The Anxious Now & the Next Big Thing

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Manisha Sharma

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Editorial Note

We are living in a strange era where the change artists, educators, policy makers, and activists have been working towards over the past century are coming to fruition in the form of globalization, multiculturalism, and critical thinking, along with the backlash to them by orthodoxy.

The problems of racism, hetero-patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism have not gone away but vigilance around the loss of power they cause to traditional cultural and economic gatekeepers, and the consequent resistance to this loss, is strong and evident globally. This has created increasingly tenuous ground of what is acceptable and what is not, in discussing these fraught issues and how we in art education address these issues.

The anxiety of being facilitators of learning and of social and cultural change, in the middle of rapidly shifting social rules and dynamics, is clearly a Big Thing in art making, research and teaching, with different nuances than we experienced even ten years ago when multicultural, social justice, and visual culture art education were becoming normalized in North American art education. The articles in this issue reflect this and provide food for thought about how we need to (or already are) shifting focus on the purpose and function of social theory in art education.

We seem to be at a moment in time where awareness of the importance of equity, diversity, inclusion, and access is somewhat established in art education discourse, along with an encouraging amount of active practice of critical thinking, if the various journals, books, webinars, conferences, and seminars etc., are taken as evidence. However, this growth has in turn created a freshly unfamiliar space of needing to re-learn the difference and line between offense and harm. Conversations about
offensive habits can be offensive themselves, in that they include offending references and collective memories. How do we, artists and educators as cultural workers, discuss the re-negotiations of problematic language and social practices, without erasure of their histories and local/global contexts? A significant role of the arts, after all, is to investigate the boundaries and limits of what is and can be offensive and to whom while still communicating recognition of where care, love, creativity, and connections lie. How do we then navigate fearless truth-telling while finding a balance between offensive and defensive strategies that reflect the hyphenation of art and education?

A large aspect of the Anxious Now, and the Next Big Thing appears to be figuring out: How do we activate social theory in solidarity with adjacent theories without conflating (and thus diluting) their goals and ideals in artistic, research, and teaching practice? And how do we acknowledge our own vulnerabilities as art educators, researchers, and social beings and practice self-care while doing this difficult work?

Ward et al.’s article also brings questions of centering and de-centering hegemonic national contexts for art and research production. For instance, it raises inquiry around how much art educators should lean on international students and scholars to view and present content (including language) within the specificities of North American and European social, political, and cultural contexts and prompts us to consider what this does to globalized learning.

Shin, Lim, Lee, Koo, Hsieh, Gu, and Bae write A Critical Discourse on Asian American Stereotypes and Pedagogical Strategies Against Anti-Asian Racism, in which they share the anxious realities of anti-Asian racism and violent exclusion through three derogatory stereotypes and tropes present in American society. They advocate for Asian American inclusivity through teaching strategies based on a Sense of Belonging, Resistance, and Coalition Building. In terms of social theory, Shin et al. provoke us to consider the creation and maintenance of the idea of ‘perpetual foreigners’ within multiracial nations through cultural behaviors and identity politics and suggest Asian futurism as a lens through which to move towards inclusivity through anti-racist action. Their framework is a Western one, in that the scholarship is largely produced within Western geographies. However, intersectionality is a consideration, since it presents the perspectives of non-western origin minorities living and working within these geographies.

The problems articulated in this article ask us to consider not only the connection between non-Western ideology born and functioning in Western geographies, but also how it changes our perceptions of what Western theorizing looks like, now and in the future. How do we allow this phenomenon of multicultural theorizing within a particular geography to shift the ways in which we categorize philosophy in a conflation of geography and ethnicity/race?
Soria-Martinez and Puchalska offer readers *New Ways of Making in the Face of Uncertainty: Approaching Difficult Conversations through Media Arts*. The program introduced in this article looks to acknowledge the unprecedented uncertainty of post-pandemic life (in the lifetime of current generations), to address at least one deep socio-cultural wound of our times (the BLM movement), through currently relevant technology (media arts) as a positive teaching and learning tool. This is to activate Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) for social justice as a curricular strategy. This research, which involves collaboration between community and state-based institutions, demonstrates a pro-active response to the anxiety foisted on teachers about “lost time” during the pandemic and to the anxiety of students’ vulnerabilities regarding mental-health and well-being by fostering their ability to engage and apply cognition in their future lives, through “increasing self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and responsible decision-making.”

Valuably, the authors illustrate how researchers can acknowledge adjacent social theories and approaches without conflating (and thus being in danger of appropriating or colonizing) marginalized tenets. They do this by explicitly recognizing their layering of SEL, Restorative Justice from Native American traditions, and Culturally Responsive Learning to build their research in a participatory practice. They offer hope, at least to this editor, that this may be a significant aspect of the Next Big Thing in respectful and inclusive allyship in research production.

Lynn Sanders-Bustle in *Sorry, Not Sorry: Activating Moments of Slippage Through Transpedagogical Practice*, and Kletchka et al., in *Thinking Through ‘Zines: A Collaborative Visual Essay Inspired by Systems Thinking, Queering the Museum, and Emergent Strategy*, also exemplify participatory collaborative projects that concede the tenuous, unruly, and emergent nature of research and teaching that explores the relationality of the complex social and institutional systems we function within and their policies we are expected to follow, along with the effect on authentic human relationships in this process. Sanders-Bustle frames her research in terms of socially engaged art and art as social practice as being inherently transpedagogical to collectively build critical and crucial questions around the inconsistencies of our socio-cultural present, as curriculum.

Where Sanders-Bustle works with high-school students, Kletchka et al. focus more on relational thinking in art museum and museum education contexts with graduate students in college. In a hopeful strategy of clarifying the layering of adjacent frameworks—Queering and Systems Thinking, most transparently—Kletchka’s team shows us a way to trace the process of personalized response building up to collective emergent thinking, via arts-based interventions that create pedagogical space in institutional places.

In *Digital Place-Futures Outside a Colonial Metaversal Imaginary*... Luke Meeken marries injustices that began in the past (colonialism and its impacts on race and gendered identities) with future technologies explored in our present within a framework of decolonial placemaking and digital materialities. Meeken analyzes Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley’s artwork *We are here because of those that are not* to inquire into how “physical and digital places crafted in colonial contexts bodily habituate settler-colonial sensibilities.”

The increasing ubiquitoussness of human habitation in a globally connected digital universe and its often-disarming impacts on both online and offline behaviors makes this exploration of what Meeken calls “critical sensitivities” timely. The author weaves the complexity of intersectional identity and space in Brathwaite-Shirley’s artwork into emerging digital technologies to both acknowledge and resist the potential and real replication of colonial ideologies.
and habits into tentative spaces. Framing this as anti-colonial work embedded with a lens of allyship, Meeken’s research offers readers space to consider how artistic and art education work may be understood as anti-colonial vis a vis decolonizing, through visual representations of occupation of space, and our emergent understanding of territory itself, in historical and new materialities.

The forty-third volume of this journal closes on a somber but caring note, wherein Horwat, Yu, and Grube “highlight the implicit generosity that arts-based research engenders in its ability to make tangible the distressing and ambiguous psychic conditions (of grief) we experience.” The authors of Good mourning: Existing with Loss While Living in the Anxious Now share their own journeys of transforming grief into “something generative” by articulating the necessity of both allowing ourselves to define the kinds of grief we are experiencing in the current moment. The authors show us how, in using creative and visual strategies to consciously make space and language to go through a healing process of mourning for our losses, we can embody a process of living inquiry into individual and collective grief.

This article is significant in a journal focused on theory, because it offers some closure in reminding us of a pragmatic need to pause and remember that our own embodied selves are not distant and separated from our researcher/teacher/productive selves, that we do need to make time and space to acknowledge the relationality of our individual and collective wounds, ethics, and responsibilities in an anxious moment in history at the cusp of change into an uncertain future that involves entrenched thinking moving into new territories and materialities.

One point that is alluded to but not directly addressed in this issue that I see as a major issue in considering The Next Big Thing is the role and place of what is being called Artificial Intelligence, drawn from collective human knowledge and experience, in artistic production and arts education. Perhaps the
How might (my) students and I demand an openness of mind and heart when faced with the N-word as a racist reminder that not all people in this country could or can engage in a practice of freedom?

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Abstract: Personal journal entries recount how graduate students, and their instructor respond to a point of encounter in an online studio course at a large research institution in the Southeastern United States. Inspired by collectivist othermothering practices, the article speaks to learning from Black scholars while chronicling a shared experience and responding to an anxious now that is navigating the N-word together. The authors aim to center caring exchanges and ethical practices for the purpose of (re)building safety and hope that this article will be helpful to art educators who also encounter the N-word or have similar moments of crisis.

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Othermothering Encounters with an Anxious Now

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Introduction

Othermothering Encounters with an Anxious Now

A graduate student from an online studio course recently submitted a video assignment in which he read from a monologue by a non-Black playwright and novelist that included a racial slur. This article explores how we (the students from the course and I) navigate this moment of crisis with support from others to center caring exchanges and ethical practices in learning/teaching for the purpose of (re)building safety in response to the following question:

“What are the outcomes/byproducts of living in the anxious now, in the fields of art and art education?”

We encountered the slur during Spring 2022 in Creative Inquiry—a course I teach at a large research institution in the Southeastern United States offered to students across disciplines with an interest in using readily accessible materials paired with concepts to explore the world around them. In the course, students engage with resources in art education, visual art, and philosophy to understand artists as creative inquirers in relation with other humans, nonhumans, the environment, and more. As stated in the course description, the content prepares them to enter their respective fields with a commitment toward caring exchanges and ethical practices. But how do we ensure adequate pedagogies of care and ethics when crises occur?

This article reads like a series of personal journal entries and speaks to the moment of crisis and responses to it during a brief period in late March 2022. While my students are co-authors, I write in first person and include in the journal entries personal communication between the class community and between colleagues and me. My hope is that this first-person account will be helpful to other art educators who face similar crises in educational spaces. At the end of each dated entry, the students and I offer theory to practice connections to process and learn from, what Elizabeth Stordeur Pryor (2020) calls, a “point of encounter.”

According to Pryor (2020), a point of encounter is when one is “stumped or provoked by” (3:00-3:02) hearing the N-word during, for example, “an uncomfortable academic conversation” (3:08-3:11). “The N-word,” a euphemism used throughout this article, replaces the racial slur spoken by the student. Because the N-word carries complex historical and contemporary meanings, it is worth contextualizing. Before the 1770s, the N-word was synonymous with slave, and North Americans in the United States (Black, White, and more) often used them interchangeably (Pryor, 2016) to describe the forced enslavement of African American laborers. As abolitionist and emancipationist movements grew in the North, during the 1820s and 1830s, White northerners began to deploy the slur as a racialized us-and-them boundary, form of White supremacy, and violent method of thwarting Black mobility (Pryor, 2016). During and after enslavement, some Black laborers not only borrowed the slur from White oppressors but also shaped it for themselves as a social identity and linguistic subversion (Litwack, 1961; Pryor, 2016; Stuckey, 1968). Two hundred years later, some Black people use the N-word today with various spellings and pronunciations as a sign of continued solidarity and subversion (Allan, 2007).

The “point of encounter” idea has been theorized across art education in literature on content flashpoints and disorienting dilemmas; so, we link

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1 This question, and others like it (see para. 5), can be found in the Journal of Social Theory in Art Education’s (2022) Call for Papers for Volume 43 in a theme titled “The Anxious Now and The Next Big Thing.”

2 Pseudonyms are used throughout for proper names (and more), including:

Students: “Alex,” “Anne,” “Bailey,” “Camille,” “Isabella,” “Lizzie,” and “Nicole” and
Colleagues: “Ava,” “Christopher,” “Hannah,” “Helene,” “Lucy,” “Maggie,” “Mary,” and “Mia.”
this idea to broader bodies of knowledge in the field to help broaden the argument beyond the N-word. Educators will encounter many moments of crisis in their classrooms, and our case offers important insights on how one could negotiate them. Content flashpoints are defining moments or manifestations of learning that occur in art education (Kraehe, Hood, & Travis, 2015; Travis, 2020, 2022) in which new knowledge arises (O’Sullivan, 2005) “from the activation of power that disturbs a seemingly fixed relationship” (Kraehe & Lewis, 2018, p. 3). Our point of encounter is a content flashpoint that is bound with the N-word. Similarly, Jack Mezirow (1981) conceptualizes “disorienting dilemmas” (p. 7) as beliefs that trigger transformative learning experiences when becoming attuned to the ways in which we are entangled with our distortions about problems. Our point of encounter also is a disorienting dilemma when troubling our understandings about the N-word during class and in this article.

The practice of othermothering is used as a theoretical framework to process and learn from the point of encounter in class. Black women educators in the United States, who have contributed to the collective welfare of their learning communities, often tend to students’ physical, emotional, and intellectual needs (Conaway, 2007). This shared practice of mothering as mentoring originally was adopted by African American enslaved women as a means of support and survival (Butler, 2019; Case, 1997) to ensure that all children’s needs were met (Bernard et al., 2012; Collins, 1991; O’Reilly, 2004)—especially those who were “orphaned by the sale or death of their mothers” (Bernard et al., 2012, p. 105) and/or excluded, by law, from formal educational systems (Dubey, 1995). Today, these othermothers, according to Patricia Hill Collins (1991), are women “who work on behalf of the Black community by expressing ethics of caring and personal accountability, which embrace conceptions of transformative power and mutuality” (p. 132). Thus, othermothering is a transformative practice of Black collective care and justice. Given the recent point of encounter from class, I look to collectivist othermothering practices with reverence and caution because I am a White American woman attempting to work within and against the White, individualist norms of our society and the academy. I do not claim to be an othermother nor do I engage in othermothering practices. I do, however, theorize othermothering in this article and believe in the pedagogical power of community to nurture learners and their needs with help from Black scholars in the process of chronicling our shared story and responding to an anxious now that is navigating the N-word together. Thus, othermothering is used as a theoretical framework to assist me—a White teacher-as-learner—when thinking-with Black collective care and justice (Kwon, 2022) practices around a point of encounter for the purpose of creating a transformative learning experience. Before thinking-with Black scholars, it is necessary to heed Courtnie Wolfgang’s (2019) call to confront (my) whiteness by acknowledging it as an unearned privilege and violent norm in art education and by working toward de-centering it in this article (and in my learning/teaching). I wonder, however: Is it enough—or even possible—to de-center whiteness when theorizing othermothering practices, knowing that White power is historically and contemporaneously entangled with Black survival?

A couple weeks before the first journal entry on March 23, 2022, I asked my colleague, Christopher, if he would consider serving as a peer observer of my care-and-justice” inspired by Vanessa Siddle Walker and John Snarey’s (2004) framework.
teaching on the evening of March 24th. Because Christopher taught at the same time on the same day, he agreed to observe a Zoom recording of that class later. Christopher is Black, and his racial identity is relevant to this article and the point of encounter occurring the day before my peer observation. The content below could be difficult for readers.

Wednesday, March 23

Students have three opportunities during the semester to get feedback from their peers and me on their in-process and completed artwork by way of critique. Artwork for Critique 2 was due yesterday. Alex—a White Colombian American student—posts in our class Canvas site a 4-minute YouTube video remix he made that includes footage by his theater students on the topic of beauty and a voiceover reading of a chapter, titled “Superman,” in 100 (monologues) by Eric Bogosian (2014)—a White Armenian American playwright and novelist. As Alex reads the monologue, I find myself growing increasingly uncomfortable at the unfolding conversation between a father and his young son:

“Dad, when I grow up, am I going to be a bum... an alcoholic... a junkie... or a homo” (Bogosian, 2014, p. 6)? The end of the monologue goes like this:

“Dad? NO WAY I CAN BE A N*****, HUH DAD, HUH?
’Cause you’re not a n***** and Mom’s not a n*****, huh? Huh?
HUH? We’re American, huh Dad?"5

(p. 6, emphasis in original, asterisks added)

A flood of emotions washes over me as I wonder how the video might impact students, especially Nicole who is Black. I also have deep concern for Alex and hope that we all can learn from this point of encounter without shaming or touching wrongness in each other.

I see a Canvas Assignment Comment from Alex that accompanies his Critique 2 submission; below is an excerpt:

“I asked [my students] to chase a video of 5 seconds, ‘Chasing for Beauty’ during class. We discussed afterward the findings and what is our understanding of what is beautiful.... We concluded that Beauty is the connection between the objects and the subjects. However, object and subject are both subjects and objects in a new world simultaneously. The monologue of Bogosian is my response to their work. It is a criticism against the adults, the ‘fathers’ of society. The answer to the Beauty in our kids’ eyes is the destruction of Beauty by segregation and addiction to power.”

I respond to Alex’s Critique 2 in the Assignment Comments; below is part of that response:

“Before you share your video during tomorrow’s critique, I invite you to speak more to the following: ‘The monologue of Bogosian is my response to [students’] work. It is a criticism against the adults, the ‘fathers’ of society. The answer to the Beauty in our kids’ eyes is the destruction of Beauty by segregation and addiction to power.’ I also invite you and everyone to watch this video in its entirety before we meet: https://www.ted.com/talks/the_n_word_in_the_classroom [Pryor, 2020]. What you presented in/as critique 2, contained a ‘point of encounter’ for me, and I’m still grappling with it all.... Inspired by Pryor [2020], I close with this question ‘Why is talking about the N-word hard?’” (18:30)

Anne, Bailey, Isabella, Nicole, and Camille also post comments to Alex about his video, but I’m surprised that no one addresses the N-word. Am I overreacting, I wonder? Alex sends me a text message, asking if I’m available to meet for office wonder: What words and feelings have we silenced and why? To what have we given more power and why?

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hours. During our meeting, he asks thoughtful questions like, “How much of my work should I explain? Am I responsible for viewers’ interpretations of my work? How do we make change without being provocative?” Alex also wonders aloud about the role of his cultural identity. As a Colombian American person, he states that he feels ignorant about the historical violence imbued in N-word in this country and expresses concern for his colleague, Nicole, and how the video he made might hurt her.

Later, I stop by Ava’s office for support. Ava is a trusted colleague and the Chair of the Department. When I share with her what happened, she asks how I am and how she can help. I notice that Ava is in the middle of a Zoom meeting; not wanting to interrupt any longer, I say, “Oh, I’m sure it will be fine. I’m fine.” I was not fine. This was not fine. I return to my office and revisit excerpts from bell hooks to find some footing.

The author states that classrooms can be “a location of possibility” (hooks, 1994, p. 207) where we must come together with our students to insist on acceptance “even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom” (p. 207). How might students and I demand an openness of mind and heart when faced with the N-word as a racist reminder that not all people in this country could or can engage in a practice of freedom? Building safety and protection are important responsibilities of othermothers and rebuilding both are paramount in this moment for healing. Wanda Thomas Bernard and her co-authors (2012) state that othermothers are not alone in their work: “Othermothering signifies the continuity of shared responsibilities that are vital in empowering students and bringing about social transformation” (p. 107) in public and educational spheres. I’m not sure how to go about sharing responsibilities with students, for example, when the Canvas comments above seem to disregard the use of the N-word. I mention this not to shame them but rather to wonder what my role might be in co-creating silence.

**Thursday, March 24**

I reach out to Hannah, a colleague from outside my institution, and ask if she is available to talk about how I might best prepare for today’s class. She offers some suggestions during our call, including one where students write a response to each other’s Critique 2 artwork using a one-word emotion about how they are feeling. She also recommends two resources. The first is an article by Bree Picower (2012) that offers theory to practice guidance for integrating “six elements of social justice curriculum design” (p. 1) into classrooms. Hannah also recommends the Learning for Justice (n.d.) website, which states that it is “a catalyst for racial justice in the South and beyond, working in partnership with communities to dismantle white supremacy, strengthen intersectional movements and advance the human rights of all people” (para. 1). I find two additional resources on the website, including an interview with Neal Lester (Price, 2011) and an article by Lester (2014). During the interview, Lester answers questions about the complexities of using the N-word in educational spaces. Rather than policing what others say and think, he suggests that we need to critique and educate ourselves by “trying to figure out how we think and how the words we use mirror our thinking” (Price, 2011, para. 8). Similarly, in the article, Lester (2014) states that many people in this country want to trouble the N-word through critical and informed conversation. My phone call with Hannah—alongside these resources—reminds me that a meaningful conversation with students is necessary.

The students and I meet for class in the late afternoon, and they each have 15 minutes to present their artwork for our second critique with the aim of receiving feedback on it. Camille, Nicole, and Alex present before our scheduled break. Ultimately, Alex
decides not to present his video, but rather discusses it at length. His colleagues share the following words in response to his work: rupture, burst, emotional, ambivalence, distinction, and passion. I thank Alex and suggest a break, and the following exchange ensues between Alex and Nicole, after she invites him to talk.

Nicole: “[Alex], I wanted to talk to you…. Sometimes that can be hard for some people because those words are triggering…. It’s a bad…. It’s bad to say it…. But it has to be talked about. We talk about it all the time in my community—you know—Black community… but everybody is not the same. They’re not going to get it the way I get it… because so many people are so angry about those words—even the homophobic term. I know you want to show this because it needs to be talked about, and I think you should but there are going to be people that are like, ‘Hey, you can’t do that.’ Are you willing to be okay with the possibility of getting in trouble?”

Alex: “[Nicole], I think that you’re nailing it…. I know that my audience is you guys. I felt, in some ways, safe to go there. But the thing you said is very important because… For example, my Latino students have obtained street language as a way of identification—slang identification…. Because Latinos also… What is our position toward all this? What is our position on the damage that is being created to the Black community?…. And what is the damage that we are having?…. I don’t think that our communities have resolved that. But your question is much more important: ‘am I, [Alex], willing to do it?’ I was thinking of you…. Then I start noticing… the heaviness in my heart, ‘Oh, what is [Nicole] going to think about me? What are the other people…? Am I willing to do that? Am I willing to play safe and just not do it?’…. So, my question is ‘How does art inform social change when there are places that I cannot go, I cannot touch, because I’m afraid someone is going to go back, back, back… because I’m afraid?’ I don’t have an answer, [Nicole]. I don’t know.”

I bring the class back together after break, and the remaining students present their artwork for critique. Just before class ends, I send Nicole a private Zoom Chat Message and invite her to stay after for a conversation, which she accepts. I end the Zoom recording and ask her how she’s doing. Nicole says that she’s feeling tension between caring for Alex and being retraumatized by hearing the N-word. I have so much heart for how she is making room for two powerful emotions: pain and care. Nicole also says that Alex has reached out to her and that they have been in conversation—perhaps as peer mentors.

On the topic of mentorship, Douglas Guiffrida (2005) writes that Black students are more likely to seek help from other historically minoritized family, friends, and mentors than from White faculty because they can be perceived as culturally insensitive (Fleming, 1984) and unrealistic role models. This makes sense when replaying the video of today’s class. Not only do I misuse hooks (1994), at one point, but also find myself whitesplaining. For example, I bring the class back together after break and state that Nicole as “the sole Black woman” in the class might feel a “responsibility, perhaps, to represent all of Black culture” which seems like too much responsibility for one person. Hooks (1994) clearly states that educators should not interfere if they see students as native informants.

Whitesplaining occurs “when the experiences, stories, and perspectives of racially marginalized people are discounted, overly simplified, or explained away by members of the dominant racial group” (Kraehe & Acuff, 2021, p. 7). Here, my response to an anxious now cannot be informed by the practice of othermothering because it likely causes more harm. Good parenting teaches us to learn from past mistakes and do better.

Friday, March 25

I call my work friend, Mia, this morning for advice. We talk for nearly an hour, brainstorming ways to
respond to students. Nearing the end of our conversation, I say something like, “I just want to know what the students need from me.” Mia replies, “Why don’t you ask them?” A couple hours later, I send each student from class a version of the email below.

