MINI MAKERS

Designing Curriculum for
Community-Based
Arts Education

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Mini Makers

Designing Curriculum for Community-Based Arts Education

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ABSTRACT

This work serves as documentation of my experience planning and teaching classes for a Rhode Island based after school visual arts program. Through arts-based action research, I explore methods of documentation and material exploration in order to create an adaptive, emergent curriculum that is responsive to a community-oriented arts education setting.

PREFACE

Prior to studying at RISD, my formal educational experience was defined by a small public school district in Pennsylvania. I made my way through the early years of school with good grades and little interest in most of the material. Art class was no exception. Although art had always been one of my interests, the experiences I was having in my elementary and middle school art classes seemed completely different than my experiences making art on my own. There was no connection between the knowledge and skills we were supposed to acquire in these classes and our lived experiences as students, community members, and human beings. Our personal interests and artistic instincts were often pushed to the side in favor of the creation of a polished final product. Perhaps this is why I don't remember much from those art classes, save for a few Van Gogh inspired sunflower paintings in the spring and collages of snow covered birch trees during the winter.

My high school art classes proved to be slightly more relevant to me, although the entry level classes were focused mostly on technical skills and drawing exercises. By my junior year, my familiarity with my art teacher and other "art kids" allowed me some freedom in what I could make. By my senior year, I was taking a class called Portfolio Prep with four other students. This class took place in the back of the art room during an entry level art class and was exclusively for students preparing to apply to art colleges. It was during this class that I was able to finally start to connect my identity, interests, and experiences to the art I was making at school.

My Portfolio Prep class allowed me to create a portfolio of paintings and drawings that led to my acceptance into Rhode Island School of Design, where I completed my undergraduate degree in painting. I found myself stuck in a different, but still frustrating, cycle of artistic production at RISD. I was interested in developing my knowledge of art materials, my technical drawing and painting skills, and how to best use these tools to express my ideas; however, I often found myself bogged down by irrelevant assignments and long, unhelpful critiques that prevented me from engaging with the kind of creation that I wanted to participate in. Despite a general sense of dissatisfaction with both my public school and college education, it wasn't until I took a Wintersession class with Dr. Shana Cinquemani in RISD's Teaching +Learning in Art + Design department that I began to imagine other possibilities for art education.

In my sophomore year, I enrolled in Dr. Cinquemani's Wintersession class, titled Artist and Designer as Teacher. This class provided insights into methods of teaching art that were alternative to what I, and many of us in the class, experienced. We covered ideas such as choice-based learning and Teaching for Artistic Behavior, as well as ways of helping students look at and interpret works of art. The class culminated in a lesson planning and teaching experience at a local elementary school. In a small group, we planned and taught a lesson about zines and accessible art. I was surprised by how much I enjoyed the experience, and applying to one of TLAD's one year master's degree programs became a very real possibility. Not only was I able to imagine alternative ways to experience art education, but I was beginning to imagine myself as someone who could be a part of that experi-

ence for others.

As I finished up my BFA, I decided to pursue a Master of Arts in Teaching at RISD. During this time, I not only learned about teaching practices and curriculum design, but I also spent time as an observer in both an elementary school and high school art classroom in preparation for student teaching. As I assisted in these classroom spaces, I felt the pressures of the public school learning environment. All the ideas I had about how I would run my classroom, what projects I would do, and how my classroom would be managed started to dissolve when I was faced with the reality of the problems and limits that existed in these classrooms. My classroom teacher mentors were generous with their guidance and very honest about the challenges they faced. While I loved and valued my time there, I realized that these educational spaces did not allow for the freedom and fluidity that I valued in my own educational and artistic practice. I needed to be able to teach with greater flexibility, and I needed an opportunity to learn about other teaching environments that were available to me.

During this time, I was involved with the Teaching + Learning in Art + Design department's Mini Makers program, which held art lessons for local children ages four to seven during the fall. These classes took place in an alternative learning space; our host was an organization focused on reusing materials sourced from businesses and manufacturers to counter waste. As I compared what I was seeing in my school observations with what I was seeing in the Mini Makers program, I knew that I wanted to change my path. I transferred from the Master of Arts in Teaching program to the Master of Arts in Art and Design Education program and began to focus on learning outside the

K-12 classroom. I was able to continue my with Mini Makers in the spring, using my experiences with the program to create my thesis project.

Many art educators, both in and outside the classroom, are shifting the way they think about art education. I am grateful to be able to participate in this shift, and thankful that I can contribute this documentation of my own teaching experiences.

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Introduction to Inquiry + Research Questions

In my thesis, I explore how educators might create an engaging and fluid curriculum in educational spaces outside of the school day. The following questions serve as guides for my thesis research.

1.	How might I implement a material exploration centered curriculum in a community-based art education setting?

2.	How can I conduct action research in order to develop a curriculum that responds to a community of learners?

3.	What kinds of learning emerge from material exploration?

Methodology

In order to gain a better understanding of successful curriculum design in community-based art education settings, I engage in action research. I begin this thesis by reviewing existing literature on the topic of action research and community-based art education, as well as exploring what has been written about material exploration in art education. This literature provides a foundation for my curriculum design.

