, it becomes merely training in the modes of academia rather than thought freed from constraints. Overutilization of explication in teaching, according to Ranciere (1991), is the core of reproducing social inequality (p.6-7). This is particularly germane to the heavy emphasis on explication in teaching art criticism. Through a conscious rejection of methods of teaching art criticism such as overly didactic lectures in favor of an interactive game, students have sometimes been emboldened to question the game itself. These questions are what led to the successful iteration of *Mantles in the Museum* into its current form.

*Mantles in the Museum* was developed, tested, and initially played with racially diverse secondary and undergraduate students from predominantly working class and lower middle class households attending two universities and two high schools in two upper midwest post-industrial cities. The authors sought to develop a pedagogical means for these students to confidently inhabit art criticism and art museums. The current iteration of *Mantles in the Museum* relies on five western aesthetic frameworks and has, based on player feedback, disrupted the barrier of student discomfort with

critically discussing art. While this is not a fully irruptive result, the shifts in students' confidence in critical discussions about works of art and their interest in visiting art museums suggest there is additional potential for *Mantles in the Museum*. We encourage educators to explore how incorporating global majority aesthetic frameworks into *Mantles in the Museum* can help realize an irruption with an art museum. The heart of our process of developing *Mantles in the Museum* beat with questions about how we could develop a game that might emancipate both students and art institutions from the limitations of colonizing thinking. These questions have not been fully answered, but the fantasy narrative and game structure of *Mantles in the Museum* has affected our students and us. We urge art educators to continue to ask these questions as we believe pursuing them will have the same impact on the world that lies beneath that fantasy as well.

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Through their interventions, [students] sought to open a dialogue about how visitors access works of art and to consider the multiple entry points into experiencing art in exhibitions.

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# Disrupting Art Museum Experiences: Interventions in a University Art Museum

**Carissa DiCindio, Christine Brindza, Shiloe Fontes, Johnathan Frew, Sonya Landau, Michelle Landry, Devan Marín, Sydney Streightiff, and Rachel Zollinger**

The University of Arizona

**Abstract:** This article focuses on interventions created by graduate students in response to the University of Arizona Museum of Art's exhibition *The Art of Food: From the Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and his Family Foundation*. Students in an art and visual culture education course designed and implemented three interventions focused on food justice, class, and economics that attended to unexplored themes in the exhibition. Focusing on materials as ingredients, soundscapes, and interrogating food culture, students developed alternate ways for visitors to interact with works of art that went beyond building on interpretations constructed by the curator. In doing so, they employed the concept of the ignorant museum in their design and implementation (Jung, 2010; Sitzia, 2018), based on theories presented in Jacques Rancière's *The ignorant schoolmaster* (1991) that promote intellectual freedom through equality. Students also utilized their university art museum as a site to explore visual culture, interrogate institutional systems, and experiment through collaboration.

Note: The authors would like to thank Willa Ahlschwede, Assistant Curator, Education and Public Programs, and the staff at the University of Arizona Museum of Art for their collaboration on this project.

Correspondence regarding this article may be sent to the author: [cdcindio@arizona.edu](mailto:cdcindio@arizona.edu)

In Fall 2021, eight graduate students in an art and visual culture education course engaged with the University of Arizona Museum of Art's (UAMA) exhibition, *The Art of Food: From the Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and his Family Foundation* focused on visual art related to themes of food. Students worked in groups to design interventions that would create sensory avenues to experience this exhibition, as opposed to more traditional museum visitor experiences. They sought to disrupt museum visits centered on the perspective of the curator by including more ways for visitors to engage with the exhibition through reflection, dialogue, and embodied response. Specifically, student interventions created participatory projects through soundscapes, an interactive online guide examining untraditional materials as "ingredients," and a printed zine. An intervention "signifies the act of interceding to create change," and in museums, it is "an artistic strategy that encourages self-reflective museum practice" (Marstine, 2017, p. 4). Interventions can signify art outside of the traditional spaces of galleries and museums and in the community as a "social collaborative event" that allows for both reflection and participation (Richardson, 2010, p. 19). Although, for this project, students worked directly with the university art museum, they were interested in how communities access works of art in museum exhibitions inside and outside of the walls of the institutions. Through their interventions, they sought to open a dialogue about how visitors interact with works of art and to consider the multiple entry points into experiencing art in exhibitions beyond traditional docent-led tours and viewing art and reading wall text for information. The class also focused on how communities could be a part of a dialogue with the museum about food and their experiences and histories with food. This interest beyond the museum setting may have been due partially to the fact that UAMA had not yet reopened after closing for COVID-19, and all the preparations were taking place outside of the museum itself. However, students also considered the role of the university art museum as a part of campus and the city of Tucson, and its relationship to

communities in and outside the University of Arizona.

UAMA often approaches its programming with a socially engaged lens, and this exhibition included subthemes of community, dissociation, and control (Miller, 2021). However, students found areas of the exhibition that were unexplored and included unattended openings for visitor experiences. Students activated the galleries through their interventions by addressing these gaps and expanding on relevant themes in the exhibition. In doing so, they incorporated an understanding of visual culture as "a social theory of visibility" that focuses on "questions of what is made visible, who sees what, how seeing, knowing, and power are all interrelated" (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p. 14). They did this by bringing new facets of the works to light and asking visitors to consider how these objects relate to discussions of inequities, social classes, and cultures.