“I’m reaching out to you and your Creative Inquiry colleagues with questions to “help make race conversations normal, constructive and successful” (NEA, 2020, para 1). Please feel free to answer one or more. Alternatively, let me know if you’d like to schedule a time to talk. How are you feeling and why? Do you need anything from me? If so, what is it and why? Do you need anything from your colleagues? If so, what is it and why?”

Anne and Lizzie both reply by email that day. Anne speaks to language as a social and cultural construct, and Lizzie discusses a desire to continue the conversation next week.

I meet with my colleagues Helene and Mary via Zoom about something unrelated that afternoon. Toward the end of our meeting, I briefly summarize what had happened before and during yesterday’s class. They both suggest that I email our colleague Christopher in advance of sharing the Zoom link with him of my teaching video and invite him to have a conversation about what to expect. I email Christopher at the end of the workday. A couple hours later, I meet my work friend, Maggie, for dinner where I speak at length about the recent point of encounter. Maggie is an art therapist and suggests that I ask students to respond artistically to our last class. This thoughtful advice carries me through the weekend.

Up to this point, I have reached out to several colleagues for help, which feels like personal progress because I was raised to be independent, believing that solving problems on my own demonstrates strength. The practice of othermothering, however, teaches us that meaningful collaboration with colleagues as maternal advocacy can lead to institutional change (Bernard et al., 2012). Yet, White educators inspired by othermothering should be mindful of asking too much from Black faculty (and students) who often already are overextended in response to, in Alana Butler’s (2019) words, widespread injustice inside and outside the academy. As part of the dominant racial group, it’s important that I learn to balance asks and collaboration with self-education and self-critique, as Lester (2014) suggests.

Monday, March 28

Christopher returns my email at the start of the workday, agreeing to a meeting. During our conversation, later that afternoon, I have an opportunity to contextualize the teaching video and offer a content warning. Christopher recommends that I consider getting support from Lucy at our institution’s Center for Teaching Excellence. He also actively listens and shares something that resonates with me, using an example from his class: “Sometimes we just have to stay in the heat of the conversation.” I appreciate his advice and candor and feel like I missed an important opportunity to stay in the heat on Thursday. I begin to realize that staying in the heat is a responsibility for some and a choice for others, especially with othermothering in mind.6

Kimberly Griffin’s (2013) research with Black women faculty speaks to some of the “energy costs” (p. 169) of othermothering; for example, one participant states that Black students often come to her “just needing stuff” (p. 177)—everything from navigating the academy to working through personal grief and loss. The participant describes othermothering as and more. Alex and I agree that the conversation he had with Nicole during the class break was generative and could have continued with the other members of our class community.

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6 On choosing not to stay in the heat, Alex states, “We fall into a trap that we create ourselves for the need of control.” The trap that Alex is referring to is our (educators’) commitment to a schedule, time, grades,
exhausting “cultural work,” (Griffin, 2013, p. 177) that often pulls her away from other work obligations. This makes me wonder how White women might look to othermothering practices to support their Black colleagues by working together to restructure service responsibilities, among other things, to account for the demands of othermothering.

Tuesday, March 29

In the early afternoon I send Lucy an email. She responds soon after, agreeing to talk by phone. During our conversation, Lucy listens attentively and offers much-needed reassurance and advice. She suspects that our community trust has been broken, and to enable healing, she encourages me to ask the class: “What do we expect from each other to feel safe again?”

After my call with Lucy, I check my email to find that Isabella has responded to the email I sent to each student last Thursday; below is an excerpt from her:

“Drawing upon the article you sent us, I latched on to the following…. ‘Avoidance speaks volumes — it communicates to students of color that racism doesn’t matter enough to warrant attention and, by omission, invalidates their experiences, perspectives, identities, and lives. White students, on the other hand, often see racism being accepted and normalized, without acknowledgement or accountability.’ [NEA, 2022, para. 5, emphasis in original]….

I think of this class as an incredible laboratory of percolating ideas and nascent practices, and you have created this container where we could actually practice having conversations about race and identity instead of just reading about inclusive teaching.”

I agree with my colleague Lucy and my student Isabella that the class needs more time to discuss the point of encounter to enable healing by, in Isabella’s words, “having conversations about race and identity.” Bernard et al. (2012) speak to othermothering and return to what hooks says about the potential for education to facilitate freedom; they state, “a culturally engaging, positive and welcoming environment that promotes and facilitates cultural advancement, not only for students, but also for the communities they represent, can and does lead to personal and collective transformation” (p. 113). For the first time, I realize that our responses to the point of encounter have the potential to make meaningful ripples far beyond our learning community.

Thursday, March 31

The students and I meet for class. After sharing current events and announcements, I invite them to create an artistic response to our last class, as suggested to me by Maggie the week before. They make art for 15 minutes followed by an hour-long conversation. I share transcribed excerpts from that conversation below, which is recorded for Nicole to watch later because she has a family emergency and cannot join us for class.

Isabella: “I’m sorry that [Nicole] is not here, but she’ll tune in. I think [Alex] brought up an interesting point about, like, if you’re trying to change the status quo… if you’re trying to change the way that things happen, how do you do that if you give like a [politically correct] version of something or you censor or… What’s possible? And what is authentic? What is meant to make people feel uncomfortable? It’s easier to skirt around and not go there, but if you don’t go there, then what? What change comes

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7 Nicole’s response to the recorded video is as follows: “As I watched the Zoom meeting, I felt a sense of relief. I was glad I wasn’t present, not only because I felt uncomfortable with the current topic but because my peers needed to have that conversation. My professor, classmates, and I created a safe space for each other previously, so I respect everyone’s opinions during the meeting and give applause to everyone, especially Camille and Bailey. They gave great feedback and I felt heard as the only black person in the class.”
about? These are questions that [Alex] started to bring up that I'm curious about.”

**Alex:** “I feel conflicted between me as a person, me as an artist, and me as a teacher. Conflicted is not the right word but…. Bogosian wrote these provocative monologues. So, when I used the N-word and the other words... I literally just thought, ‘That's a good text that shows how we, the adults, have ruined the world for the kids.’ But then by utilizing the N-word, it becomes something that I wasn't expecting…. It's like different voices talking to you, right? ‘So, what's up? You're going to play it safe now, and you have so much need for validation?’ And the other part of me is like 'no wait, I want to connect to these people. I want to be able to develop a language where I can say something.' And the other part of me is like the teacher, is like... But then you hear the kids using it. Then it becomes so much about the N-word that everything else disappears. Then, suddenly I feel myself in damage control.... And again, I don't want to offend anybody.”

**Camille:** “I've been told by many people that I am too harsh, especially with social justice issues and that I make people uncomfortable. With that said, I do think that there are boundaries within my work. I use slurs, but these are slurs that I've had to deal with myself, slurs I've been told and that I've been hurt by. I feel like sometimes to be heard you have to make people uncomfortable, but not with certain slurs.... I guess you can always speak on injustices that are happening to all communities, and I feel like you should, but I don't think we have the place to say that word if we were not marginalized by it.”

**Bailey:** Saying “that monologue in a general environment would mean that it is going to hurt, and I think that we have to walk the line of understanding that those words are shocking for a lot of people when they come from someone who is not from that group who is marginalized.... I think it depends on who you're talking with and how you're talking about them. And I applaud you for being comfortable enough to explore these topics with us. And I think that that's something that you should be able to do in an educational environment.”

**Anne:** “Like [Bailey] said, these words do have a lot of shock value, and it really does depend on the demographic, the audience, the context, the environment.... I'm not in the position to say whether it's good or bad, if it's right or wrong.... Language is always evolving, and when we think about semantics, a lot of times there's different definitions, different meanings for a user.... But in our current world, this word is more often used amongst the community that it once plagued as a term of like – I wouldn't go as far as to say endearment or companionship but solidarity perhaps? And, of course, that's not the origin of its historical meaning but this reclamation of oppressive language proves the power of language—for better or worse.”

**Bailey:** “And when someone uses the hard R, it means that original connotation of the word, and I think that it's understanding like that word has developed into very different meanings over time.... I think that there's better ways of expressing the message without using the value of shock.... If your whole story is just clickbait, then there's no substance. What are you doing with your story? What are you trying to say? How are you trying to say it? How can you tell the best story possible without using that word?”

**Alex:** “Yeah, I agree. And just to contextualize a little bit... What I hear from you is in the context of United States... The word itself is very close in Spanish, and we actually use the word as an endearment. In Colombia we use the same word.”

**Lizzie:** “I've struggled with this position.... As a White person, I don't necessarily feel it's my place to determine whether it's inappropriate because I think it depends. If a Black person wants to say, ‘this is offensive,’ I will stand by them, but as someone... who has not lived the life of an African American
person, I can't speak to how they feel. I tend to stay quiet. If [Nicole] prefers you don't use the word, then I'm going to stand behind her.”

**Camille:** “I think it's especially hard for [Nicole] being the only Black person in the class.... I feel like it puts her in an uncomfortable situation when everyone looks to her to represent the Black community as a whole. And I feel bad.”

**Isabella:** “I think I'm just missing a key component here. As I understand, you were reading a monologue of something that already existed. These weren't your words.”

**Alex:** “Yeah, correct.... When I moved to United States, Eric Bogosian was presented to me as one of the most important American writers.... In 'Superman' the kid is confused and wanted to be like his dad.... Is the kid supposed to be like....? But it had nothing to do with the N-word. It was just about stereotypes. I feel like it really was for me, something that was like a theater piece.... That's when I understood this was generational. I'm facing ignorance in a contemporary sense of a new generation because my classmates are younger than me. And then I am trying to understand, as a teacher, if I am understanding the culture.”

**Me:** “You recently shared with me that you didn't understand the gravity of the word... You didn't have an appreciation for what that word has historically meant in the U.S., and how closely it's associated with enslavement.... I was so torn when we had the break last class and you and [Nicole] were engaged in this important and meaningful conversation because I didn't feel like I had the tools to support you both.... I still don't feel prepared to be having this conversation with you all now, but I never will be. I'll never be fully prepared because it's scary.... I just regret that I didn't trust you all like I could have last week in the moment when we were all feeling the feelings.... I think another thing that I was grappling with was my own power, which speaks a little bit to what [Lizzie] said. Who am I, as a White woman and the instructor of the class, to be mediating a conversation between an [African American and Colombian American] student about the N-word? I was really grappling with what to do with that power. How to best put it to work? We can't absolve ourselves of the power that we have, but how do we best put that power to work?”

**Outcomes/Byproducts: Encounters with an Anxious Now**

As demonstrated by the transcript above, the students and I try to center caring exchanges and ethical practices in learning/teaching for the purpose of (re)building safety. It now occurs to me that the students and I lean on each other for support just as much as I seek help from colleagues and scholarship. The students seem to hold each other accountable but do so with love and compassion. On this, Bernard et al. (2013) state that an othermother can facilitate success and be empowering by “being tough without being demeaning” (p. 113). While I am not suggesting that our students should become othermothers, I do believe that it is beneficial to look to the communal practices of othermothering as inspiration for creating liberatory communities and classrooms with students.

I conclude with connections to the data by responding to questions from a reviewer of this article who writes: “I was left wondering what recommendations you had for art educators who experience similar encounters. What did you learn about yourself and your pedagogy? How did othermothering relate to the experiences you had in the classroom?” Before addressing these questions, is it important to note that the article reviewers (masked) and journal editors (Manisha Sharma and Carissa DiCindio) are becoming unexpected othermothers in this collective work, and I thank them for that. Now for the responses to the questions above. First, my recommendation for art educators, who undoubtedly will experience similar
moments of crisis, is to be vulnerable with yourself, students, and colleagues. It also is paramount to be open to growth by engaging with work from historically minoritized scholars in journal articles and via social media (Wolfgang, 2019). At the same time, and with help from another reviewer, I add that White educators should not “expect those students and peers who are most likely to be impacted by these words to take the lead in discussion, approach, and solution as to how these terms/concepts should be grappled with in an educational setting.” Second, my teaching is a work in progress that thrives when in community; chronic individualism and independence are learned and often serve a White supremacist agenda in and outside classrooms. Finally, othermothering relates to the experiences I had in the classroom by recognizing not only my limitations but also a responsibility to myself, students, and colleagues “to stay in the heat of the conversation,” as Christopher suggests. Ultimately, a primary outcome/byproduct of living in and exploring an anxious now, in the fields of art and art education, is an invitation to those in the dominant majority to be in fellowship with and in service to collective pedagogies while also committing to personal accountability and growth.

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Ward, A. / Othermothering

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Belonging does not mean always being attached to the same cultural or ethnic group, but instead feeling welcomed by people of other groups in various educational, social, political, and community settings...

Abstract: In this article, we address the three derogatory stereotypes and tropes of anti-Asian racism: model minority, perpetual foreigner, and yellow peril. We problematize how each of the three stereotypes was formed and has been sustained, affecting our art classroom and professional practices. After that, we offer the novel and futuristic conception of Asian American inclusivity as a critical project in our society. Lastly, in challenging the three Asian stereotypes and embracing Asian American inclusivity, we offer S-R-C teaching strategies (Sense of Belonging, Resist, and Coalition Building) to confront anti-Asian racism and violence. The strategies are designed to help art educators and students address the roots of anti-Asian stereotypes and remove anti-Asian racism in educational settings.

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A Critical Discourse on Asian American Stereotypes and Pedagogical Strategies against Anti-Asian Racism

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Introduction

In response to increasing anti-Asian incidents, prejudice, and xenophobia amplified by the COVID-19 global pandemic in the United States, we, as Asian American art educators, have paid close attention to recent violence and hate crimes against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI). According to a national report by Stop AAPI Hate, an organization devoted to both advancing equity and justice for Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) and ending AAPI hate, a total of 10,905 hate incidents targeting Asian Americans nationwide occurred between March 2020 and December 2021 (Jeung et al., 2022). Further, researchers found that overall hate crimes in the United States decreased by 6 percent between 2019 and 2020, while those targeting Asian people rose by nearly 150 percent (Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism, 2021).

Other researchers have pointed out that many factors contribute to racism, such as implicit and explicit stereotypes, bias, misunderstanding, and cultural appropriation (Acuff & Kraehe, 2020; Ho, 2021). White (2018) urged educators, especially teacher educators and institutions, to provide learning opportunities and develop preventive interventions to combat misrepresentations, stereotypes, and racism. We echo this assertion, seeing that art has the power to disrupt silence surrounding gender, race, class, and sexuality privileges and to allow viewers to look deeply, think, feel, and respond (Kraehe, 2022). Art also prompts students to have difficult discussions for social changes (Buffington & Waldner, 2012). Our article advocates the power of art as a response to historically widespread and emerging racism against Asians.

In this article, we share our experiences and insights as Asian American art educators to address three derogatory stereotypes of anti-Asian racism: model minority, perpetual foreigner, and yellow peril (Tchen & Yeats, 2014). These stereotypes have been rooted in society and popular media for many years (Iftikar & Museus, 2018; Wu & Nguyen, 2022), laying the groundwork for recent anti-Asian racism and prejudice. First, we briefly introduce how each of the three stereotypes was formed and has been sustained and how it affects our teaching and professional practices. We then provide futuristic ways of conceptualizing Asian American inclusivity, challenging the constraints of a Western lens or hegemony. Asian American inclusivity is based on the Asian American experience and a vision of equality and inclusion for all minority groups (Chan, 2016; Shin, R., Lim, M., Lee, O., & Han, S (Eds.), 2022). Lastly, by reflecting on the three stereotypes and new Asian identities, we offer S-R-C teaching strategies (Sense of Belonging, Resistance, and Coalition Building) to confront anti-Asian racism and violence. The strategies are also designed to confront the roots of anti-Asian racism.

Stereotypes and Tropes of Asian Americans

In this section, we trace the historical origins and development of three stereotypes that affect Asian Americans in their lives, education, and work. We also share how these stereotypes have influenced our pedagogical experiences in the classroom, campus life, and professional development, offering our personal narratives of discrimination, jurisdictions and/or the diasporic communities of these geographic regions” (Asian Pacific Institute, n.d., para. 3). In this article, we distinguish the two terms: Asian Americans and AAPIs. We use the term, Asian Americans, in the context of discussing the stereotypes and myths of East Asians, such as model minority, yellow peril, and perpetual foreigner. AAPIs is used to address all Asian American and Pacific Islanders in discussing teaching strategies to address the racial violence and discrimination of AAPIs.
marginalization, and ostracization, both in our classrooms and on campus. At times these manifestations of anti-Asian racism are unspoken and latent, but they continuously serve as invisible walls to restrict our work and pedagogy.

**Model Minority**

Asian Americans are often depicted as a “model minority” (An, 2017; Iftikar & Museus, 2018; Rodriguez & Kim, 2018), an idea that ties them together as a compliant, hardworking, law-abiding, and successful minority group (Lee, 2009). “Model minority” is a term coined in 1966 by American sociologist William Petersen to describe the success of the Asian American ethnic minorities in the United States. In it, Petersen mistakenly attributes such success to “Asian Americans’ ability to transcend historical racial antagonism, overcome systemic barriers, and achieve mainstream success” (Wu & Nguyen, 2022, p.1). This model minority myth selectively focused on a small group of high-achieving Asian Americans while disregarding the experiences of those facing poverty, discrimination, and other challenges. This narrative allowed for the tokenization of Asian Americans, reinforcing stereotypes, and obscuring the diversity of experiences within the community (Sions, 2023). It also created a false perception of homogeneity and ignored the structural barriers that many Asian Americans faced (Shin, R., et.al., 2022).

The model minority myth emerged during the Cold War era when the United States was engaged in ideological competition with the Soviet Union (Lee, 2010). Portraying Asian Americans as successful and assimilated was seen as a way to demonstrate the superiority of American democracy and capitalism over communism (Lee, 2010). By highlighting Asian Americans’ educational achievements and economic success, it was believed that the myth could counter the negative stereotypes associated with other minority groups and present the United States as a land of equal opportunity.

Yet, the term suggests that successful Asian Americans do not face racism or discrimination or suffer tokenism in their communities or workplaces. In fact, many scholars have criticized the disrespect implicit in the tokenization of Asians and various other ethnic, cultural, and linguistic groups (An, 2017; May & Sleeter, 2010). We agree that the model minority trope casts Asian Americans as a successful, well-adjusted minority group. At the same time, however, it blames Asians and other ethnic groups who do not fit this stereotype and characterizes them as problematic or socially maladaptive. One notable example can be found in the contrast between the academic success of many Asian American students in U.S. schools (Hartlep, 2015; Lee, 2009) and the Asian American students who do poorly in school (Lee, 2009). Students who do not live up to model minority expectations tend to feel especially inferior and embarrassed, leading them to negative self-perceptions, emotional turmoil, and low self-confidence (An, 2017).

Lee et al. (2008) described the experience of living within the model minority trope in a case study:

...a student at a selective magnet high school expressed a great deal of anxiety about living up to the model minority stereotype. Although she earned outstanding grades, participated in extracurricular activities, and got high SAT scores, Mei Ling lived in fear of failure. (p. 69)

In universities and art education professional organizations, the model minority stereotype affects us as art educators, in that our voices are often silenced, neglected, or essentialized. People assume that successful Asian Americans, including higher education professors, do not face racism or discrimination in academia or other workplaces (An, 2017). However, we reject homogenous Asianization, which lumps all Asians together as a model minority and erases individual voices (An, 2017). We also reject the silencing and excluding our voices, which often takes the form of microaggressions that reflect
misassumptions about Asians’ lack of communication skills or failure to resist or complain about the loss of an opportunity. Often, discriminatory decision-making against Asian American workers in organizations or cooperation seem to be justified by misperceptions about a lack of their leadership potential (Hyun, 2005; Wayne, 2022). Just as the so-called “bamboo ceiling” barrier (Hyun, 2005) has prevented the advancement of Asian Americans in fields such as business and government, Asian American educators face challenges and impediments to their upward movement inside universities and professional organizations.

**Perpetual Foreigner**

Another dominant stereotype of Asian Americans is that of the perpetual foreigner (Daley et al., 2022; Huynh et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2008; Murjani, 2015; Ng et al., 2007). Regardless of those who were born and raised in the United States, Asian Americans are forever viewed as foreigners, that is, as aliens who are outsiders to the dominant U.S. culture. This stereotype may exist for multiple reasons, including the history of Asian immigration, and differences in physical appearance and language because norms are white centric (Chung, 1999; Kim, 2008). With the stereotype of the perpetual foreigner comes the appraisal that Asian Americans are “inherently foreign and therefore not truly American” (Lee et al., 2008, p. 69). In the dominant White U.S. culture (Huynh et al., 2011, p. 133), the perpetual foreigner stereotype cements the position of Asian Americans as “the other.” Wu (2002) described this process of racialization and marginalization:

> The perpetual foreigner syndrome suggests that to understand the complexities of race, we must use a paradigm that is not exclusively black and white in literal and figurative terms. In literal terms, if “American” means “white” and “minority” mean “black”, then individuals who are neither white nor black end up being neither American nor minority. They are excluded altogether as foreigners who lack rights, even if they are in fact native-born Asian Americans. (p. 22)

Seen as perpetual foreigners, Asian American art educators and students experience diverse racial microaggressions in their everyday life. Unlike other minorities, Asian Americans get challenged about their rights as citizens due to their “Oriental” and “foreign” Asian appearance (Chung, 1999). This physical characteristic contributes to the kind of racial other-ing that constructs racial boundaries and maintains a racial hierarchy in the United States (Kim, 2008). As Chung (1999) noted, because Asian Americans are visibly different, it makes it easier to exclude them from being members of the entitled group.

Research on the influence of the perpetual foreigner stereotype on Asian Americans reveals that this stereotype disrupts the connections between foreign-born and U.S.-born Asian Americans and eventually reduces their sense of belonging in the U.S. (Armenta et al., 2013; Huynh et al., 2011). The perpetual foreigner stereotype causes Asian Americans to experience conflicted feelings about their ethnic and national identity, as well as low self-esteem, and eventually, less life satisfaction (Armenta et al., 2013; Huynh et al., 2011; Wu, 2002). One of the authors explained:

> On-campus, I am an Asian American woman faculty member. The first, and sometimes, only question I often encounter from the campus community is, “Where are you from?” I pause for a moment, asking myself, “Where am I from?” I think, “Should I tell them all of the places where I have lived/moved for more than 20 years in the U.S.?” Then, after a moment of silence, I usually reply with a smile, “I am from xxx (my current resident city), xx (the current resident state in the U.S). Then they ask me again, “No, where are you really (originally) from?” and/or “How long
have you been in the U.S?”—questions I have never asked White, Black, or Hispanic Americans.

For Asian American students, the perpetual foreigner stereotype can have an even more harmful effect. According to a recent study of 308 Filipino Americans and 340 Korean American youths, Asian American youths’ awareness of the perpetual foreigner stereotype increased internalized problems such as negative affect, depressive symptoms, and suicidal thoughts (Park et al., 2021). The related treatment and expectations of others cause many Asian American children and youth to consciously and unconsciously internalize the sense that they are not a “real American” (Lee et al., 2008, p. 79).

Yoo’s (2020) focus group interviews also highlight the struggle of Asian American college students to deal with a sense of loss and belonging, even in a multiracial university. They see themselves as often left out of U.S. society and education, making it difficult for them to weave themselves into American society and their community. For instance, one female biracial student expressed that “I would never be enough to be an Asian and yet I would never be enough to be an American because I look Asian” (personal communication, December 2022). In a similar way, Asian art education faculty in higher education face the same significant issue—a sense of less belonging in our institutions and educational environments. One of the authors shared their personal experience regarding their applications for elected positions in their university and professional organizations:

Despite my efforts in applying for numerous elected positions at my university and various professional organizations, I have repeatedly faced rejection or my application materials have not been chosen. It is disheartening to suspect that my Asian name, coupled with English not being my mother language, has played a role in questioning my credibility and legitimacy for administrative and service positions.