Collected data includes iterations of my own curriculum, notes taken during lessons, student artwork, and photographs of students, their art, and the classroom that hosted our classes. This data is used in the reflection and evaluation of my curriculum.

Scope + Limitations

The scale of this project is small; I was working with only between 10 and 12 first and second grade students over three approximately one hour after-school art lessons. My findings are specific to my thesis project; any conclusions taken away from my research are about only the effectiveness of my own curriculum planning and implementation.

CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW
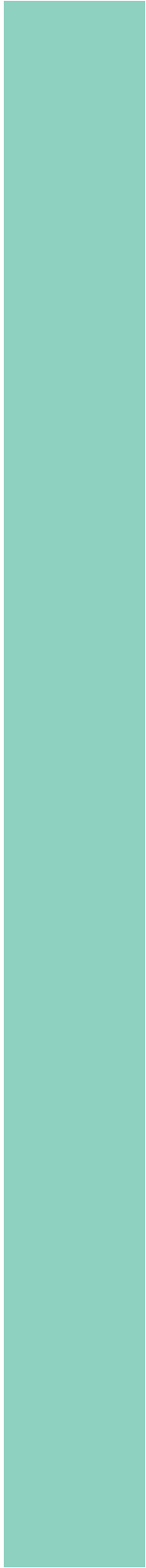
ACTION RESEARCH

As my research consists of reflecting on my experiences plan-
ning and teaching classes in the Mini Makers after-school program, it is
important to discuss and define the kind of research that I am engag-
ing in, the way that this research is conducted, and the implications
of this research. I explain my process of planning, reflecting on, and
reconstructing my curriculum with the term action research. Action re-
search is a form of research that focuses on iteration, change, and en-
gagement. Jokela and Huhmarniemi (2018) describe arts-based action
research as "a cyclical process of research and development" (p. 14)
where the documentation and results of one research cycle are used
as research material that informs the next cycle. According to Jokela
and Huhmarniemi (2018):

> In art-based action research, the experiences of the commu-
> nity or research topic are not intended to be studied from a
> third-party perspective. It is more the opposite in the sense that
> experiences are often intended to influence and be influenced as
> part of the research process (p. 12).

Jokela and Huhmarniemi (2018) describe this cycle of influence
in the following diagram (figure 1). The researcher's activity is ob-
served and documented, and this documentation allows the researcher
to reflect on what was observed. Through reflection, the researcher
reaches conclusions about the action, and then investigates further to
create a new plan for another action. This cycle allows for the

- Work with the observation data in a dialogical form for the focus group = evaluation / reflection data.
- Use interviews, group interviews and stimulated group discussions based on the reflection data and participants (user experiences).

- Investigate the socio-cultural-visual situation of the place.
- Investigate what has been done in the field of applied arts in similar situations/research/activities.
- Build up the working team / focus group.

Reflect
Evaluate data with the organisation, focus group or users

Investigate
Plan
Design
Organize

Observe
Document

Make action /
Art works

- Observe how the planned action works.
- Collect research data and make documentation.
- Use research diaries, video and audio recordings during the key activities.

- Make implementation of the project plan.
- Be sure everyone knows the aims and roles.
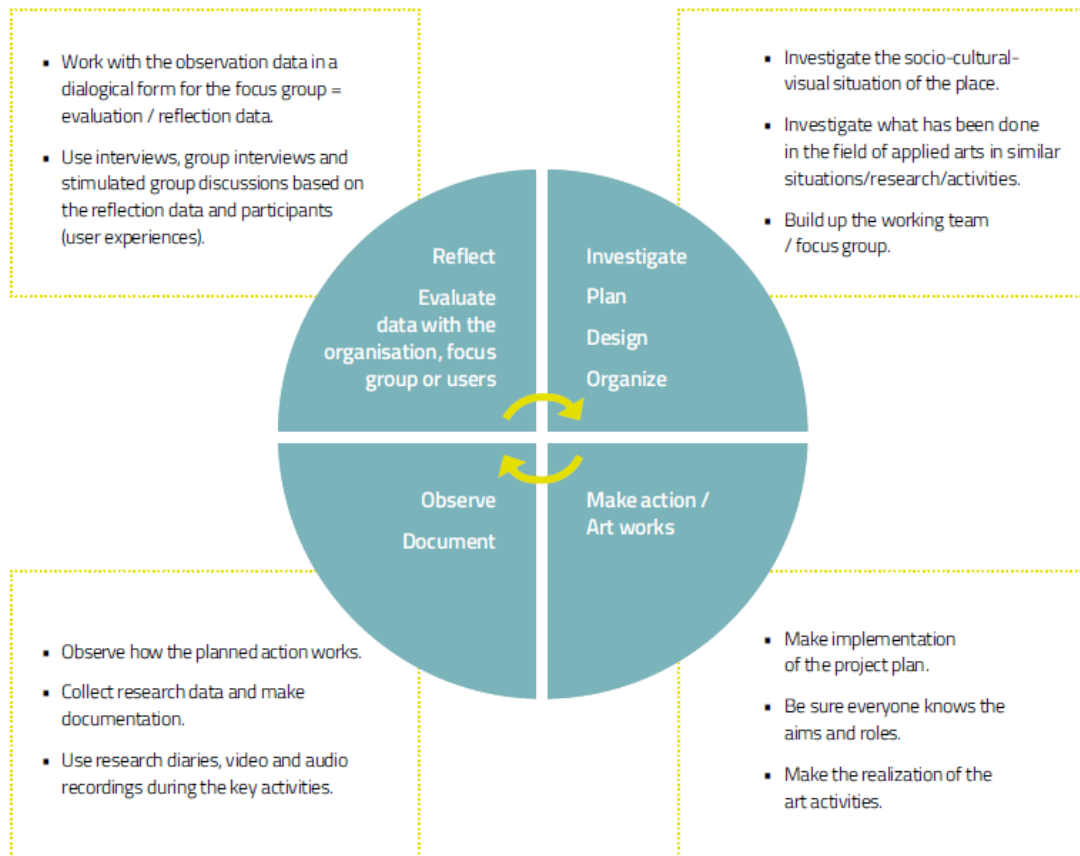- Make the realization of the art activities.

