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Art And Exceptionality: Addressing Art Fear And Fear Of Difference In An Introductory Art Course
Art et exceptionnalité : s'attaquer à la peur de l'art et de la différence dans le cadre d'un court d'initiation à l'art

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Résumé de l'article

Des éducatrices et éducateurs universitaires ont conçu et co-enseigné un cours axé sur la création artistique et l'apprentissage coopératif au sein d'un organisme communautaire voué aux arts qui dessert des personnes en situation de handicap. Leur objectif était d'aider les étudiant.e.s universitaires à analyser le potentiel de l'art et son impact sur leur vie personnelle et professionnelle. Ils voulaient savoir comment alimenter une volonté d'action artistique chez des étudiant.e.s de premier cycle qui ne se considèrent pas des artistes. Les éducatrices et les éducateurs ont remarqué qu'aborder la peur de l'art sous une optique de création artistique inclusive était bénéfique.

Art and Exceptionality: Addressing Art Fear and Fear of Difference in an Introductory Art Course

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Abstract: University educators designed and co-taught a course which involved collaborative artmaking and learning with a community-based arts organization that serves individuals with disabilities. Their goal was to help university students examine the potential of art and how it applies to their personal and professional lives. They sought to better understand how to nurture a feeling of artistic agency in undergraduate students who do not define themselves as artists. Educators found that students benefited from an exploration of art fear through an inclusive approach to art creation.

Keywords: Art fear; Disability; Collaborative artmaking; Higher education; Experiential learning.

Introduction

In their book, *Art & Fear: Observations on the Perils (and Rewards) of Artmaking*, Bayles and Orland (1993) explain that "fears about yourself prevent you from doing your best work, while fears about your reception by others prevent you from doing your own work" (p. 23). They are speaking here of art and artists, but perhaps they could be speaking about all work and all people. Fear can hold people back from so much: being comfortable with themselves, being comfortable with new ideas; and certainly, fear can prevent those who define themselves as *non-artistic* or as *uncreative* from fully participating in an artful life.

The perspective of the authors starts with caring about art and also caring about individuals who might be known as disabled—neurologically, physically, or emotionally atypical, or as we prefer *exceptional.* The authors wondered whether the intersection of art and exceptionality could provide a pathway for university students in a general arts education class to address fear of artmaking. The authors, one a professor of special education and the other a professor of elementary education who works in the arts, examined our own teaching practices and student reflections using a teacher research approach to better understand the impact of a university course designed and co-taught in an inclusive setting in partnership with a community-based arts organization. The purpose of the study was to better understand how to nurture a feeling of artistic agency in university students who do not define themselves as artists and to examine the application of art to their lives through working at a community-based arts organization. Specifically, the authors focused on two research questions, each with two parts. The first set was: *What is the relationship between art fear and fear of differences in others, and how can we use this to nurture a feeling of artistic agency in undergraduate students who do not define themselves as artists?* The second set of questions led us in a more practical direction of where specifically and how concretely we could address these fears: *How does the experience of working with a*

community-based arts organization lead undergraduate students to examine the meaning of art, and how does it apply to their personal and professional lives?

Literature Review

There has been a great deal of research on the benefits of general arts education. While exceptions exist, the majority of arts education research is focused on primary and secondary school-age students and, in general, falls into three categories: 1) ways that arts education benefits overall development; 2) connection between arts education and improvement in other curricular areas; and 3) the need for further research (Lloyd, 2017). Given that the approach addressed in this article involved a university-level course that confronts art fear through experience at a community-based arts organization that supports individuals with disability, the review of the literature examines areas outside of the common topics covered in art education research. The first area examines art fear in arts education: the importance of building artistic capacity through artistic experience and artistic self-perception. The second area of the literature review addresses disability and inclusion, particularly as it relates to art. Finally, as done in the course, the literature review connects fear of art with fear of differences and how experiences in both serve one another.

Art Fear

We reviewed research that explores the question: What is the place of art in an individual's life and how might we best nurture it? In their study, *Cultivating Demand for the Arts: Arts Learning, Arts Engagement and State Arts Policy*, Zakaras and Lowell (2008) note that support and experience in the arts are intimately linked. Increased personal creation nurtures increased advocacy and belief in the importance of the arts. It may be harder to understand that which one cannot connect to personally. The study suggests that the best way to increase a sense of value for the arts is to "build the capacity for aesthetic perception [and] the ability to create artistically in an art form" (p. 96). The question then becomes: What helps or hinders art creation in an individual?

