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Mending Art Classrooms: An Exploration of the Benefits of Collaborative Artmaking for Underinvested Black Youth in Richmond, Virginia

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Art Education at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Abstract

MENDING ART CLASSROOMS: AN EXPLORATION OF THE BENEFITS OF COLLABORATIVE ARTMAKING FOR UNDERINVESTED BLACK YOUTH IN RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

By Jazmine M. Beatty, BFA, MAE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Art Education at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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Major Director: Dr. Yi Wen Wei
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This arts-informed research study explored the experiences of local community artists and educators working to radically transform and heal the experiences of underinvested Black students in Richmond through collaborative arts engagement. Through a series of seven one-on-one interviews with Black teaching artists in the Richmond community, I was able to uncover how collaboration has and can continue to improve the well-being and livelihoods of Black students in Richmond. Also, by tapping into the local Mending Walls mural project, I was able to make a tangible connection between the Richmond community, art, and collaboration. An analysis of the interviews led to the identification of three major themes that progressively outline the necessary components of beneficial collaboration: Acknowledgment, Engagement, and Upliftment. The goal of this research is to utilize the findings detailed within each theme to help transform local student learning environments through collaborative community art investment. The findings of this research were more practically communicated through a curricular guidebook, which can be utilized as an entry point for teachers to explore collaborative making, the Mending Walls project, and community engaged reference points. By building relationships between teachers, students, and the local community, with a focus on the positive connections and associations that students have with their community cultures, collaborative artmaking can become a space for enhancing and healing student learning.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In this study, I explored the benefits of collaborative artmaking for underinvested Black students through the perspectives of community teaching artists. Within this research, I am defining the *underinvested* as those who live and '*operate*' in predominantly low-income communities (Hanley et al., 2013), yet whose cultural experiences are a form of capital (Yosso, 2005, as cited in Dixson et al., 2017). In this paper, underinvested is used to expand on the term underserved, as used by Hanley et al. (2013), to emphasize the contributions of societally marginalized groups as valuable community cultural assets, worth societal investment (Yosso, 2005, as cited in Dixson et al., 2017).

My interest in this topic stems from my own experiences as a Black student whose schooling has always seemed separate from and even counter to my own racial identity. At the same time, I realize that my experiences as a Black student with class privilege have differed from those of underinvested Black students. My educational experiences, entangled with my position as a Black woman, have made me more critically aware of racial injustices within the United States (U.S.) education system. Many Black students living in low-income communities are not afforded the same opportunities or resources as students in higher-income communities to pursue extracurricular programs (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008) or see continued learning as integral to life (Lawton, 2010). By life, I mean the ways in which people experience the world, how their education connects to real-world experiences, and the decisions they make based on those experiences. As a society, we should expand educational opportunities for marginalized and underinvested youth who may not have the resources, knowledge, or support to explore their dreams, and it must start at the local level.

Statement of Problem

The Richmond Public School (RPS) system in Virginia has an 88% minority enrollment, with nearly 70% of the students identifying as Black (Public School Review, 2021). Additionally, over 20% of the

Richmond population lives in poverty, double that of both the state and national percentages (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Despite a majority of the Richmond student population being Black, the local education system was not sufficiently designed for Black students to succeed, as is the case for many urban school settings (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Richmond public schools are ranked in the bottom 50% of all Virginia school districts, ranked at #131 out of 135 (Public School Review, 2021). The learning loss during the pandemic has only exacerbated students' poor academic standing (i.e., poor test scores and grades) (French, 2021; Thompson, 2021).

However, these standardized measures of success do not account for the "complexity and humanity" of students and are continuously hurting their learning (Flook, 2019, "Create an integrated system" section). In my opinion, RPS is a prime example of how the U.S. education system hurts students' learning by not centering their culture and experiences. While they have, in recent years, begun to lay out strategies for a more culturally competent and responsive learning environment through the Dreams4RPS strategic plan (Richmond Public Schools, 2022), the foundation of the educational structure remains the same. I believe the Visual Arts Standards of Learning [SOL] can be utilized as an entry point into the radical transformation of educational practices and expectations. The SOLs are the baseline requirement for learning content and objectives, and though they were recently updated and improved upon in 2020 (Virginia Department of Education [VDE], 2020), they still do not account for the specific cultural experiences, knowledge bases, and practices of students (VDE, 2020), which I believe is crucial to developing meaningful learning environments that reflect upon students' lived experiences. The academic standing of RPS reflects how far-removed standardized education strategies are from the students' lived experiences.

The history of white-supremacy, racism, and slavery in the U.S. has normalized the devaluing of Black experiences (Acuff, 2020; Walters, 2001) and this is present within the foundation of the U.S. education system today. The current measures of academic success are centered around racialized

standardized testing that positions middle-class Whiteness as the norm, placing low-income students of color at a great disadvantage (Cunningham, 2019). The White norms embedded in school systems must be actively dismantled for underinvested Black students to take pride in their culture, while coming to understand and redefine their place in the world. Research has found that art-learning experiences increased students' compassion for others and their engagement with academic learning (Bowen & Kisida, 2019). Furthermore, research has also been conducted on how collaborative learning strategies have affirmed students in their learning process (Fenner 2020). Therefore, I posit that providing underinvested Black students with collaborative arts learning experiences may support their learning and achievement in the ways that school systems have long neglected.

Many Richmond-based artists, art organizations, art education practitioners and scholars have been supporting the lived experiences and cultural identities of Black students through collaborative art making projects, such as artist Hamilton Glass (whosham.com), art educator Pamela Lawton (phlawton.wixsite.com/artstories/blog), and the ART 180 nonprofit (www.art180.org). Therefore, through my arts-informed research, I aimed to explore the experiences of local community "artivists" (Lawton, 2019, p. 206) working to radically transform and heal the experiences of underinvested Black students in Richmond through creative engagement. The ultimate goal is to transform student learning environments through collaborative community art investment.

Research Question

1. What opportunities are there for educators to utilize collaborative artmaking to heal, reform, and transform student learning?
2. How can educators utilize collaborative art making help Black students be culturally rooted and academically successful?