Figure 1. Action Research Cycle. (Jokela and Huhmarniemi, 2018)

researcher to make changes based on evaluation of previous activity. In the Mini Makers program, this cyclical process allowed me to change and adjust my curriculum based on my observations and reflections. All reflections and conclusions in my own research were about the effectiveness of my curriculum; the subject being researched was my own curriculum, pedagogy, and teaching methods.

It is important to reiterate that those conducting action research are active participants in the research, not outside parties. The exact role of action researchers is dependent upon the nature of their participation. Keifer-Boyd (2013) explains the roles of "participant" and "participant observer" as "[a researcher] who inquires into and plans an action to change a teaching situation, and shares critical insights from those experiences reflections, and actions" (p.247). In action research in which the researcher is a participant or a participant observer, the researcher is able to reflect on both their own and their learners' behavior in the teaching environment. This role is in contrast to research methods in which the researcher is producing knowledge about a subject that is removed from themselves. Because the researcher is a participant in action research, this type of research is an ideal in the field of education. It allows educators to evaluate the ways in which their own teaching and pedagogy leads to learning experiences.

Although figure 1 categorizes the action stage and the observation and collection of data stage as separate categories, they are often happening simultaneously (Keifer-Boyd, 2013). Documentation can take many forms in this type of research; Jokela and Huhmarniemi (2018) list the following as examples of documentation:

- Meeting memos and notes

- Researcher's personal observations of the activities in which he/she is involved

- Photographic and video documentation of the activities

- Completed drafts, plans, and art pieces

- Sketches, drawings, and other planning and design material made by the researcher or other participants

- Documentation of the activities' reflection and evaluation discussions

- Various interviews, questionnaires, and other feedback (p 16)

My own documentation includes notes jotted down while in the learning space, photographs of students and their artwork, the students' artistic products, and my own curriculum plans. It was important to me that learners were involved with the documentation process. Part of the responsibility of researchers is ensuring that learners consent to be photographed and are given anonymity when reproducing photographs and artworks for presentation.

By constructing my thesis research around action research cycle, I was able to create a framework for curriculum design as an iterative process. Based on my experiences planning, executing, documenting, and interpreting my previous Mini Makers classes, my curriculum plans shifted and evolved, creating a curriculum that was responsive to the individuals experiencing it. I discuss my curriculum planning and its iterations further in Chapter III.

MATERIAL EXPLORATION

The topic of material exploration is common in discussions about the Reggio Emilia approach. Eckhoff and Spearman (2009) write specifically about the function of material exploration and reuse in Reggio Emilia art education spaces. Reggio Emilia is a town in Italy known for developing the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education, which centers the experience and choices of children. Collaboration and inquiry are foundational to the Reggio Emilia approach; as explained by Eckhoff and Spearman (2009), "the Reggio Emilia approach stresses the relationship between children and environment, collaborative learning, and inquiry-centered projects" (p. 10).

Material exploration, especially exploration of reused materials, fits easily into this inquiry-based method of teaching and learning (Eckhoff and Spearman, 2009). Learners are able to imagine what a material might have been before it made its way to them and are able to imagine new possibilities for materials. They explore their materials and speculate about the possibilities of both past and future use; learners use what they know about their worlds to construct meaning around these materials.

Material exploration can also lead to collaborative learning (Topal and Gandini, 1999). I experienced this during the Mini Makers after-school program; learners were eager to share new discoveries with each other, and these discoveries sometimes led to collaborative projects or moments where students stepped briefly into the role of educator to share knowledge.