It is worth noting that similar subjective experiences have been reported by many Asian American professionals in various fields, including business, government, and other organizations (Venkataraman & Yee, 2022).

The Yellow Peril

During the 19th century, European imperialists such as German Kaiser Wilhelm II invented a racially ideological trope (Tchen & Yeats, 2014), the yellow peril, to stigmatize Asians or Asian Americans as a potential threat to European civilization and provide a rationalization for the colonization of Asian countries (Wu & Nguyen, 2022). In other words, the unknown, oriental, or fearsome (yellow) were cast as dangerous threats (peril) to Western civilization and enlightenment (Said, 1978).

The Anti-Asian racism that accelerated after the global COVID-19 outbreak is a good example of the negative effect of the yellow peril trope. When racialization takes the form of pathologization of Asian Americans, either by politicians or media, racist acts or hate crimes occur (Cooper et al., 2022). For example, countless late-19th-century and early-20th-century posters, magazine covers,4 or newspaper graphics5 depict a yellow octopus that destroys Western civilizations and societies. They imply that a particular race is a threat to Western society. American popular media also has played an important role in the racialization and othering of Asians in a disaster-themed context, as seen in the movie Contagion (Soderbergh, 2011),5 which

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3 “The Japanese brain trust” by Erich Schilling, Simplicissimus, 39(44), January 27, 1935. In this illustration, an octopus face with squinted eyes was featured as a metaphor for destroying the Western world, sucking and cracking it with arms and legs.


5 Directed by Steven Soderbergh (2011).
associates a deadly contagious disease with Asia as its origin.

For many years, Asian Americans have been victimized socially and politically by discriminative policies that were facilitated and impacted by the yellow peril trope in popular media and culture (Kuo, 1998). The idea of the yellow peril not only reinforces stereotypes but also opens spaces for the expression and spread of racism through mainstream culture and online spaces, where racist videos are easily dispersed and shared. While its consequences may be difficult to quantify, popular media seems to have contributed to recent anti-Asian violence in the United States, such as in the Atlanta spa shootings of 2021. For developing inclusive art lessons with antiracist approaches, it is essential for teachers to address how certain stereotypes are constructed and used to oppress other races of students and guide young learners to defy misrepresentations, stereotypes, and biases toward other groups of people.

**Asian American Inclusivity**

The three Asian stereotypes and tropes discussed in this discourse have caused suffering among Asian American art educators and students, who deserve equity and inclusion in U.S. education settings (An, 2017; Wu & Nguyen, 2022). Seeking inclusion and equity for Asian Americans means the outright rejection and removal of these stereotypes. We propose that breaking out of the model minority and perpetual foreigner stereotypes will enhance Asian American inclusivity. Due to the widespread and discriminatory model minority myth, immigrant and U.S. born Asian Americans have had a lack of voice and felt pressure to assimilate into White or mainstream U.S. culture (Li & Nicholson, 2021). The stereotype of the perpetual foreigner serves as a constant reminder of our foreigner status and limits our sense of belonging in the classroom and community. To address these biases and stereotypes, we advocate for Asian American inclusion that can break the existing barrier of racism. Asian American inclusivity means that Asian Americans are immersed systemically in their classrooms and professions without being treated as foreigners, and at the same time, not losing their individualities. Specific pedagogical strategies that help to achieve these outcomes are shared in the next section.

We believe inclusion goals can be advanced by cultivating a futuristic identity for Asian American art educators and students in the context of Asian Futurism (Chan, 2016), drawing on the realm of speculative fiction and forward-thinking ideas, which provides a space where Asian identities are defined not by historical prejudice or Western-centric views, but by their own diverse experiences, aspirations, and innovative perspectives. This visionary framework can be instrumental in overcoming the three stereotypes and tropes we have described, one of which is the yellow peril. The yellow peril has been a feature of various sectors of U.S. society and contributed to the development of a host of negative images as if Asian Americans pose a dangerous threat to White America and White identity, which has marginalized non-white people as inferior. In reaction to this discriminatory trope and challenge the normalization of White America, we argue that educators acknowledge the many ways Asian Americans have contributed to the diversification of American education and community. Redefining Asian Americans as individuals with a collective voice allows us to challenge prevailing notions of these stereotypes. Under the Asian Futuristic lens, we can develop Asian American art and pedagogical projects, free of stereotypes of Asian art, art history, and art pedagogies.

From within the Asian Futurism perspective, we also suggest that art educators deeply investigate and celebrate Asian Americans’ diversity in art education. Currently, there is an ironic coexistence of racial discrimination toward Asian Americans and the great
consumption of Asian pop cultures in the United States. Thus, art educators need to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the rich cultural backgrounds of the Asian. To achieve this, we value the presence of Asian American students in art classrooms from the perspective of asset-based inclusion. Rather than seeing Asian American students in terms of a group that needs support for assimilation, we should focus on their contributions to the diversity of thought, culture, and traits in the art classroom (Romero & Reyes, 2022). These cultural assets can function as valuable means and resources in art classrooms. Among the various Asian American ethnic groups, there are diverse heritage backgrounds, which can be seen as cultural assets that can bring unique approaches to art education pedagogical praxis. Specifically, Asian American students come from diverse ethnic backgrounds, such as Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Indian, Filipino, and many others. Each of these ethnic groups has its unique artistic traditions, techniques, and aesthetics that can enrich the art classroom. For example, Malaysian shadow puppet play (Pillai, 2012), Japanese calligraphy (Nakao, 2012), Tibetan mandala (Graham, 2012), Korean traditional architecture (Yi, 2017), and Chinese literati painting (Wang, 2022) are all distinct art forms that can be shared and explored. Asian cultures are often rich in symbolism and iconography. Asian American students can introduce unique symbols, motifs, and meanings associated with their cultural backgrounds (Chung, 2012). For instance, the lotus flower symbolizes purity and enlightenment in Buddhism, while the dragon represents power and strength in Chinese culture (Hu, 2022). These symbols can add depth and layers of meaning to artistic creations.

While advocating for a new Asian American identity, we also acknowledge that Asian Americans have a long history of fighting for civil rights and equity in education (Kuo, 1998). The history of Asian American resistance against oppression is not often recognized or heard about in schools (Hartlep, 2015). For instance, in the case of Tape v. Hurley (1885) during the dangerous anti-Chinese immigration climate in the late 1800s, the Chinese-American family of Joseph and Mary Tape took legal steps to dispute the denial of their daughter Mamie, who was born and raised in the United States, to Spring Valley Primary School in San Francisco, California (An, 2016; Kuo, 1998). Recently, in Wisconsin, Hmong community members and state education policymakers worked on a bill that would add Hmong, AAPI, and the history of other Asian American communities to the Wisconsin public school curriculum (Scarborough, 2021). The bill requires schools to teach about the role of the Hmong people and AAPI in fighting for the United States during many wars involving U.S. military interventions. These cases clearly illustrate how Asian Americans have challenged educational inequalities in U.S. public schools.

Moving one step further, we imagine Asian American art teachers and students becoming an integral moving force for Asian American inclusion in schools. As one of the minority groups that has been deeply affected by hate crimes and violence, we as AAPIs raise our voices to call for respecting and valuing our voices as well as collaborating and coalescing with the racially marginalized groups, including Asian, American Indian and Alaskan Native, Black, Hispanic, Multiracial, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander. Within Asian American inclusivity, we value coalitions with other minority groups. For example, By Us For Us (BUFU) is an excellent Afro-Asian futurism project aimed at redressing interracial conflict. Created by African American and Asian American artists, BUFU facilitates conversations between African Americans and individuals of Asian diaspora to ease the sociopolitical tensions between the two groups (Gaillot, 2017). The project highlights the lived experiences of those in the two marginalized communities, told in their own voices. Our approach to inclusivity relies on the long history
and lesson of multiracial coalition among various races (Mantler, 2013; Márquez, 2014; Tulloch, 2020).

To redress the historical and contemporary practices of Asian American stereotypes and tropes, we propose Asian American inclusivity as an important direction or purpose in our pedagogical projects and efforts. To substantiate our vision and inclusivity efforts, we propose the following pedagogical strategies to address anti-Asian stereotypes and tropes in the classroom.

S-R-C teaching strategies (Sense of Belonging, Resistance, and Coalition Building) Challenging Anti-Asian Racism

Our pedagogical approach does not merely add more Asian or Asian-American artists to the school curriculum, but we rely on the transformative power of art that offers social practices and interventions that directly confront the racism rampant in U.S. society. Below, we share the teaching strategies we have used to challenge anti-Asian racism and underlying stereotypes and tropes. We call these S-R-C teaching strategies (Sense of Belonging, Resistance, and Coalition Building). As artists, activists, and educators, we have devised these teaching strategies specifically to build the inclusivity of Asian Americans.

Sense of Belonging

To challenge the stereotype of Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners, we advocate that art educators should actively promote a sense of belonging among Asian Americans and all other minority students in art classrooms. A sense of belonging in schools, workplaces, or communities is a key cognitive and affective dimension of the need to find one’s place or space culturally or psychologically (Prince & Hadwin, 2013). The perceived stereotype of Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners negatively affects this important sense of belonging in the dominant White U.S. culture (Huynh et al., 2011).

Belonging does not mean always being attached to the same cultural or ethnic group, but instead feeling welcomed by people of other groups in various educational, social, political, and community settings. In other words, a sense of belonging is different from a personal identity. Instead, as Paul Jones and Michał Krzyżanowski (2008) noted, “Individuals often express a sense of belonging with an ‘other,’ while remaining outside the bounds of the group” (p. 45). Although a similar concept, a sense of place, refers to emotional bonds and attachment to locations or spaces in home and nation (Foote & Azaryahu, 2009), the sense of belonging, in our view, is more significant in our classrooms and relationships with others. In particular, many Asian American students have expressed their struggle to find a sense of belonging within their identity development in educational settings (Wu, 2002; Yoo, 2020).

We encourage art educators to share with their students the works of contemporary immigrant or...
U.S.-born Asian American artists who struggle with a sense of belonging and express those experiences in their works, such as Lisa Wool-Rim Sjöblom, Monyee Chau, and Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya. These artists address the complexities of their sense of belonging or place in the context of their identity exploration and community connections, especially since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Their artworks and experiences provide opportunities for students and teachers to unpack issues related to belonging and otherness. In particular, the Asian-inspired travel posters created for the Asian American Federation (AAF)’s “I am Really From” series (see Figure 1) can serve as an example of how we engage with our students. The AAF is one of the leading organizations serving various AAPI communities in New York. In November 2021, AAF released ten posters—designed as travel posters—to subvert the stereotype of Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners. All the posters address the common question “Where are you really from?” Ten Asian Americans, including Asian American celebrities and victims of anti-Asian hate violence and crimes, were selected to be featured in each of the ten posters. Each poster includes iconic images and symbols that honor them and represent their life and experiences in their city or community. For example, the poster in Figure 1 honors Kevin Kwan, the author of Crazy Rich Asians (Kwan, 2014), and shows his life experiences as a youth through images of an Asian grocery store with fluorescent lights, teacups, and a record shop that he frequented with friends.

When authors delivered a workshop for art teachers about anti-Asian racism, the attendees analyzed the AAF posters. They saw how the posters dealt with Asian American identities and sense of belonging, and imagined how students might research and explore their own sense of belonging, regardless of their ethnicity or minority background. Many attendees were interested in including this poster series in their art curriculum to help Asian American students to develop a sense of belonging. The art teacher attendees also considered keeping the posters’ format or using mixed media collages for all students to explore the complexities of identities. Some teachers also mentioned that they would love to work with local history museums and Asian American organizations to gain information about the immigration history of local Asians and local Asian cultural events. At the end of the workshop, the authors and participants agreed that school art curriculums need to include more contemporary Asian or Asian American artists in response to anti-Asian racism or stereotypes.

In our classroom practice, we invited students to explore their sense of belonging. For instance, an African American student from an urban city delved into her personal and cultural identities inspired by the AAF’s travel posters. (See Figure 2). She wrote:

My poster is about the significance of Black culture and my family and how that has impacted me growing up. Suki Terada, a Japanese American artist from Harlem, New York, inspired me. Growing up, she experienced a lot of racism and discrimination against herself and other Japanese American citizens, which led her to become a big advocate for the AAPI community. (personal communication, September 7, 2022)

The other student shared her insights on how her artwork captured the values of living in a small town. Inspired by Kevin Kwan’s I’m Really From poster, she said that "I am very proud to be from a southern small town. Through this assignment, I have found the importance of understanding and believing in where you come from". (personal communication, September 7, 2022)
Resisting Anti-Asian Racism

Highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic, recent anti-Asian incidents reflect deeply rooted stereotypes, tropes that suppressed voices, and misconceptions about Asian Americans. As art educators, we have been concerned with the recent negative and socially vile images. To challenge anti-Asian racism and race-based hate crimes, we offer the strategy of visual interventions.

An excellent example of a visual intervention designed to resist racism and prejudice is Red Hong Yi’s ten portraits showcasing the effects of anti-Asian racism. Yi is a Chinese Malaysian artist, who focuses on working with everyday materials, including soil, matchsticks, eggshells, teabags, and chopsticks (Yi, 2020). The title of her series is *I am not a virus* (see Figure 3). She noted that through her art and Instagram posts, “I recognize that racism exists in every country, every skin color. We must squash it so we can build a better world for everyone” (Yi, [@redhongyi], 2020). As with her social media commentary against Asian hate crimes, Red Hong Yi’s recent artworks speak to the power of colligated resistance against racial injustice among minorities. The art images Yi shares on various social media convey her critical views of racial and cultural diversity and inclusiveness. Several authors introduced the work of Red Hong Yi to their students and sought to engage them with Red Hong Yi’s thought-provoking art pieces and social media postings.

The students were inspired, and even researched racial-discrimination-related issues and topics about which they were most concerned. The students researched the historical backgrounds of their chosen topics and shared their personal connections to their research, as well as creating art pieces and demonstrating their perspectives (see Figure 4). The topics the students chose for their research included No Asian Hate, COVID-19, Black Lives Matter (BLM),...
Selma to Montgomery, the Tulsa Race Massacre, and the 16th Street Baptist Church Bombing. Their artworks took various forms, such as drawings, paintings, digital collages, and filmmaking. Given our experiences of successful teaching about anti-Asian racism intervention artworks, we reiterate that artistic and visual interventions help students explore and understand the history and roots of negative representations, biases, and distortions about AAPI and other minority racial and ethnic groups.

Figure 4. Lunch, Acrylic Painting, 2020. Courtesy of the student artist. A common experience from Asian American’s childhood. A classmate points an accusatory finger towards a Korean American classmate’s lunch, which contains traditional Korean food and snacks.

Coalition Building

Along with both a sense of belonging among Asian Americans and artistic interventions to resist anti-Asian racism, we value and seek the power of inter-ethnic or inter-racial coalitions to confront and address racism and racial inequity in the United States. We believe that cross-racial and cross-ethnic solidarity is a shared goal that all minority groups should seek and expect, and we encourage educators and students of color to develop such coalitions. We believe that educators must break out of the divided and compartmentalized racial and ethnic walls defined by master narratives and White supremacy (Acuff et al., 2012; Lee, 2018, Rodriguez & Kim, 2018). Inter-racial conflict, distrust, and struggle among minority groups, such as Asian Americans, African Americans, Native Americans, Latinx Americans, and others, have been mischaracterized as inter-racial crises and distorted by biased media representations, supporting the interests of White supremacy. When different racial and ethnic groups of students share and seek mutual understanding for the purposes of solidarity, it facilitates the development of more racially just, inclusive, and responsive classrooms (Lawton, 2018).

We believe in the power of visual symbols via art, creation, and social media. Solidarity images and memes have flourished in social media to support the BLM movement, and they encourage coalitions and solidarity among all minority groups. For example, Monyee Chau, who was born and raised in Seattle, Washington, and who is a queer and of Taiwanese and Chinese descent, created an activism poster with a powerful graphic of a crouching tiger and black panther circumscribed within a yellow and black yin-yang symbol (see Figure 5). The poster bears the inscription “Black Lives Matter: We Stand in Solidarity,” as a way of supporting the protests against the murder of George Floyd (Shum, 2021). In the image, two animals, a yellow tiger and a black panther, powerfully represent Asian Americans and African American in support of BLM (Rainbow, 2020).
Chau’s poster affirms the meaning of solidarity to Asian Americans who seek ways to ally with Black communities. In our art classes, some students created an artwork featuring raised hands of three colors that signify the unity of different races, and other students created artworks expressing support for #StopAsianHate or BLM in the style of social media posters or memes. Sharing and understanding with others to build solidarity between and among different racial and ethnic groups of students facilitates the development of more racially just, inclusive, and responsive classrooms (Lawton, 2018; Woo et al., 2020).

From engaging students with these anti-racism artworks to encouraging students to create their own versions of artistic interventions against racism, we believe that S-R-C teaching strategies are crucial in addressing our concerns about anti-Asian racism and violence. Art teachers can apply all or any one of the three S-R-C teaching strategies to help students to explore racism and racial concerns in art educational settings.

**Conclusion**

This article addresses a complex and intricate task that we, as Asian American art educators, have faced in our schools, university campuses, and society. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, we not only have struggled with pedagogical strategies to support our AAPI students but have found ourselves deeply affected by the turmoil and reality of AAPI hate crimes and violence (Roberto et al., 2020). We found it devastating to reflect on the lack of progress in equity and inclusion for Asian Americans as we face the reality of the ongoing spread of anti-Asian racism in this country (Ho, 2021). In our struggle to address this issue, we highlighted anti-Asian stereotypes and tropes and shared inclusive art pedagogical strategies that will reject widespread stereotypes and tropes about AAPIs. These teaching strategies support the positive perception and praxis of Asian American inclusivity.

A greater outcome of Asian American inclusivity would be the creation of a society where AAPI individuals are recognized, celebrated, and empowered as valuable contributors to the cultural fabric and diversity of the nation. By dismantling stereotypes and tropes through inclusive art pedagogical strategies, we can foster an environment that appreciates the richness and complexity of Asian American experiences, promoting empathy, understanding, and respect. Ultimately, this transformative approach to inclusivity can lead to a more harmonious and equitable society that values the voices and perspectives of all its members, irrespective of their racial and cultural backgrounds.
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Our participants were divided between the ones that saw in this rupture an opportunity to examine the structural foundations that lead the way to systemic inequality and be able to change them, and those who thought that the momentum would be assimilated by capitalist culture in a way that would leave those very foundations intact.

Abstract: In this paper, the authors reflect on a learning experience in which we devised practices grounded in Culturally Responsive Teaching, Equity, Social Emotional Learning (SEL), and Digital Media Arts and how this experience would help students and members of the community (including us as educators) to develop critical knowledge and interconnectedness in the face of uncertainty. We drew on previous research and critical discussions on SEL to create an educational practice that promotes equity and confronts oppression by encouraging students to develop inquiry questions about race and to listen to different perspectives as they form their own answers. In doing this work, we describe those connections and analyze the interviews our students held with community members to explore how these conversations put our students in a role of ownership in their learning path and expanded the idea of community building.

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New Ways of Making in the Face of Uncertainty.
Approaching Difficult Conversations through Media Arts

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Introduction

During the summer of 2020, as schools and districts prepared to face the school year after the general lockdown, the authors conducted a free program in Rockford where they participated as organizers and instructors. This program was called New Ways and later evolved into an apprenticeship. Both were a partnership between the Rockford Area Arts Council, the United Way of Rock River Valley, and New Genres Art Space, a non-profit dedicated to bringing digital media and experimental arts as a form of expression, education, and social change to traditionally underserved communities.

The program resulted in a collaborative community stop-motion animation publicly presented at the end of that summer and a series of interviews with community members that the students planned, directed, and recorded. The interviews, at the request of our students, who were primarily BIPOC, drew on the pressing issues at the time regarding the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. This paper presents this proposed and enacted curriculum, focusing on Equity and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and the use of digital media tools, discussing how using the interview format as a media arts tool activated SEL and restorative justice processes. By reflecting on these interviews, we intend to determine how SEL helped us define our teaching practices and how they, in combination with the use of media arts, deepened our students’ self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and responsible decision-making.

Art Education and SEL as Means for Approaching Equity

It has been researched how the arts teach ways of thinking for tomorrow’s workplace by promoting learning dispositions and habits of mind (Sheridan et al., 2023, pp. 1-6). Specifically, because of what the arts teach, “As schools cut time for the arts, they may be losing their ability to produce not just the artistic creators of the future, but innovative leaders who improve the world they inherit” (Winner & Hetland, 2007, in Sheridan et al., 2023, p. 7). Thus, neglecting art education in low-income schools to compensate for learning lost in the pandemic could mean leaving those student groups even more vulnerable by cutting them off from innovative learning that could translate into securing better employment prospects and leveling the field with those age peers in more affluent settings.

Besides enhancing learning dispositions, artistic outcomes lend themselves to exploring SEL competencies because of the issues the arts usually deal with. This relationship has been examined in service-learning art, with students serving as role models to younger students (Hutzel & Rusell, 2010) and studied to make policy provisions (Edgar & Morrison, 2021). This research shows that arts education enhances SEL, improving students' mental health and well-being, increasing engagement, and establishing the foundations for applying cognition (Eddy et al., 2021). Meanwhile, Bowen and Kisida found in 2019 that free arts programs correlate with decreased disciplinary infractions and increased student engagement, college aspirations, and arts-facilitated empathy (Bowen & Kisida, 2019).

However, it has been previously pointed out how promoting SEL from an ahistorical perspective without addressing the implicit biases of students’ everyday lives may contribute to stagnation and hegemonic miseducation (Camangian & Cariaga, 2022). Considering this, our learning experience aimed to deepen our understanding of that socio-historical moment by having our students reflect on it, articulating questions about race and equity through dialogues with the community. The goal would be to create an audiovisual production that would raise their own awareness and that of other community members about issues like racism, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

The Context for the Learning Experience
New Genres Art Space was founded in 2019 by Iga Puchalska and Jason Judd, and after establishing in their hometown of Rockford IL, they engaged Verónica Soria-Martínez and Steve Nofsinger as instructors, and later in 2021, as members of their board. During the Fall of 2019 and Winter of 2020, New Genres Art Space offered some after-school programs in partnership with the local library, specializing in digital animation and sound art. After the March 2020 lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw schools nationwide closing their doors for months, everything went into hiatus. As a result, New Genres Art Space’s activity and educational programs were temporarily halted.

However, a new partnership was formed with the United Way and the Rockford Area Arts Council to offer these programs during the summer in the United Way’s Strong Neighborhood Initiative houses. These are strategically placed in low-income neighborhoods to offer free services to neighbors, such as informational events, town hall meetings, and block parties. Organizers and mentors thoroughly plan activities to engage youth throughout the year. There, youth can come after school to borrow books and media, finish their homework by themselves or with the help of tutors, do sports, collaborate in the community garden, or socialize with other young people. This partnership would meet a need in our community because more affluent schools and districts across the state developed and implemented media arts curricula that we felt were missing from our schools at the time1, revealing potentially missed opportunities for our students. We found that at this moment, in which the media were (and continue to be) so pervasive, it became crucial to educate our students as critical consumers and producers of media.

Verónica Soria-Martínez, Iga Puchalska and Steve Nofsinger started at the Strong Neighborhood house at the end of June 2020. Iga was teaching digital video production; Verónica, sound editing and podcasting; and Steve, 3D printing. Each of these workshops would take about two weeks, and the three instructors always took turns having a lead instructor and a supporting instructor present. During these weeks, we had the chance to meet our students (six, ages 9-16, five of them BIPOC, of whom two identified as female and four as male) and learn about how they were taking in the pressing issues unfolding that summer, namely the COVID-19 lockdown and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement.