3. How can educators utilize collaborative artmaking to evoke cultural understanding among an entire school/learning environment?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review explores works related to how collaborative artmaking can foster student connection (Lawton, 2010; Lawton et al., 2019) and enhance learning opportunities for underinvested Black students as they come to understand the world—and their own existence within it. When the intersections of how students experience the world, and thus how they process knowledge, are not considered in school, students can be resistant to make sense out of what is taught and ultimately lose motivation to engage in their education (Hanley et al., 2013). The current U.S. school system is grounded in master narratives of White experiences and high-stake standardized testing (Cunningham, 2019), which can push away students who fall outside of the dominant, White group as it excludes their lived experiences (Acuff, 2013). Collaboration within education environments can counter this exclusion and standardization by helping students develop deeper connections with one another, enabling them to understand the lives and cultures of others more thoroughly (Foster, 2016).

Before investigating the topics of this paper further, I want to clarify some of the language I will be using throughout the thesis. The idea of *learning* within this paper refers to student advancement and transformation over time, with a focus on academic progress over external standards (Ladson-Billings, personal communication, December 1, 2020). In alignment with Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings' definition of academic success (personal communication, December 1, 2020), I will be using *success* and [student] *learning* interchangeably throughout this paper. This understanding of learning is essential when discussing inequality and inequity.

To explore how collaborative artmaking enhances underinvested Black students' learning, I first examine the barriers to their learning through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT). While there are other marginalized groups that experience education inequity, this literature review focuses on racial inequities related to Black Americans. However, as Delgado and Stefancic (2017) have stated, every oppressed group has the capacity to inform another, as all are in opposition to whiteness, and its

societal standards in the U.S. The unique positioning of Black people in America pertains to the history of race-based enslavement.

Critical Race Theory Combating Education Inequity

Acknowledging an education system rooted in racism enables one to better understand the inherent inequality of the educational experiences of youth in lower-income communities, which overwhelmingly consist of Black people (Walters, 2001). Critical Race Theory combats the white-supremacist ideas instilled in the United States by understanding race as a social construct that empowers Whites and marginalizes people of color. CRT originated after the civil rights movement, to develop new ways of combating racism that go beyond legal measures. Critical Race theorists believed this approach was needed because race and racism are so deeply ingrained that the institutions within society, such as the education system, cannot become more just by passing a law; fundamental transformation must occur (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Dixson et al., 2017; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

Educators Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) have discussed this need for transformation in the context of urban schools, which disproportionately consist of Black and Brown students. Due to racialized standardized testing that positions whiteness as the norm (Cunningham, 2019), urban schools tend to be categorized as "failing" schools. The idea of "failing" most often relates to the students' academic success, or lack of, as it is assessed by national standards (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; G. Ladson-Billings, personal communication, December 1, 2020). Urban schools are considered failing because of poor test scores, which only persist because the schools are not invested in the students, but in the standardization of education. Standardized tests are tailored towards the dominant group, the cultural capital of affluent, middle-to-upper class White students, thus marginalizing students of lower socio-economic status and/or of color (Cunningham, 2019; Yosso, 2005, as cited in Dixson et al., 2017).

That being said, it is not the schools that are failing, but rather the education system that has been designed for them to "fail" (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

The U.S., and the institutions within it, were designed for White people to succeed, and with little regard for the advancement of non-White people—and their cultural identities (Cunningham, 2019; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Therefore, scholars have called for new systems or ways of operating that center on marginalized, unacknowledged communities, such as Black Americans (Acuff, 2013, 2020; Ladson-Billings, 1995, G. Ladson-Billings, personal communication, December 1, 2020). Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) have countered the social construction of "failing" schools, in part, by engaging in critical dialogue and collaborative ideation with students. Dialogue promotes the opportunity for acquiring and creating knowledge. Conversations with and among students can help to reexamine the existing educational standards, which largely center on whiteness (Cunningham, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Collaborative Community Artmaking

Through art, people can reimagine the normalized, White ways of being (Hanley et al., 2013). Collaborative artmaking, specifically, explores multiple perspectives, in pursuit of understanding oneself in relation to others (Foster, 2016). Community-based learning provides a ground for collaboration, self-actualization, and broader societal impact—the ability to think beyond oneself (Lawton, 2010). In her service-learning projects, art educator Pam Lawton (2010; Lawton et al., 2019) has advocated for the integration of classroom with community as a way of connecting structured learning to the outside world through shared learning in a collaborative environment. Another, more recent, collaborative project, *Resilience and Girl Power—Adolescent Girls Make Art*, utilized art to bring girls with similar traumatic experiences together to build trust and foster inner strength and healing (Kay & Wolf, 2017). The parameters of this project centered on the needs of youth in low-income communities who have

experienced trauma and/or violence, and the importance of addressing those realities of their lives within their learning processes. When students are experiencing death, violence, poverty, and police brutality outside of school, it seems irrational to have them forget these grave experiences when they enter a classroom (Hutzel, 2007; G. Ladson-Billings, personal communication, December 1, 2020). Those more immediate issues are constantly on their minds, not their grades or performance in school, which can seem trivial and irrelevant in comparison. A way to address such grave issues is through connectivity—to self and surroundings (Lawton, 2010). Building relationships can help foster comfortability within a shared and safe space, making people more likely to open up and thus more receptive to new information (Kay & Wolf, 2017).