### Creating Interventions

UAMA collaborated with students to incorporate their perspectives into the programming for the exhibition through these interventions. The staff was willing to work with students, respond to ideas, and share space, time, and resources for this project. Willa Ahlschwede, Assistant Curator, Education and Public Programs, met with students to talk about the upcoming exhibition, including themes, specific works of art, programming, and exhibition design plans. One of the components of the exhibition was to include engagement through technology for people wanting to engage with the exhibition offsite through online resources. Students shared initial thoughts on this project with the class and began to work together in groups to continue brainstorming. They naturally divided themselves into groups based on similar themes and interests (Figure 1). Devan described the process of their group,

At the beginning of this intervention project, we all had seemingly different interests. I was considering ways for visitors to represent their own stories in the exhibition, Johnathan wanted to question the overuse of

certain artists in museums, and Rachel was interested in community participation and fostering symbiotic relationships. However, the more that we talked as a class, the more we realized our ideas were not that dissimilar at all. They all revolved around aspects of community engagement. We wanted to provide an outlet for visitors' voices to be heard. We decided to partner up and start brainstorming ways to combine all our objectives into a single intervention. We concluded that a zine would be the easiest and most immersive way to do so. Zines are self-published and small-circulating booklets that generally contain original media by one or more individuals. They are often used as a means of artistic collaboration and expression. This then makes them the perfect choice for such a diverse set of specific goals under the larger umbrella of community engagement.

Each group eventually came up with a proposal that was shared with Willa, who shared the proposals with other staff members in the museum. This dialogue was an important part of the process as students wanted the projects to complement existing plans at UAMA, and the museum staff's feedback helped them to shape how their interventions would work on a practical level.

The interventions this class created are described by the students below and were built from experimentation, sensory experiences, participatory practices, and humor. They will be implemented as part of UAMA's Community Day and throughout the run of the exhibition.



**Figure 1.** Students designing the zine for their intervention.

### Materials as Ingredients

The "Shopping for Art" intervention focuses on a print series by Ed Ruscha (b.1937) called *News, Mews, Pews, Brews, Stews, and Dues* (Figure 2). In this art museum intervention taken in the form of a digital interpretive guide, we chose to demystify or break down the components of the print series into more understandable means. By using an everyday, ephemeral item—a grocery ad—as a tool for delivery, barriers are broken between these "highbrow" museum art objects and a common, mass-produced newspaper print. Some art forms, which often include paintings, sculpture, and in many cases, high quality prints, are considered inaccessible to some audiences. The intention of this intervention is to equalize both forms as well as present additional information and imagery about the works of art. Shifts from fine art to more inclusive visual culture engagements are more common in art education classrooms. Art museums still struggle with incorporating visual culture into conversations about art, even though, as Vallance (2008) suggests, visual culture helps us to understand the context of museum objects beyond the walls of the museum gallery.

In this series, Ed Ruscha's inks were created out of food and everyday items that celebrate various parts of "Englishness." Each component symbolizes an aspect of English culture, including the words on the prints themselves. By looking at their previous

forms, there is deeper insight into the original foodstuffs and how they are normally used. Yet, many of these items are not widely available or affordable to all—a Branston pickle, red salmon roe, and caviar—the third item being lavish fare costing \$50 to \$75 per ounce.

Further, food is a temporary, tangible object meant to be consumed, and the longevity and care in maintaining the prints appear contradictory to this intent. In this sense, it has a renewed or extended “shelf life.” This brings to mind the shelves of a grocery store with its canned goods and boxed and bagged items as a place for mass consumption. As a general concept, a grocery store is a place for everyone who can purchase items, regardless of background, because food serves as a great equalizer: it is necessary for the daily needs of all human beings. Contrasting ideas of accessibility and mass consumption with items that are unaffordable pushes us to consider how we think of food and our relationships to food. It makes us question which food is for whom. It also mirrors issues in museums related to who can access these institutions and who feels welcome in these spaces that may be perceived as highbrow. By bringing in these conversations, we can see the impact of disruptive museum education practices that move beyond guided interpretation with the works of art.

Through the creation of a fictional tongue-in-cheek grocery store, *Ruscha’s*, we re-envision the works of art through their materials as if for sale, featuring representative images for each print ink ingredient (Figure 3). This grocery store can be accessed through a QR code. When participants select on one of the grocery groupings on the homepage, they are directed to an image of Ruscha’s print to find more information about these ingredients. Per each type of “ink” there are jars, cans, and appetizing displays of the items in their common forms. While not all foods are typically known to appetites in the United States, the presentation of these foods and everyday items in a grocery advertisement also creates relatability, materiality, and may inspire some to try them. It is through this knowing, remembering, or being engaged in the pursuit of understanding of a certain

look, taste, or feel of an object that there is potential for more meaning or impact. By using an individual’s sense of familiarity or acquaintance, the meanings behind works of art can be revealed.

Yet, it is important to recall the physical setting of the prints on display. When considering axle grease, pie fillings, or crushed flowers, these unorthodox materials could be dirty or exert smells, which seems unwelcome in a museum environment conscious of contents that may decompose or attract insects. Although museums display objects about class and economics, bringing in materials that intervene in the physical environment of the museum is a step that many traditional institutions are not willing to take. Acting as interventional tools themselves, by inserting these works into an art museum environment, they instantly break from norms and expectations of what is considered fine art and assumptions about what is considered “museum quality.”