When a group of learners is participating in material exploration,

the teacher's role often changes from instructor to facilitator. (Eckhoff and Spearman, 2009). Providing guiding and prompting questions can help learners find a path of inquiry, as can making statements about the material or someone's use of it. Guiding learners to make their own discoveries is valuable, but Topal and Gandini note that adults often have trouble stepping back and allowing children to experiment without instruction (Topal and Gandini, 1999). Grappling with our own expectations of how a learning experience should be structured is necessary if we are going to broaden the definition of what learning can be.

"In essence, including reclaimed materials and supportive classroom dialogue allows arts educators to foster children's repertoire of expressive, artistic languages through arts practices that encourage creative reuse"

Eckhoff and Spearman, 2009, p. 15

COMMUNITY-BASED ART EDUCATION

It can be somewhat difficult to describe what community-based art education can entail. Community is a broad term; it can consist of a handful of individuals, or it can be hundreds of thousands of people. People move in and out of communities constantly, and often communities overlap in membership, definition, location, and any other characteristic often used in the definition of a community. It can therefore be difficult to pinpoint what exactly constitutes community-based education.

Pamela Lawton (2019) offers one description of community-based art education:

Community-based art education takes place in both educational institutions and communities. It provides opportunities for participants to develop art skills while learning from one another about their community as situated in the larger context, and by building meaningful connections through artistic collaborations that inspire personal, social, and communal transformation (p. 206).

The key elements here that separate community-based art education from other forms of art education are a larger context and meaningful connections. In other words, community-based art education prioritizes the experience of existing in a specific context (or community).

Lawton dives into the history of community-based art education, referencing John Dewey's ideas about education, social responsibility,

and connections within communities (Lawton, 2019). Dewey believed that education should not be separate from a person's lived experiences and should be relevant to their lives. This is something that education systems still struggle with, but community-based education has potential to excel at due to its foundation in the experiences of the community it serves. Community-based education directly accounts for the who, when, and where of an educational experience; relevance is a part of community-based education by definition.

EMERGENT CURRICULUM

The idea of emergent curriculum is essential to my thesis and describes the kind of curriculum I intended to create for the Mini Makers program. Susan Stacey (2018) has excellent insights into emergent curriculum; she explains basic principles of an emergent curriculum, such as embracing a child's prior knowledge, being responsive to students' interests and ideas, and making space for learning opportunities to emerge (Stacey, 2018). Emergent curriculum allows learners to use their lived experiences to generate learning. In this way, emergent curriculum is a collaboration between educators and learners. Learners provide their insights, interests, and past experiences and knowledge, and educators respond by creating a dynamic curriculum that is responsive to what learners offer.

Documentation is also an important aspect of emergent curriculum (Stacey, 2018). Documenting learners' thinking allows educators to make connections, gather knowledge about each individual, and use this information to ensure that learning is engaging and relevant to learners. This is partially why action research is complimentary to a project focusing on emergent curriculum; action research sets up a framework for documentation and reflection, which is used to create a responsive plan for learning.

Although educators embracing emergent curriculum embrace flexibility in learning environments, they still provide a foundation for learning to occur. In my own teaching, I use the availability of different materials and flexible prompts and activities to provide a foundation for learning that offers structure without being prescriptive. It can be

difficult to find a balance between flexibility and planning when design-

ing curriculum. One of the goals of this project is to discover what that

balance can look like.

CHAPTER III
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

MATERIALS-BASED CURRICULUM PLANNING

In the earliest stages of my thesis project, I began to think about what kinds of lessons and activities might happen during the hour that I would be with the Mini Makers each week. I was overwhelmed by the seemingly infinite possibilities. With no external goals or standards to meet, and so many possible directions, I had to narrow my thinking. At this point, I knew my thesis would be centered around action research and emergent curriculum planning, and I knew material exploration would be a common thread throughout said curriculum. While this gave me a solid base for developing lessons, material exploration itself is a broad topic with many meaningful and exciting possibilities. Even within the constraints of the program, such as storage and time, there were still many potentials to sift through.

In my studio practice, the work I make is directly influenced by what I have available. Rather than starting with a preconceived idea and gathering what I need to execute it, I ask myself what I can make with what I have. This is partly out of necessity, but it also provides constraints that can lead to new and unexpected developments in my practice. Embracing the limited availability of materials has allowed me to create works that I would have otherwise never thought of as possibilities.

As I developed my thesis, I began to see my curriculum planning as a practice similar to art-making, and I began to consider preparing for a curriculum the same what I might prepare for a new painting. I would start by asking myself what I have physically available, how I might use that material, and what I might be able to easily acquire

that could compliment and engage with what I already have. I ended up developing a plan to structure my curriculum around materials sourced from the same reuse center that the fall Mini Makers program was held at. This allowed me to generate novel ideas that were engaging for both me and the Mini Makers learners.