In educator/researcher Karen Hutzel's (2007) community mural project study, the students of a predominantly Black, low-income community came to realize their individual and collective ability to affect positive change and unite their community. Through the process of working together for a greater purpose, beyond a grade, beyond personal gain, students discover how their own actions can impact the lives of others. Many other projects have been conducted to explore the impact of collaborative community art engagement, including Judy Baca's "Great Wall of Los Angeles" (Lepage, 2017) and Pepon Osorio's "ReForm" project (Grady, 2022), though Hutzel's project specifically engaged underinvested Black students. Like Hanley et al. (2013) assert, art has the capacity to expand imaginations. Hutzel's community mural project study brought students closer to their community, while also enabling their community to be transformed for the better—turning a formerly depressing, unsafe, playground space into a long-lasting vision of joy and prosperity (Hutzel, 2007). Pride in one's community is important because it counters the assumption that people must detach the part(s) of themselves that do not fit into what society says is acceptable (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Accepted standards in the U.S. can be associated with class hierarchy, and thus compared with Bourdieu's traditional cultural capital theory, viewing cultural capital as attributes or practices valued by the

dominant group, the White middle-to-upper class (Yosso, 2005, as cited in Dixson et al., 2017). As a result, low-income neighborhoods in the U.S. are often portrayed as "bad", undesirable (hooks, 2000). The violence and poverty within them are "bad" and therefore something to be avoided (Duncan-Andrade, 2018). There is often a sense of *class shame* when people come from a low-income community, and thus an obsession with rising above poverty by degrading low-income experiences (Clay, 2019; hooks, 2000). This deficit way of thinking has created conflicts in people's identities as they are forced to disassociate themselves from their communities, for better and worse, in order to advance in society (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Yosso, 2005, as cited in Dixson et al., 2017). What this narrow-minded view of success leaves out is the potential to advance society itself (Duncan-Andrade, 2018). Hutzel's project (2007) is a prime example of how asset-based approaches to success can help improve communities within society. By focusing on the positive connections and associations that students have with their communities, as opposed to the negative and harmful community aspects, Hutzel's collaborative community artmaking became a space for embracing culture, not altering it to meet society's accepted, White standards.

Summary

The concepts of self-expression, ownership of oneself, and community orientation are crucial for marginalized groups, such as Black Americans, to thrive and feel validated in a society that centers on whiteness (Acuff, 2020; Goldstein, 2017; Hutzel, 2007). Self-expressive art is important for Black people to regain a sense of agency (Goldstein, 2017), but equally important is the power of collaborative art and collective action to support marginalized groups (Hutzel, 2007) and to oppose the dominant White culture (Acuff, 2020). Traditionally, Black Americans, especially those of lower socio-economic status, have not been seen as a group that has valuable cultural capital to contribute to society, as they are not part of the dominant, White group (Yosso, 2005, as cited in Dixson et al., 2017). However, by reframing

the idea of cultural capital to incorporate the unique experiences and knowledge that BIPOC groups possess, the community cultural capital of Black people living in lower-income communities can be valued and utilized to expand people's understanding of the world (Clay & Rubin, 2019; Yosso, 2005, as cited in Dixson et al., 2017).

The works explored in this literature review have given context to the influence of identity and race on learning and provided evidence of the benefits of collaborative artmaking on students' learning experiences. What could be explored further, based on these findings, is the impact of collaborative artmaking on underinvested Black students within school curriculums. By locating opportunities for collaborative artmaking to heal, reform, and transform student learning for underinvested Black youth, I can begin to address the educational experiences of students in my local community and develop tangible ideas for implementing collaboration in Richmond, VA schools. I would like to conclude this literature review with educator/researcher Derek Fenner's vision for future education, "We have the chance to radically change education, instead of rebuilding the sinking ship that we're already on…the time is ripe to build what we believe our schools and communities should look like'' (2020, p. 174).

Chapter 3: Methodology

The theoretical framework underpinning this research project is Black Feminist Theory (BFT), which emphasizes that "theory is developed from experiential knowledge and daily lived experiences" (Acuff, 2018, p. 203). With this emphasis on experiences, research based in BFT is collaborative and encourages an exchange of ideas between researchers and participants. This collaborative exchange allows dialogue to unfold naturally, and thus views interviews as "*recorded dialogic conversations"* (Patterson et al., 2016, p. 62, as cited in Acuff, 2018). BFT honors the participants' voice and existence with an emphasis on, as Acuff (2018, p. 207) annotated, "humanizing, engaging, and inclusive practices in which the researcher and the participants share or co-write data reflections with the goal of presenting results to serve the participants instead of the researcher." With BFT in mind, I conducted an arts-informed qualitative study that discusses the benefits of collaborative artmaking on the learning experiences of underinvested Black students in Richmond, Virginia.

The focal area of this research was Richmond City in Virginia due to my current location and its accessibility, making it practical and convenient to conduct research in. It is also a community that I am educationally and artistically part of, so there is a sense of personal responsibility and attachment in my desire to engage this community as well. I conducted this project to explore collaborative efforts that are already being done in Richmond and how those can be expanded upon within school curriculum. Mending Walls, being a prime example of community collaboration, has been utilized to serve as a visual entry point into implementing collaborative art activities into the students' daily education.

I explored varying methods, strategies, and outcomes of collaborative artmaking, relating to and inspired by the Mending Walls project (www.mendingwallsrva.com), with Black artists and art educators in the Richmond area. Mending walls is a collaborative public art project in Richmond focused on social and racial justice and community engagement. For my project, I utilized arts-informed research (Blaikie, 2014; Leavy, 2018) strategies that center collaborative artmaking because collaboration is an important

artistic process to explore, as it fosters relationship building, which is a necessary part of arts-informed research (Blaikie, 2014; Leavy, 2017). However, engaging my participants in this process was inconsistent, which I will explain and provide suggestions for later in Chapter Five. Additionally, in my study, I allowed space for narrative inquiry (Barone & Eisner, 2012) within participant responses in order to effectively bring the stories and lived experiences of Black student populations to the forefront—taking from the stories of Black artists and art educators with first-hand knowledge of those students' experiences.

Context and Participants

As a pre-service art educator, I am directly involved with art education organizations in the Richmond area including the Art Education department at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), where I am a graduate student in the master's program. VCU's Art Education department is a "breeding ground" for accessing networks of artists, preservice teachers, and current educators in the arts. Another organization I am involved with, as a teaching artist, is ART 180, a non-profit community art organization dedicated to servicing underinvested youth of color. The Mending Walls project is also an organization that I have been involved with as an engaged community member.