The grocery advertisement format further asserts the peculiarity of these items in this space, offering pause for thought about their make-up and purpose. This accomplishes what Richardson (2010), claims is the purpose of an intervention, that it “can potentially throw a public site into confusion, the resolution of which requires an implicit renegotiation among those who share the space. Within this exchange resides the potential for new social formulations and new thoughts previously by social, discursive, or physical restrictions” (Richardson, p. 21).

Art is frequently relegated to being created out of typical mediums that are seen as the norm; Ruscha takes this to the next level by not only making a commentary on the medium but of the foods and objects that are seen as just that—what they are, versus what else they could be. By taking the concept of an art installation and transforming it into a grocery ad, we too are making a commentary on what something is, versus what else it can be by pushing what is deemed acceptable in a museum setting.



**Figure 2.** Willa Ahlschwede, Assistant Curator, Education and Public Programs, sharing Ruscha's series in the exhibition.



**Figure 4.** Students sharing their soundscapes.

### Inserting Sound

For the interventions we created, we focused on the idea that the awareness of sound is especially apparent amid silence. In this case, we thought specifically of the silence of museums and how we could activate these quiet spaces through soundscapes (Figure 4). A soundscape is the human perception of a specific acoustic environment. Community events, celebrations, and specific occasions all have their own unique sounds. In this intervention, we provide an acoustically immersive environment designed to engage senses and enhance the viewer's experience. Sounds were collected and recorded then combined to create a rich, layered "soundscape" specific to individual works of art in the exhibition.

We were inspired by the scientific phenomenon of synesthesia, meaning "joined sensation," in which a person experiences something usually perceived via one bodily sense in connection with a feeling from another, including literally seeing sound (Cytowic, 1989). While we cannot replicate such an experience, we created an intervention that emphasizes the strong connections between our senses. As Kai-Kee, Latina, and Sadoyan (2020) write, "all the senses provide portals to engagement with art" (p. 100). These soundscapes activate the senses, inspire memories, and elevate a sense of time and place in the works of art. As Merleau-Ponty (1962) describes, our senses are not separate, but work together as we encounter them. In other



**Figure 3.** Home page of online grocery store.

words, something can be a visual and auditory experience at the same time without distinguishing between the two individual senses (Kai-Kee, Latina, & Sadoyan, 2020). When creating these soundscapes, we sourced material online and in the [city] community. We approached these works individually, creating literal versions of some scenes and more lyrical interpretations of others. Most art museums focus almost exclusively on seeing, but what happens when other sensory experiences are added?

Hubard (2007) describes how museum activities focused on embodied response, including through sound, “help visitors engage their bodies and emotions in response to an object” and “grant viewers access to those aspects of a work that may elude discourse” (p. 48). This exhibition reminds us of the unique ways food plays into not only art, but life and culture as well. We hope that our intervention amplifies these cultural expressions. We took to heart the idea that “poets help us discover within ourselves such joy in [perceiving] that sometimes, in the presence of a perfectly familiar object, we experience an extension of our intimate space.” (Bachelard, 1994, p. 199) The familiarity of certain foods and food settings can become so commonplace or routine that we no longer approach them with a sense of wonder or excitement. We want to reawaken those feelings and emphasize the tone of these works.



Figure 5. Draft of zine for the intervention.

## Interrogating Food Culture

As we flipped through the slide deck of images depicting art included in the upcoming exhibition, we were struck by the high number of works by big-name artists who rose to prominence in the late twentieth century: Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Damien Hirst, Ed Ruscha, and more. We wondered, what would this exhibition of food-themed art look like without the superabundant perspectives of Warhol and his cohort? How would other artists represent and interrogate contemporary food culture? Simultaneously, we wryly noted the foods characterized in these artworks hardly reflected the rich multicultural food heritage and unique food history of the Tucson area, or of any food traditions important to us; rather, we felt they reflected depersonalized consumption of food products. As we discussed our own relationships to food and food cultures, we also considered the disparity between foodie culture and food insecurity within a city recently designated as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy. We were curious how museum visitors’ own experiences might add to this conversation around food culture and value. We wondered, what foods are important to them? How could their lives and voices be included here?

To intervene in this exhibition, we wanted to acknowledge “the visitor’s intelligence” (Sitzia, 2018, p. 80) and create an opportunity to communicate their knowledge and experience. We agreed on the format of a participatory zine—pocket-sized, hand-folded booklets filled with

open-ended prompts for writing and drawing to accompany the visitor’s museum visit. Zines, as the chosen medium of counter-consumerism and ephemeral underground publication (Piepmeier, 2008), are an ideal vehicle for slipping between the institutionally produced art exhibition and the visitor experience. For design inspiration, we riffed on the Pop artists’ graphic aesthetic and Analía Saban’s relief print series of generic, disposable plastic bags, included in the exhibition (Figure 6).

Led by a simple question: *What’s on your plate?*, we ask what foods are personally valued by museum

attendees, and how they connect to other important social relationships and nurture a sense of belonging (Figure 7). In our own initial encounters with the exhibition, we noted a disconnect between the foods of our own lives and the foods being presented as art. We used these thoughts as motivation for developing questions for our zine.