The three lesson plans I created for this program set the stage for different kinds of material exploration. My first lesson presents one material (sticker paper) that can be used a variety of ways, and provides an optional prompt. My second lesson introduces multiple materials, including light, with an optional prompt to explore how the three-dimensional materials interact with light. The third and final lesson presents a variety of materials with no prompt at all.

LESSON PLANS

The following section contains my lesson plans for the Mini Makers after-school program. There are multiple iterations of these plans; as my project is rooted in action research, I point out changes that were made between iterations and the reasoning behind these changes. Many of these changes took place because of my documentation and reflection of previous Mini Makers classes, new constraints, self-reflection, and feedback from peers, professors, and students.

Major changes between iterations are highlighted in yellow, and notes and explanations for the changes can be found after each lesson plan.

Class One: Sticker Paper Collages - Iteration I

Overview:

During this introductory class, the class will be using sticker paper activities to get to know each other. There will be a focus on creating a fun, relaxed, and welcoming environment that will establish a positive foundation for the remaining sessions.

Objectives:

The class will get to know the instructor, and the instructor will gain insight into the interests, personalities, and working styles of the class. Students will create name tags and sticker stories.

Description:

Name tag Activity Introduction: 5 minutes

The instructor will come in wearing a decorated sticker name tag and introduce themselves. The name tag will be decorated with drawings that are relevant to the instructors life and interests. They will explain why they chose to decorate the name tag the way they did, and introduce the name tag activity and materials.

Name tag Activity: 15 minutes

Participants will create name tags that introduce aspects of their identities as well as their names. The instructor will encourage students to decorate their name tags with drawings, symbols, and colors that reflect their identities and interests. Instructor will have students share

one aspect of their name tag with the class.

Sticker Story Activity Introduction: 2 minutes

Instructor will introduce new materials (colored sticker paper) and activity.

Sticker Stories Activity: 30 minutes

Students will use the sticker material to create a story about themselves, real or fictional. Students will wear their sticker stories along with their name tags, and each student will share one sticker story with the class.

Cleanup: 8 minutes

Classroom Materials:

Markers, color pencils, pencils, sticker paper (UPS shipping labels), sticker paper, plain white paper, scissors

Preparation:

Cut individual stickers from sheets to make four smaller papers per page. Cut in half for name tags. Before class, set up sticker paper at the front of the room and make drawing materials available on tables.

Class One: Sticker Paper Collages - Iteration II

Overview:

During this introductory class, the class will be using sticker paper activities to get to know each other. There will be a focus on creating a fun, relaxed, and welcoming environment that will establish a positive foundation for the remaining sessions.

Objectives:

The class will get to know the instructor, and the instructor will gain insight into the interests, personalities, and working styles of the class. Students will create name tags and a collage.

Description:

Name tag Activity Introduction: 5 minutes

The instructor will come in wearing a decorated sticker name tag and introduce themselves. The name tag will be decorated with drawings that are relevant to the instructors life and interests. They will explain why they chose to decorate the name tag the way they did, and introduce the name tag activity and materials.

Name tag Activity: 15 minutes

Participants will create name tags that introduce aspects of their identities as well as their names. The instructor will encourage students to decorate their name tags with drawings, symbols, and colors that reflect their identities and interests. Instructor will have students share

one aspect of their name tag with the class.

Collage Activity Introduction: 2 minutes

Instructor will introduce new materials (colored sticker paper) and activity.

Collage Activity: 30 minutes

Students will create collages using the materials provided. They will be encouraged to create a collage that shares something about themselves, similar to the name tag. This could be a story, an interest, etc. The instructor will emphasize that the students should have fun with the materials and that they are able to make anything they would like to.

Cleanup: 8 minutes

Classroom Materials:

Markers, color pencils, pencils, sticker paper (UPS shipping labels), painted sticker paper, plain white paper, scissors

Preparation:

Cut individual stickers from sheets to make four smaller papers per page. Cut in half for name tags. Prep painted sticker paper by painting several sheets with various colors of acrylic paint.

Before class, set up sticker paper at the front of the room and make drawing materials available on tables.

Class One: Sticker Paper Collages - Explanation of Curriculum

There was one major change between iteration I and iteration II of the first Mini Makers lesson. I had originally planned for a story-telling activity, which I conceptualized as a continuation of the name tag activity. As I continues to brainstorm ideas and consider the role of materials in my curriculum, I decided that this activity did not use the sticker paper material, which I considered to be a very lucky find, to its full potential. Stories could be illustrated on regular paper, and the sticker stories activity was too similar to the name tag activity to lead to any new learning opportunities.

I knew that the novelty of stickers would be engaging, and came up with the idea of sticker collages to better facilitate engagement with all the possibilities of the sticker material. Students were still able to draw and illustrate on the material, and many of them did, but more possibilities for use were opened by painting the material. It became a mess-free collage material that could be attached to anything in the room and easily removed.