For the purposes of my research, I believe familiarity is crucial, as that is a necessary component to beneficial and effective collaboration (Fenner, 2020; Seidman, 2013), therefore, having pre-established relationships with participants was an important part to the research itself. To choose my participants for the study, I used judgment sampling (Fetterman, 2010). Initiating the recruitment process with email invitations to various individuals from VCU, Art 180, and the Mending Walls Project, —many of whom I was previously familiar with— I pursued "information-rich" cases (Leavy, 2017, p. 79) from within these organizations. I directed my attention to focusing on conversations with Black artists and art educators in these organizations who are actively engaged in collaborative artmaking and have

experience working with underinvested Black student populations in Richmond, Virginia. The intended number of interviews for my research project was between six to 10 people, which I met by interviewing seven people. Ideally, I would have liked to have between two to four participants deriving from each of the three organizations previously mentioned. Though ultimately, with the responses I received, there was a lot of overlap, which I will discuss more in Chapter Four. My participant sample size was based on the idea of *information power*, meaning the more information a sample holds relevant to the study, the less participants are needed (Malterud et al., 2016). According to Malterud et al. (2016, p 1756) in their qualitative research study, "a purposive sample of six to 10 participants with diverse experiences can provide sufficient information power" for qualitative interviews.

Research Methods

I employed a dialogic qualitative interview method (Harvey, 2015) into my research design that centered one-on-one interviews. This method allowed me to focus on the co-construction of ideas and the production of rich, meaningful, and descriptive data that valued the participants' subjective experiences and meaning-making processes (Leavy, 2018; Rolling, 2018). Utilizing a semi-structured approach, I asked each participant a series of open-ended questions (Seidman, 2013) for the first part of the interviews (see Appendix A). The second part of the interviews utilized images of the Mending Walls murals as a way of inspiring creative ideation (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2018). In keeping with an arts-informed research design, the second part of the interviews drew on generative and emergent data collection processes (Blaikie, 2014; Harvey, 2015; Leavy, 2018) through reflective creative responses from the participants.

Data collection

Upon receiving the initial responses from potential participants, stating their willingness to participate, I provided them with further information, including Research Participant Information sheets (see Appendix A), Interview Consent forms (see Appendix B), and my Calendly link (calendly.com/jazminebeatty). The Calendly scheduling was utilized for participants to schedule the most convenient interview time, streamline the scheduling process, and track participant names and their affiliations (e.g., VCU, Art 180, or Mending Walls).

Before each interview session, I ensured that the participants read and signed the Interview Consent form and had a thorough understanding of the research participant information. At the beginning and end of each interview, I asked the participants if there was any information they would not like to be shared within the presentation of my research findings, such as their name, any personal stories they shared, etc. Everyone was comfortable with their name being shared, so I do not use any pseudonyms in the following chapters. After each interview, I sent a follow-up email to each participant, thanking them for their help and support to exemplify that I value their time and knowledge (Fetterman, 2010). Ultimately, my research findings have been presented in the form of a curricular guidebook (see Appendix D), centering the thoughts and ideas of my research participants.

During the interview sessions, participants were asked to engage in approximately 45-minute, semi-structured dialogue with the researcher (myself) via Zoom about collaborative artmaking with underinvested Black students, in order to contribute to the collaborative curricular guidebook. The interviews were semi-structured in order to keep a handle on time, while allowing for emergent conversation, utilizing the interview questions merely as a guiding point, yet allowing the conversations to evolve with the participants (Harvey, 2015). Throughout each interview session, I took a few hand-written “on the fly” notes (Leavy, 2017, p. 137) to capture any initial thoughts or ideas that stood out to

me. However, notetaking was not a priority during interviews, in order to be fully present with each participant. More thorough notetaking transpired after the transcription of all interview recordings.

For the first part of the interview sessions, participants engaged in a 30-minute dialogic interview (see Appendix A). After this, the participants partook in a series of three brief reflective exercises for 15 minutes (approximately five minutes each). The exercises were intended to be drawn and/or written responses to images of select Mending Walls murals (see Appendix C), though ultimately, all the participant responses were written. The reflective responses were given with regard to underinvested Black students—considering the students they work with and their own previous experiences as a Black student. Participants selected three murals that stood out to them (from a slideshow of 20 Mending Walls murals) and artistically responded to the given prompts (see Appendix A). The responses produced by the participants were collected at the end of the interview sessions either via the Zoom chat or email. Ultimately, I combined the participants' individual responses to coexist in the resultant curricular guidebook I created after data analysis as a form of researcher-made art (Leavy, 2017)—the contents of which I more thoroughly explain in Chapter Five.

Data Analysis

To begin the data analysis process, I transcribed each interview verbatim, to preserve a complete record of the interviews (Leavy, 2017). Then, I labeled and color-coded (Cera, 2013) main ideas that emerged. (Seidman, 2013); creating a shorthand list of keywords, phrases, and symbols to represent the main ideas or patterns I discovered. Upon transcribing and coding all the interviews, many overlapping themes were revealed to me and I began to develop extensive lists to categorize the themes. Through ongoing reflection and reiteration, I uncovered and decided upon three major themes and subdivisions — which I detail in Chapter Five. I also conducted reflective journaling (Cera, 2013) and

included my own reflective thoughts and connections to the major themes to account for my own positionality throughout the research process (Seidman, 2013).

Presentation of Findings

The resultant curricular guidebook is the medium I have chosen to share and interpret my research data (Seidman, 2013). A majority of the book content emerged as the interview sessions took place, thus facilitating the curation process. The outline of the book content included a big idea for each of the selected murals, the key points and participant thoughts about the significance of collaboration, and a compilation of suggested collaborative art activities or projects. In keeping with my focus on the co-construction of ideas based on BFT (Acuff, 2018), all participants' names are referenced in the book as co-authors. As a form of member checking (Cera, 2013; Seidman, 2013), once I completed a first draft of the curricular guidebook, I sent pdfs and a digital flipbook link to each participant, in order to confirm that I depicted their contributions accurately and in a manner they were re comfortable with. The final curricular guidebook is to first be shared (digitally and in print, if fiscally possible) with all the study participants and the members of my graduate committee. Eventually, it will also be shared with the general public of artists, art educators, and students across the Richmond area in an open-access format—the timing and distribution methods of this are to be determined.