Back in the summer of 2020, businesses and public buildings were starting to open with precautions. The murder of George Floyd during an encounter with police in May of 2020 was the tipping point to a history of injustices perpetrated against Black people in the United States (among others, segregation, fatal encounters with the police, and the uneven casualties of brown and Black people to COVID), and a subsequent series of protests nationwide took place during weeks. The BLM movement became the center of attention of news outlets and social media platforms. Subsequently, the BLM movement was scrutinized and critiqued due to the unrest during the protests and how they were perceived in the media. Our students were living first-hand the effects of those two issues, permeating our interactions, so we all felt the need to address them in our workshops.

As the workshops developed, we were able to offer these students the opportunity to expand on their learning by participating in an apprenticeship sponsored by the Rockford Area Arts Council that took place in the morning for four weeks (overlapping with the afternoon workshops) and which was led by Verónica and Iga. Five students signed up. Before we started the apprenticeship, the students practiced interviewing and recording

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1 Soria-Martínez worked as an art teacher for the district at the time, whereas Puchalska would start working for the district at the end of that summer.
themselves. We also had two preparatory walks and interviews with two key people in the community, Tony Turner (leader and mentor at the Strong Neighborhood house) and Xen Moore (artist and activist), who separately led us on two neighborhood walks and narrated for us what had been going on in recent years, highlighting how the neighborhoods had changed and what factors contributed to those changes. Tony also arranged for us to interview Anqunette Parham and Tiana McCall. These experiences were impactful because these four people are prominent in the city and knowledgeable of the issues affecting people of color in the Rockford community.

Theoretical Foundations for the Learning Experience

In this section, we will describe how we first connected SEL competencies in their relation to artmaking, specifically in community-oriented art projects, secondly, how we built structures and routines consistent with culturally responsive teaching, and, lastly, how we adopted the structures of restorative circles to work with each other. Additionally, we argue that by carrying out the interviews, we extended the circles to the larger community, furthering the conversations.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) establishes five core competencies: Self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness (CASEL, 2020). By designing the interviews, our students would reflect on their self-awareness by integrating their personal and social identities, identifying their personal, cultural, and linguistic assets, and their emotions in response to both the inequities and the unrest that unfolded at that moment. When conducting the interviews, students would enhance their social awareness by taking others’ perspectives and identifying diverse social norms, including unjust ones. More importantly, they would “understand the influence of organizations/systems on behavior,” which is one of the capacities highlighted by CASEL (2020) because the interviews would help them approach these issues from different people’s perspectives (n.p.). Furthermore, in carrying out the interviews, students would have to practice managing their emotions and exhibit self-discipline, which relates to self-management, communicate effectively, develop positive relationships, and stand up for the rights of others, which are connected to relationship skills.

In establishing a framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching, Hammond (2014) emphasizes building awareness of the students’ culture, learning partnerships, and intellective capacity. Regarding cultural awareness, teachers should get to know their students’ deep culture (comprising the collective unconscious, beliefs, and norms, as opposed to surface culture, which would focus on aspects like food or holidays) and understand implicit bias and structural racialization. Additionally, teachers should consider how the brain works and how trauma interferes with learning. As for building learning partnerships, Hammond highlights the importance of checking in with students about how they are feeling, offering emotional encouragement, following up and checking progress, and emphasizing learner independence (Hammond, 2014, p. 105). We focused on centering and valuing students’ cultures and identities as students decided to work on their reflection of their race and how it is perceived in the community they live in and contrast it with their interviews. Students would have a chance to explore how races tend to be seen as encompassing categories, even as several people of the same race may have very different cultures and identities.

Restorative circles are one of the restorative practices identified by the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP), which has its roots in restorative justice (Costello et al., 2010, p. 6). They borrow practices from indigenous traditions, mainly Native American (Karp, 2019, p. 34). They
“intentionally seek to attend(s) to the whole person and to provide space for emotional, social, and moral development along the mental and the physical” (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015, p. 6). They are crucial in developing positive discipline (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015, pp. 6-9) and social discipline (Costello et al., 2010, p. 8). Similarly, they promote belonging, trauma-sensitive learning environments, and mindfulness practices (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015, pp. 6-9). We used the structure of community circles to build strong positive relationships between students and between students and teachers. Karp (2019, p. 36) describes four rounds to organize a circle: connection (building trust), concern (exploring the issue), collaboration (brainstorming next steps), and closing (assessment and appreciation). We would incorporate these steps in creating our workshop routines, as explained below in the section about the preparation of the learning experience.

Additionally, in establishing the basis for restorative justice processes, Boyes-Watson and Pranis (2015) recognize seven core assumptions to start community circles, which we adopted as our guiding principles in our conversations with students and community members:

1. The true self in everyone is good, wise, and powerful.
2. The world is profoundly interconnected.
3. All human beings have a deep desire to be in a good relationship.
4. All human beings have gifts, and everyone is needed for what they bring.
5. Everything we need to make positive change is already here.
6. Human beings are holistic.
7. We need practices to “build habits of living from the core self”. (pp. 9-16)

In the field of art education, Olivia Gude has synthesized the core postmodern principles that contemporary art may instill into students’ work. Concretely, the principle of gazing encourages students to “spontaneously question who controls imagery and how this imagery affects our understandings of reality – an important activity of visual culture art education” (Gude, 2004, p. 10). In this case, the interviews would allow students to investigate our notions of “others.” Similarly, Gude determines that art classes should provide students with “opportunities for meaningful self-expression in which they become representin’, self-creating beings. These opportunities should allow students to see examples of contemporary artists using artmaking to explore the potentials and problems in their own cultural and political settings” (Gude, 2004, pp. 11-12). This learning experience would allow students to do this exploration firsthand.

Lastly, Julia Marshall (2019) established inquiry trails as a method to facilitate learning that encourages students to design their own questions and devise a way to look for answers using strategies from contemporary art. In creative-based inquiry learning, instructors guide students through big questions and provide students with research materials. In contrast, students learn about cross-cutting concepts and develop an investigation through artmaking using creative strategies. In our experience, our learners would create the documentary based on the interviews and the community stop-motion animation.

Co-designing the Learning Experience

We decided to involve our students in co-designing the learning experience because, based on our understanding of culturally responsive teaching, we wanted to grant our students a higher degree of autonomy and ownership. We informed them that, while we would facilitate learning regarding the technical aspects (video production, sound editing, and 3D printing), we urged them to do their production about whatever was essential for them. As young people (most of them 14-16 years old),
they were trying to wrap their heads around the events that took place that summer. As Black youth, they felt othered by the narratives dominating the media and trying to find their place in issues that had situated them on the first line at a very young age without being asked. We agreed to create a documentary with interviews conducted in the Rockford community and a collaborative animation inviting everybody to participate. Next, we encouraged them to design the interviews and carry out the conversations.

We were mindful that Iga (of Polish origin) and Verónica (of Spanish origin) are White and perceived differently from our students. However, because we both are immigrants, we could empathize with the sense of otherness (Kristeva, 1991) and were trying to understand these issues in our new home country. As educators, we respect their need to understand themselves and drive their inquiry. This entailed allowing students to develop their own interview questions, although we would help them refine the questions in case they were too broad or yes/no questions. We would do so by questioning the students to look for exactly what they meant until they worded their questions precisely.

**Set of student-designed questions:**

- Please tell us something about you (name, profession, origin),
- How has the recent BLM movement affected you and your family?
- What are some of the preliminary actions that you think we as a country should take on to resolve this issue?
- How have these riots and protests changed your perspective on our country?
- Liberty and justice for all... what do they mean to you?
- Do you believe that our nation can resolve these issues in a peaceful manner? If so, how?

**Student-designed follow-up questions:**

- Have you seen (or experienced) racism in your life?
- Have you felt afraid for your own safety?
- Have you participated in the protests?
- What would you tell a young person experiencing this today or to the next generation decades from now living in this country?

**Preparation for the Learning Experience**

The apprenticeship had an ideal location because the bike path by the river is where innumerable people of all backgrounds and income levels choose to work out, socialize, and recreate. The Arts Council lent us a space (the small building that serves as the Sea Scouts headquarters) next to it. We set a tarp to create shade in the morning sun and placed signs that the students made to attract people and inform them of what we were doing. We set the animation station inside the building and an improvised interview space, with chairs for our guests and two cameras, under the tarp. Besides the two cameras, we counted with lapel microphones and digital sound recorders for the interviews; for the community animation, we had an animation table stand prepared for iPad.

The instructors established a flexible structure for the day. Every day we started with a circle, where we would talk about how we felt that day, review the day before, and set goals for the starting day. By the end of the day, we closed with another circle, where we shared what we had learned and detected things we could fix for the following day. This wrapped three hours of work. The students would stand on the bike path and invite passersby, asking them if they would like to sit and converse with them about current affairs and the BLM movement. After being invited to the interview, whether they accepted or declined, the participants were invited inside our pop-up animation studio, where the students instructed them with quick notions about stop-motion animation. Participants would draw in the sand as our students took pictures for the stop-motion animation. As they drew, participants...
answered one question: “What does Black Lives Matter mean to you?” Their answers would be to be intertwined with the animation.

Responses of participants: Living in the anxious now

Once at the bike path, we had about 28 people participate in the interviews. While some people were wary of talking about it while on camera and refused to sit with us or be recorded, several people took the opportunity to voice their concerns or show their allyship. Of the 28, about 16 were African American, ten were White, one was Latinx, and one was of Asian origin. As for ages, all the interviewees (besides our group) were over 18, and we had about four people over 50 and about five people who seemed to be in their 20s, with most of the participants ranging between 30-49 years old, approximately (we did not ask their age). All the interviewees lived in Rockford. However, their birthplaces were diverse, with one participant being born in the Virgin Islands, another in Germany, another in Mexico, and two in Africa. Some participants were from other states and had moved to Rockford (about three people from Delaware, upstate New York) or were from neighboring towns and had relocated. Most were born and raised in Rockford. We were lucky to access the mayor, who agreed to sit with us. We also endured how some passersby would refuse to participate or yell at us. Simultaneously, we witnessed a neighboring artistic project being cut short because of fear of how the public would react to a symbol of support for BLM.

In their search to find out how racism and anti-racist protests were clashing and impacting our community, our students found that our participants were trying to make sense of what was perceived then as a liminal state. In part, because some expected that the pandemic would be less of a concern and the restrictions would soon lift (it would still take another year for that to happen), and partly because some expected that the protests would bring some resolution that would alleviate systemic inequity and structural injustice. At any rate, all perceived this moment as a transition into another stage. In between these coordinates, participants would express a continuum from hopefulness to skepticism, from enthusiasm to realism, implying that it would require a long journey, not an easy solution, to get out of that in-between state successfully. Two years later, much of what was a sensation of discontinuity now feels like a missed opportunity. The sections below include multiple participant quotes that speak to the points of this continuum from hopefulness to skepticism, and the coordinates in between.

Uncertainty

The participants’ responses showed much uncertainty about how the rupture caused by the COVID-19 pandemic would resolve and what the future would look like for the BLM movement after the summer’s momentum. However, they were not uncertain regarding their positions toward the protests and the injustice. Our participants were divided between the ones that saw in this rupture an opportunity to examine the structural foundations that lead the way to systemic inequality and be able to change them and those who thought that the momentum would be assimilated by capitalist culture in a way that would leave those very foundations intact. One interviewee expresses that “Luckily things are changing... seemingly...you go to Walmart and see things that say Black lives matter, but it is the companies doing that, the government is not doing any changes”, alluding to how minorities cultures are targeted as just another flavor to buy, but race inequalities existing in the labor market are not changed. In this sense, two other participants expressed that the BLM movement had not changed their beliefs or the work that they were already doing with Black communities because they were doing it before the movement started. They knew they would keep doing it for the long term. One stated,
“The BLM movement and how it has affected my family is quite interesting as my family is already involved in things pertaining to African American people.” In that respect, the protests had not altered what she was already doing. The other explained, “It has not changed my beliefs but reaffirmed that we have to make our voices heard.

**Hopefulness**

Other participants expressed hopefulness that the BLM movement “is bringing attention to things that need to be highlighted.” Alternatively, as one of our participants said:

“I think BLM is finally making a difference because everybody is keeping it up; you have to keep the pressure on because otherwise, they are going to do something like take down a statue and not change how they do things.

One interviewee, a young White woman, expressed:

I am just hoping that other White people can start to see and open up their eyes, and their hearts, and their minds to why this is happening, why people are making their voices heard, and why there needs to be a change in this country, or else it is just going to keep going, and it is just going to continuously be heartbreaking.

However, interviewees were less hopeful regarding changing aspects of how racism shows itself: “That is the majority of the type of racism that’s out there right now; with cancel culture, people are scared to say how they really feel, so they kind of hide their racism nowadays.” Furthermore, when it concerned the question of liberty and justice for all concerning hopefulness, a participant said,

Liberty and justice for all, you hear it, is in our pledge of allegiance, (which) we are trained to say as young students. However, it is something that we have not seen, so if you say, ‘liberty and justice for all’ for a Black person, it comes with a caveat; maybe you have ‘liberty and justice for all,’ and so you ... have to face different obstacles, that a person that are not minorities would not have to face.

This quote underscores the participant's perception of a double standard in our societal values, highlighting the disproportionate effort racialized minorities must exert to attain rights granted more readily to those perceived as White. It also reflects the participant’s pessimism about the likelihood of significant change in the foreseeable future.

**Participation**

The level of participation in the protests was also mixed. Some older people told us: “I have not been able to participate very much because I do not walk very fast.” Others could not personally attend for other reasons, such as citizenship status: “I cannot go to the protests because if one of the peaceful protesters got arrested, and it was me, I could get scrutinized, and it could hurt my legality to be here.” However, that did not prevent participants from supporting the movement in other ways: “I try to do my part, I have been donating to various, like The Bail Project, I keep going to protests when I can, educating myself on defunding police.” One of our participants, who marched during the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, said: “I am so proud of those young people who are fighting for justice right now.” This same person further explained how a girl, who must have been about 18 years old, said: “They messed with the wrong generation because we are not going to stop until we are just (a fair society).” This sums up the sense of urgency that was distilled from our participants.

**Possible resolutions**

As for the solutions participants proposed about how we can reconfigure our current conditions and move us beyond that transitional moment at the global and community levels, they all highlighted listening as a crucial aspect to reach an understanding and
possibly start a healing process. An interviewee suggested that “there are a lot of things you can do to help... just to be understanding of the other side and know it”. Another interviewee recognized that,

From a city-wide perspective, it has been a very difficult time, but also a tremendous opportunity for union if we all work together and we all work for positive change together...the first thing we need to do is to listen and engage.

A participant proposed:

What I am hoping I can do is be there for the Black community as a White person in the best way, what is needed from me as a White person, as an ally, and to understand what I can do to benefit.

Along the same lines, one of our interviewees exposed that,

For the country as a whole, something they can do is listen to the people that are out there in the streets; a lot of this stuff has happened time and time again... Black people have faced police brutality, so just listen and try and come up with creative and meaningful solutions, do not just try to throw something, this is going to be a long time, so the solution has to be something that is a long journey. It will not be an easy fix, so you have to be committed to whatever the solution is for the long run.

At the personal level, a participant responded that if he could advise his former 15-year-old self, it would be that knowledge is critical: “Use your knowledge to gain access and information, be aware of everything, people you interact with, your surroundings, environment, and stay on top of everything as far as political, social, and everything that is just going around.” Another participant stated that she wished everyone self-efficacy and grace:

Some of the perils of White racism in our society have really caused a lot of people who look like us to believe certain things that are not true about themselves; there are certain pathologies that have been passed on for generations as a result of living in a racist culture that hates you and hates everything about you; it hates you mentally, it hates you physically, it hates your spiritual aspects and all of your strengths, so one thing that I would impart is definitely self-efficacy for people to really know who they are and believe in who they are and what they can do... and grace (because) we can be very critical of ourselves and it is important for people not only extend grace to other people but also to themselves and I think an extension of treating other people well is treating yourself well.

This strongly connects with the idea of self-efficacy as part of the “knowledge (and love) of self” that is proposed as humanization or an alternative to SEL that is grounded on a critical analysis of intersecting oppressions (Camangian & Cariaga, 2022, p. 2).

Our social present veils an abjection, an aberrant idea hidden in everyday language, which is that “matter,” in this context, merely means not to be killed. One of our participants points at it when she says:

My current thoughts on BLM, as a phrase, (are that) BLM is not enough because mattering is the bare minimum, that is the minimum threshold, Black Lives are critically important, Black Lives are amazing, Black Lives are priceless, Black Lives are worth all of the energy that we have to put forward to save them, so I think that the movement BLM to just demand basic human rights and equal treatment under the law, equal protection under the law, is critical. But again, as a phrase, I think it is just the bare minimum because we are critically important, but our fight even now is just to matter, so the phrase is heartbreaking to me because at this point, after hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years in this country, we still should not be fighting just to matter,
because we are integral, we built this country! So, we do more than matter.

Another participant synthesized it when it came to the question of liberty and justice: “Liberty and justice for all is the removal of all those systemic forms of oppression that keep people down.” This also reinforced the idea that SEL alone is not enough. However, we can make crucial transformations by implementing equitable practices as educators, in the content, but especially in the form we teach by critically questioning the processes we use to facilitate learning.

**Conclusion: How we experienced this moment through art education**

This workshop helped us navigate this transitional moment through artmaking and SEL. Our thoughts about teaching evolved through this experience, as we decided to infuse it with SEL strategies, culturally responsive teaching, restorative practices, and contemporary art strategies. These decisions manifested in how we conducted it, grounding it in restorative circles and interviews with the community. We started a listening process that could open to the larger community, which comprised the practice videos students took of each other, the walks with activists and organizers, and the interviews with regional experts, and continued during the apprenticeship at the bike path.

When participants answered the interview questions and when they responded to “What does Black Lives Matter mean to you?” as they drew in the sand, we understand that, in a way, they were enacting a kind of community circle rounds, with each member answering the same question and passing it on to the next. People were very honest about their beliefs. As our participants demanded, it became clear that in this in-between moment, having these difficult conversations and, most importantly, listening were the most critical next steps. Boyes-Watson and Pranis explain that the circle invites participants to drop their usual masks and protections that create distance from others (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015). This project allowed people to drop their masks, hoping to be listened to. The structures we put in place as we developed the learning experience with our students and the nature of the interviews contributed to it.

Anybody who wished to sit with us could do so, and many did, from different lifestyles and backgrounds. We listened to their shared longing for unity. Furthermore, we listened to them, asking for more people to listen. As the responses of our interviewees suggested, if there is ever an opportunity to heal as a society, it will have to start by listening to each other, and this workshop taught us how to start in that direction as educators.

Students went through an iterative circle of exploring their identities and confronting others with curiosity. They then used this learning to reflect on the larger community and decide how to act. We went through these circles with them. As a result, we saw some of the students’ initial statements become more nuanced by the end of the apprenticeship. In this project, we developed conversations, reflections, and visual work, allowing students to develop the knowledge, skills, and vision to transform the world and allow others to gain some understanding by showing their work. Finally, the project gave way to their self-expression, raised self- and social awareness, and contributed to their responsible decision-making.

The animation portion of the apprenticeship opened at an exhibition organized by the Rockford Area Arts Council at the Nicholas Conservatory and Gardens in August 2020. Local media interviewed the students that came to the opening. Our interviews with the public have not been shown yet, but we are currently reviewing the existing footage to create a short documentary that would synthesize the participants’ answers. We hope that with future scheduled showings in the community, people living in this city will develop the ability to put themselves in the place of others and explore interconnectedness.
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In an inquiry into practicum as a participatory endeavor, I focus on.... transpedagogies (mine and those of pre-service teachers) as multiples and explore the challenges of examining any process of (un)becoming as fleeting, incomplete, and always in the making.

Abstract: While innovative approaches to teacher preparation are implemented in teacher education curricula, most practicums continue to be built around normative standards of teacher practice. Intended to prepare future teachers to be successful in K-12 settings burdened by a stifling audit culture, policy overreach, and standardized assessments, continued efforts are needed to engage preservice teachers with the unknowns of pedagogy through contemporary art practices that foreground social interaction and open space for new ways for becoming a teacher.

In this article, the author/inquirer examines preservice teachers’ participation in transpedagogical practice (social practice) aimed at guiding high schoolers in a 2019 social practice project designed to make change in their schools. In this inquiry the researcher asked, What happens when preservice teachers participate in teacher (un)preparation and how might tenuous, emergent, and even unruly transpedagogical practice unmake what seems sensible for practicum? Careful study of course artifacts and research journal entries revealed the emergence of moments of slippage or those unexpected and often disconcerting occurrences that form when the norms of teacher practice do not sit quietly with practice that is “(un)becoming”. Three moments of slippage are used as springboards for discussion and offer implications for the field of art education.

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Introduction

Expanding on social practice artist, Pablo Helguera's (2011) term, transpedagogy or the blending of art and teaching in informal settings, I suggest that transpedagogies can be found in all places of learning, informal or otherwise. I also propose that a transpedagogical practicum that foregrounds dialogue (Kester, 2004, 2011), participation (Bishop, 2006A, 2012), and civic engagement, while risky and not without constraints, should be a key element of teacher preparation. Such practices can open spaces for unexpected pedagogical events to emerge creating alternative social interactions, challenging normative teaching practices, and heightening the role that uncertainty and ambiguity can play in (un)becoming a teacher. Instead of working toward established or expected norms, preservice teachers are encouraged to consider the complicated and even paradoxical nature of a collective practice and to think anew curriculum as a collaborative, emergent and sometimes precarious undertaking, rich in potential and constraints. And finally, by engaging in pedagogy as artists preservice teachers can begin to consider the material pliability of schooling (Lucero, 2023, p.13) while realizing the potential for social change locally and globally.

In this light, transpedagogues are asked to consider their practice "in relation with" foregrounding the input of learners/participants in the design of a collective curriculum charged through social interaction. This is not unlike what Freire (1979) proposed as a key feature of critical pedagogy that is co-intentional, fosters reciprocity and honors the knowledge and assets that learners bring to learning. Yet despite calls for critical and emancipatory praxis that promotes dialogue, reflexivity, and greater participation or voice in the field, perhaps it is the field as a calcification of possibility that must be rethought with greater attention to the expansive relational potentials that need (un)making. Perhaps greater emphasis needs to be placed on participating in a collective practice as opposed to completing practicum as a goal for being a teacher. Instead, becoming a teacher is considered a fluid state of (un)working, something to be artfully, ethically, politically transversed "in relation with". Like socially engaged art, becoming a teacher is an emergent, complex, and uncertain endeavor that often stalls or soars, skids to a halt, or dangles in a state of waiting for what’s next. Wildemeersch (2018) suggests that, “the complexity of the initiative (social practice) makes it unpredictable and necessitates creative answers to unforeseen circumstances” (p.7) which, can be applied to transpedagogy as a process for enabling creatively and critically generated inquiries and potential solutions to exceedingly complicated problems (un)related to artmaking, teaching, and world(un)making.

In this inquiry, I examined preservice teachers’ participation in a practicum that positioned them as artists/educators whose collective curriculum-making was aimed at guiding high schoolers in a 2019 social practice project designed to make change in their schools. I asked the following questions: What happens when preservice teachers participate in teacher (un)preparation and how might risky, emergent, and even unruly transpedagogical practice unmake what seems sensible for practicum? Yet, having worked in teacher preparation for over twenty years it is safe to say that I feel the headwinds of standards in the acronyms that make up well-meaning attempts to assign value to the work of educators while feeling guilty at times for placing preservice teachers in less predictable and often unsettling scenarios (mis)characterized as generative and necessary. For the most part becoming a competent or successful teacher has meant becoming professionally efficient, knowledgeable, and able to design strong and effective instruction that carefully aligns objectives and assessments and anticipates outcomes. While these qualities are helpful for functioning in a highly normalized school setting, the excessive focus on such qualities by preservice teachers can lead to an overwhelming desire to meet or exceed standardized performance expectations and accept cultural myths about
teaching “that render irrelevant arguments for other ways of becoming a teacher” (Britzman, 2003, p. 6).