Class One: Sticker Paper Collages - Observations, Documentation, and Reflections

The students were very excited about the sticker paper, and were eager to start working. The name tag activity went longer than expected, as students were eager to create something representative of themselves. I did not have students each share an element of their name tags, since they were already having conversations about their choices while working. Some students chose to draw a pet on their name tag, likely due to the cat on mine. One student shared that her cat has three legs, which sparked a bit of conversation. Some students drew favorite characters and foods.

The class made collages, but also used the materials in unexpected ways. One student began cutting elaborate shapes into a sheet of sticker paper and asked to stick it on my shoulder, which led to me receiving more decorations. Two learners placed the stickers on their stuffed animals and themselves. The stuffed animals were given stickers that were "Band-Aids" due to imaginary injuries. One animal was given a sticker paw print.

Students struggled with peeling the backs off the stickers. This led to them helping each other and excitement about learning the peeling "trick" I was showing them (bending a corner to peel).

I found this to be an exciting first class. I was happy to see materials being used in ways alternative to my suggestions. This group needed little prompting to explore materials; this is likely due to their

familiarity with the school and each other. The group was also there by choice, and each student had a personal interest in art. Another group may have needed more prompting.

Figure 2: A student shows me her sticker paper collage depicting a ballerina star. She informed me that she wrote "wonderful" and drew this image because she is a wonderful dancer. Many other students were eager to share their interests and talents through their artworks as well.

Figure 3: A student applies a "Band-Aid" to her stuffed cat. Other students see this and start using the sticker paper in similar ways.
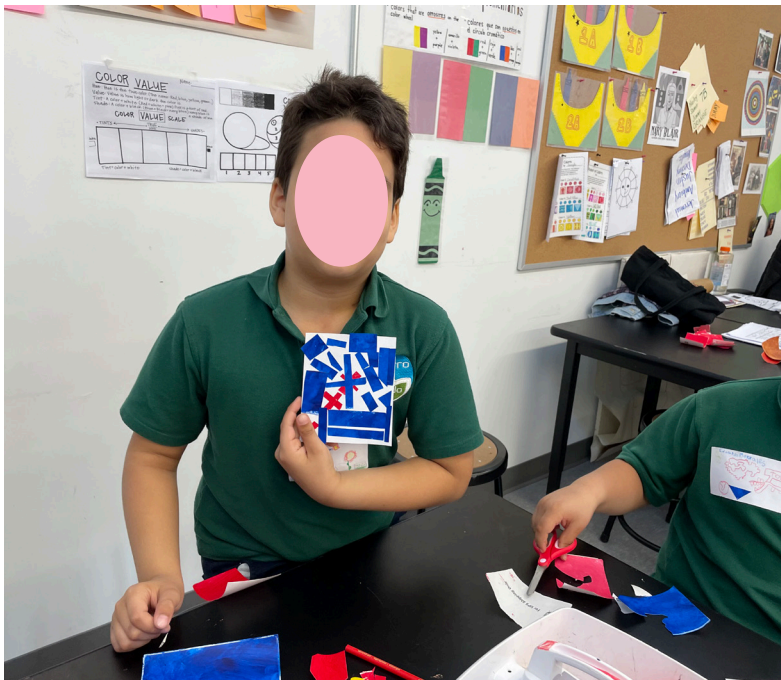

Figure 4: A student shows his abstract sticker collage.

Class Two: Shadow Objects - Iteration I

Overview:

This lesson will focus on the exploration of light and shadows. Materials will be available for students to construct objects to be placed in front of flashlights. Students will be encouraged to explore different combinations of materials that interact with light in different ways.

Objectives:

Students will experience arranging materials in ways that invite questions, excitement, and self-driven exploration.

Description:

Recap and intro to lesson: 5 minutes

Instructor will ask students what they remember from last week. Possible questions include:

Does anyone remember something that we did last week? Does anyone have a favorite part of last week's lesson?

Instructor will introduce activity by showing students the light sources, materials, and showing examples of artists (Tim Noble and Sue Webster, Kumi Yamashita) working with shadows. Instructor will go over important guidelines for this class: flashlights should always be pointed away from other students' eyes, and we should take turns with materials, including flashlights.

Activity: 45 minutes

Students will experiment with light and shadow by using the provided materials.

Classroom Materials:

Fabric scraps, sticker paper, clothespins, glue, tape, yarn, cardboard, scissors, paper, foam, plastic, flashlights, pencils, markers, colored pencils

Class Two: Shadow Objects - Iteration II

Overview:

This lesson will focus on the exploration of light and shadows as well as documentation. Materials will be available for students to construct objects to be placed in front of flashlights. Students will be encouraged to explore different combinations of materials that interact with light in different ways. Students will document their work with disposable cameras, making choices about what they would like to document.

Objectives:

Students will experience arranging materials in ways that provoke questions, excitement, and self-driven exploration. Students will also make decisions about how and what to document.