Significance of Study

As scholar and educator bell hooks (2003) exclaimed, education is the foundation to everything that is learned about society, yet schooling is often the site where students are indoctrinated into the existing white-supremacist systems. The current U.S. education system was not designed to support all students (Duncane-Andrade & Morrell, 2008), but a collective refocusing on students' lived experiences can help change this (Flook, 2019). With the current push for transformative education in response to

the Covid-19 pandemic and the 2020 racial justice uproar, there is an amazing opportunity to tap into local community resources, like Mending Walls, to develop educational strategies that help underinvested Black students take claim of their cultural capital. Ultimately, the ideas explored in this project can hopefully be utilized to help transform and improve student learning in Richmond, VA. An education system centered around collaborative artmaking could exemplify how collective, creative power can affect positive change within our local communities and society at large (Foster, 2016).

Preliminary Limitations

In alignment with the progression of VCU's Art Education Master's Program, the timeline for this research project is confined to one semester because thesis work does not begin until the second year of the program and there are several necessary approvals to obtain within the first semester of that year. The research procedures were designed with the master's thesis timeline in mind, building around the idea of a project I could conduct myself in less than six months. With consideration of the time restraints, I made the decision to omit student voice, as including minors would require a more extensive review from the IRB, thus producing a barrier to receiving approval in a timely manner. Therefore, my "first-hand" knowledge came from the artists and educators who work directly with them, rather than the students themselves. Being the sole researcher in this project, I deemed it necessary to scale down the number of participants from my ideal 20 to 30 participants (to align with each of the Mending Walls murals) to a manageable size of six to 10, to allow myself the time and mental stamina to thoroughly collect and analyze the data.

Summary

This arts-informed research project provides context for the potential impact of collaborative artmaking on underinvested Black students in Richmond, VA. Like most institutions, the U.S. education

system was not designed for Black students to succeed (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). The U.S. educational systems legitimizing whiteness but neglecting the cultural assets of BIPOC communities, particularly low-income Black communities, has profoundly harmed underinvested Black students, as evidenced by the standardized rankings of RPS (Public School Review, 2021). By focusing on the Richmond area, where I currently reside, I explored the importance of tapping into local community resources to enable the incorporation of students' daily lived experiences into their learning (G. Ladson-Billings, personal communication, December 1, 2020). As Flook (2019) indicated, schools must be transformed to support the achievement and cultural identities of the students they serve, and these educational strategies cannot be generalized.

A great starting point to this transformation is conversation and co-constructed ideation with the artists and educators who work directly with students in Richmond schools. I hope the ideas explored in this study can be utilized to help underinvested Black students take pride in their culture and lived experiences, and help teachers and students alike see those experiences as an essential part of the student learning process. Through this study, I explored how utilizing collaborative community artmaking platforms like Mending Walls may transform the education experiences of RPS students by building relationships between teachers, students, and the local community. If student learning environments focused on relationship building, the potential for students to engage with and understand the world would grow immensely (Fenner, 2020; Ginwright, 2016).

Chapter 4: Findings

Overview of Research

The purpose of breaking down my findings into themes was to isolate the essential components of collaborative artmaking that came about throughout the seven interviews, deeming them key, reoccurring themes. The interview questions were developed to streamline the broader research questions and serve as a guide for the written content within the resultant curricular guidebook. Responding to the research questions outlined in Chapter One, the themes I discovered through "*recorded dialogic conversation*" with the participating Black artists and art educators were (1) ***Cultural Struggles***, (2) ***Authentic Community Engagement***, and (3) ***Cultivating Positive Pathways***.

Rather than each of these themes alone addressing a particular research question, there is a lot of overlap. In keeping with BFT, I believe that these three major themes, in collaboration with one another, encompass potential answers to the three research questions outlined above. To effectively implement collaborative artmaking in the regular learning processes of Richmond youth, we as educators must first acknowledge their (1) **cultural struggles** in the classroom and begin opening opportunities for them to embrace their cultural experiences. An understanding of this can help us more (2) **authentically engage with the community** and build relationships that in turn make our students more comfortable and ready to learn. Through [direct] community engagement, we can begin (3) **cultivating positive pathways** for our students to imagine beyond the negative aspects of their circumstances. The themes are outlined in sequential order, to most appropriately demonstrate the flow of understanding.

Before explaining each theme in more detail, I would like to identify each of the research participants and their positionality. I interviewed seven people total, six of which have worked with the local community art organization Art 180, five of which were Mending Walls artists, and three of which

are actively engaged with All City Art Club— a local artist collective. It was interesting to discover the overlaps in experiences and associations between the various participants—some of the overlap I was familiar with, some I was not. Participant one was Mending Walls muralist and community teaching artist Austin Miles. Participant two was VCUarts doctoral student and poet KàLyn Coghill. Participant three was community teaching artist and dancer Kaitlynn Davis. Participant four was Mending Walls muralist and Art 180 teaching artist Nadd Harvin. Participant five was Mending Walls muralist, VCUarts student, and A.R.T.S Community Center (theartsrva.com) co-founder Amiri Richardson-Keys. Participant six was Mending Walls muralist and community teaching artist Jowarnise Caston. Lastly, participant seven, was Mending Walls muralist and community teaching artist Khalid Thompson. As the premise of this research is to investigate the benefits of collaboration, the three themes outlined earlier reflect a compilation of all participants' thoughts, ideas, feelings, and experiences, and will be discussed accordingly in this chapter. There is a lot of overlap, so I will be mentioning each of the participants listed above almost interchangeably. Each of the themes detailed below are broken into several subthemes.