Furthermore, intense focus on normative standards of practice can perpetuate stale or even unjust systems or simply fall short of producing what’s needed in a field that is always unstable and always in the making. More disconcerting is the way that an audit culture and policy overreach have stripped teachers of their ability to make pedagogical decisions deemed effective (Hanawalt, 2018) and just, while reigning in any sense of creativity or autonomy, due to the risks associated with doing so. Recent examples include radical aims to pressure school boards, efforts to ban books in libraries and the misguided calls to eradicate critical race theory in K-12 curriculum (Carpenter, Crabbe, Desai, Kantawala, Kraehe, Mask & Thatte, 2021; Duckworth, 2021). These pressures coupled with having internalized 12 years of K-12 schooling, make the ability for preservice teachers to imagine otherwise at the very least challenging. Unless provided with opportunities to grapple with new ways of being in schools, preservice teachers carry forward systems which are ineffective for reaching today’s learners and in many ways perpetuate a curriculum that is at best stagnant and at worst unjust. Garoian (2014) argues that unfortunately “existing metrics for gauging teaching performance and effectiveness are constituted after the fact” (p.388) making curriculum irrelevant and disconnected from the lives of students at all levels of schooling.

Instead, like Kalin and Barney (2014), I advocate for “monstrous curricular excesses and conflicts...” essential for “...perforating both our students and our own current and historical borders of a field yet to come” (19). In this light, teacher preparation programs are challenged to consider their roles in providing curricula that animates new lines of participation through guided encounters with ambiguity, uncertainty, and the unknown as energizing forces for something new (Hegeman, Sanders-Bustle & Hanawalt, 2020). More emphasis must be placed on teaching, what Aoki (2005) referred to as the indwelling between a curriculum lived and a curriculum planned, a dynamic positioning that produces “a multiplicity of curricula, as many as there are teachers and students” (p. 2). Aoki proposed that curricula unfolds or emerges as a collective formed in relation with as opposed to individually, setting in motion multiple intentions and motivations that stimulate unanticipated responses. Browne (2017) also speaks to the presence of multiplicity in her conceptualization of emergence as “the way complex systems and patterns arise out of a multiplicity of relatively simple interactions ... a process which ...emphasizes critical connection over critical mass, building authentic relationships, listening with all senses” (p. 3). The collective and relational elements addressed by Browne are similar to qualities often associated with social practice which makes participatory art a useful approach for rethinking practicum as a collective curriculum.

### Social Practice as Transpedagogical Practice

The relational qualities of this work are at the center of transpedagogy as a kind of social practice or socially engaged art. While social engaged art has gained prominence in contemporary art circles (Bishop, 2006, 2012; Finkelpearl, 2013; Helguera, 2011; Kester, 2011), implementation in school settings and teacher preparation programs is still limited and practitioner applications are often left out of theoretical examinations (Sanders-Bustle, 2019). Therefore, ongoing work is needed to involve preservice teachers in contemporary art practices that encourage alternative forms of participation in schools that offer something new at a time when something else is called for. With this in mind, since 2017, in my work as a university art educator, I have tried to work outside the somewhat predictable and normative methodologies of teacher practicum (of which I am fully implicated) to involve preservice teachers in the making/teaching of socially engaged art in public schools (Sanders-Bustle, 2019). While
my practice as a K-12 art teacher in the 1990s and my work in service-learning in the 2000s (Sanders-Bustle 2014, Sanders-Bustle & Lalik, 2017) foreshadowed an ongoing interest in the potential for collaborative artmaking it was not until later that I learned about social practice as a contemporary art form. Borrowing from qualities of social practice to design a practicum curriculum, I lovingly refer to social practice in public schools as social sketches (Sanders-Bustle, 2019). Not fully formed, they reflect the imperfect and fluid nature of transpedagogical practice which serves not as a model but rather a participatory process that animates the relational potentialities for teacher practice.

A key element of social practice is the increased role that participation plays in practice, whereby the lines between artist and spectator are blurred (Bourriaud, 1997; Rancière, 2011) and possibilities for viewer involvement is broadened. Rancière (2011) describes this as emancipatory in nature, as the spectator shifts from passive onlooker to active participant. Artistic and/or pedagogical practice can thus be viewed as a shared endeavor increasing attention to intersubjectivity and interdependence and potentially enabling endless variations of participation.

For Helguera (2011), participation in socially engaged art is described as a multilayered taxonomy ranging from nominal to collaborative. Earlier Arnstein (1969) proposed that participation be thought of as a ladder of citizen participation that represents “the extent of citizens’ power in determining the plan and/or program” (p. 216). Useful in describing participation as a process, in some ways attempts to identify frameworks or models makes assumptions about the needs and motivations of communities and does not consider the role that multiplicity plays in what Kwon (2002) describes as the necessary unworking communities. In other words, both participation and community are considered key elements of social practice, yet both are often acted upon as preconceived entities rather than uniquely situated, diverse and fluid. This makes it exceedingly difficult to determine the ethical, political, or aesthetic qualities, values, or outcomes of participatory art which Bishop (2012) asserts requires “finding a more nuanced language to address the artistic status of the work” (p. 18).

In this inquiry into practicum as a participatory endeavor I focus on potentialities and constraints of transpedagogical practice and make no claims as to the effectiveness of activities or the responses and perspectives of the school community. Rather I focus on transpedagogies (mine and those of the preservice teachers) as multiples and explore the challenge of examining any process of (un)becoming as fleeting, incomplete, and always in the making. To think through this inquiry, I respond to emerging evidence found in my fieldnotes and preservice teachers’ final semester Pecha Kucha presentations, written reflections, and other course artifacts. I view these as partial tellings that at best offer glimpses into what I will describe later as moments of slippage or points where “participation in teaching fell out of line, uncomfortably” with pedagogical sensibilities. I realize that these moments represent only a few of the many moments that occur during practicum, yet value them as occurrences to think around when considering the future of preservice teacher education.

**Our Transpedagogies**

In the spring of 2019, preservice teachers enrolled in the course *Secondary Curriculum in Art Education* and I positioned ourselves as social practice artists with the intention of implementing what Bishop (2012) would describe as pedagogical projects. Working in a public high school and university settings, our charge was to think transpedagogically about practicum in dialogue with high schoolers as they explored aspects of the high school they hoped to change. At the time of this work, student outrage and protest related to shootings at Marjory Stoneman High School, police violence, and unjust policies and treatment of immigrants energized youth in the US. Having visited with the high
schoolers ahead of the semester to find out which social issues they were interested in, we learned that immigration policy was at the top of their list. Consequently, we decided that the topic of citizenship would be a productive starting point for our curriculum.

However, before designing the curriculum, we wanted a better understanding of transpedagogical practice and socially engaged art. As previously discussed, Helguera (2011) defines transpedagogy as the blending of teaching and art in informal settings; however, unlike Helguera who associates socially engaged with art in "informal" settings, we thought of the high school as neither informal or formal but rather an ecology of (un)predictable day-to-day social exceptionalities. This did not mean that we dismissed (or were able to dismiss) existing normative elements of schooling such as schedules, time and space limitations, curriculum, classroom management, assessment, and administrative considerations, but rather that we paid particular attention these qualities as part of an emergent and open-ended process for unlearning or reversing our pedagogy (Butler, 2008). In other words, the hope was that we would be able to allow unexpected events to unsettle our deeply entrenched normalized learnings about pedagogy, schooling, and art, and to work in alternative ways in the school.

This also meant considering what I refer to as the entangled quality of artistic and pedagogical participations across, between and with the preservice teachers and the highschoolers, not to mention the larger school community and beyond. Our participation was never solitary. We were always working as a group. Contemplating what "participating" might look like with this complex relational web in mind became important. Related, working to blur the lines between artist/facilitator and viewer/student, as facilitator of the course, I wanted to foreground the ideas and actions of the preservice teachers while encouraging them to make decisions, take the lead, and pose new questions along the way: in essence to co-create an emergent curriculum. I also kept a journal of fieldnotes, documenting and reflecting on our process while the preservice teachers kept artist/teacher/researcher sketchbooks. I wanted the students to work like artists/researchers to establish a process through which to chronicle their ideas and experiences, generate new questions related to readings or their placements, collect and generate new imagery, and to push their thinking. A transpedagogical tool, the artist/teacher/researcher sketchbook suggested a strong relationship between art, pedagogy and research highlighting the creative and critical potential art and research can play in forming an emergent pedagogy, a sentiment that I feel gets lost when becoming a teacher is practiced in compliance with what’s expected, individualized, and standardized.

In addition, preparation involved learning more about socially engaged art by reading, studying, and sharing the works and methods of contemporary artists. Key readings included excerpts from Thompson’s Living as Form, Lacy’s Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art and Helguera’s, Education for Socially Engaged Art prompting the creation of a collaborative list of qualities found in socially engaged art which included: collaboration, dialogue, social change, social form, unknowability, fluidity, disruption, and intervention. We positioned these qualities as key drivers of our pedagogy referring to them often as the curriculum emerged. Additionally, given that the high schoolers would be creating work based on change they wanted to see in their schools, it was essential for us to think deeply about art as civic action and to consider the role that civic engagement might play in art and teaching. To gain a greater appreciation of complexities surrounding the topic of citizenship, we read and discussed Biesta’s (2011) article, The Ignorant Citizen: Mouffe, Ranciè re, and the Subject of Democratic Education. In the article he explored key questions related to the nature of citizenship, challenging our own understanding of citizenship, and complicating our approach to curriculum. In response, we
generated a list of essential questions that could serve as a starting point for the curriculum we wanted to share with the high schoolers. Questions included: What is citizenship? Who gets to be a citizen and why? How does the definition of citizenship affect how we view one another? Is citizenship a barrier or a privilege? Is citizenship a feeling or a status? And, finally, what are the responsibilities of a citizen?

We also read Claudia Rankin’s (2014) collection of prose and images, titled Citizen: An American Lyric. In this book, Rankin explores the intersections of race and citizenship in America offering provocative, complicated, and painful examples of microaggressions toward Black citizens in the US. In response to our discussions about the book and an audiotaped interview of Rankin discussing her work, the preservice teachers created visual responses using texts from Rankin’s poems as well as other materials. I purposefully left the prompt for the assignment vague only asking the students to respond visually using any of the materials available in the room. By doing so the students could produce a work that expressed connections made with the reading providing a range of perspectives. Visual responses were shared and discussed with the larger group and the conversation widened as students were given opportunities to write comments and questions written in the margins of students’ work. Questions included: How can we approach issues that society may not yet accept? If we cry out, how loud does our voice have to be to make a change? How to mark the unmarked? But what if what you say is seen as wrong? (Figure 1)

To prepare for upcoming instruction at the high school, the preservice teachers formed four small groups of four, each responsible for teaching two lessons at the high school. Prior to going to the school, for the next month the preservice teachers met at the university in their groups alternating with whole group discussions to share lesson ideas and to make sure that lessons built off one another. After about six weeks, we split our time between the high school and the university. While at the school, the students began by taking turns observing in the classroom and getting to know the high schoolers. Back at the university the students continued to plan their lessons and share their ideas with the whole class. A key element of this work was the time devoted to co-designing instruction that aligned across groups offering time for feedback and revision. In essence, the preservice teachers were engaging in a participatory pedagogy which involved the difficult task of trying to reach consensus on how to move forward. In the end decisions had to be made. While the co-designing of lessons provided valuable opportunities to discuss the potentials and constraints of our work, it also proved taxing for some who found letting go of their ideas painful. For me, it was always challenging to know when to step
in and when to step back and probably, like the students, often later questioned my decisions, comments, and actions.

The first lesson involved the high schoolers in a free writing activity and the making of altered poems. The preservice teachers opened with a five-minute free response activity which asked the high schoolers to, through writing or drawing, answer the following questions: What is a citizen? What does citizenship mean to you? And, what qualities make you a citizen? Using these questions to generate discussion, of which there was very little, the preservice teachers introduced poets such as Claudia Rankin, Gwendolyn Brooks, Sean O’Kane, Rupi Kaur, John Loving III, and Audre Lorde explaining how each have explored the topic of citizenship in their work. Then, prompted with the question, “What does citizenship mean to me?”, using tape, markers and scissors the high schoolers selected and altered excerpts from poetry or lyrics by reassembling materials as a response (Figure 2). The class ended with a closure activity they called “snowfall” in which the high schoolers wrote what they learned on small slips of paper which were thrown into the air at the end of class. Later that week, back at the university, we reflected on the lesson and specifically discussed the varying degrees of participation during activities. Some preservice teachers expressed discomfort talking with the students and others were concerned about the lack of excitement and quiet demeanor of the high schoolers.

The next project was designed to help the high schoolers identify aspects of the school they wanted to change. Working in groups and provided with large, printed maps of the school, the high schoolers reflected on places they felt comfortable or uncomfortable and those in which they participated or wanted to change. Using a legend, colored dots, and markers the students provided input and further embellished the maps with comments and drawings. As a result of these activities, over time the high schoolers formed groups around issues that were important to them which included: bad school lunches, graffitied bathrooms, student|teacher relationships, and unfair enforcement of dress codes. Given that the high schooler’s participation in whole group discussions was limited, we intentionally decided that all future pedagogy would take place in small groups instead of the whole class. We felt that this would give the preservice teachers more flexibility and allow them to listen more closely to student ideas. For the high schoolers we hoped that this would invite more dialogue, encourage decision-making, and generate new ideas. Back at the university we reflected on our practice specifically talking about how participation was unfolding. To deepen our understanding of overall participation in the project, I asked the preservice teachers to create
a visual representation of participation thus far. A few drew conceptual maps depicting participants and drawing arrows and lines to indicate interactions. Others drew tables identifying participants who were involved, and one student elaborated on the nature of participation as generative and reactive, which I failed to follow up on. Another student sketched a Venn diagram accompanied by percentages of active and passive participants. Finally, two students worked together to create a page of thought bubbles reflecting their ideas (Figure 3). All of the visuals centered participation on people or institutions involved and all tried to capture the relational dynamics at play. Yet they did not take into account other structural, political, or material elements at play. In a way, we were trapped in a preconceived idea about participation.

Going forward the preservice teachers worked alongside the high schoolers as they learned more about socially engaged art and created proposals for their social practice projects which were shared with an administrator and later with the principal. Over time, the preservice teachers noticed that the high schoolers were talking more and contributing ideas, however they still expressed that in some groups high schoolers had difficulty taking the lead and, in some cases, they were not sure if they were interested. One high schooler shared that she was not used to being able to make all the decisions and found it difficult. The preservice teachers also expressed difficulty deciding when they needed to step in or when they needed to step back and noticed that some students tended to take the lead while others were fine saying nothing. I offered that we were still probably viewed as outsiders and that building trust takes more time than we have. Time and participation are inextricably linked.

Weeks passed and the high schoolers continued to work on their projects. One group decided to create a blackboard to be installed in a school bathroom that would feature uplifting phrases and chalk for students to respond. They hoped that this would take the place of random and sometimes obscene graffiti and hopefully improve the bathroom environment overall. In response to what the students described as “bad” lunches, one group decided to have a pizza tasting contest and created place settings to be installed in the cafeteria for a meal with school board members. Genuinely wanting to get to know teachers better, another group created a series of games they could play with teachers. And finally, concerned with the way that mostly girls of color were treated differently when it came to dress code enforcement, one group created door covers to raise awareness about inconsistencies in treatment and to solicit responses from other students. Their collaborative research is represented in Figure 4.
After students in the “lunch” group did not receive responses to lunch invitations they sent to school board members, a preservice teacher who was working with the group decided to email an invitation to school board members. Upon receiving the email and wanting to avoid a larger problem, the Director of Nutrition immediately contacted the principal and at 7am the following morning a preservice teacher and I found ourselves in a meeting with five other administrators talking about the social practice project. From this meeting, the Director on Nutrition agreed to meet with students, myself, a preservice teacher, and the art teacher at another time at which point she shared how and why decisions are made about lunches and the students were given an opportunity to talk about concerns. As for the other projects, the principal felt it best to put them on hold for the time being, leaving my students feeling that we had failed. One preservice remarked, “We told the students that their voices did matter, and, in the end, they didn’t.”

Dismayed, back on campus, we spent an entire three-hour class thinking through our next steps and decided to be honest with the high schoolers and give them an opportunity to express their thoughts. With a peace offering of pizza, we involved them in an activity in which they could express their ideas with chalk on pizza lids painted with blackboard paint. Finally, while we were not able to implement the social practice projects as expected, we did exhibit photographs and proposals for their projects at an open house at the high school later that month. A last-minute addition, it seemed like a lackluster attempt to bring value to a process that on many accounts seemed like a failed social practice project, a misguided curriculum, and a transpedagogical fiasco.

**Moments of Slippage as New Ways of Participating**

The aforementioned activities in some ways were the (un)making of our collective transpedagogies. While it might be argued that the relational nature of our work was positive and even fruitful in some regards, key moments of slippage emerged for us out of the tensions that we encountered. I describe moments of slippage as those unexpected and often disconcerting occurrences that form when the norms of teacher practice do not sit quietly with pedagogical practice that is “(un)becoming”. Instead, by participating collectively, our pedagogies precariously dwelled in the in-between spaces, waiting, often anxiously for the unknown next event—an ambiguous place which I would argue is in fact, fruitful, albeit unsettling. Similar to Rancière's (2015) concept of dissensus described as a “conflict between a sensory presentation and a way of making sense of it, or between several sensory regimes and/or bodies” (p. 147), moments of slippage may or may not speak to the presence of sense or sensibility, conflict or conviviality, but rather unfolds as ruptures in normality or what is expected. Such moments are similarly described by Garoian (2014) as unexpected crises of knowledge in pedagogy or “an awkward, unfamiliar event that emerges unexpectedly and disrupts normalcy in the classroom” (p. 388).

Whether emerging unexpectedly or initiated, these ruptures act as sentient provocations that may or may not challenge norms or raise new questions...
about practice but perhaps provide glimpses into new ways of becoming a teacher. However, at the same time, participating collectively added a layer of precarity and risk that is not without consideration. In the following section I introduce three moments of slippage that provide insights about transpedagogy recognizing that they represent only glimpses into the multiple, varied, and complex forms of participation at play in social practice.

**Moment of Slippage #1: Off-road pedagogy**

The first moment is reflected in a journal entry describing how I felt once we learned that we were in trouble with the administration at the high school and that the social practice projects were on hold (or were they?). It reads:

*I distinctly remember, back at the university, leaning forward on the table, weight on my elbows and remarking to my preservice teachers, with an exasperated, but sly smile on my face, “Boy, this is a wonderful problem we’ve made”. I responded to this sudden realization by laughing out loud, shaking my head and looking to the preservice teachers in front of me for next steps as I am sure they wondered what I might offer. I had nothing. Secretly I was pleased with the seemingly precarious result. We had in fact, found ourselves off the curricular grid, bumping around in unknown territory, unsure about where we were going while dodging the debris of institutional norms that popped up in unforeseen places regardless of efforts to account for and perhaps manage them. While I had engaged in potentially risky pedagogical ventures over the years, never before had the risks involved so many, including preservice teachers, the art teacher, the school administration and the school board, parents, not to mention other unknown actors or forces. “I” became “we”, yet I still internalized our semester’s work as my failure, not being able to distribute the weight of “our” unfolding dilemma. This transpedagogical scenario was new, both energizing and uncomfortable, a strange reworking of a normally obedient citizen/teacher who still chased the ever evasive “successful project” as my (undoing). Oddly, the idea of going to the principal’s office was far more intriguing than it was scary. At the time, I was reading Boyd & Mitchell’s (2012) collection of tactics Beautiful Trouble and took some solace in Dr. Martin Luther King’s quote that appears at the beginning of the introduction which reads, “Human salvation lies in the hands of the creatively maladjusted” (cited in Boyd and Mitchell, 2016, p. 1). Conversely, anxiety and angst rose up from uncertainty about a solution and options available to us as the semester drew to a close. Time pressing on us, worry was far flung scattered across a participatory web as I questioned my practice and worried relentlessly about failing the preservice teachers.

At the same time, disappointment, doubt, and uncertainty landed hard on the preservice teachers, the significance of which hung heavy around us. We found ourselves in a very precarious position brought on by what Tsing (2015) might refer to as unstable “shifting assemblages” that often unknowingly “remake us as well as others” (p. 21). And, we were in this remaking collectively, stymied by the mysteries of possible pedagogies in relation-with as opposed to individually oriented solutions, making it impossible to ascertain a solution much less gain control of the curriculum that unfolded before us.

For me, remaking my practice meant being okay with multiplicities and widening the parameters of potential responses to a collective, liminal space buzzing with possibilities, uncertainties, and vulnerabilities. Additionally, working-with, invested me further in practicum as a collective unmaking, tempering my own lineage of “curriculum-as-planned” as a stabilizing force in my own teacher preparation which called for decentering my presence while at the same time being accountable for what was expected by preservice teachers who as third year undergraduates were within one or two semesters of student teaching in schools.

**Moment of Slippage 2: Feeling Unprepared and Not Knowing What’s Next**
The next moment of slippage is represented by text from preservice teacher, Rachel's (pseudonym) Pecha Kucha slide show presented on the final day of class and a follow-up conversation I had with her. In what can be seen as a form of resistance to the transpedagogical practice I initiated, Rachel's summative reflection offers another perspective on what it means when practicum does not align with normative expectations for teacher preparation. She included the following text on two of her slides:

I feel that if we had a better plan of action we would have more to account for. I understand that in all it was hard for us to know what was going to come next because we were going off of the students. Knowing that this is the last class for art education before I start student teaching is a bit nerve racking. To be honest I feel that this semester did not give me what I was hoping for in order to feel more confident as a teacher and to just be more fully equipped with more teaching information.

In many ways Rachel's Pecha Kucha presentation was a public indictment of the semesters' work and our transpedagogical practice which she foreshadowed by looking at me at the start of her presentation and remarking that she hoped her comments wouldn't hurt my feelings. They did. Not so much for the sentiment but for the publicness of her assessment. Later, when the two of us sat down to talk she explained that she wished I would have taken more control over the process and that it really made her anxious not to know what we were doing. I explained that the transpedagogical practice was designed intentionally to be emergent so that she and the other preservice teachers could work together to create curriculum based on the high schoolers' expressed interests. Even though, early in the semester, we had identified unknowability and fluidity as key elements of social practice, for her, these qualities did not translate over to a pedagogy she could put into practice. Nor was Rachel able to reconcile a collective and emergent process with the anticipated pedagogy she expected to integrate into her clinical placement the following semester.

In the end, this put her in a vulnerable situation created by a felt disconnect between her expectations for a sensible practicum and one that was collectively-driven, unruly and full of variables. In her presentation she spoke directly to her need to “feel” confident, certainly not vulnerable, or unsure moving forward. Confidence, being prepared and informed, clashed with the ambiguity, uncertainty, and risk she experienced, potentially rendering her participation of little value for her future work as a teacher. Instead, the transpedagogical practicum offered an alternative, competing form of teacher practice, one that at the time of the reflections seemed irrelevant for what was next.

In essence, as her instructor, I had asked her to participate in a risky manner by imposing my own form of governmentality as her participation was tied to a grade I, in the end, would administer. As a student, her willingness to share her disappointment in the class (me) compounded her risk while at the same time exercising her right to voice her opinion, an equally compelling response to transpedagogical practice. Both vulnerable and powerful, she was able to share her thoughts and resist what I was offering, a quality of the work, which I was slow to acknowledge as a significant part of practice. In this case risk shared a space with resistance, prompting Rachel to take action. Consequently, I had to consider the (im)possibility of transpedagogical curriculum and to question the ethics of failing to deliver an experience that would, in fact, prepare her to transition successfully and with less trepidation into her teaching role the following semester.