In a nation-wide United States survey of self-perceptions of creativity, Novak-Leonard et al. (2020) found that "self-perceptions of artistic creativity are significant positive predictors of both arts attendance and art-making" (p. 4). Specifically, it is less about objective measures of artistic ability and more about one's own view of self as an artist that defines participation in both viewing art and making art. This would suggest that general art courses should not neglect artistic self-perception as a central purpose.

Mansour et al. (2018) reinforce the idea that artistic self-concept positively predicts participation. Their study indicates that "active forms of participation are better placed to enhance students' arts self-concept than the more passive receptive arts participation" (p. 249). They recommend utilizing artistic experiences that build on the artistic strengths that students already have. This research suggests that general art courses need to be experiential in nature, utilizing strategies that make it easy for students to participate and feel success, thus lifting their artistic self-image. Furthermore, Dumas and Dunbar (2016) found that creativity can be positively or negatively impacted by the stereotypes connected to creative tasks. For example, many individuals perceive art as a matter of talent born out of DNA, rather than as a muscle that can be exercised and used. These are stereotypes that are brought to art, that impact our artistic self-perception and might lead to fear over participation.

Zakaras and Lowell (2008) suggest the power of local collaborative networks in support of arts learning. Rather than having general arts education occur in isolation within the educational institution, one might take advantage of the synergy created by learning in context, serving both

the community and the general art course. This involves engaging in artmaking and community service. This instills an additional layer of purpose to our creative work and our artistic self-perception. Ng Heung Sang (2009) found the potential for collaborative projects to "nurture community spirit and strengthen relationships between schools and various public and private organizations" (p. 188).

Research supports the impact that artistic participation has in other academic fields. For example, the arts have been used successfully to build teamwork and communication skills in health care professionals (Acai et al., 2017). Another study by Kinsella and Bidinosti (2016) showed how artistic activity was used for skill building in health professionals in the following areas: value awareness, professional application of creativity, reflective practice, self-awareness, and developing a professional identity. Other studies have focused on additional benefits in using the arts for disciplines beyond the arts (Jones et al., 2017; Mangione et al., 2018). This suggests that educators might nurture a greater sense of purpose for creative work, and thus positively impact artistic self-perception, through connecting creativity directly with the career path of students, particularly at the university level where the career is imminent.

This research suggests that addressing artistic self-perception, utilizing community partners, and connecting the arts to future career paths are key tools in addressing art fear. When examining how art can be used to both redefine self as artist and redefine disability, questions remain regarding what the literature says about an experiential approach to reshape perceptions.

Disability, Inclusion, and the Arts

Hall's (2010) research on the social exclusion and inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities highlights the potential of inclusive artistic spaces for developing a sense of belonging to society and overall wellbeing. The research suggests that the creation of arts-related social networks paired with being paid for socially valued art can foster attachment and feelings of value within a community. Furthermore, other studies suggest that art pedagogy can be integrated with sociocultural concepts addressed in the field of Disability Studies to confront ableism (Derby, 2016; Derby & Karr, 2015) and promote inclusive practices (Collier & Wix, 2017).

Whereas an art course is an effective space for integration of sociocultural concepts related to Disabilities Studies (Derby, 2016; Derby & Karr, 2015), it also provides a rich opportunity to explore the connection between art fear and fear of differences. Collier and Wix (2017) noted the fear expressed by undergraduate students from different disciplines within the field of education in a course entitled Art for the Exceptional Child, specifically special education teacher candidates expressed a "fear of succeeding in art, suggesting that making art was a scary and unfamiliar experience. Some of the art teacher candidates admitted their lack of education and experience regarding how to teach art to students with special needs" (p. 40). It would stand to reason that those lacking in background knowledge and experience with disabilities and who also do not self-describe as artistic would be challenged to confront fears in a unique way.