Table 1

List of Participants

PARTICIPANT NAMES	ROLES/ POSITIONS	AFFILIATIONS
1. Austin (Auz) Miles	● Muralist ● Teaching artist	All City Art Club, Mending Walls
2. KáLyn Coghill	● Poet/ Creative writer ● Phd student ● Educator	All City Art Club, VCU
3. Kaitlynn Davis	● Dancer	Art 180

	• Teaching artist	
4. Nadd Harvin	• Visual artist • Teaching artist	All City Art Club, Art 180, Mending Walls
5. Amiri Richardson-Keys	• ARTS Community Center founder • Painter	Mending Walls, VCU
6. Jowarnise (Jo) Caston	• Visual artist • Teaching artist	Mending Walls
7. Khalid Thompson	• Painter • Teaching artist	Art 180, Mending Walls

I. Cultural Struggles

Theme one, Cultural Struggles, has been identified as the entry point into understanding the importance of engaging underinvested Black youth in Richmond with collaborative artmaking. Through my conversations with the research participants, it became clear that acknowledging the history of racial injustice in America is crucial, as it directly affects the lives of these students. My research participant Jo Caston discussed how the history of racial injustice has "affected the Black community for such a long time, basically since the start of this country." Historically, Black communities have been negatively impacted by school curricula that centered White experiences and resulted in the degradation of Black experiences (Spring, 2018). A sentiment that is still true in today's art scene, as noted by Nadd Harvin when discussing the instrumental work of All City Art Club—an artist collective founded by local artist Silly Genius. Nadd discussed how mural projects in Richmond have often recruited outside artists and have focused on neighborhoods like Scott's Addition— a gentrified, predominantly White area of

Richmond City (Scott's Addition, 2016). Nadd was suggesting that middle-to-upper class, predominantly White neighborhoods got the major attention of community art projects. These neighborhoods are considered more valuable and seen as more viable economic prospects. Meanwhile, the low-income predominantly Black areas of Richmond are more likely to be neglected and ignored.

As Nadd explained, most of the work All City Art Club does is in South Side and East End—predominantly Black, low-income areas in Richmond. The differences in experience and opportunity between Black and White communities are in stark contrast to one another and thus must be acknowledged (Krahe et al., 2016). In addition to the economic disparities concerning community visibility, KáLyn Coghill's sentiment pointed out the differences in educational opportunity. She said, "the privilege that White people have to experience art museums and say, go to art school and to experience art camps is very different than the experiences of Black people." Similarly, Khalid Thompson discussed the effects of economic marginalization on students' social emotional development. "There's a lot of emotional and psychological components that come with [economic marginalization]. And those can often be ceilings or blocks to being able to see the world in more open perspectives" he said. In his opinion, because of the psycho emotional trauma prevailing among low-income communities, there is a tendency to remain close-minded and to self-sabotage. Khalid warned that "[when] you're treated by the larger society a certain way, that can create self-sabotaging perspectives that can transfer from generation to generation." According to the abovementioned sentiments, it is worth noting that when the society we live in is constantly degrading the identity, culture, and experiences of Black people, particularly in low-income communities, those perceptions can be internalized, and in turn lower the self-esteem of Black people within those communities and their ability to imagine better futures for themselves.

Navigating Trauma

Due to the history of racial injustice in America, from slavery to Jim Crow laws, and the efforts of resolving historic racial injustice, from the civil rights movement to Black Lives Matter, the effects of discrimination and degradation continue to cause generational marginalization and trauma. The discriminatory housing practices based on the race and ethnicity have filtered communities of Black people into poverty, where there is a lack of resources, which can often ignite violence or crime, and ultimately produce unsafe and unhealthy neighborhoods with concentrated poverty. These environments were designed to be isolated, ignored and neglected, exemplified by the historic practices of redlining and housing inequality (Ryan, 2010), thus furthering the potential for negative self-images among the predominantly Black residents that live there (their families, children, etc.).

I believe the negative perceptions of low-income communities, often reinforced through the mainstream media's hyper-focus on the violence and crime within these areas, can become ingrained into the minds of people living in those spaces, who may feel that the system is rigged against them and thus do not feel motivated to do more or be more, or may just not know how to (hooks, 2000). While there are many other perspectives and outlooks among people living in low-income communities, the mindset previously mentioned can negatively affect the psyches of our students, who may become conditioned to doubting themselves and their ability to succeed. Khalid stated, "a lot of these kids aren't just battling the economic situation, they're battling psycho emotional circumstances that are reinforced from their family, their friends or local community." The victimization of economically marginalized Black communities is often not openly talked about. Racial injustice at large does not appear to be regularly talked about in school settings. Jo also commented on race being treated as a taboo subject that is not brought up on a daily basis. She stated that people "don't talk about the mistreatment of Black people every day, like, hey, it's Tuesday, let's talk about how this guy died unfairly." As a society,

we must talk about racial injustice more regularly—since it is a fundamental aspect to the structures of our societal institutions.

Jo discussed the importance of the Mending Walls project as "a unique opportunity" to have that type of conversation. My interpretation of Jo's point is that, through community building and collaborative making, there can be open discussion about life experiences with discrimination and injustice. Collaborative art platforms and outlets allow a unique opportunity to address "taboo" issues like racial injustice in more digestible ways, beyond words. Providing students with spaces to subliminally express their emotions in regard to discrimination, financial hardship, and other situational traumas can more appropriately address and validate their lived experiences within their learning.

Lack of Representation

As a result of the history of racial injustice, Black youth have suffered from a lack of representation in their school systems. Even in art classes, it is more likely that these students often do not see people that look like them teaching in their classrooms, nor who can relate to their lived experiences. This limitation to reaching students is really just an opportunity to bring in people and artists from the local community who can relate to students and show them what is possible. The community art organization Art 180 is an admirable example of providing students with more comprehensive representation among their teachers. Nadd discussed the significance of Art 180 and the organization's efforts to get artists that look like the students that they serve. Nadd stated, "I think that is the biggest takeaway is to see people [creating] that look like me, that understand me."