Description:

Recap and intro to lesson: 5-10 minutes

Instructor will ask students what they remember from last week. Possible questions include:

Does anyone remember something that we did last week? Does anyone have a favorite part of last week's lesson? What materials did we use last week?

Instructor will introduce activity by showing students the light sources and materials, and by showing examples of artists working with shadows. The instructor will go over important guidelines for this class:

flashlights should always be pointed away from other students' eyes, and we should take turns with materials, including flashlights. Instructor will show students how to use disposable cameras. They will also emphasize that there is limited film, and that we should be respectful about photographing each other and each other's work- always ask for permission.

The instructor will also introduce the idea of documentation, emphasizing that it is important to make decisions about what document. The instructor will let one camera be passed around freely by students. They will hold onto another until about halfway through the class, and then will ask if everyone has gotten to take a photograph. This will ensure that everyone gets a chance to document their work with the limited film.

Activity: 40 minutes

Students will experiment with the provided materials and document their experiences.

Classroom Materials:

Fabric scraps, sticker paper, clothespins, glue, tape, yarn, cardboard, scissors, paper, foam, plastic, flashlights, pencils, markers, colored pencils, disposable cameras

Class Two: Shadow Objects - Explanation of Curriculum

During the first Mini Makers lesson, students were interested in my journal and the photographs I was taking. While my original idea, which was developed at the same time as the first Mini Makers lesson, was focused entirely on exploration of light as a material, I shifted the lesson to include elements of documentation after a class discussion where my thesis advisor, Dr. Courtnie Wolfgang, suggested disposable cameras as a way to let learners document their own experiences. I also knew that I needed to provide as many different materials as I could, as the Mini Makers learners had no hesitations about exploring materials in our first meeting.

Class Two: Shadow Objects - Observations, Documentation, and Reflections

Unfortunately, the disposable cameras were lost by the pharmacy that was developing them. I was able to document the students' use of the disposable cameras, however. Although I was extremely disappointed by the loss of the students' documentation, a lesson can be learned here about the value of multiple documentation methods when conducting research.

While students were interested in the cameras and the light, they were not as interested in them as I believed they would be. One student was especially interested in the camera and one was very interested in the shadows created by his objects, most were far more interested in the re-purposed materials I had brought in. There were amazing material explorations and conversations taking place, many of which are documented in these images.

Figure 5: A student shows off his creation made from leaves, a stick, and tape, shaking it to see what kind of sounds this new object can make. Another student prepares to take a photograph of this moment. Many students were more interested in documenting each other than their own work.

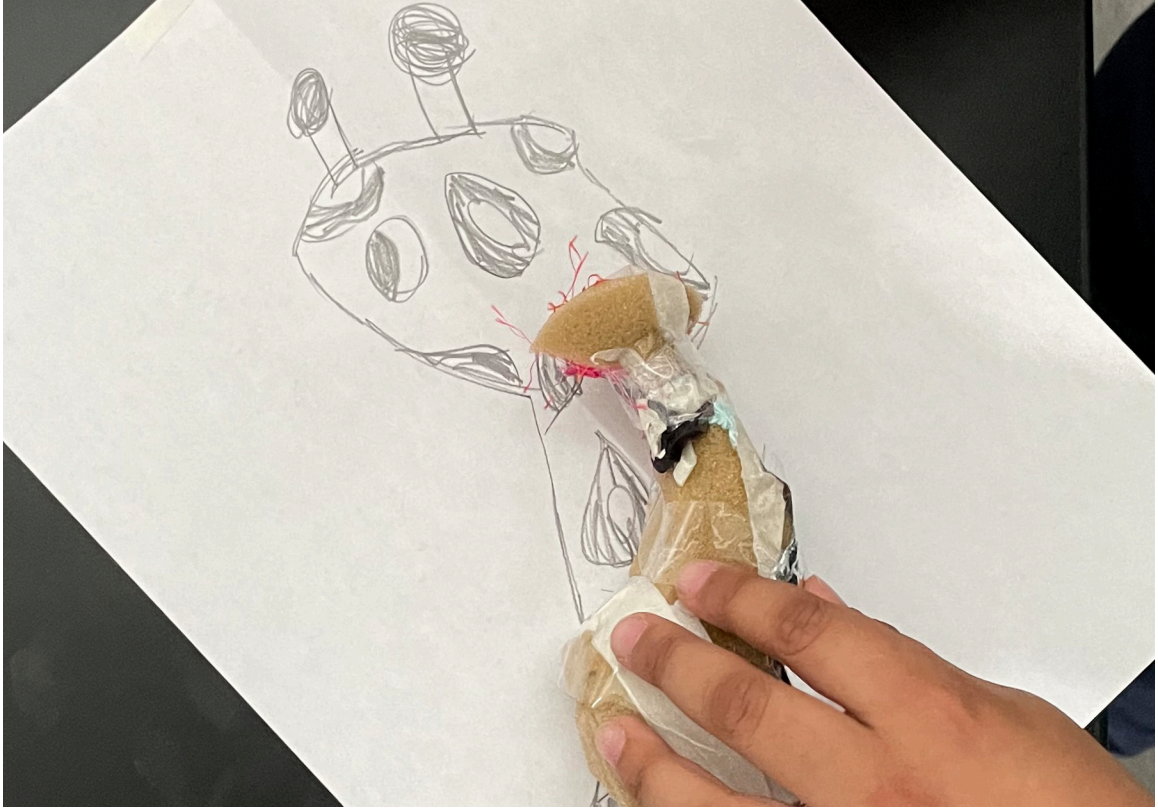Figure 6: A piece of paper creates a shadow creature.