In addition to asking *What's on your plate?*, we ask museum attendees *What is missing? Do you see foods from your life in the exhibition?* We hoped visitors will be compelled to explore their own relationships to art and food culture and share their stories in pictures and words. Though our own questions regarding artistic and cultural representation remain at the heart of our intervention project, our goal is not to transmit facts or criticism but to open a two-way conduit for knowledge. We offer our knowledge as arts education graduate students through playful prompts and questions, and we hope visitors reciprocate with their own thoughts and experiences.



**Figure 6.** Willa Ahlschwede, Assistant Curator, Education and Public Programs engaging with Saban's prints in the exhibition.

## University Art Museums as Sites for Experimentation

Through experimentation and collaboration with each other and the museum, students found new pathways to experience works of art in their university art museum. University art museums can serve as ideal settings for this type of project because students can participate in real-life museum activities and think critically about these practices (King & Marstine, 2006). Corwin discussed the concept of university art museums and galleries as laboratories as a site for experimentation and risk-taking (in Hammond et al., 2006). Focusing on exhibitions by undergraduate students that push traditional narratives of museums, Marstine (2007) writes of the third space of university museums that allows for visitors to engage with multiple perspectives and the messiness that comes with students' work, not through uneven processes or results, but in actively creating new space through experimentation, questioning, and "the power to mix things up" (p. 305). DiCindio (2020) discusses university art museum galleries as in-between spaces that allow for new possibilities to emerge through student-led engagement with works of art.

Museum educators regularly create activities and programming that ask visitors to engage with art from new and different perspectives. However, in this project, students intervened from outside of the museum, rather than acting as educators creating programming as insiders, and designing their interventions as bridges between the institution and the community. UAMA has a history of giving students space to add alternative ways to engage with art through course collaborations, interdisciplinary projects, and student interventions. [Citation withheld] (2016) describes the collaborative, non-hierarchical nature of university art museums as sites for interdisciplinary connections and active learning. Writing about university students' interventions, Reid (2016) argues that university art museums are ideal settings for students "to experiment with institutional critique focused on inclusive practices" (p. 13). This project,



created in the same university art museum, continues this work through engagement with new exhibitions.

These interventions used the lens of the ignorant museum in their design and implementation (Jung, 2010; Sitzia, 2018). The ignorant museum is based on theories presented in Jacques Rancière's *The ignorant schoolmaster* (1991) that promotes intellectual freedom through equality as opposed to "intellectual hierarchy" (Jung, 2010, p. 149). Sitzia (2018) connects these practices to the constructivist paradigm in museum education (Hein, 1998) as museums shift from the transmission of expert knowledge to a public forum built on "a trust in the public and a loss of control by the institution over what knowledge is created and what results can be expected" (p. 80). The visitor-centered, and often visitor-produced, programming that many art museums now employ "offer agency to the visitors in terms of what and how they learn, shifting the balance of power from the institution to the individual learner and to some measure introducing critical pedagogical practices in the museum" (p. 77). In these interventions, the students embraced alternative forms of engagement with works of art. Rather than reinforce the curator's perspective in the exhibition through interpretations of the works, students found issues in the exhibition that had not been addressed. They extended the experience of the visitor by disrupting the curatorial voice and attending to these gaps. Through their questions and strategies, they raised localized questions about cultural class, economics, and food justice. They invited visitors to participate in meaning making and experiences with the works of art by considering the role of food and access to food in their lives, cultures, and communities. Through their interventions, students added openings for participation and for visitors to include their own voices in the experience of the exhibitions.

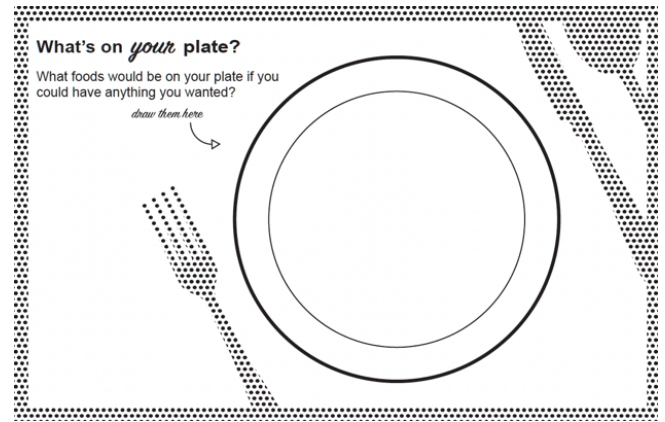


Figure 7. *What's on your plate?* zine activity.

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I expand upon the relations between art museums and communities posited by a post-critical, socially responsive museological framework, and explore the potential for a feminist philosophical *Ethics of Care* to orient a moral, relational model of education and public practice.