Nadd also talked about the importance of, in their own work with underinvested Black youth, allowing them to see themselves in art projects. Being that the education system was founded on the centering of White middle-upper class cultural experience and the degradation of all others', learning content has not typically centered the lived experiences of underinvested Black communities. Therefore,

even in art class, Black students are often only able to see themselves through the lens of White, Western ideals. Allowing students the opportunity to step outside of these traditional education norms can create avenues for representation that truly pull them into their projects, beyond classroom walls. As a mural artist, Nadd not only works with youth in 'traditional' classroom settings, they engage students in their local community mural projects as well. Nadd exclaimed the importance of "collaborating with the community and the kids so that they can see themselves."

Austin Miles also talked about the importance of representation and students being able to see themselves in the projects taking place in their community. For example, the collaboration Austin did with Dr. Kristal Brown on Hull Street on the Southside of Richmond entitled *Brown Girls Narrative* (news.vcu.edu/article/Mural) is evocative of community representation. The project consisted of interviewing Black women across Richmond about their experiences, and as a product of those interviews, creating a mural that depicted portraits of the women as a way of representing women, specifically Black women, of all shapes and sizes. Austin stated that "painting that mural was one of the moments where like little girls were coming and being like, Oh, that one was me." Young Black girls passing by were able to see themselves in the mural. The ripple effect of community art projects, as exemplified by Austin's statement, combats the feeling of not seeing oneself, which Austin also discussed, that many Black students are often left thinking. Not seeing Black role models or positive representations in any given public domain or narratives could have a devastating effect on Black youth in a long run. Therefore, we must provide them with opportunities to see people and creatives, who look like them and who understand their experiences, out in the world achieving creative success.

Expanding upon Nadd's and Austin's comments, Jo discussed her work with Girls for a Change (girlsforachange.org), exposing young girls to Black female artists. Alongside artist and friend Unicia R. Buster, Jo conducted a community workshop to teach young girls about the role of Black female artists through artmaking and discussion on the importance of Black female representation. Positive

representation of Black women is so crucial, because they are so often devalued or just ignored in the narratives of American history. Several participants talked about the significance of Black women. For example, KáLyn discussed the incorporation of Jasmine Mann's book, *Black Girl Called Home*. It is a poetry book, and every section is based around a hip hop song. KáLyn mentioned that they often used music as a way to teach their Black female students about Black feminism and hip-hop culture. Having reference points for Black students from underinvested communities is essential. As Kaitlynn discussed, in many cases, Black children do not even realize what is out there if they live in a community where the arts or a variety of creative expression outlets are often unprovided, or inaccessible. Without reference points or exposure to people exploring an array of creative outlets, it will be challenging for them to know other existing choices and opportunities, which in turn could limit their possibilities for the future.

Comprehensive representation is about exposure to people in the current day, as well as historically—especially historically. The influence of Black people is habitually disregarded in American society, in the education system, and in the arts. Tying back into KáLyn's incorporation of hip-hop culture, Khalid discussed how artistic genres such as hip-hop are rooted in the hopes and struggles of underinvested Black communities. Khalid stated, "Look at what Black marginalized communities have accomplished. Most of our contemporary sounds, perspectives and aesthetics come from those communities." In summary, it is crucial to expose students to and teach them about Black excellence and its historic existence and significance. If students know the accomplishments people in their communities have achieved, they can more readily acknowledge their own greatness and begin to believe in and value themselves. They can begin seeing their own worth, thus motivating them to make an effort, to have dreams, and to take steps to accomplish those dreams.

Lack of Access

Providing students with representation makes learning content more accessible to them. However, a lack of access is one of the many circumstances that has historically restricted the prosperity of Black people. So, we have to acknowledge that there is still a lack of access as a result of the historic framing that has centered White experiences and hindered Black opportunity. As KáLyn said, "Collaborative art making makes it easier and more accessible for Black people, especially Black students, to be able to experience some of the same art experiences and art making that White people get to experience just because they're White." Due to the racialized conditions of our society, people in predominantly White, higher-income areas are more likely to receive a diverse array of experiences than Black residences living in low-income communities do, including extracurricular art enrichment (Wei & Broome, 2022).

Having years of teaching experiences with Black students, Nadd said, "Art is…traditionally kept from us." They raised an important issue that low-income Black communities are often excluded from art and artistic communities. Indeed, there is a lack of opportunity for exposing students in underinvested communities to the larger world outside of their environment (Wei & Broome, 2022). Unfortunately, Kaitlynn said, "this world doesn't want Black youth to have the same opportunity." Therefore, as Kaitlynn suggests, "we have to challenge them in ways that the world doesn't want them to be challenged." We can challenge them by expanding their access to the world and providing them with opportunities to explore new experiences through collaboration.

My participants proposed that collaboration opens up opportunities for students to gain access to cultural experiences outside of their own. Like KáLyn suggested, "it is important to do collaborative art making with [underinvested] groups because they may not have access to it outside of what you're doing with them." My reflection of her statement, along with my observation in public school art classrooms, confirmed that students in low-income neighborhoods often have limited access to the

world outside of their daily circumstances. Unfortunately, these students' school environments are also not providing them with the resources and opportunities they need to generate joy from their education while being successful. This sentiment was discussed by Austin, who shared her observations on the lack of art learning experiences at schools located in low-income neighborhoods. She talked about the lack of resources provided to the students by their schools, and the need for them to obtain more beneficial learning experiences. To remedy the undesirable situation, collaboration allows students to obtain experiences that truly support them. Amiri Richardson-Keys stated during our interview session, "It gives them an opportunity to really just say the things or showcase the talents that they do have, because a lot of them are talented… just they may not have the resources to express those talents or have the guidance." In Amiri's opinion, since their schools are not providing the students with support to cultivate their creative expression, the students may be unaware of the programs that exist around their community and/or have no means (i.e., transportation) to get there.

Austin stressed the importance of providing students with opportunity. She has been working with Richmond youth who do not have creative opportunities in their schools. As a result, she explained, they have not been able to tap into their creativity nor do they have the support of educators who are able to nurture it. Khalid addressed a similar comment that economically marginalized Black students lack access to programs or concepts that might really evolve their perspective. Expanding on this, Khalid discussed how the homogenized school systems and underinvested communities they are in limit their access to diversity. KáLyn discussed how the lack of exposure in Black communities can be combated through collectives like All City Art Club. She said, "Community engagement with art collectives allows students to be exposed to art forms that may not be taught in the school systems." Thus, through collaboration, underinvested Black students can gain access to experiences that are left out of their community spaces.