To Sum Up

The connection between the fear of difference and art fear is explored by Bayles and Orland in *Art and Fear* (1993): "We all learn at a young age the perils of being perceived as different. We learn that others have the power to single out, to ridicule, to turn away from and to mark the one who is different" (p. 52). Bayles and Orland go on to write that "wanting to be understood is a basic need – an affirmation of the humanity you share with everyone around you" (p. 53). The examination of the barriers we put up that keep us from progress is a part of the creative process. Twyla Tharp, great American choreographer, explained that she has five fears that she brings to

every creative act: "People will laugh at me; Someone has done it before; I have nothing to say; I will upset someone; and Once executed, the idea will never be as good as it is in my mind" (Tharp & Reiter, 2006, p. 22). Taken generally, these fears could resonate with those attempting creative acts and when trying to relate to others in social settings.

Hall (2010) writes that "to belong is to feel attached, to feel valued, and to have a sense of insiderness" (p. 54). Relationship comes through understanding. To be misunderstood or to misunderstand is a barrier to connection that fosters belongingness. Whether this idea is applied to artistic expression or overcoming 'otherness' by finding community with those who may appear to have more differences than similarities, an examination of fear can help us find the courage to overcome it. The literature points to benefits of artmaking within an inclusive creative space while examining ideas related to artistic agency, difference and similarity, and the reduction of fear. This article adds to the literature by describing a pedagogical approach that combines artmaking with individuals with disabilities and an exploration of sociocultural concepts rooted in the Disability Studies field.

Undergraduate students, such as those included in this study, may have an interest in disability rights, culture, advocacy, and allyship, but without curricular integration they likely lack the opportunity for meaningful study and experience in this area (Derby & Karr, 2015). Ultimately, the authors were interested in the relationship between art fear and the fear of difference in others. Could experiential learning in an inclusive space nurture both artistic agency and acceptance of others? Could the experience of working in a community-based arts organization for individuals with disabilities foster an understanding of the meaning of art in one's personal and professional life? The study is aimed at addressing these questions.

Course Description

The context of this work began when the authors designed a core curriculum course that fulfils a creative art requirement of all majors at our urban university. There are many course offerings that fulfill this university core curriculum requirement. Each course is different, but all share common objectives to ensure consistency across iterations. These common objectives have to do with art appreciation, art creation, aesthetic value, and lifelong artistic engagement. From our experience working with the arts and working with people who have disabilities, the authors saw a natural connective tissue between the uncertainty one might have when first getting to know a person with an identified disability and the uncertainty the people bring to art and artmaking. We wanted to explore this further.

We connected with a local arts organization to provide the context to engage in this work. The local arts non-profit has as its guiding principle the motto: Art Redefining Disability. The organization engages with people who have disabilities through five core art programs, but one specific one seemed a particularly apt fit for what we were attempting, because it allowed us to make art side-by-side with people of a similar age to our undergraduate college students. The site is an art studio where artists typically work with clay but might engage with a variety of media. This program is a nationally recognized program which hires young adults with physical or development disabilities who range in age from 16 to 22 years old. The organization uses the term *intern* when referring to the young adults with disabilities to acknowledge the vocational training aspect of the program. This article will also use the term *intern* for those associated with the arts organization and *student* for those associated with the university. Most interns are enrolled in local high schools and are a part of the program to develop vocational skills as a way to transition from school to the workplace. Some interns are on the autism spectrum, or have Down's syndrome or

other disabilities. As noted, we prefer the term "exceptionalities", but will use *disabilities* throughout the article for the sake of clarity.

One unique feature of the course is that it is taught almost 100 per cent on-site at the arts organization instead of in a traditional university classroom, so our students learn through doing, and their experience is not filtered through the university setting or its constructs. The authors spent a year planning together. We constructed our course, got it approved through the university process, and began a partnership which is now in its sixth year.

The program takes commissions to create art which is then sold. The interns come in from a variety of public schools in the area and are paid minimum wage and must follow guidelines associated with a working environment. The studio is a remarkable place where the interns use the arts as a pathway to development. In this program none of the art is made individually. Each individual contributes to the final piece according to his or her ability, and yet every piece is influenced by all of us: interns, university students, and instructors.