Moments of Slippage #3: Sorry, Not Sorry

The final moment of slippage actually comes from a Pecha Kucha presented by Massie (pseudonym), who led the lunchroom group and sent an email to the school board. It reads:

There have been a lot of “I’m sorrys” this semester
I’m sorry another schedule change
I’m sorry I sent an email to the Board of Education
I’m sorry your proposals are not approved

But despite all these apologies I’m learning that maybe we shouldn’t be sorry
.... So I’m not sorry. I think while what we did at the high school had its flaws and risks, something good can come from this drive for social change. As teachers we owe it to our students to take risks for their education and to not be scared or sorry (Figure 5).

Fig 5. Sorry, not sorry: Slide from Massie’s Pecha Kucha. Slide by Massie

A play on a phrase used in a popular commercial for Reese’s Peanut Butter Cups, Massie’s defiant response to the seemingly negative result of the projects highlights the generative and creative potential for risk taking or failure as elements of transpedagogical practice. Her perspective echoes Halberstam’s (2011) claim that “under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world” (p. 3). Instead of lamenting about the failures and subsequent apologies throughout, she can see the productive and positive aspects of the work that in essence dismantles logic (Halberstam, 2011) which often calls for tangible, preconceived outcomes as indications of success and value. Contrastingly, transpedagogical offers an alternative to expected standards of pedagogy placing value on happenstance, emergence, and often dialogical or relational (re)makings of social interactions that cannot be predetermined. While the level of risk Massie took was similar in scope to that of Rachel’s and despite the lunchroom incident, she still acknowledges the value of taking that risk in curriculum and, in this instance, is confident in what was learned. However, this does not mean that she didn’t have other concerns related to her work as a future intern.

Concluding thoughts

All three moments of dissensus offer considerations for transpedagogical practice moving forward. However, it’s important to note that I acknowledge that it must be very daunting for preservice teachers to engage in practices that ask them to grapple with social issues, contemporary art, transpedagogy, and schools all at the same time, and to consider how these things relate in a curricular sense which is always “complicated” (Pinar, 2019). While contemporary art and topics related to social justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion are woven throughout the art education program at the university where I work, considering practicum as an artistic practice is not prevalent to my knowledge and, in my experience, is thus far something that takes a back seat in the minds of preservice teachers in their internships. Yet, approaching pedagogy as teachers/artists seems necessary especially when asked to co-exist with frameworks and structures that are seemingly static and resistant to change. Rancière (2015) asserts that:

Within any given framework, artists are those whose strategies aim to change the frames, speeds and scales according to which we perceive the visible, and combine it with a specific invisible element and a specific meaning. Such strategies are intended to make the invisible visible or to question the self-evidence of the visible; to rupture given relations between things and meanings and inversely, to invent
novel relationships between things and meanings that were previously unrelated. (p.149)

It is, in my view, by working as artists that preservice teachers can (re)invent relationships among seemingly unrelated normative and emergent practices animating moments of slippage through a range of possible encounters with risk, failure, and ambiguity. However, it’s important to note that risk-taking like participating is not evenly distributed, nor are consequences. For example, my risk as a White, tenured, late career university professor in an art school afforded me some composure and even exhilaration at the prospect of making trouble, a process which I felt would be supported by my administrators. For the preservice teachers participating in practicum differently put their immediate future practice (unknown) at risk. Many were getting ready to student teach and “being unprepared” or in the end at risk of not being hired were key concerns making seeing any benefits difficult. A sense of urgency coupled with a higher degree of vulnerability were also at play with the students which I did not have to contend with.

Furthermore, the perceived risks taken by others, such as the high school art teacher who supported our curriculum and her students who participated was not fully clear, but certainly present. For me as a teacher educator, new questions emerged as I grappled with how to reconcile the need for predictability with an emergent and participatory curriculum. Given the risks, I wondered if social practice as a kind of pedagogy could prove valuable for preservice teachers given the stage of their study? Was it too soon, too much, too fast? I asked, can the need for confidence, control, information, and planning co-exist with emergence, fluidity, uncertainty, and if so, what does that look like, and what is produced?

While I continue to grapple with these questions, I offer a few insights. Key in a transpedagogical practice is foregrounding the felt presence of becoming a teacher, through artistic practices which encourage a deliberation of pedagogical paradoxes, deeply felt vulnerabilities, and tightly held anxieties.

Participating as artist/teachers must also include playful engagement with everyday occurrences, mysteries, and curiosities often associated with seemingly restrictive settings. While individual forms of assessment will continue to loom large, shared ownership of “teacher practice” can be encouraged early on. Besides including group activities, investigating the potential for collective curriculum through contemporary works that raise questions about how teachers and learners are expected to participate—and how they might participate differently—can lead to rethinking preconceived notions of teacher practice. Consequently, for teacher educators, it might be helpful to release our grip on the very things that seem to restrict us such as standards, lesson design, classroom management strategies etc. and instead situate them as malleable materials to be experimented with and then presented anew. Honest conversations need to be initiated with preservice teachers about what makes for a valuable practicum experience, for whom, and why? In the end, it’s important to consider that the values that shape pedagogy are never fully understood and are always in the making, perhaps always leaving us vulnerable, unsure and even fearful. With this in mind, preservice teachers might be encouraged to acknowledge vulnerability, failure, and uncertainty as expected and even valuable qualities of pedagogy alongside preparedness, sound grasp of content, and effective classroom management. Perhaps part of what is learned through an unstable and risky state of teacher practice is our comfort level with precarity, a tutorial in our willingness to participate anew in the tenuous and liminal spaces afforded by not fully knowing what’s next and how to respond, making participating with others necessary.

I close with the assertion that transpedagogical practicum enlivens the expansive and diverse relational qualities that have and will always be a part of teacher practice. By attending closely to these
nuanced qualities, new ways of doing, being, and acting in and out of schools can take form and, in doing so, offer diverse entry points for participating. If approached with vulnerability and a greater awareness of our relational presence the greater hope is that new and more socially just ways of being can be collectively created that honor both the precarity of existence and the need to be cared for.

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Sanders-Bustle, L. (2019). Sketching a social/teacher practice through participation: An Imperfect
The ‘zines celebrate grassroots movements, highlight values of resilience and curiosity, and connect optimism with accountability. Together, they envision a future for the field that is both hopeful and full of change.

Abstract: In this visual essay, students enrolled in a museum education and administration specialization, centered in a university art education department, respond to course readings on museum work and Emergent Strategy through journaling and ‘zine making. While the course is intended to prepare students for the political and practical realities of working in an art museum, it is structured to elicit group and individual understandings of the readings, projects, and other assignments as well as to consider the ways in which we can collectively and incrementally create museological change.

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Introduction

In spring 2022, I taught my fourth iteration of a practicum course intended to prepare Master's and Ph.D. students for the realities of working in art museums. What began in 2018 as a crowdsourced curriculum on what art museum educators wished they would have known before entering the field has become a post-pandemic space for connecting, re-thinking, imagining, and worldbuilding. Our course, ARTE EDUC 7748: Art Museum Practicum, comprises nine graduate students who engage with three texts and several projects to practice practical skills such as SWOT analyses (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) and grant-writing exercises as well as addressing the real-word issues of museum work, such as job precarity, pay, and benefits that are incommensurate with experience and education (Gill & Pratt, 2008; Ross, 2022; Wetenhall, 2019; Whitaker, 2021), inconsistencies between stated missions and institutional practices (Ng & Ware 2014), relevance to communities (Gurian, 2021; Simon, 2010), and the legacies of colonialism that permeate museum practices like microscopic filaments (Bennett, 1995; Karp & Levine, 1991; Lonetree, 2009; Sleeper-Smith, 2009).

Our syllabus outlines the goals of the course within a framework of three different sources: Systems Thinking in Museums: Theory and Practice (Jung & Love, 2017); Queering the Museum (Sullivan & Middleton, 2020), and Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds (brown, 2017). Through these texts, we positioned art museums as open ecosystems that exist within interrelated internal and external environments; troubled existing paradigms of museology through the consideration of “queer/ing” ethics, display practices, meaning-making, and engagement toward a new ontology for museums, and then thought about ways tomorrow’s museum workers can “grow liberation and justice, learn from the world around us how to best collaborate, and how to shape change (brown, 2017, p. 1). Students grappled with the complex lineage of American museums in terms of cultural power and privilege as well as the current reconsideration of their positionality and purposes in society and developed 21st century leadership and communication skills both in and outside of the museum.

This class necessarily requires a deep dive into our professional aspirations and positionality while insisting on our obligation to care and work for one another (Kletchka, 2023) as we seek authentic ways of building museological futures together, inspired by the academic research, lived experience, and ancestral work of authors from marginalized identities including women, femme, queer, and Black and Indigenous writers, practitioners, and world builders. Each week one student summarizes our readings and facilitates a discussion that synthesizes content with other readings, course themes, and professional histories. Class activities have included mock program development, creating and enhancing fractal patterns, Post-It note interventions in exhibition spaces on our university campus, and the project that is highlighted in this manuscript: Our work in responding to the weekly provocation of communicating with museum audiences after reading “Systems Thinking in Exhibitions and Programs,” (Jung & Love, 2017), “Queer/ing Display” (Sullivan & Middleton, 2020), and “Nonlinear and Iterative: The Pace and Pathways of Change” (brown, 2017).

Personal Zines

Bekah Leathersich, a Master’s student, class facilitator for this session, and author of this section of our article, noted brown’s framing of emergent strategy as a “philosophy for how to be in harmony and love.” Given this, Bekah settled on the idea of per-zines (personal zines), which are “do-it-yourself” magazines that typically revolve around the unique perspective of the creator. The medium of ‘zines historically provided a mode for marginalized communities to share art and ideas, acting not only as a means of self-expression, but also community
organizing and activism (French & Curd, 2021). In short, ‘zines provide an accessible medium for sharing and centering knowledge and creativity, while also giving creators a space to reflect on their personal interests, experiences, and opinions. The creation of ‘zines in this class served to facilitate creative inquiry while disrupting the traditional power structure of typical university classrooms, thus queering the pedagogy of our encounter.

While reading the aforementioned texts (brown, 2017; Jung & Love, 2017; Sullivan & Middleton, 2020), Bekah noticed the emergence of important themes worthy of personal reflection through ‘zine making. Jung & Love (2017), use the concept of systems thinking to frame each aspect of the museum as part of the working whole. In that system, the experiences of individuals within the museum space impact the institution’s trajectory in terms of growth, effectiveness, and community engagement. Sullivan and Middleton (2020) draw attention to the hegemonic narrative evident in contemporary museum displays. They call on museum professionals to question their privilege and assumptions that drive the interpretation of museum displays and encourage “critically interrogating not only the museological practices that are the lifeblood of museums, but also our own professional identities and dispositions,” (p. 31), through the lens of queer[ing] and queer ethics, which positions the knowledge, shared through the act of display as “multifaceted, complex, contradictory, and shifting...reduce[ing] monochromatic knowledge and its exclusionary effect,” (p. 33).

Sullivan and Middleton (2020) ask readers to reflect on museums as spaces for sharing knowledge and disrupt them by finding ways to share diverse perspectives. brown (2017) asks us to rethink the process of transformation and growth. Rather than linear systems that rely on what she calls “a framework of failure,” she conceptualizes transformation and growth as cyclical, “iterative cycles,” in which we should be asking ourselves “how do we learn from this?” (p. 105). In short, brown (2017) reminds us that growth emerges from consistent, intentional reflection of both ourselves and the systems we participate in—those systems in which we hope to evoke positive change. The theme of transformation triggered by reflection situated the ‘zines as an ideal way to begin considering these topics as a group.

To center our ‘zine making workshop around our reading, Bekah returned to the texts and isolated questions that acted as prompts to help guide their projects. Some students chose to use these prompts; some used their own personal reflections on the readings. Questions included “What role do museums play in society? What role do I wish they played?,” “What does peace look like to you?,” “What are the roots of my knowledge about the world? Do I value some roots above others?,” and “How do we ensure museums are spaces for healing and transformation?” Bekah prepared the blank booklets ahead of time and brought a variety of materials with which the class created their ‘zines. What Bekah anticipated would be a thirty-minute activity soon took over the entirety of the two-hour-forty-five-minute seminar. While we created together, we spoke about our readings, as well as about our ‘zines and the meaning behind them. Our conversations revealed our anxieties and hopes for the museum profession, which were then reflected in our visual creations. Students explored a variety of themes, including concerns about hegemony and inequitable power dynamics, capitalism, colonialism, heteronormativity, sexism, and White supremacy, but also their hopes for peace, transformation, and growth in both museums and broader society.

The Visual Journal

The images in this visual journal reflect each participant’s response to a specific question posed by Bekah and one page of accompanying text written by each ‘zine creator. As the professor of the class, I participated as a both co-learner and co-creator of
this, a ‘zine along with the student makers. Two participants opted to let their ‘zine pages speak for themselves. We offer these images in the hope that readers will take time to conduct their own visual analyses of these pages in connection with the themes of systems thinking, queering the museum, and emergent strategy. (see Figures 1-10)

**Conclusion**

These images speak to problematic issues prevalent in the museum field—sexism, racism, colonialism, and neoliberal capitalism—but they are also overwhelmingly hopeful. The ‘zines celebrate grassroots movements, highlight values of resilience and curiosity, and connect optimism with accountability. Together, they envision a future for the field that is both hopeful and full of change. We as a class cohort collectively invite readers to imagine the potential ramifications for the future of the field if all emerging museum professionals are taught to think through systems thinking and eschew practices that foster fierce competition between siloed departments and stem from scarcity mindsets. We encourage readers to critically interrogate museological practices and imagine them queerly—blur boundaries, resist exclusion, and question precedent. We wish joy for museum workers who need solidarity, care, and support in addition to fair pay, professional development, and recognition for the work that they do. We hope readers reflect on the questions in this essay and recommend that those who work with emerging museum professionals introduce these texts to their syllabi (or vice versa!).

Additionally, we encourage emerging museum professionals to start book clubs with these texts and their colleagues or professors, working through the reflective prompts in *Systems Thinking* and *Emergent Strategy* as a team to ensure that museums are spaces of healing and transformation. It is our earnest hope that this provocation encourages critical museological practices and care for colleagues and communities in the same way it has lifted and sustained us as emerging professionals and supportive co-learners.

Figure 1.

The question that served as provocation for my ‘zine is “How do we ensure museums are spaces for “healing and transformation?” While I hope that my research and participation in the field ultimately changes museums’ trajectory into rich spaces for community engagement and learning, I know that the most important legacy I might possibly leave is through the students with whom I work. They are the dreamers, the thinkers, the trailblazers, the future makers... they are creating and building a world that I could not have imagined when I began working in art museums. And they are doing it collectively, with compassion, care, and love. Given the monumental social, political, health, and economic challenges that we are navigating personally and as a society right now, our weekly time together feels precious and rare—an escape into a care-full, conscientious world that we are cultivating together.

~Dana Carlisle Kletchka, associate professor
Responding to the prompt “How do we ensure that museums are spaces of healing and transformation?,” I began my ‘zine with a quote by adrienne maree brown (2017), which highlights such spaces as essential for survival. I then follow with a question about the possibility for museums to act as these spaces given their histories. The page incorporates a tag torn into pieces which lists some of the evils that museums have participated or been complicit in. The following pages list hopeful strategies inspired by brown’s “transformative justice.” Throughout the ‘zine I tried to incorporate symbols traditionally affiliated with museums (classical architecture and statuary, columns etc.) and disrupt them through tearing and subverting them. Plant motifs also spread throughout, inspired by brown’s call for biomimicry, growth, and resilience. I finished the back cover by adding another quote from brown about the importance of peace, along with a blackout poem in which I isolated words and phrases that reflected the ideas from my ‘zine and from brown’s Emergent Strategy (2017).

–Bekah Leathersich, facilitator for ‘zine project and M.A. student.
Initially, I hesitated to write a response to my page. I couldn’t decide between the competing goals of the visual medium of the ‘zine and my preference for narrative writing. The activity called for expression through selected images. It’s an exercise that I usually struggle with, but I wanted to try my best to follow the spirit of it and rely on words as little as possible. Writing, as I related to it, might undermine the purpose of the ‘zine as a visual/interpretative media and the value of the reader’s response to it. In the end, I settled on expressing my apprehension and leaving the story of the page to the viewer.

–Travis Deal, M.A. student
Bekah’s zine assignment encouraged me to consider “What it means to decolonize the museum?” It prompted me to once again consider the land that museums occupy, and the cultural belongings contained within their walls. Further, it prepared me to concentrate on and design a workshop where other museum educators could critically examine exhibition spaces and perhaps consider some issues I found pressing. Several months later, I produced and led a “Gallery Interventions” workshop at the National Art Education’s Museum Education Division preconference, where art museum educators utilized post-it notes to leave critical questions, comments, lyrics, and small drawings in exhibition spaces. While I recognized that such a workshop might evoke art museum educators’ room to critique an exhibition setting and work together to discuss various issues, the workshop revealed that several museum educators were not only interested in repeating the session at their institutions but doing so with members of their curatorial departments. Some participants recognized that the workshop might act as a bridge between museum education departments and curatorial. A few commented on how the hands-on activity could provide a better way to collaborate and counter the ways in which some museum educators find themselves preparing education programs after a curatorial team has led a project.
By the time I arrive to class on Friday afternoon, I’m typically a combination of exhausted and flustered. A week full of back-to-back meetings, readings, and assignments is the norm for graduate school, and I feel like I am imperfectly juggling a complex set of responsibilities. This semester, our readings from adrienne maree brown’s Emergent Strategy have offered me much-needed permission to pause. Her lessons about adaptation and resilience provide opportunities for self-reflection and self-love, and through the notion of fractal change, she positions personal growth and individual relationships as essential to systemic and transformative justice (brown, 2017). Once again stressed on a Friday afternoon, I chose to respond to the prompt “What does peace mean to you?” as the basis for my ‘zine. I explored the ways that I find peace as an individual, through walks and family dinners, a swim, or watching a sunset on my balcony. With each image I glued or flower I sketched, I felt more relaxed, as well as more capable. Following brown’s thinking, my hope is that my personal peace has a fractal effect, rippling to a broader scale. brown states that “peace is the most strategic option for our long-term survival. Not an uninformed or compromising peace—a peace that is built on truth, accountability, and equity” (brown, 2017, p.132). How might we each contribute to this form of collective peace? What does peace mean to you?

~Julia Harth, Ph.D. student
Figure 6.

–Yanshing Li, M.A. student (no written text)
Figure 7.

Life is/as a museum. Inspired by a cute, folded booklet, whimsical New Yorker Magazine cartoons, and lush photos from tourism calendars, I created a ‘zine for all ages, to inspire and elicit thought. In museum studies coursework, we study the systems, networks, and operations of contemporary museums and their collective move toward decolonization, representation, and accessibility. My ‘zine highlights main questions that arise as I explore this museum world, regarding my relationship with museology and artifacts.

I was raised near Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia, and I left the state when I was 18. Pages one and two represent the cognitive dissonance I experienced as queer in a Southern state and in reframing the broader historical context (colonial is literally in the name . . .) of my upbringing. This mirrors the museum’s responsibility to present accurate and inclusive depictions of history.

Pages three and four represent travel and embodied arts practice. Every location one visits is imbued with histories and filled with artifacts. With well-honed vision, these stories and artifacts can be effectively and affectively presented to audiences. My home is a museum, a curated cabinet of curiosities that tells many stories. Embodied everyday arts practices can reveal that the classroom, office, or alleyway is also a museum.

I often rearrange my home. Different juxtapositions of my mementos reveal new stories upon rearrangement. But I’m not done. Like the museum, I will continue to explore, rearrange, and reframe until my museum for one is truly for all.

~Cary Mitchell, Ph.D. student
I opened my ‘zine with a representation of a black hole. The prompt—“What old ideas of the museum am I ready to release?”—recalled artist Sarah Rosalena’s (Huichol) engagement with outer space as a contested terrain in neocolonial exploration and the crisis of climate change; Rosalena uses the black hole as a metaphor for the theoretical exits from our habits of violent extraction and exploitation. The following pages of my ‘zine, then, feature elements of the museum world that I hope get drawn into a black hole, never to be seen in their current formations again: The service to interests of capital and nationalism, the deferral to out-of-touch board members and elite donors. Created against the backdrop of an ongoing labor strike at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, I continued the ‘zine with an image of a tree branch extending into space, a fractal symbol of change and growth, and finally end with a quotation from Ariella Aisha Azoulay’s (2019) goosebump-inducing *Imagine Going on Strike: Museum Workers*. Azoulay imagines the radical, transformative potential of a strike organized “not in terms of the right to protest against oppression, but rather as an opportunity to care for the shared world,” where “going on strike is to claim one’s right not to engage with destructive practices, not to be an oppressor and perpetrator, not to act according to norms and protocols whose goals were defined to reproduce imperial and racial capitalist structures” (p. 157–158). Through this zine, I invite you to join with Azoulay and the growing number of unionizing museum workers to “imagine a strike like this” (p. 161).

–Amanda Tobin Ripley, Ph.D. student
Figure 9.

–Abigail Turner, M.A, student (no written text)
Figure 10.

–Abigail Turner, M.A, student (no written text)
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Identity tourism in digital places encourages a form of settler entitlement, but rather than entitlement to place, it invites an entitlement to the emplaced bodies and experiences of marginalized and colonized people.

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Digital Place-Futures Outside a Colonial Metaversal Imaginary: Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley’s WE ARE HERE BECAUSE OF THOSE THAT ARE NOT as Critical Digital Place-Craft

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Abstract: In this piece, I analyze a recorded digital walk-through of Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley’s WE ARE HERE BECAUSE OF THOSE THAT ARE NOT, a digital archival place designed to contain, protect, and share the experiences of Black trans people. I contextualize and analyze my encounter with Brathwaite-Shirley’s work through critical and decolonial place lenses and digital materialist lenses. I pay particular attention to the ways physical and digital places crafted in colonial contexts bodily habituate settler-colonial sensibilities. I examine how the critical digital placemaking strategies practiced by Brathwaite-Shirley informed teacher and student place-craft within the context of a summer camp program focusing on youth crafting of 3D digital environments. I suggest that such strategies of critical digital place-craft are relevant for contemporary educators who craft their own digital places as part of their teaching, educators who specifically engage with digital place-craft as an arts practice in their teaching, and educators likely to be faced with commercially developed ‘metaverses’ as a part of their future teaching.

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Introduction

In the fall of 2021, as I was reflecting on the data collected during the Digital Places camps I had remotely co-taught the summer prior, Mark Zuckerberg released a keynote (Meta, 2021) describing his vision for the development of a “Metaverse.” In the presentation, Zuckerberg showcased Horizon Home, a vision of home that elided the complex embodied politics of family, cohabitation, property, domestic labor, and refuge from labor, exclusively inviting an experience of home as a place for performing one’s individual identity as a neoliberal consumer shaping their sovereign territory through independent aesthetic and commercial choices. Zuckerberg also described his Metaverse as a force for equity, “giving people access to jobs in more places, no matter where they live, [which] will be a big deal for spreading opportunity to more people” (Meta, 2021, 00:29:49), evoking for me Facebook’s history of leveraging language of equity to mask exploitative practices. Facebook’s Free Basics program, for example, claimed to offer no-cost, phone-based internet access to users in the Global South, but was banned in India as a form of “digital colonialism” for funneling users into a handful of privately-owned, U.S.-based services where a great deal of their personal data was harvested without their consent (Nothias, 2020, para. 26; Solon, 2017, para. 6).

Zuckerberg’s announcement has given me a sense of urgency about my teaching and research with digital places. Considering the theme of this issue, I see considerable investment in the next big thing involving the circumscription of learning, working, and leisure within digital places whose material qualities are shaped by the Silicon-Valley ideologies that shaped Facebook. Consequently, it feels particularly urgent for art educators to cultivate the critical sensitivities necessary to recognize the ideologically laden doings of those material qualities of place, and to conceive and craft digital places of learning that operate otherwise.