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## **Our Magnitude and Bond: An Ethics of Care for Art Museum Education**

**Dana Carlisle Kletchka**  
The Ohio State University

**Abstract:** This work responds to contemporary concerns about the future of art museum education and public practice and art museums more broadly in the wake of a global pandemic that has, at present, killed more than a million people in the United States and sickened millions more. I respond to questions posed by the board of the *Journal of Social Theory in Art Education* in relation to the theme of *Inclusion Invasion*, expand upon the relations between art museums and communities posited by a post-critical, socially responsive museological framework, and explore the potential for a feminist philosophical *Ethics of Care* to orient a moral, relational model of education and public practice. I begin by discussing the effects of COVID-19 on art museums and communities, introduce Care Ethics as a potential way in which to situate personal and professional morals, review ways that it has influenced other educational contexts, and conclude by suggesting how this philosophical orientation has the potential to guide art museum education practices, from idea conception to outreach and public programming.

Note: The author wishes to thank Dr. Sarah Clark Miller for her generosity in reading and commenting on a draft of this manuscript.

Correspondence regarding this article may be sent to the author:  
[kletchka.1@osu.edu](mailto:kletchka.1@osu.edu)

we are each other's  
harvest:  
we are each other's  
business:  
we are each other's  
magnitude and bond

~From **Paul Robeson**  
by Gwendolyn  
Brooks (1984)

## Introduction

As much of the world grappled with the immense personal and social consequences of the COVID-19 global pandemic, it became clear that there is little, if any, separation between the two. This may be exemplified by the ongoing debate about mask-wearing and getting COVID-19 vaccines and boosters, which is a matter of personal judgment that has grave consequences on the collective health of our global community. There seems to be no aspect of our personal and public lives that has been left untouched by the coronavirus and its variants: Our health, education, economic, and political systems are all dealing with what it means to have "personal and collective responsibility regarding race, nationality, and wellness" (JSTAE, 2021, para. 1). Rather than seeing these as separate fields to be dealt with on an individual basis, I propose that we as art and museum educators consider them under a larger umbrella of philosophical morality that might guide our personal and professional decision making, as both are equally as impactful to other beings in our current environment.

In this manuscript, I ruminate most specifically on a query posed by the editors of JSTAE in their 2021 call for papers, wherein they posed the question, "How does our sense of belonging on the spectrum of inclusion and alienation affect art educators' curricular choices?" (2021, para. 6). I extrapolated this question as a multilayered exploration of several concerns specific to the recent and ongoing experiences of the community

comprising much of my research: Art museum educators. Myriad and interrelated components of their trajectories include personal/familial health and safety in a time of global pandemic, the precariousness of museum education/interpretation/public practice positions and careers in a shaken non-profit economy, the responsibility of cultural institutions to their communities whether online or in person, and the bases on which decisions are made in art museum contexts. Embedded in this discussion is the fierce acknowledgement of race, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, and professional positionality as essential, interlocking experiences that affect the ability to pursue a healthy integration of life and work.

## Positioning COVID-19 and Art Museum Education/Public Practice

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, art museums were already wrestling with serious questions about their philosophies, collections, and motivations via scholarly and activist critique of their colonial foundations and public stances. The pandemic also called into consideration the ways in which museums interact with their audiences and communities when physical spaces are not able to host living bodies due to the danger of transmission presented by a novel virus. I have written previously about situating current social issues within post-critical museological framework (Kletchka, 2018) and positioning museums and their relationships to communities as socially responsive and conceptualized similarly to digital, networked models of communication. The arrival of COVID-19 pushed this museological condition into a starkly relevant profile as museum pivoted into largely online relationships as a way of maintaining connection with their communities. Museum audiences (can they be called "visitors" if they are not physically present in the building? Shall

we adopt the term “bodyminds”<sup>1</sup> from critical disability studies?) are dealing in ways large and small with a virus that has changed nearly every aspect of life: personal, social, health and wellness, education, professional, and mental health. How are museum staff, particularly educators, to respond to this new reality?

The process of reckoning with a global pandemic also forced art museum directors, boards, and administrators to determine priorities and make decisions to remain financially solvent. These decisions both revealed and reinforced the capitalist reality that has been evident in much museum practice for more than a century—ultimately, objects are of more value than visitors; subsequently, the staff that ensures the acquisition and development of the collection remained employed at higher rates than visitor services, front of house, and education staff (AAM & Wilkening Consulting, 2020). Museum educators at all levels experienced job losses and furloughs at the same moment that the desperate need for meaningful connections and community building became glaringly evident. Amanda Krantz, Director of Research and Practice with the planning, research, and evaluation firm Kera Collective (formerly RK&A), cautioned that there are consequences for these layoffs and furloughs, noting, “Museum educators are essential to museums and make the institution what it is in a community” (2020) and calling them a “lifeline” to their institutions. Still, as museum educator and former NAEA Museum Education Division President Juline Chevalier elegantly illustrated in a blog post for *Art Museum Teaching*: “COVID-19 Has Taken A Toll on Museum Education” (Chevalier, 2021).

This leads me once again to the question posed by the JSTAE editors and to consider this moment as a paradox of both inclusion *and* alienation for art museum educators, whose work is perhaps more relevant and consequential than ever. While I cannot

change the longstanding and contemporary external circumstances that lead to our current COVID-19 reality, I can suggest ways in which art museum educators might adjust and respond to that reality in ways that are hopeful, loving, and human-centered.