Figure 7: A student traces the shadow of an object he created to create a drawing of a giraffe.

Figure 8: A student uses fabric, tape, and plastic to create a bag capable of holding a small container of Play Dough.

Class Three: Creating Tools- Iteration I

Overview:

Students will use a variety of materials to create a tool with any function. We will discuss what a tool is and how it meets the needs of those who use it.

Objectives:

Students will consider the functionality of the materials they are working with and generate new uses for objects.

Description:

Intro to lesson: 5 minutes

The instructor will start the class by asking what a tool is. After a brief discussion where we settle on a definition, the instructor will introduce the activity.

Activity: 45 minutes

Students will use a variety of materials to create tools.

Classroom Materials:

TBD

Class Three: Material Exploration - Iteration II

Overview:

Students will use a variety of materials to freely create anything they wish.

Objectives:

Students will create their own learning opportunities by engaging with materials collaboratively.

Description:

The instructor will simply introduce the materials and encourage students to continue the collaborative making that was happening during the last lesson.

Classroom Materials:

Fabric scraps, sticker paper, clothespins, glue, tape, yarn, cardboard, scissors, paper, foam, plastic, pencils, markers, colored pencils, buttons, zippers, paper cups, plastic cups, wool.

Class Three: Material Exploration - Explanation of Curriculum

The first iteration of this lesson was written early on in my planning. After experiencing the Mini Makers' self-directed work in lesson two, I began to wonder what would happen if they were not given a prompt at all. They had already created tools, such as bags and instruments, without any prompting during the second class. I was confidant that this group would be able to handle the freedom that came with having very little guidance on what to make or how to make it.

There was also quite a few lesson ideas that I wanted to introduce, but unfortunately I did not get the chance. Due to scheduling and an illness, lessons were canceled and I had to cover as much ground as possible in one lesson. Allowing students to create with very few boundaries was meant that my lessons would provide a good overview of how these learners reacted to different amounts of direction.

Class Three: Material Exploration - Observations, Documentation, and Reflections

The complete freedom students had during this class allowed them to create a huge variety of projects. One student created something best described as a decorated cup for a friend who could not come to the Mini Makers meeting that day. Another used paint (an unexpected material offered by the teacher hosting us in her room) to create a dye for wool. Another created a paper cup dragon that could move by twisting the cups and could "eat" if one opened the fabric flap covering its stomach and placed something inside. One student created a "beehive with mechanical stuff."

This community of learners was actively engaged in both their own and each others creations. More than the others, it was during this lesson that I had to really embrace the role of facilitator. I offered suggestions, answered questions about materials, and asked students to tell me about what they were making. It was difficult to not jump to conclusions about students' work or provide unnecessary labels or categories.

Figure 9: Amusingly, many tools, including these weapons, were created during this class.

Figure 10: A drawing of a rainbow cat rests on top of a "mechanical beehive."

CHAPTER IV
CONCLUSION

To conclude my thesis, I return to my research questions. I asked myself how I might go about creating a curriculum centered on material exploration and how I could use action research to develop a curriculum. I found that there is great importance in being being comfortable in the role of facilitator when participating in action research as well as in material-centered learning experiences. This was sometimes difficult. I found myself wondering what I was "supposed" to be doing often, and I was frequently worried that I was crossing the line from prompting and responding to directing. However, the students I worked with were engaged, socializing, learning, and having positive experiences with one another; regardless of how well I managed to balance my various roles, there is at least one success.

As noted in my literature review, community-based art education is education that is responsive to the context that it takes place in. It is difficult to create a curriculum that is engaged and responsive in such a short amount of time. Creating curriculum that is truly community engaged requires a deeper understanding of those around you than I was able to achieve. However, there was some success in creating connections within the community of learners through collaboration and positive art education experiences. Conversation during lessons tended to shift between what was happening with a project, sharing experiences, and connecting what was happening in the classroom to broader life experiences.

I found that it is difficult to categorize the kinds of learning that can stem from material exploration. I watched students collaborate, solve problems, ask questions, and create completely new objects out of reclaimed materials. My experiences showed me that learning and

creating without striving towards a final product opens up a world of possibilities.

      This thesis gave me the opportunity to explore methods of creating an engaging curriculum that, through material exploration, connects to my own artistic practice. This project is one of my first in my journey as an art educator, and I look forward to applying this experience to future opportunities.

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