Another unique feature of the course is its quality of reversing the dominant paradigm for people with significant disabilities in society. Oftentimes, people with disabilities are viewed as divergent individuals who must assimilate into a standardized setting, one which might not be inclusive of various abilities. In this course, we are coming to the interns. Many of our students are very nervous about artmaking, and many have had little or no experience with people who have disabilities. Even though the course is labelled as a *service-learning* course, students are not volunteering in any traditional sense. Students collaboratively engage in the work, in the making of art, along with interns. Students learn from the interns because interns often have more experience in the art studio and with the tools. Many students have the misconception at the beginning of the course that they will be helping interns with projects, but they soon realize that interns are helping them.

Over time the course has evolved, as the authors, who co-teach the course, have gained confidence and learned from our experiences working with interns and teaching artists. At the beginning of the partnership, we did not have a previous connection with this organization, and so trust had to be built over time. Early on we engaged in coursework readings, discussions, and activities with only students, and then we would come together with the interns to make art. We have evolved now to a routine in which we do almost everything together. The authors do lesson planning with the teaching artists. We invite interns to do course readings, discussions, and activities with students. Over time the authors learned that an inclusive setting means that we include interns and students in everything. If an intern or student struggles with a reading, we adapt. If an activity is overwhelming, we allow the intern or student to sit out. The only exception is that students have to submit assignments for grading purposes.

In a two-and-a-half-hour-long weekly class session, everyone is invited to participate in all aspects of the class. Typically, our course has an enrollment of between 20-30 students, while the site has half as many interns. This ratio is intentional, so as not to overwhelm the program or the interns. Experiences, artmaking, and artistic materials are selected intentionally to foster engagement and inclusion. For example, the primary medium used in artmaking is clay. The use of clay is significant because it is both strong and flexible. It is meant to be pressed, rolled, molded, shaped, stretched, changed. It is highly responsive to touch. It is a natural material, coming from the earth, and it can be found in multiple shades and textures. When working with clay, students and interns use their bare hands, making it a highly sensory experience. We found that repairing mistakes was easy, so the fear of making errors was lessened. What the students and interns created was multi-dimensional, but for it to be well constructed, certain guidelines were followed. Students

and interns learned the basics of slipping and scoring and proper thickness needed for stability. A level of structure and limits, instead of a free-for-all, set them up for greater success. There was a basic functional purpose to each piece (say an ornament or a bowl), but then each individual was given tools, techniques and the freedom to make the piece their own. We continually returned to this idea of personal expression within a given structure as a way to explode the myth that creativity has no structure and to show how structure can be used to nurture creativity.

Metaphorical underpinnings related to the medium of choice extend to other aspects of class. We aimed for philosophical alignment in assignments, activities, and the ways we communicate with students and interns. We were continually asking one another: What are the optimal conditions for creativity? How are we creating an environment where everyone feels safe enough to take artistic risks? Are there barriers to keep people from being included, and, if so, how can we remove them? Do activities, assignments, or materials separate us into those who can and those who cannot? Does everyone have a meaningful role? Is what we are doing increasing fear or reducing fear? These questions are explored explicitly when we engage in creative activities throughout the course.

Most of our students come to this experience with the typical notions of what the arts mean for all of us: The arts are reserved for the chosen few who are recognized as having talent, with the rest of people divided into two groups—those who appreciate and understand art, and those who do not. Stone and Hess (2020), Sawyer (2006), and Andiliou and Murphy (2010), among others, speak about the pervasive myth of the artistic genius, that creativity is only available to those born that way. Their research suggests that most people tend to believe this in full or in part. In Stone and Hess's research, participants were far more likely to agree with the statement: "creative results are effortless" (p. 373). They and others, Berghetto and Kaufman (2007) for example, worry that the standard model for general art instruction connects creativity too intrinsically to the eminence of artists in museums, as opposed to distinguishing between talent versus hard work and the imaginative potential that all possess.

Perhaps it is useful to think of athletics. It is possible to watch professionals with appreciation and respect, but also know, hopefully, that exercise has an important place in life. Inactive muscles forget their full capability and functionality. With intentional and graduated practice, the hope is that lifelong, healthful living can be a part of everyone's life, professional or not. The authors take this idea into general art instruction, attempting to address creative self-perception and misconceptions about art as a central focus. In the course, the muscles are artistic ones, the hope being that students can come to see the concrete value of the *creative* in daily life. Students are pushed to make the connection to their individual professional journeys. What would it mean to be an artful accountant or pharmacist? What if individuals completed their professional education able to find divergent or creative solutions to problems, beyond disciplinary socialization and traditional ways of thinking? Using the lens of artistic self-perception and fear of difference, through concrete experience, this course pushes students towards a creative future.

