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

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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.

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“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 5th 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 makerspaces¹ (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 20th 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.

¹ 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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