### **The growing impact of wholeness, self-care, and love as essential components of professional practice**

There is a growing movement to consider one’s own health and happiness in relationship to market-induced or *neoliberal* precarity, that is, “inequality as a necessary by-product of the ultimate goal of high productivity” under neoliberal capitalism (Hamington and Flower, 2021, p. 2). The ubiquity of neoliberal precarity is evidenced in part by myriad laws to restrain labor organizations, create favorable tax laws for investors, “corporate access to state officials to maintain inequality and restrain unemployment benefits,” “extensive discipline of the work force,” and “the use of the state to enforce debt payments and foreclosures,” (Connolly, 2012, as quoted in Hamington and Flower, 2021, p. 2). These actions are predicated by a lack of care ethics that otherwise resists the suffering of those who do not flourish under market-induced capitalism.

This movement to care is emphasized by the COVID-19 pandemic’s dramatic effect on work practices, mental and physical health, and the implications of personal decisions on communal health and wellness. While there are certainly investigations into care ethics in various philosophical projects, I wish to specifically discuss a phenomenon that primarily emerges from the lived experiences and scholarship of Black and brown women who, in the tradition of Audre Lorde (1984), envision a better world through personal and communal love, pleasure, and social activism (hooks, 2001; brown, 2019; Hersey, 2021a).<sup>2</sup> This feminist

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<sup>1</sup> “bodymind” references the body and mind as inseparable and entangled. See McRuer & Johnson, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> As a white, cisgender woman who identifies as queer, I respectfully acknowledge that this manuscript builds on foundations built by Black and brown women-identifying writers and scholars.

approach to morality is counter to the cool rationality that characterizes much Eurocolonial philosophy.

Tricia Hersey, founder of *The Nap Ministry*, views rest—specifically in the form of naps—as a form of resistance against capitalistic “grind culture” and a form of liberation for bodies that are pushed to be productive under white, patriarchal capitalism. The ministry’s motto, “REST IS RESISTENCE,” describes a “meticulous love practice” (Hersey, 2021a), “steeped in dismantling white supremacy and capitalism by using rest as the foundation for this disruption. We believe rest is a spiritual practice, a racial justice issue and a social justice issue” (Hersey, 2021). Her arts-based ministry of Black liberation, started in 2016, is based on “The 4 tenets of the Nap Ministry, a set of core principles infused with the principles of Black Liberation Theology, Afrofuturism, Womanism, somatics, and communal care” (Hersey, 2021b). She posts reminders and words of encouragement on a blog platform, Instagram, Twitter, and (rarely) TikTok, as well as through podcasts, public installations, retreats, and performance art. In 2019, the National Art Education Association’s Museum Education Division Preconference featured her as the keynote speaker in recognition of the strained relationship between self-care and professional obligations of art museum educators.

### **The liberatory politics of love and pleasure.**

In *All About Love: New Visions*, (2001), Black feminist theorist bell hooks mediates on the meaning of love and what it means to *practice* love—as a verb—in everyday life. While the word “love” is most commonly discussed in romantic or sexual contexts, hooks pursues a meaning of love that is at once intellectual, informative, and politically useful. She asserts the importance of non-romantic love as a principle of human relations and social justice movements, as an “awakening to love [that] can only happen as we let go of our obsession with power and domination” (p. 87) and “see our lives as intimately

connected to those of everyone else on the planet” (p. 87–88). hooks also positions love and care as a direct challenge to patriarchy, a system of domination that naturalizes the binary notion of a powerful, strong superior party that maintains rule over weak, inferior parties through violence. Further, she encourages us to practice a love ethic in relationships far beyond the personal and private realms of sex and romance:

When love is present the desire to dominate and exercise power cannot rule the day. All the great social movements for freedom and justice in our society have promoted a love ethic. If all public policy was created in the spirit of love, we would not have to worry about unemployment, homelessness, schools failing to teach children, or addiction. Were a love ethic informing all public policy in cities and towns, individuals would come together and map out programs that would affect the good of everyone. (hooks, 2001, p. 98–99)

Similarly, facilitator and emergent strategist adrienne marie brown (2019) suggests that love—and pleasure—are forms of “political resistance and cultivating resilience” (p. 59) against the way that heteropatriarchy has socialized us to believe that our value is less than. She asserts that we are taught to “seek and perpetuate private, even corporate, love” but that if we do not change the way we love, we are: going to die from isolation, loneliness, depression, abandoning each other to oppression, from lack of touch, from forgetting that we are precious. We can no longer love as a secret or a presentation, as something we prioritize, hoard for people we know. Prioritizing ourselves in love is political strategy, is survival. (p. 60)

### **An Ethics of Care**

How do we as art museum educators respond to current conditions in ways that value and address our shared humanity and position the health of museums as relational to the health of their staff and

communities during a time of pandemic? In this section, I suggest that one way to approach this question, in concert with the aforementioned writers and scholars, is to use a philosophical notion of an ethics of care to make decisions that ultimately affect visitors, communities, volunteers, and other staff members.