Inquiry Process

To understand the impact of the course, we used an inquiry approach to better understand our own practice. We were guided by the work of Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993), who explain that "systematic, intentional inquiry by teachers" (p.1) can offer unique perspectives on teaching and learning and such a process can be used to improve practices. It is a methodology which acknowledges the teacher as insider and expert. The broader methodology of teacher research is a

powerful tool for generating new knowledge about one's practice within their own educational context (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993).

Documentation was collected over five academic years, starting in January 2015 and ending in May 2019 as a part of our routine practice as educators. We reviewed this archival data and purposeful sampling was used as we examined only data related to our specific course for the systematic inquiry. We compared and contrasted information from different sources and perspectives all related to the five iterations of the same course co-taught by authors (Anderson, et al., 2007). We paid specific attention to student reflections from a consistent written assignment and contextualized findings from the assignment with data from course evaluations, community partner feedback, and field notes.

Student reflections were analyzed from the spring semesters of 2015 through 2019. We found themes in the data by coding repetitions of key words and ideas in the student reflections. Each author did this separately before coming together to analyze results. Based on our initial coding we developed a set of categories, and then used these categories to form two sets of questions: 1) What is the relationship between art fear and fear of differences in others, and how can we use this to nurture a feeling of artistic agency in undergraduate students who do not define themselves as artists? 2) How does the experience of working with a community-based arts organization lead undergraduate students to examine the meaning of art, and how does it apply to their personal and professional lives?

To further understand these questions, we analyzed course evaluations, field notes, and community partner feedback to find resonance and divergence with our categories. Course evaluations were reviewed from the same period. Field note observations that were recorded by the co-teachers during each iteration of the course were reviewed. Before and after each semester we engaged in a debrief to build on what went well and to revise elements needing adjustment and those notes were reviewed. We also reviewed digital correspondence between the authors and community partners that informally assessed the program. Additional anecdotal data was collected from our community partner through digital correspondence.

What We Learned

Our analysis led to the identification of themes and key learnings from the systematic and intentional inquiry. Two general themes emerged: transformed ideas of self as creative individual and letting go of fears (in relation to arts and disability). We attribute the change of mindsets to collaborative artmaking and a class community. Students' ideas about the meaning of the arts in relation to service changed over the course of the semester. They also learned about how the arts and creative processes apply to their personal and professional lives. Throughout this section, we will use anonymized quotes from student reflections and teaching artists to support our key learnings about the course. While field notes, course evaluations, and community partner feedback were also used, what we learned was primarily gleaned from student reflections.

Transformed Ideas of Self as Creative Individual

> I fear that I may lack creativity which could hurt my chances to fully enjoy the arts. I also fear that my lack of creativity could ultimately hold me back from getting the most I can out of the class (student reflection).

Most of the students in our course start with a high level of uncertainty. They self-define as unartistic. Even those who are majoring in one art form, say music, feel nervous about engaging

in the visual arts. We wondered if this feeling of a lack of experience and artistic agency is reinforced in all people as they age, so that the arts become absent or merely an adjunct to what society and schooling convey as the important work of life. Many years spent working in arts education has both taught the authors this and led us to construct this course. This is why in our course we directly face this artistic fear and connect it to the fear that we might have of people who are different from us. We spend a considerable amount of time engaging concretely in artistic creation with interns. The artwork we engage in with the interns is all done collaboratively. For example, one small group of students and interns may be responsible for smoothing out rectangles of clay and adding repeated patterns on the surface, while the next group is responsible for shaping those rectangles into mugs that look like monsters.