In this article, and in my other writing on digital place-craft in art education (Meeken, 2022), material qualities of place are the invitations and inhibitions toward action and sensation evinced by a place (Drucker, 2013; Ellsworth, 2005; Verbeek, 2006). Materiality is defined here as performative, rather than as physicality. It is a product of the ways materials act upon bodies. Within this performative articulation of materiality, digital places possess material qualities just as physical places do (Drucker, 2013; Hayles, 2004; Leonardi, 2010). When I discuss fostering critical sensitivities to the material qualities of digital places, I define critical sensitivity as an awareness of the material qualities enacted by material entities, the ways they act upon bodies, and the ideologies they enact (Meeken, 2022). Digital and physical places may materially enact ideologies imbued by their human designers, demanding deliberate, sensitizing inquiry and pedagogy that recognizes that what is sensed – and what is not – is a political issue (Ahmed, 2010; Calderon, 2014; Latour, 1992/2008; Latour, 2005; Verbeek, 2006).

The Digital Places camps mentioned above provided an opportunity for myself, my co-teacher and collaborator Oscar Keyes, and the students we worked with to explore and apply critical sensitivity through digital place-craft, both through teachers’ co-development of a curricular resource website and students’ co-development of 3D digital environments. In these camps, youth collaborated on 3D digital environments after critically examining settler-colonial sentiments habituated by popular digital places. Our camp curriculum articulated settler colonialism using the distinction education scholars Eve Tuck (Unangax̂) and Marcia McKenzie (2015) made between what they called settler colonialism and exploitation colonialism.¹ Per Tuck (2014), who posited four major categories of colonialism: settler colonialism, exploitation colonialism, surrogate colonialism, and internal

¹ This is just one taxonomy of colonialism(s). Other scholars have developed more complex taxonomies, such as historian Christoph Mick Meeken, L. A./ Digital Place-Futures Outside a Colonial Metaversal Imaginary.

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and McKenzie (p. 59), exploitation colonialism entails colonizer domination of a local labor force to harvest resources to send back to the metropole, whereas settler colonialism involves colonizers coming to a land inhabited by Indigenous residents, and claiming that land as their new home. Settler colonialism is not a past invasion event, but an ongoing structure (Wolfe, 2006). It is not only propped up by written settler laws and histories (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015), but also supported by settler sentiments, including felt entitlement to land and mourning for a tragic past to which the settler-colonial project is relegated to foreclose present political action (Yoon-Ramirez & Ramirez, 2021).

Colonized physical places, through their material qualities, habituate settler-colonial sentiments of place, facilitating, for example, settler senses of belonging to and power over land through residential and transportation infrastructures (Khanna, 2020; Rifkin, 2014; Yoon-Ramirez & Ramirez, 2021). Likewise, digital places have the capacity to habituate settler place relations based on the material qualities they possess. Digital game places that invite individualistic agency over a place and its inhabitants inculcate settler entitlement to place and reinforce a liberal individualism that discourages sensitivity to historic and systemic qualities of places as colonized (Byrd, 2016). Digital game places that purport to recreate real-world colonial histories often reinscribe settler-colonial notions of terra nullius, rendering uncolonized lands as unmarked blank slates (Loban & Apperley, 2019). Digital archival places, such as public museum archives of scanned artifacts, often prioritize open access to their contents without considering the ethics of a majority-settler audience being empowered to download and remix Indigenous cultural knowledges and objects (Carroll et al., 2020). Digital representations of physical places through Street-View and mapping uncritically assert settler names, claims, and boundaries on Indigenous lands (Calderon, 2014; Hunt & Stevenson, 2017). My analysis of youth place-craft in the Digital Places camp, as well as my analysis of my own curricular place-craft through the crafting of online digital resources for the camp, centered on ways that critical sensitivity to the ideologically laden material doings of digital places may help learners and teachers to craft places that do not habituate settler sentiments of place (Meeken, 2022).

One sensitizing tool in my own scholarship on digital place-craft has been to make sensorially-attentive visits to digital places crafted by marginalized artists as acts of critical place-craft. In this article, I focus on one work of critical place-craft that deliberately subverts several of the settler place norms materialized in many commercial digital places, the digital archive WE ARE HERE BECAUSE OF THOSE THAT ARE NOT by Black British trans woman artist Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley. Through my recounting and analysis of my experience of this digital place, I aim to model how art educators may surface the ways digital places participate in and respond to settler-colonial place relations. I also hope to illustrate, through the selection of this exemplary artwork, how the creation of digital places may itself function as a critical gesture, materializing a critical sensitivity to, and interrogation of, settler place norms. I have chosen to center Brathwaite-Shirley’s piece in this article because it provides an opportunity to explore critical place-craft outside of works that explicitly textually engage with real-world histories of settler colonialism, or which are crafted by Indigenous artists. Anticolonial digital places crafted by Indigenous artists played a significant role in the Digital Places camp curriculum. However, not only works that explicitly textually engage with colonialism are impacted by it or responsive to it (Rifkin, 2014). Examining Brathwaite-Shirley’s work can highlight strategies for non-Indigenous teachers...
and learners to engage in critical anticolonial digital place-craft.

In this article I include a narrative sensory account of a video-recorded walkthrough of Brathwaite-Shirley’s digital place which I recorded as part of the research and development process for the Digital Places curriculum. I then shift into an analysis drawing upon critical digital materialisms and decolonial critique of settler placemaking. Recorded walks have an established history in human subject and ethnographic filmmaking (e.g., Crawford & Scott, 2003; Jhala, 2007; MacDougall & MacDougall, 1977; Pink, 2004; Powell, 2020), and walking-through as a methodology affords researchers the opportunity to attend to relational and sensory activities of place (Powell, 2020). As my teaching and research are interested in the sensory ways digital places habituate colonizing norms, critically and sensitively attending to my walking through this digital place affords access to the data I find most important. My own experiences in this digital place have made salient to me novel and necessary modes of digital place-craft that not only shaped my own co-creation of curricular websites and synchronous remote-learning settings, but also shaped the ways I frame digital place-craft in my teaching. After my walkthrough and analysis of Brathwaite-Shirley’s work, I highlight ways that Brathwaite-Shirley’s critical place-craft strategies inflected my own curricular place-craft and my encounters with places crafted by youth participating in the Digital Places camp.

Walking Through WE ARE HERE BECAUSE OF THOSE THAT ARE NOT

Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley’s WE ARE HERE BECAUSE OF THOSE THAT ARE NOT opens by describing itself as “the pro Black pro trans archive” with bold, purple text appearing over dark footage that indicates that I am floating forward over a barely lit terrain. The text alerts me that “Your own identity will determine how you can interact with the archive” and admonishes me to “Be honest with the archive.” In words emulating the End User License Agreements (EULAs) that dictate the rights of users of software and websites, the site tells me that “By entering this space you are agreeing to centre the Black trans experience.” However, unlike most EULAs, which disinvite reading through them, and invite users to hastily scroll past and click through (Chee et al., 2012), this agreement is succinct and unambiguous.

The site then textually reminds me that “This is not your space, this is our space,” a statement asserting specific boundaries when encountered by my White cis male body. This is a place that centers Black trans people and experiences. It is emphatically not a place designed to cater to my presence or assumptions. In fact, it is designed to make me uncomfortable in sensitizing ways.

After the introductory text, I am greeted by a figure standing against a dark ground, composed of loosely joined, undulating forms and colors, who asks me “What do you identify as?” and prompts me to respond as being either Black and trans, trans, or cis (Figure 1). When I indicate that I am cis, this figure tells me that they cannot trust me, and admonishes me to prove them wrong. I am then brought to a “Terms and Conditions” screen (Figure 2) that informs me that “[y]ou must agree to centre Black trans people and use your privileges to help them. This is not a place where we make you feel better! Your actions will tell us if you stand in support of our existence.” When I agree to the terms set out, a “loading screen” appears. Rather than indicate that it is loading assets, models, or sounds, this screen alerts me that it is loading “Security against trans tourism” and “Allyship” as well as performing expected technical processes such as “Deleting cookies.”
Figure 1: A screenshot from my walkthrough, depicting a prompt for me to identify myself as Black and trans, trans, or cis.

Figure 2: A screenshot from my walkthrough, depicting the “terms and conditions” requiring me to center Black trans people.

Finally, entering the archive proper (or the segment of it accessible to cisgender visitors), I find that WE ARE HERE BECAUSE OF THOSE THAT ARE NOT continues to engage with me on its own terms. I do not have direct control over my movement through this digital place. Rather, I am moved through it, encountering situations and figures which are visually challenging through their idiosyncratic incoherence and mutability, and often ethically challenging, confronting me with the expectations the archive has of me as a cis visitor. Sometimes the site admonishes me for the low expectations it has of me. One such moment is when a figure appears with the words “STOP LOOKING FOR IT” printed on their crotch and pectoral areas. The figure speaks on experiencing cisgender gazes that probe trans and gender-indeterminate bodies in an attempt to “reach an answer” to the problem a trans body supposedly poses. Other times the site articulates high expectations it hopes I will meet, such as the moment when I am reminded that, in leveraging my privilege as allyship, I am expected to use actions, not only rhetoric. The piece invites me to indicate whether I feel I have no privileges, whether I do not know how to use my privilege, or whether I will use my privilege to protect others (Figure 3). Tripartite prompts like this are the sole way I am invited to act within this place, and they determine which areas of the place I end up visiting. In response to this prompt, I choose the second option, indicating that I do not know how to use my privilege to be an ally.

Figure 3: A screenshot from my walkthrough, showing a prompt asking whether I have privilege, whether I do not know how to use my privilege, or whether I will use my privilege to protect others.

This choice first takes me to the above-described encounter with the figure admonishing me for “LOOKING FOR IT.” I am then introduced to a figure who identifies themselves as a “Forgotten Black Trans Body,” who charges me with burying their deadname, the only thing that was not buried when they died. Glittering text then informs me that I have “joined the security team” as a voice intones the phrases,

I am tired of hiding...I am tired of wiping off my makeup...I am tired of travelling scared. I am tired of travelling scared. I am tired of preparing. I am tired of looking back over my shoulder...I am tired. I am tired.
At this point, a fluctuating, abstracted green body with the glowing word “SECURITY” on its side appears, and is identified as me. I am then introduced to another abstracted figure, a Black trans femme who I will help to remain safe when traveling to meet her friends who are “feeling down.”

My chosen paths on this escort task eventually lead me to a “Deadname burial site,” where I remember the earlier request of the Forgotten Black Trans Body. However, visiting this site does not allow me to bury their deadname, eliciting in me a feeling of frustration with a task left incomplete. My visit to WE ARE HERE BECAUSE OF THOSE THAT ARE NOT abruptly ends at this moment of frustration, with the screen cutting to black, then displaying a credits sequence acknowledging the Black trans artists who contributed to the archive in workshops run by Brathwaite-Shirley.

**Examining my Walkthrough of WE ARE HERE BECAUSE OF THOSE THAT ARE NOT**

Because it situates itself as an archive, when considering WE ARE HERE BECAUSE OF THOSE THAT ARE NOT within decolonizing frames of digital place-craft, my attention turns to the Global Indigenous Data Alliance (GIDA, 2019) and the norms it has developed for digital archival places. Resisting the white technoliberal bromide that “information wants to be free” (Levy, 2014, para. 14), articulated by the widely adopted FAIR (findable, accessible, interoperable, reusable) open data principles (Carroll et al., 2020), GIDA advocates for CARE principles: collective benefit, authority to control, responsibility, and ethics. While Brathwaite-Shirley does not claim an Indigenous identity, her work evokes the decolonizing ethos of the GIDA care principles by explicitly not making all the content of its archive freely findable, accessible, or usable. Rather, it asserts unambiguous boundaries, set by Brathwaite-Shirley, a Black trans woman, which make some of the parts of the archive off-limits to non-Black and non-trans visitors. WE ARE HERE BECAUSE OF THOSE THAT ARE NOT materially asserts that marginalized peoples should have the authority in digital archival places to control access to their community’s archived data, an ethical choice made for the collective benefit of Black trans people.

In addition to describing this work as a digital archive (Brathwaite-Shirley, 2020a; 2020b), Brathwaite-Shirley also at times describes it as a game (Brathwaite-Shirley, 2020c; Vallette, 2020), inviting comparison to digital-games-as-places. The material invitations and inhibitions of WE ARE HERE BECAUSE OF THOSE THAT ARE NOT serve to frustrate settler entitlement to place in ways many commercial digital-games-as-places do not. Settler-colonial projects, in addition to dispossessing Indigenous people of land, also induce an affective sensibility, or felt relationship, toward land that normalizes settler entitlement to Indigenous land (Khan, 2020; Yoon-Ramirez & Ramirez, 2021). Quotidian experiences within colonized places induce habits of being, sensing, and doing that reify settler entitlement (Rifkin, 2014; Yoon-Ramirez & Ramirez, 2021). Among the sources of quotidian experiences that inculcate settler sensibilities of entitlement to land are engagements with digital places, including video games, the most widely played of which are commercial games that materially invite colonizing actions to the places they contain or depict (Alfaraj, 2019; Byrd, 2016; Loban & Apperley, 2019; Mukherjee, 2019). Several popular games I have discussed with students in Digital Places camps reflect these norms. For example, in Super Mario 3D World (rated for play by all ages), the player is incentivized to kill the inhabitants of places visited in the game, extract money and resources, and eventually raise their flag over the conquered place, with overall progress represented by a map with the players’ monogrammed flags fluttering over conquered territories. In the trailer for Red Dead Redemption 2 (rated for play be people ages 17 and up), settler expansion into the West of the North American continent is presented as an inevitable expansion of “civilization” into the “wild and lawless...
frontier” (Rockstar Games, 2018, 00:29), and the player is invited into the role of a white settler facilitating disputes between other white settlers, engaging in combat with Indigenous residents of the land, and inescapably participating in a recreation of the white settlement of the American West.

Conversely, *WE ARE HERE BECAUSE OF THOSE THAT ARE NOT* deliberately frustrated any entitlement I may have felt toward it as a place. Most overtly, the regular textual reminders that “This is not your space, this is our space” made it clear that this was a place made by and for Black trans people, in which I was at most a temporary visitor. Beyond the textual statements, the material qualities of *WE ARE HERE BECAUSE OF THOSE THAT ARE NOT* regularly resisted my habitual felt entitlement toward digital places. Cordonning off two-thirds of the archive for Black and trans individuals frustrated any completionist aims I may have had to extract all of the “content” from this experience. By constructing the place materially as a series of videos with occasional interactive prompts, Brathwaite-Shirley prevented me from feeling like I was entitled to freely roam and explore the Black trans archive. My own prior experiences in schooling, work, and video games have habituated in myself a feeling that I must successfully complete tasks and solve problems in the places I find myself – a sentiment that *WE ARE HERE BECAUSE OF THOSE THAT ARE NOT* deliberately frustrated. I must also acknowledge the fact that most of my schooling, working, and playing have been on stolen land in a settler-colonial state, as a white settler. Living in a colonized context in my settler positionality has inculcated in me sentiments such as entitlement to place and experience of places as potential sites for extracting value (Rifkin, 2014). My completionist aims, which were frustrated by Brathwaite-Shirley’s digital place, stem from this habituated settler sensibility, which included a felt entitlement to go everywhere in the place and to extract all of the experiential data it would yield.

The frustration I expressed above about not being able to bury the deadname of the Forgotten Black Trans Body is not solely rooted in the productivity-oriented school and work experiences identified above, but also likely in a habituated colonial sensibility of white saviorhood (Bandyopadhyay & Patil, 2017). The sensibility of white saviorhood invokes a feeling that my unquestioned entitlement to, and power in, place carries a felt responsibility to solve the problems of oppressed peoples in that place, eliciting a self-congratulatory feeling for myself without necessarily addressing the systemic causes of the problems encountered (Bandyopadhyay & Patil, 2017). Repeatedly, and insistently, *WE ARE HERE BECAUSE OF THOSE THAT ARE NOT* calls attention to colonizing sentiments of place, habituated in my white settler self by past experiences in digital and physical places, by resisting and frustrating those sentiments. *WE ARE HERE BECAUSE OF THOSE THAT ARE NOT*’s textual and material qualities also defy the norms in commercial video games that invite identity tourism in marginalized bodies for privileged audience-members (Leonard, 2003; Mills & Godley, 2018). Identity tourism in digital places encourages a form of settler entitlement, but rather than entitlement to place, it invites an entitlement to the emplaced bodies and experiences of marginalized and colonized people. *WE ARE HERE BECAUSE OF THOSE THAT ARE NOT* textually inhibits a sense of identity tourism by explicitly stating that is it loading “security against trans tourism” on the screen that precedes entry to the archive. Materially, the piece inhibits identity tourism through its careful design of specific places for non-Black and non-trans visitors which explicitly acknowledge, address, and reinforce the visitors’ positionality (Hart, 2020). During my time in *WE ARE HERE BECAUSE OF THOSE THAT ARE NOT*, I was never placed in the body of a trans person in an attempt to foster empathy. Rather, I was placed in the position of a cisgender ally helping a trans femme travel at night, in the position of a cisgender onlooker subjecting trans body to an
invasive, interrogatory gaze, and in the position of a well-meaning cisgender person who nonetheless needed to earn trust by moving beyond stated intentions toward embodied actions. The explicit experiential boundaries set up by Brathwaite-Shirley felt to me like a reaction to the experiences of Anna Anthropy, a white trans woman artist, who was angered by the number of cis male critics who claimed that playing Anthropy’s game Dysonia allowed them to walk the proverbial mile in her shoes (D’Anastasio, 2015). Anthropy’s response was the participatory artwork Empathy Game, consisting of a pair of Anthropy’s boots with a pedometer attached, allowing gallery visitors to score a single point for walking a literal mile in her shoes, with no possibility of equaling the ‘score’ Anthropy had accrued over her lifetime (D’Anastasio, 2015). Brathwaite-Shirley inhibits the impulse for cis men like me to assume WE ARE HERE BECAUSE OF THOSE THAT ARE NOT has given us an empathic window into trans experience by repeatedly and firmly situating us within our own embodied positions in relation to trans experiences.

WE ARE HERE BECAUSE OF THOSE THAT ARE NOT consistently, though its material qualities of place, resists sentiments of settler entitlement inculcated in me through decades of life as a settler living in physical and digital places crafted in and on colonized contexts. Brathwaite-Shirley’s piece delimited my access to its archive, asserted my position as a cisgender outsider whose presence was contingent on judgements outside of my control, and refused me the voyeuristic catharsis of assumed empathy through the appropriation of a marginalized embodied identity. In doing so, WE ARE HERE BECAUSE OF THOSE THAT ARE NOT resisted settler-colonial norms of digital archival and game places, and prompted my reflection on the entitlement to colonized places and bodies such digital places often habituate (Byrd, 2016; Carroll et al., 2020; Leonard, 2003; Mills & Godley, 2018).

Student and Teacher Critical Digital Place-Craft

Brathwaite-Shirley’s critical place-craft strategies, along with those of other artists outside the scope of this article, substantively informed my re-crafting of the Digital Places camp curriculum in 2021 and contributed to a shift in curricular focus toward critical sensitivity toward colonial qualities of digital places. When bringing in popular commercial works to the curriculum as objects of discussion, I no longer framed them solely as potential sources of sensory experiences that students might extract for their own sensitive digital place-craft. Rather, I contextualized these works with questions to prompt consideration of place-histories and the sovereignty of Indigenous human and non-human residents of a place (Figure 4). Brathwaite-Shirley’s choice to delimit access to her archival place and restrict visitor movement, to maintain safety and control for the marginalized people whose experiences were archived, prompted for me a sensitivity to the way the way invitations and inhibitions designed into digital places participate in historical and present power relations. Consequently, I crafted the framing prompts to aid students in considering the actions and experiences invited by digital places, and the ideological entailments of those actions. The prompts also positioned the student as a visitor to the place with its own prior life and history, rather than as an agentic or heroic player for whom the place was designed.
These framing concerns also informed our discussions of critical place-craft by Indigenous artists included in the curriculum. One such work was Naphtali Faulkner’s (Ngāi Te Rangi) Umurangi Generation, a series of digital places which contain diegetic histories evoking real-world histories of colonization, Indigenous resistance, and climate catastrophe. Umurangi Generation pointedly positions the visitor as a photographic documenter of the apocalypse, rather than as an agentic savior. Another work visited and discussed was Taylor Peyton McArthur’s (Nakota of Pheasant Rump Nakota First Nation, Saskatchewan) Line of Sight, which presents a deceptively complex and uncompromising setting of invisible boundaries and portals, which operate on their own terms and frustrate attempts to traverse, claim, or understand its digital terrain. Our discussion of these works was also informed by my experience with the “security against trans tourism” in Brathwaite-Shirley’s piece, as we identified the critical placemaking choices made by these Indigenous artists in these places, without claiming our visiting these places gave those of us who were settlers an empathic understanding of Indigenous lived experiences.

Student responses to the curriculum’s framing of digital places varied in their critical approaches, as I have explored in detail elsewhere (Meeken, 2022). Considering the students’ work in the context of Brathwaite-Shirley’s piece prompted my attention to the ways their work addressed and positioned the human visitor/player. Three digital places were collaboratively crafted by participating youth.

One group pursued an avoidant strategy, developing an emotional dreamscape, that the students described as disconnected from the violence entailed in real-world colonial histories, but inadvertently rooting their depictions of emotional states in extractive settler conceptions of place and land (Meeken, 2022). This group was reluctant to identify the implied dreamer conjuring their dreamscape, and when leading the class on a walking tour of their place, focused on how the present material state of their dreamscape reflected the present emotional state of the implied dreamer, without acknowledging the individual or systemic histories that may have informed that dreaming.

Another group crafted a digital place with a complex diegetic history involving a population displaced by natural disaster, and refused refuge by a more affluent adjoining nation which may have been responsible for the natural disaster. Their place evoked the real-world ways colonial histories map onto who is displaced by climate crisis and who is empowered to accept or refuse displaced peoples (Meeken, 2022). The human visitor/player to this place, however, was not acknowledged by the place, nor was their relationship to the diegetic history undergirding the place.

The third group developed a place with a similarly rich diegetic history, an Earth-bound enclave of extraterrestrial refugees stranded after escaping human colonization of their own planet (Meeken, 2022). Unlike the prior two projects, this third place explicitly acknowledged the position of the human visitor/player, who was framed as a human photographer seeking to document the enclave, and toward whom the extraterrestrial residents vocally...
reacted with justified resentment and aggression (Meeken, 2022).

When reflecting on my sensitization to the ways students’ places acknowledged or elided the political position of the visitor/player, I find that my experiences in Brathwaite-Shirley’s work were essential in making salient the critical potential of this design decision. The other digital works I visited during my research and crafting of the curriculum prompted my pedagogical focus on critical historying of digital places and critical approaches to visitor agency in digital places (Meeken, 2022), but only in WE ARE HERE BECAUSE OF THOSE THAT ARE NOT did I encounter a digital place that explicitly, and critically, addressed my positionality as a visitor to its archive.

Outside of my own teaching with digital place-craft, I see the critical sensitivities materially invited by works like WE ARE HERE BECAUSE OF THOSE THAT ARE NOT as necessary for any art teacher teaching in the present moment. Teaching in and through digital places is more common than ever, due to the ongoing pandemic (McClain et al., 2021). Since Zuckerberg’s announcement mentioned in this piece’s introduction, billions of dollars have been invested by largely white male settler technologists in the development of immersive metaversal digital places which will exert material agencies over future teaching (Meta, 2023). And, presently, students are spending a tremendous amount of their school and non-school lives navigating a variety of digital places largely developed by settlers in settler-colonized and colonizer contexts (Anderson & Jiang, 2018; Auxier et al., 2020). As educators, who participate in pedagogical place-craft every time we set preferences for our Zoom class meetings or arrange materials in an online discussion board to complement our face-to-face teaching, it is necessary that we think critically about the ways our own digital place-craft resists or affirms prevailing, harmful, and colonizing norms manifested in the curricula of so many digital places.