### Philosophical Ethics of Care

Care ethics are a philosophical approach to morals descended from the work of two white feminist scholars, Nel Noddings and Carol Gilligan, who first introduced their work in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Noddings (1984) suggested that there is a relationship between the *feminine* (which we will return to later) and *caring* as a moral imperative and a foundation for ethical decision making. While her early work situates caring in the home, she later sites the role of care in educational spaces, such as schools (1992). She also makes a distinction between *caring-about* and *caring-for*—the former a general feeling of concern and the desire to do something to make a situation better (1992); the latter a direct, in-person gesture of care that is recognized by the recipient (2002). Gilligan introduced

a distinctive philosophy of women’s personal and moral development, diverging from the traditions of Sigmund Freud, Jean Piaget, and Lawrence Kohlberg, which held women as morally and developmentally inferior to men. Rather than identifying the genders as inferior or superior, Gilligan asserted that the experiences of men and women are fundamentally different and thus require separate approaches in their investigation. (Gottschalk, 2007)

Her work challenged Kohlberg’s *Theory of Moral Development*, which utilized exclusively male research subjects. His study suggested that there are three levels and six distinct stages of moral development that focus on justice and rights and continued to develop over time (1958, 1985). Alternatively, Gilligan’s (1982, 1993) theory of moral development—or a *Morality of Care*—focused

exclusively on women and posited that that they go through three levels of development (Preconventional, Conventional, and Postconventional), each with a transition that represents deeper understandings of the self, responsibility to others, goodness, and truth. Gilligan’s concepts are fundamental to an Ethic of Care, which centers compassion, well-being, and collectivity as part of moral decision making.

What does it mean exactly to say that an Ethics of Care may be a useful framework for decision-making in art museums? Firstly, it is useful to differentiate *ethics*, or rules of conduct commonly recognized by a particular group of people; and *morals*, which are principles, based on beliefs, that inform personal decisions of right and wrong. An ethics of care, then, may serve to inform specific moral decisions related to our professional and personal lives. Additionally, Noddings (2012) insists that care ethics are *relational*, that is, involve both the *carer* and the *cared-for* even in very brief encounters:

Typically, on detecting an expressed need, the carer ‘feels with’ the cared-for and experiences motivational displacement: that is, her motive energy is directed (temporarily) away from her own projects and toward those of the cared-for. Then she must think what to do. She must respond. She responds positively to the need if she has the resources to do so and if doing so will not hurt others in the web of care. If a positive response might hurt others, she must still try to find a way to respond so that caring relation can be preserved even though the need has been denied. All parents and professionals in the helping professions understand the challenge implied here. (2012)

An exploration of elements of a care ethic and the ways in which they interrelate is helpful for this discussion. Feminist philosopher Sarah Clark Miller recently mapped care ethics through four key concepts of caring relations: Need, vulnerability, dependency, and precariousness, through the lenses

of finitude<sup>3</sup> and embodiment (Miller, 2020). Specific forms of *need*, as experienced by humans, may happen once during a lifespan or recur more frequently. Need “indicates that which must be met or provided in order for humans to continue to live, to function as agents, and to thrive” (2020, p. 646). While *vulnerability* has largely been theorized through a lens of harm, Miller suggests that it “represents a manner of openness to the world and other people—for example, corporeal, psychological, or emotional openness—over which we have limited control” (2020, p. 646). Notably, she includes an openness to “certain aesthetic experiences might be a kind of vulnerability we want to cultivate for the enrichment they can bring” (2020, p. 646). *Dependency* is inextricable with both need and vulnerability—we rely on others to meet our needs and care for us just as we know that others will certainly rely on us in the same way. Lastly, Miller elucidates the notion of *precariousness* as a condition that defines the other concepts, as it engenders *vulnerability*, or the state of having need and dependence on others. In her illustrative cosmos of care ethics, *finitude* is a link that connects these four distinct key concepts together; *embodiment* is an acknowledgment of the body as the site “where we interface with our own and others’ needs, vulnerability, dependency, and precariousness” (2020, p. 653).

### Ethics of care in educational settings.

Noddings, an educational psychologist, provided teacher trainings focusing not on student achievement but on their “academic, emotional, and moral development” (Yaakoby, 2012, p. 25). Five components comprised the training: 1) *Modeling* care for students, 2) *Dialogue* that helps students listen and accept others, 3) *Experience* from watching teachers who employ an ethics of care with their

students, 4) *Confirmation* from those teachers as students develop their own care ethics, and 5) *Universalism*, or acknowledging that all humans need care (Yaakoby, 2012).

Other scholars have investigated the possibilities of care ethics as guides for practice in both formal and informal educational settings, including higher education, non-profit, and other educational settings—essentially any instructional contexts where “relationships between facilitators and participants are valued as part of an active learning environment” (Glowacki-Dudka, et. al., 2018, 62). In an article for planners of educational programs, Michelle Glowacki-Dudka and co-authors propose using the methods of popular education within a framework of care ethics to plan programs through “establishing a community, opening communication, encouraging critical reflection, working toward equality, and acting democratically with the participants, all the while understanding that people have individual struggles, varying interests, and personal intentions as they work toward social and/or political changes” (2018, p. 63). They define *community* as participants and the broader community; consider *open communication* to be establishing care and trust amongst participants through crucial conversations; establish *critical reflection* by “examining how and what people are learning but also situates the context of their learning within structures of power and hegemony, equality, and democracy” (2018, p. 65); pursue *equality* through dialogue and action, and advocate for *democracy* through intention, democratic participation, and an equitable approach to education, where all learners are seen and heard (Glowacki-Dudka, et. al., 2018).