The central strategy of the course is to provide artistic structure and choose specific artistic experiences which are aesthetically valid but do not categorize us, implicitly or explicitly, according to talent. The authors do this by spending the first third of the class engaging our students in artistic events that are intentionally invitational, and through getting to know students and interns as individuals, so we can read and respond to their artistic self-image. We then spend the remainder of class guiding them, individually, in pairs and in groups, in finding and then implementing their own accessible arts experiences. For example, we explore artists who use *found* objects, and then have students bring in small items that carry personal significance to create self-portraits. The items they bring in are defined in shape, color and size, which frees individuals from having to worry about most elements of manipulation, yet these items can still be used creatively to express an idea and a feeling (such as an introspective eye).

This inspires universal participation and allows everyone to actively and positively use creative parts of themselves which may have lain dormant for a long time. Students wrote:

> The class made me realize that everyone is an artist and art is what you make of it, it is personal and there is no way of doing it wrong. Throughout this class and its activities, I learned a lot about myself. I left my comfort zone, and I am able to say that now I have a new appreciation of art (student reflection).

> It took a few visits for me to realize that being a perfectionist and making my own pieces of art was not what truly mattered. Being in the moment at [the community art center] and working together with the program interns is where the enjoyable and educational experiences came from (student reflection).

Letting Go of Fears (in Relation to Arts and Disability)

Similar to their fear of art, our students brought hesitancy to working with interns on the autism spectrum, with Down syndrome, etc. This is natural, because, as with art, somewhere in middle school or high school people tend to be funneled into categories and spaces where there are whole swathes of individuals and experiences which are not part of life or learning. Why would a person feel comfortable with what is not known or seen? One student wrote: "My fear is that people will not be able to relate to me or that I will not be able to develop a significant understanding of the people there" (student reflection). Another student reflected:

> Being disrespectful out of ignorance. I do not want to have something I say be misunderstood or for it to hurt someone. I learned so much just in our first class and I'm worried there's more that I need to learn to be acceptable (student reflection).

As with the course's approach to artmaking, time is spent talking about and exploring differences intellectually with students and interns.During class time, differences and exceptionalities are explored, some of which are easy to see and some which are not. However, beyond the intellectual, students spend much more emphasis on organically making art with the program interns, so that in time the intern with autism has a name and a relationship is formed. This is the same way that the course's artmaking evolves from the students' initial feelings of intimidation to becoming an authentic expression of self. Work is done together as one, from the artmaking to the course activities. The artmaking becomes about the process, not the product, as together participants work through thoughts, experiences, and emotions while honing the technique (Pöllänen, 2011). The course also looks at the work of other artists, as a point of reference, particularly focusing on minority artists and artists with disabilities. For example, when the work of Kerry James Marshall and Judith Scott are used as exemplars, all participate—students, interns, and instructors. When student groups lead arts experiences which they have designed, everyone participates. Finally, when the task is creating large ceramic bowls to express the symbolic meaning of the time together, as a culminating activity, it is done together, hopefully now as individuals who fear neither one another nor the possibility of being creative. Students wrote:

> In my opinion, I wrote my definition as seeing disabilities as more of a negative way. I think now I would change it to make it more positive and write about how it's not only helping someone else. The other person is going to help you in some way even if you don't expect or realize it (student reflection).

> At the beginning of this class, I was a little nervous about working with the program interns, simply because I was worried that I would not do well with interacting with them and making them feel comfortable. I quickly learned that I did not necessarily need to have that concern, because more and more, I am seeing our similarities instead of our differences. The parts that separate us used to stand out to me so much more, but I have so genuinely enjoyed my time in this course and with the program interns, I do not feel that our differences are important. They make us unique, but they do not make us unequal by any means (student reflection).

> Before this class, I would look at individuals with some type of exceptionality and feel a little sympathy for them, as if their exceptionality was holding them back in some way. This project and our course have helped me to realize that while individuals with exceptionalities may face challenges that I cannot imagine, it does not hinder their ability to accomplish great tasks (student reflection).

The aim was to engage in collaborative art making with the program interns in a way that removed inhibitions and uncertainties related to engaging with individuals with disabilities. As you can see from the sample of comments above the efforts were successful. The authors attribute success to the amount of time spent together: 2-3 hours per week over the course of an entire semester. The participants were situated so that groups were mixed. Additionally, participants had the structure of the collaborative artmaking to support getting to know one another organically. The artmaking was a natural get-to know-you activity that played out over time. The next sections address how this process also served to reduce students' initial uncertainties about artmaking and engaging creatively. In this way, there was an organic parallel lessening of fear of differences in others, as well as fear of artmaking.