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Arts-based research offers us the ability to understand the unnamable aches and allusive psychic pains that afflict us without symbolic form—afflictions so defiant of language that we often doubt their existence and ignore our embodied ways of making sense, until they metastasize into a more aggressive pathology.

Abstract: Absence and loss are part of what it means to be alive. While common, grief is a difficult and complex aspect of the human psyche, often producing affects that mask themselves in different forms such as anxiety, anger, despair, and isolation. Able to bring into form the unnamable affects of our psychic lives (Irwin & Springgay, 2008), arts-based research methods can be viable means to transform the grief into something generative. In this paper, each author describes a project that uses a different arts-based research approach to explore a personal experience with grief. Drawing from wordless narrative research (Horwat, 2018) diffractive ethnography (Gullion, 2018) and walking currere (Irwin, 2006), these projects seek to make sense of ubiquitous expressions of grief, such as complicated grief, political grief, and ecological grief, to show how they not only can generate new understandings but make empathic connections with others suffering from similar allusive psychic afflictions. The paper highlights the implicit generosity that arts-based research engenders in its ability to make tangible the distressing and ambiguous psychic conditions we experience.

Good Mourning: Existing with Loss While Living in the Anxious Now

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Every Mourning is a New Arrival

While every generation since recorded history has believed they lived in an age of anxiety, this moment seems particularly catastrophic. Statistically, as one of the deadliest events in American history, the Covid 19 pandemic destroyed families, communities, livelihoods, and economies and exacerbated a wide range of preexisting social, economic, and political crises—producing a perfect storm of death and destruction (Branswell, 2021; Žižek, 2020). Additionally, we are experiencing an ecological crisis that has contributed to the loss of landscapes and species (Consulo & Ellis, 2018). As our planet and society experience existential losses, the ethical challenge for survivors is to persist beyond overwhelming doubt, push forward despite systemic opposition, and fight harder than ever while grieving the loss of the world we once knew. How do we endure while living with and through the grief we continue to accrue with each passing day?

We posit that how we move through and with grief during these times of despair requires creative acts that allow mourning to be recognized as generative. Philips (2000) writes that “Mourning is the necessary suffering that makes life possible. Good mourning keeps people moving on, keeps them in time, bad mourning becomes something akin to an ascetic personal religion” (p.28). In this article, we reflect on the intertwined roles of artists, researchers, and teachers as a viable way to not only process different forms of grief but learn from it—using the loss to forge new connections. We propose that arts-based research can transform grief into something generative—broad understandings that have the capacity to cross contexts and instill some form of wisdom for others. In this view, art practice is a self-reflective crucial process of naming the unnameable.

...And a Good Mourning to you Too...

Our understanding of grief (a term sometimes used interchangeably with mourning), has evolved since intellectuals and psychoanalysts like Burton (1651/1938), Freud (1917/1963), Shand, (1914/1920), and others wrote about this seemingly impenetrable emotion. First understood as an ambiguous form of melancholy or intense sadness, grief was believed to be a psychic state that “usually begins with a definitive event when the death or life disruption occurred; [with] its ending or perhaps resolution [being] often much less clear and may never occur” (Charmaz & Milligan, 2006, p. 520). The amorphous duration of grief and the mysterious process of grieving is one of the more debatable and unique aspects as it both suggests our continued lack of understanding as well as a significant divide in how to manage it—viewing grief as a complex, natural process (Goldie, 2011), or as a pathology requiring medicalized treatment (Granek, 2010).

Grief is understood as an intense and persistent form of psychic pain caused by the loss or absence of someone or something of significance (Charmaz & Milligan, 2006; Granek, 2010). Often associated with the loss of a family member, friend, or beloved pet, grief can be experienced by the loss of cherished objects, or the loss of one's home. However, grief extends to losses beyond the material, for we can grieve the loss of our identities, the loss of our culture, the loss of our sense of place, or the loss of a personal dream or ambition (Charmaz & Milligan, 2006).

The traditional use of the word grief refers specifically to relational grief, which describes the grief of losing a loved one (Charmaz & Milligan, 2006; Kumar, 2021). Literature describes other common forms of grief, such as delayed grief, where the mourner appears in denial of the loss and processes, such as the loss after the initial separation, and anticipatory grief, where mourners grieve an imminent loss such as family member slowing dying from a terminal illness, and collective grief where a shared or communal experience loss is felt within a community or nation-state (Charmaz &
Milligan, 2006; Goldie, 2011; Granek, 2010; Kumar, 2021). There are also uncommon forms of grief, emotional responses that may speak to some of the more ubiquitous experiences of loss like complicated grief, political grief, and ecological grief. Complicated grief is understood as “[resulting] from multiple stressors and is characterized by excessive rumination, alienation, hopelessness, and intrusive thought for the dead” (Kumar, 2021, p. 104). Political grief or ideological grief was conceptualized as an increasing polarization of political movements across the different nation-states where contrasting ideologies suggest immense losses for the supporters of political parties out of power, relating directly to “losses that are experienced by individuals as a result of political policies, ideologies, and oppression enacted and/or empowered at the sociopolitical levels” (Harris, 2021, p. 579). With climate change comes ecological grief, experienced as a result of loss of ecosystems and landscapes that are closely tied to social, cultural, and economic well-being (Consulo & Ellis, 2018; Crossley, 2020). These less discernible experiences of grief are challenging in both their infrequent use in common lexicons of grief and mourning and their ambiguous contours, which are often misrepresented with inaccurate emotions.

A common thread throughout the different forms of grief is the inability to comprehend the absence of something significant. Like the separation of atomic particles, the ripping apart of something personally fundamental produces an existential form of psychic distress where “the person not only feels the void of loss but also the lack of its reality” (Charmaz & Milligan, 2006, p. 520). With grief having the capacity to profoundly impact our lives, we return to the question of how best to live with and through the pervasive anxieties, losses, and expressions of grief. In this article, we respond to different forms of grief we are experiencing today as a society through their arts-based practices—projects.

Mourning is what You make of It

As artists, researchers, and teachers, how do we live with these overwhelming feelings of loss and despair? What is the role of art in a world that seems like it’s on fire? Creative expressive acts have the potential to help us transform loss into something generative, productive, and new. Ruti (2009) suggests that “through creativity, we are able to signify our suffering and in, in doing, to gradually translate an unnamable ache into a namable recollection; we are able to replace the void of nonmeaning by meaning” (p. 118). To work through grief is to transform the effects of sadness, loss, and grief into something that not only engenders healing but opens new possibilities for personal growth. In this regard, grief is understood as an opportunity to live through the loss to engage in meaning production.

Thus, creative acts are a means to mourn well—a way to channel loss into something generative and productive, breathing life and meaning into absence. Furthermore, creative acts promote growth for the practitioners that produce them and serve as catalysts for helping others transform their own grief into something rejuvenating. They do this by creating conditions for community and collective healing through forming empathic connections with others and solidarity with others’ struggles and suffering. In experiences of personal and collective trauma, artistic expressions are lights in the darkness that suggest the seemingly endless tragedies we experience do not need to define our life experiences. We believe that to live well in the anxious now requires us to mourn well. As suggested above, creative acts are instrumental in processing loss and grief, transforming the plethora of unnamable aches and seemingly meaningless psychic pains into something restorative and significant.

We call attention to the intertwining of artmaking/researching/teaching as a living inquiry,
making visible the creative and generative possibilities only experienced through grief and loss. Moving beyond traditional and binary concepts of artist, researcher, and teacher, we instead propose unfolding courses of action, “Loss, shift, and rupture create presence through absence, they become tactile, felt, and seen” (Springgay, et al., 2005, p. 898). Drawing from different arts-based autoethnographic methodologies such as wordless narrative research (Horwat, 2018), diffractive ethnography (Gullion, 2018), and a self-care pedagogy as walking currere (Irwin, 2006), the following vignettes use different creative scholarly approaches to generate new meanings and understandings through intertwining visual and text - grief and loss. Jeff Horwat explores the ambiguities and isolating self-doubt of complicated grief with a wordless allegory based on his experiences in Chicago during civil unrest following the murder of George Floyd during the height of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Vicky Grube laments the losses experienced through encroaching neoliberalism in education which transformed the nobility of teaching and learning into a soulless commodity. Through the spirit of diffractive methodology, Vicky wonders if we can practice thinking with instead of thinking about (Gullion, 2018). Gigi Yu highlights the natural world as a space for healing and transformation while grappling with the existential impact of the pandemic, climate change, and the heaviness of ecological grief. Each author speaks to the importance of experiencing loss through creativity in relation to care, healing, and renewal.

The World is a (not) Cold Dead Place (Jeff Horwat)

Storytelling is a profoundly human way to make sense of a seemingly chaotic world (Leavy, 2015; Lewis, 2011). It is during periods of intense uncertainty that “stories have the potential to make us feel connected, open our eyes to new perspectives, [and] stimulate the development of empathy, self-awareness or social reflection” (Leavy, 2015, p. 39). By organizing and (re)constructing fragmented experiences, memories, and traumas into a linear chronology, new meanings and insights can be understood (Kim, 2016). Thus, while we draw from our life experiences to create stories, the stories we tell often create new perspectives. Lewis (2011) suggests that this relationship is uniquely symbiotic in that, “we use the story form and the story forms us” (p. 22).

As a compelling form of storytelling, visual narratives—imagery that decenters text as the primary modality of communication—have a unique position in their ability to transcend linguistic barriers and address an affective domain that language is often unable to access. As a method of doing creative scholarship, “wordless narrative research can be useful for exploring a range of social phenomena, [and] particularly valuable for exploring preverbal constructions of lived experiences, including trauma, repressed memories, and other forms of emotional knowledge often times only made accessible through affective or embodied modalities” (Horwat, 2018, p. 176). Drawing inspiration from wordless novels, an obscure genre, first made popular by early twentieth century pioneers Frans Masereel (1918/2019) and Lynd Ward (1932/2008) and developed by contemporary practitioners like Eric Drooker (2007, 2002), Shawn Tan (2007), and Marnie Galloway (2016), wordless narrative research operationalizes the silence of particular human experiences to call attention to the marginalized, overlooked, or depreciated (Horwat, 2022). Furthermore, this exploration of silence is extended to addressing the unnamable aches and psychic pains that often elude language and prohibit growth and healing—such as those affects that relate to complicated grief.

The following silent allegory speaks to the silent and seemingly unnamable feeling my family and I experienced in June of 2020 while living in Chicago. During this tumultuous period, we watched the
vibrancy and energy of the city quickly transform into a desolate and seemingly apocalyptic landscape—the city that we loved becoming seemingly unidentifiable overnight. Consumed by anxiety and concerned about our safety, we focused on adapting to the new world unfolding before us, while silently struggling with a mysterious affect we struggled privately to understand. Percolating under the surface of our daily lives, the unspoken psychic ache manifested itself as a seething anxiety, occasional outbursts of anger, and dull sense dread that was at times paralyzing. Unbeknownst to me, I was struggling with complicated grief which is described as “a persistent disturbing sense of disbelief regarding the death or loss—with feelings of anger, bitterness, and resistance to acceptance of the painful reality” (Shear & Shair, 2005, p. 253). Confused, frustrated, and isolated, complicated grief’s fluidity makes it challenging to describe and address as it both denies but responds to the losses.

Unable to discern the contours of complicated grief, I made art. As an artist and researcher, I used my art practice to understand the unnamable affects by drawing through these indecipherable feelings and transforming them into new visual metaphors, thus “creating new associations and habits of clustering emotion around new images” (Hickey-Moody, 2013, p.87). While initially therapeutic, these drawings become a catalyst to transform and (re)present the unnamable affect to promote personal understanding. Rather than recreating my experiences and memories through representational imagery, I use a playful and surreal visual language that utilizes humanoid toy forms as the subjects and a barren landscape as a stage for these subjects to play out different scenes. Somehow, exploring the existential through innocent subject matter disempowers the anxiety—making it more palatable—and provides an entry point for self-introspection and understanding. By focusing on conceptual connections over the representational, the intent is for the narrative to explore the unnamable affect. In the following visual essay, a female protagonist is seen scavenging a barren surreal wasteland for rocks and stones that she brings back to a male figure who uses the collected building materials to construct a stone bunker. After completing their rock structure, the couple is seen huddled around a burning candle. Seemingly safe but insecure, they watch the candle until it slowly burns out. With the candle extinguished, they are confronted by the horrors awaiting them in the darkness of their safe space and quickly vacate. As the new day rises, the protagonists observe other characters disassembling their stone bunkers and repurposing the stones to produce a sculptural form. The wordless narrative concludes with the protagonists joining the others to produce a melancholic monument—an anthropomorphic grieving monolith.
Figure 1.
Figure 2.

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Figure 3.
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Figure 6.
Figure 7

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Figure 10.

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A God Damn Circus (Vicky Grube)

I struggle with depression and anxiety. I awake every morning at 4:30 am, eat the same breakfast, read while having my second cup of coffee, and then begin pacing. I pace through my little house and pace back around half listening to NPR. My hands are behind my back, and I pace for twenty or thirty minutes. I know about my depression from a life experience of worry and isolation: knowing how and knowing when. I am on the ground level. I see this existence as an assemblage. The pacing, for example, has the lights illuminating the rooms from the blue-black of the early morning, the worn floor that I feel as I pace without slippers, my plants, the voice from the radio, the chairs: I am in the doing of being anxious. I am pacing.

Figure 15
At times I find myself in the liminal – folded into the familiar until the familiar becomes unfamiliar. What does this steady pacing do for me? I know this walking back and forth is a human experience that emerges as matter around me changes, reforming in unexpected ways as I do. The plants look peaked, so I stop and water them and begin the pacing again. I find small objects out of place, and in my passing back and through the house, I reposition them. It is cold in the house, so I turn up the thermostat.

I understand this pacing as the tip of the iceberg. I suffer from depression not as a tragedy but as a possibility or a complex experience not, as a throbbing wound with roots in trauma. Cathy Carruth (2014) teaches me about Judith Herman’s work “an affliction of the powerless” (p.33). I cannot stop this walking from one corner to another. I live alone and delight in isolation but know I cannot be without others. Still, I am reticent of others. I feel capsized. My memory, a link to difficult experiences, is not purely a mental moment but bodily as well. So, there you have it. This complex experience that I lived is the memory of the senses. The story of my past is connected to my deep memory and haunts me every day. I pace to ease my body.

When I wake, there is a range of upsetting dreams. I worry about my university art education students. Are they given enough freedom to experiment – to realize their own lives are immersed in matter and meaning? Is their knowledge of art as a humming assemblage of the organic and the non-organic affecting one another? Will my
students have their feet on the floor when they perform the edTPA lite in a school of testing, surveillance, accountability, and corporations calling the shots (Guillion, 2018, p.31)? These neoliberal ideals scare the students who were not taught to teach to universal standards. There is a hegemonic politics of evidence (Guillion, 2018).

I sit down to draw, and imagine these students’ struggles and wish schools could offer nepantla (Anzaldúa, 2015, p.15) or liminal places, where the familiar becomes the unfamiliar and transformation takes place, where time allows experimentation. I would love to see the school day slow down and pace vary as unpredictable entanglements impact infinite emerging assemblages. I draw images of the circus as a fluid site that behaves as an in between place, a marginalized community.
Figure 18

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Walking with: A Pedagogy of Self-care (Gigi Yu)

Vicky Grube’s pacing within a small space, and the concern about students’ struggles, bring up my own memories and experiences heightened during the pandemic. Being attuned to oneself and the interactions between people, materials, and the environment are essential aspects that contribute to becoming an engaged art educator, which often becomes quickly dismissed when teaching and learning are viewed through linear and prescribed teaching approaches. How do we create for students “liminal moments and spaces in between elements of a formal learning organization and use those occasions to nurture an aesthetic and spiritual currere” (Irwin, 2006, p. 75), where unexpectedness leads to opportunities for transformation? The following is an autoethnographic, an aesthetic walking currere, that allows for a “slowing down” to become “more fully engaged with the aesthetics of place, experience and movement,” a self-care pedagogy (Cutcher & Irwin, 2017, p. 117).

During the Covid 19 quarantine, my home life blurred with my academic life. With my three children and husband working and learning from home, I constantly cared for their needs, helping with homework, cooking meals, and listening to their struggles with isolation. This was compounded by the numerous hours of online teaching and meetings. Like many other educators, I recall the small frames of students’ faces confined within the boundaries of the Zoom frames. It was nearly impossible to read their faces and gestures. Students were also facing challenges of isolation, illnesses, and the burden of caring for others. I started to spiral into feelings of anxiety and depression. I met with a therapist online to help deal with my anxiety. Sometimes we meditated together over Zoom. She guided me through closing my eyes and envisioning a place where I felt a sense of peace. In these moments, tears formed and rolled down my cheeks. I tried to sort through the roots of my feelings of emptiness and loss, and the disconnect from my body. Irwin (2006) refers to the focus on the care we often give to others as educators and the neglected pedagogy of self, which was prevalent for many women during the pandemic. Seeking out ways to care for myself became essential for caring for others.

I am privileged to live in an area of the United States surrounded by natural beauty. While many people in large cities worldwide were confined to small apartments, I was fortunate to seek refuge in an open natural space near my home known as the bosque. Bosque is a Spanish word that translates as gallery forest, a habitat along the riverbanks, which runs like a long thread down the center of Albuquerque, traveling to Mexico. Tall cottonwood trees spread throughout the forest. The bosque is located within the unceded lands of the Tewa/Tiwa people, and I am grateful for their ongoing stewardship and contributions as creative caretakers of this land. Because of their knowledge and care of the land, I am able to walk here and care for myself. Walking within the bosque during the pandemic became an act of self-care, a time when I could slow down and notice the subtle processes of transformation in the natural world when all things otherwise appeared stagnant.
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Each visit was an encounter with the place as the material, breathing new life into my practice as an artist, researcher, and teacher. Walking was, for me, both a metaphor and an embodiment of a liminal space between self-care and art practice (Irwin, 2006). I created an intra-active art pedagogy through heightened observations, awakening the senses while engaging with the wind, water, dirt, and wildlife (Lenz-Taguchi, 2010). An “aesthetic currere,” a pedagogy of self (Irwin, 2006, p. 80), with my mind, heart, and hands. Observing and documenting through photographing and drawing with the flows and rhythms of natural pigments became opportunities to re-see myself and the world (Yu, 2021).

![Figure 22. Drawing with the flow of natural pigments](image)

Upon returning to in-person teaching at the university, I recognized that art education students were also responding to various stress and uncertainty and seeking care experiences. Introducing students to walking, noticing, and artmaking as possibilities for experiencing slow research and teaching was an intentional introduction to radical necessities of care (Cutcher & Irwin, 2017; Mountz et al., 2015). In this practice, my intention was to hold space for myself and students to grieve as well as heal due to the collective trauma experienced during the pandemic. We headed to the woods by the river with our drawing materials on a particularly windy spring day. I was eager to walk with them in the bosque for healing, finding relief, and creating. Would the students be overwhelmed by the natural elements? Would they see the wonder that inspired my transformation?

Irwin describes a walking currere as, “inherently transformative and offers opportunities for self-creation” (p. 78). By guiding the students through walking explorations, experimentations, and creations with found materials, the environment, and drawing exercises, the students used their imaginations to see the extraordinary happening all around us. I guided them in becoming attuned to the environment through their senses, slowing down, and being within the place (Cutcher & Irwin, 2017). “Listen closely,” I told them, “to the wind blowing through the trees and to feel the movement of the leaves and branches surrounding us”. Through this slowed-down process, drawing was a form of searching, noticing, documenting, and creating, contributing to a deeper relationship with the transformations around us. One student’s reflection, “Beauty in nature is right at our fingertips,” and another remembered, “There was a lot of commemoratory, conversation, input, and excitement about the results. Artmaking within nature could be replicated with my future students.” These testaments reflect an entanglement of place, togetherness, and materials in the process of becoming art teachers.
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The most memorable part of our time studying the bosque for me was the movement. Everything moved. Birds, and lizards, of course, but so did the trees, the light, the shadows, the water, and even the dirt when the wind picked up.” Student reflection, April 2022

The story could end here. I felt somewhat accomplished at the end of the semester. I reveled in the discoveries students and I made through walking and creating within the natural world. However, tragedy and loss struck again. In the late spring of 2022, New Mexico was ravaged by fires, destroying several sacred natural spaces throughout the state. Shortly after our visit to the bosque, a forest fire consumed the space, literally jumping from one side of the Rio Grande to the other. The smell of smoke filled the air for miles, signifying the loss of trees and other wildlife and a devastating reminder of humans’ destructive impact on the natural environment.

It took several weeks before I could revisit the bosque, due to restrictions placed on visitors. My anxiety about not knowing the damage and loss equated to “an ecological grief” experienced due to the potential loss of a meaningful relationship with the landscape of the bosque acquired over time (Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018, p. 275). However, during my first walking excursion, I was amazed at the forest’s own process of creation and transformation (Figure 9 and 10). The burnt tree branches contrasted against the bright green sprouts of new growth were visual testaments to the restorative nature and transformations that can only be experienced.

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through loss (Figure 29, 30, 31). The natural transformations taking place within the bosque remind us that we are constantly in a cycle of loss and mourning and discovery and renewal; we are never in a fixed state of being.

The Overlooked Generosity of Arts-Based Research

We experience some degree of grief and mourning anytime there is loss or absence. Our visual narratives suggest, oftentimes, the expressions of grief that we experience are so subtle and ubiquitous that it is difficult to understand the allusive affect and the related absence that triggers it. The expressions of grief illustrated in our narratives—complicated political, and ecological—pale compared to the depth of loss experienced through the absence of a loved one. They do, however, speak to the isolation experienced particularly by those in Western societies where individualism permeates through cultural ideologies when confronted by absence and loss (Charmaz & Milligan, 2006; Granek, 2010).

Furthermore, the generosity of arts-based research allowed us to appreciate what is often overlooked in loss and mourning. Arts-based research offers us the ability to understand the unnameable aches and allusive psychic pains that afflict us without symbolic form—afflictions so defiant of language that we often doubt their existence and ignore our embodied ways of making sense, until they metastasize into a more aggressive pathology. Understood through the context of grief, arts-based research is an act of solidarity with other mourners and survivors—a gesture of love to others suffering from similar unnamable aches and psychic pains. By describing the form of these emotional specters, arts-based research helps to understand and validate these experiences—constituting as a provocation for introspection and action.

In the rhizomatic assemblage of the artist/researcher/teacher artmaking becomes a process of ethical reflection and response that is relatable to others outside of self (Irwin & Springgay, 2008). Wordless narrative research invites readers to insert the particularities of their lives into the silence of the visual stories. In diffractive ethnography humans are entangled with the world but are not the loudest voice. This is not post-human, rather, the human is recentered. We must turn away from hierarchical categories and the familiar and look at our data.
with an inventive mind, perhaps as Delanda Guillon suggests, “... but as literally composed of intensities (of color, sound, aroma, flavor, texture (2018, p. 69). Enacting a walking pedagogy for a self-care pedagogy allows for sharing in healing and well-being. All these arts-based research methodologies have the capacity to create relationships with others by transforming hidden psychic phenomena into something material, visualizing the unnameable.

Our art practice has the possibility to renovate and renew, cultivating a generosity of spirit and an interconnectedness (assemblages and entanglements) rather than a disparity and fracturedness in the world. Through creative acts, loss and despair are transformed into new ways of seeing, being, and relating with the world. How does making art, a social activity, challenge this individualized relationship with grief? Is there an implicit generosity in arts-based research that also contributes to the generative, restorative, and collective healing? The process of artmaking presents a process that can work through loss and grief is a generous act, a good mourning.
References


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