In an article more specific to art museum education, six graduate students<sup>4</sup> at The Ohio State University and I reckoned with contemporary practices in art museums by engaging in a project

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<sup>3</sup> In a delightfully illustrative example of finitude, Dr. Miller suggests that there are a limited number of times that humans can listen to the Rick Astley song “Never Gonna Give You Up.” Indeed.

<sup>4</sup> Adéwálé Adénlé, Shannon Thacker Cregg, Anna Freeman, Damarius Johnson, Megan Wanttie, and Logan Ward



“shaped by open, ongoing dialogue and critical reflection about the field of museology and centered in both radical critique and boundless possibility (Kletchka, et. al., 2020) as a way of exploring critical foundations that might lead toward decolonial, equitable, and affirming art museum practices. They developed a collective vision of potential museums, rooted in conversations about African American history museums, critical pedagogy, decolonialism, disability studies, the politics of identity and representation, and embodied experience/authentic engagement (Kletchka, et. al., 2020). The project culminated in a manifesto, rooted in love and an ethic of care, “*that builds towards the [potential museum] as a range of accessible, inclusive, and equitable cultural institutions for our communities, the public, museum staff, directors, and boards*” (Kletchka, et. al., 2020, p. 70). This manifesto might serve as a powerful model for art museum educators who wish to engage in their work framed by care ethics.

### Critiques, Caveats, and Considerations

Gilligan and Noddings’ work is subject to third-wave feminist, anti-essentialist critique—at least initially steeped in second-wave iterations of American white feminism, most notably the eliding of sex and gender—in an effort to wrench women’s experience from a larger patriarchal framework, they also appeared to reify an essentialist understanding of women and womanhood. Gilligan responded to this critique of essentialism by offering a distinction “between a *feminine* ethic of care and a *feminist* ethics of care” [italics mine] (Gilligan, 1995, p. 122). A feminine care ethic is based on selflessness or self-sacrifice in a disconnected, oppositional, patriarchal relationship. To the contrary,

A feminist ethic of care begins with connection, theorized as primary and seen as fundamental in human life. People live in connection with one another; human lives are interwoven in a myriad of subtle and not so subtle ways. A feminist ethic of care reveals the disconnections in a feminine

ethic of care as problems of relationship. (1995, p. 122)

This caveat about the conceptualization of sex and gender in care work is particularly important for art museum educators as their work, as well as their bodies, are historically constructed as female or feminine in a gendered, binary museum hierarchy (Kletchka, 2021). Any museum educator who is automatically assumed to work with young audiences or preK-12 students by virtue of their title can tell you that this perception of museum education as feminized work (and therefore most appropriate with young learners) continues to pervade institutional mindsets. However, like Gilligan (1995), we may situate care work as a *feminist*, rather than *feminine* endeavor, as relational rather than patriarchal—that is, equally applicable to the humans that we work with and for regardless of job title, sex, race, or gender.

### Developing an Ethics of Care for Art Museum Education

I return to the notion of an *Inclusion Invasion* in the call for papers by the editorial board for JSTAE (2021) and offer the following suggestions for consideration as art museum educators return to their work (or start anew). They are intended to generate thought about the ways in which love and care may become part of interrelated professional and personal practices that will sustain art museum educators and their communities as we turn toward socially responsive, community centered practices both in and outside of our institutions. They are grounded in an ethic of care that recognizes need, vulnerability, dependency, and precariousness as relational considerations for moral decision making and are rooted in love, freedom, and justice. They are intended to guide relations, undergirded by practices of open communication, critical reflection, equality, and democracy, as art museum educators begin again after a great pause necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Use this moment, as much as possible, to reflect on your professional and broader institutional practices that do not serve you, your staff colleagues including volunteers, and/or your visitors and communities. Reflect on the origins of these practices and note what you can influence or resist.
- Consider your philosophical and theoretical orientation toward public practice and how you situate learners and visitors in those orientations. In what ways do you consider their potential needs as you endeavor to create curriculum, programs, and engagement both in and outside of the museum? How do you break these groups down into sub-groups (i.e., grade, age, race, ability, status) and how does that affect educational expectations and outcomes? Where do their care needs enter this equation?
- Think about how you typically interact with other members of the staff both in and out of your immediate department. What are your needs as you engage in research, planning, public practice, and evaluation? How might a taking an inventory of the resources that you require to flourish change your ability to ask for what you must have to thrive?
- Reflect on the decisions that you make every day as part of your professional practice. How might these decisions be informed by an ethics of care in addition to other, more traditional considerations such as budget, policy, tradition, or roles? In what ways does an ethic of care already permeate your decisions?
- How might conceptualizing your community (including yourself, colleagues, and museum learners) as being cared-for rather than cared-about change your everyday decision-making processes?
- What are your goals for establishing a thriving, healthy professional life? How does prioritizing your own happiness change those goals?
- How might *all* museum staff members use an ethic of care to rethink their work with audiences

and communities in a way that values connection and interdependence?

The COVID-19 pandemic—and the underlying issues of structural racism, personal and social responsibility, access to safety and security, and work-related inequality that are interrelated with our present circumstances—irrefutably changed almost every aspect of our personal and professional lives. As art museum educators collectively work our way to a better, more just future, we benefit from alternative ways of thinking about our work that allow us to prioritize ourselves, our colleagues, and our communities in shared humanity, love, and care.

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