<u>Collaborative Artmaking and Classroom Community</u>

The community art center website references its mission to "foster collaboration by developing and maintaining relationships with others through the strength of team work and the blending of skills." (ArtMix, n.d.). The sense of community is felt, and this feeling of belonging is of utmost importance for students to let go of art fear and fear of difference. The welcoming and accepting environment at the center is intentionally created and sustained so that interns do not feel judged or afraid of making mistakes. The focus is on abilities, not limitations. Students sense this early on and attribute it to their change of mindset—away from fear and toward confidence.

A sense of community is felt by students, and they notice how they are welcomed into it. Collaborative artmaking feels natural because it is the practice of the community and it is aligned with the mission of the organization. Still, students must overcome their feelings of fear and overcome the voice in their head that tells them they are not allowed to claim the identity of artist or creative person. Students wrote:

> To be frank, I have a lot of anxiety when it comes to making visual art. I never considered myself to be an artist growing up, nor did I consider myself to be talented within the realm of visual art. I also had very limited experience working with people who have impairments, so I was also nervous about how I would work with [the intern]. However, every fear and worry I had going into this experience was erased by my group and [the teaching artist], who guided us every step of the way. Everyone was so encouraging during our time at [the community art center], and the atmosphere was never competitive or judgmental; they really freed up the space for everyone to relax and simply create (student reflection).

> Naturally, I was a little worried about creating our art. I felt confident in my prose and that ability. That has been something I have been practicing since I was young. However, the art made me nervous. I thought about what if they do not get why I did that? Or is it the right size? . . . I got peace of mind when I thought back on our class community and how everyone is creating art. We all were in the same boat so why worry (student reflection).

This permission to create in a community ends up feeling like play. There is intentionality in the work being done, but the conditions have been created to be open to others and to build relationships. Students and interns talk to one another while working on a project. They laugh and listen to music. They relate to one another about shared interests. If mistakes are made, they work through them. Most often, clay is the medium. Students find it to be a forgiving material. One student reflected:

> It doesn't matter how great you are at art, but what matters most is how willing you are to try. Through the art making, I have discovered that we all make art or partake in some art form in some way. Art is so important in everyone's life (student reflection).

Another student wrote: "We don't judge each other's art; we don't judge each other. The arts have united us—a diverse group of students and interns—around a shared goal. This environment also encourages identity development as a creative individual." (student reflection). In an interview with a teaching artist on the impact of the community art center, the artist wrote: "Everybody has something to give, and it may not be the same thing as another person but then when we put all of those things together, we come up with something pretty amazing."

As students came to a deeper understanding of what they were doing and why, their definition of service began to evolve. They realized that they are benefitting from what has been deemed a *service-learning* course. Over the course of the semester, the meaning of *service* changes. Students wrote:

> In my first reflection, my definition of service focused mostly on what I could give to others—but after this semester, I see how what others give to me can be a part of the service as well. By teaching and learning from each other in class and with the program interns, we make a cycle of service that gives everyone skills and experience. Everyone gets something back for what they put in, and it's not a matter of me gaining something from other people as everyone sustaining an educational environment (student reflection).

> I would change my definition to make it say more about working collaboratively with others, instead of helping others. Originally, I was thinking that service meant more about a person who helps someone that needs assistance. After [our class], I realize that it's more about working alongside someone, not making it seem like one person is more knowledgeable than another (student reflection).

The course has a *service-learning* designation. Service learning can be seen as volunteering, but the authors wanted students to see the experience as working *with*, more than working *for*. During class there were structured conversations about how people with disabilities are commonly excluded, devalued, and marginalized, and the societal barriers that exist affect people on a daily basis. Along with misconceptions about creativity the intention was to debunk

any myths that individuals with disabilities inherently need help. Instead, emphasis was placed on the need for access and opportunity, as created by programs like the one in which our course took place. The sample comments above demonstrate that students were able to understand that everyone was there to serve the artmaking and the program.

One of the teaching artists at the site outlined her perspective on the shared approach to reducing uncertainty in both the artmaking and the developmental differences.

> We reduce fear by working to set goals that are attainable and clear. We give lots of encouragement and constructive criticism. Our joint class works to reduce fear through simple small steps for the group working toward a bigger goal. Each project has many small steps; not everybody has to do everything. We rely on each other. In the beginning it is barely organized chaos, but we hope that the university students leave certain of the value of the arts, the joy of hard work, the strengths that anyone can share, and the awesome power of many people working in cooperation (teaching artist reflection).

Implications of the Creative Process for One's Personal and Professional Life

Most of the students come to this experience with a narrow view of what the arts are and how they define creativity. They view the arts as only about artmaking—that the arts have no other societal function beyond this. In this course students learn that the arts can provide life skills, confidence, and purpose for individuals who might not find it anywhere else. While the authors support and nurture the idea of art for its own sake, the course also demonstrates the concrete, additive nature of what the arts can be. The arts are not just one thing; they are more than many of us may have suspected. One student wrote: "Looking toward my future profession, this experience has allowed me to understand how to communicate with people with exceptionalities" (student reflection). Other student quotes are included below:

> The interns have taught me so much about myself by just being who they are and spreading their love of art. I also now view the creative process in a different way. If I was asked to do this project last year, I would probably have drawn a not so great eye and turned it in. Not really loving what I created, but it was an eye and it was done. Now, I see the process as more of a true process (student reflection).

> I hope to bring the relaxation and calm I've found through spending time at [the community art center] into my job. I also think this project has changed the way I plan to interact with those around me. Working with the program interns can truly open your heart and makes you want to put the phone down and set aside your worries for the day and enjoy art and life in general (student reflection).

Over the course of the semester, students come to the realization that the arts and creativity have relevance for their personal and professional life. In addition, they connect ideas related to

letting go of art fear and fear of difference. One student wrote: "This class has taught me to embrace what I don't know and strive to learn more" (student reflection). Another student wrote:

> It wasn't really about a grade . . . it is about improving yourself and learning new skills and outlook on life. This is not an average class it is a character changer by finding new outlook on life and service (student reflection).

The mission of the community art center is to transform the lives of people with disabilities through the creation of art, but the conditions that the arts organization has created combined with the unique course objectives have presented a new outlook on life and a new inward look at self for many students. While this is inquiry and not a traditional work of scientific research, it is a systematic analyzation and unpacking of a course that has repeatedly demonstrated successful artistic transformation for individuals who would initially define themselves as non-artistic, so that it might be replicated.

Closing Thoughts

While the authors have described a specific course, the hope is that readers will take away larger constructs that transcend circumstances and thus could be applied anywhere. Where will the arts' future audiences, advocates, and benefactors come from? They will come from individuals who see the value of the arts for their own lives, and for the life of the larger culture. This is a frame of mind that is built through concrete experience aiming to lessen fear and concretize the usefulness and necessity of creativity for us all. You may not have an arts organization that supports individuals with disabilities in your community, but you may have other artistic spaces where you can bring the general public, where the focus is on collaborative artmaking, the reduction of fear, and the heightening of creative possibility for us all. It could be a college course, as in our case, particularly one that is required and thus brings in individuals who did not know that this type of experience is just what they needed. Or perhaps it is at an art or community center. You might also be able to address art fear through the lens of other uncertainties in our world, which in our case was fear of individuals with disabilities.

Whatever the context, the necessary ingredients would include elements that aim towards the opposite of fear. What is the opposite of fear? Multiple iterations of this course suggest that it must include the gaining of knowledge through concrete, graduated experience. It is harder to be afraid of something you know. But it is not just any knowing; it is knowing in a context that understands and accepts where each person is. This stimulated imaginative risks. The authors saw this both in coming to know the interns and in exploring creativity with the students. Coming to know these things in a scaffolded manner felt organic. The experience over time taught that the opposite of fear must include time and experience. Students made art with the interns every week. This helped artmaking to become normalized and natural. Finally, the experience taught that the opposite of fear must include joy. While participants all stretched and were challenged, it was in a way that felt easy. Utilizing artistic structure and using artistic strategies that were inclusive and forgiving helped to lessen any lingering creative misconceptions. With joy attached to learning and experience there is an increased chance for a traction that sustains over time.

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