II. Authentic Community Engagement

The second emerged theme is authentic community engagement. This theme came about and is noted second on the list because it immediately follows an acknowledgement of cultural struggles. Once we are aware of the daily cultural, social, and emotional struggles of our students, we can more authentically engage with the communities in which they live, highlighting their unique cultural assets, tapping into and adding onto what is already there rather than imposing knowledge without consideration for the existing environment. Achieving authentic community engagement encompasses a combination of relationship building and connection with the community, as well as open collaboration and empathetic understanding.

Grabbing Hold of The Local Culture

Authentic community engagement physically pulls community members into the work and ensures that the content of the work is focused on issues those community members care about. Kaitlynn mentioned her experiences with community art festivals, "I had a chance to work with kids. A lot of the kids were from Church Hill, right from the neighborhood." She enjoyed feeling tied to her local culture while teaching dance at various community festivals. On a similar note, Nadd described how the All City Art Club utilizes art to grab hold of the local culture "in a way that one engages the community, but also centers the community."

In Austin's collaborative project, *Brown Girl Narrative,* she and Dr. Brown worked directly with Black women in the Richmond community, getting to know them and how they feel about being Black women. This is the essence of community engagement, working to connect with community members before adding anything to their community. Austin suggested, "Going out in the community and asking questions" as a way of learning about the local culture. Along with that, the idea of a community

Involvement Day, which Austin also discussed, where the community members can come and help create is something I believe should be embedded into our school cultures.

Often, in public art projects, the art is just thrown onto the walls, without the artists getting community input. As a result, the community does not resonate with the work, and can even feel disconnected from their own community. Nadd explained the lack of engagement as follows, "A lot of times you have artists even if they're within the community or neighborhood, they're tasked with telling the vision of the community or representing them, without asking them, you know, how do you know what's going on?" I believe this same context can be true for our school and classroom environments. When we develop curriculum without the input of our students, we cannot accurately respond to their experiences of the world and thus are not creating learning content that resonates with them. As a result, they can feel disconnected from their learning environments. By "bringing them into the action," as Nadd phrased it, we can better connect with our students and better connect our students to their learning. We must model this connection for our students within our own artistic practices as well. Jo expressed how the simple act of being able to connect with others is very powerful.

Relationship Building

Directly involving community members into community art projects helps build relationships. As Austin stated, "I started to get to know the people who were in the community, you know, by first name basis." Through community collaboration, people are able to connect in more personal ways. Austin discussed how connecting people in the community through painting murals allows for their stories to be shared throughout Richmond in a creative, expressive way for masses of people to see. By engaging in community collaboration, students can ultimately create artwork that will, as Austin worded it, "exist and live with them in their space, in their environment, in their neighborhood." Echoing Austin's points, I

believe that being able to engage and affect their community in such representative ways can produce a positive impact on morale and togetherness.

Artist collectives are a great outlet for producing positive community engagement. All City Art Club, for example, has impacted many of my research participants. Austin Miles, KáLyn Coghill and Nadd Harvin are all active members of the collective. Nadd talked about connecting with artists from social media in real life as a new reoccurring and enriching part of their collaborative art practice with All City Art Club. Through artist collectives like All City, artists can more easily come together to support one another and work together to share their art with others. As KáLyn stated, connecting people to their art and allowing everyone "an opportunity to be a part of the community of artists." The impact of this type of community connection and engagement in schools or learning spaces could be beneficial to students. "Community engagement with art collectives allows students to be exposed to art forms," KáLyn emphasized. I agree with them that by engaging with art collectives, we can expand our students' creative horizons, allowing them access to a variety of artists and artistic styles, and doing it in a tangible way by physically bringing in artists from the local community to collaborate with our students on creative community projects.

Through authentic community engagement, people are able to exchange stories of their life experiences. Austin's mural practice is based in sharing stories that tell of the daily cultural experiences of Black people. During Austin's experience with *The Brown Girl Narrative,* she was able to participate in the case study, hearing all the narratives of other Black women and contributing her own. This framing can be utilized for underinvested Black students, to help them see collaborative artmaking as a ground for sharing their lived experiences. Accurately depicting and reflecting on the stories people share showcases everyone's perspectives and helps us to better understand one another. Through authentic community engagement, we learn about each other. By working together with those in our community, we inherently get to know other people. Amiri discussed how Mending Walls allowed him to collaborate

with artists he did not know, from different backgrounds, and learn who they are. Amiri believes the beginning phases of collaboration have the greatest impact on a group of people because they are focused on developing relationships with co-collaborators and getting to know one another. He said this is especially important with our students, getting to know them first, I would argue, to better establish bonds of trust.

Jo also touched on similar points, stating that through collaboration "you also learn more about that person you're working with, where they came from." As we collaborate with our students and learn about them, we begin to develop relationships and gain their trust. As Nadd put it, "to collaborate and know that the other person gets you as much as possible. I think that's the most important part for these young people." Self-reflective projects, a curricular stagey Amiri uses in his teaching practice, can help teachers learn their students, thus facilitating a greater connection between teacher and students. The project he does, called "The Inner Me" helps students get in touch with who they are and introduces him to who they are by exploring their interests, identities, and experiences. Along with that, I believe it is just as important for teachers to introduce and share who they are with their students. By getting to know each other, teachers can more readily, as Khalid stated, "come to a common ground" with their students. As teachers come to understand their students, and vice versa, they can develop more impactful relationships.

Openness

Enforcing relationship development opens us and our students up to embracing alternate perspectives. During our interview, Austin stressed the idea of open-mindedness and how essential it is in collaboration.

> Whether it's the collaboration between someone of a dissimilar background, like with Mending Walls or if it's someone who you know very well, when you're collaborating, you're both kind of

working together to come up with ideas that are going to work for both of your visions and that's going to be something that both of you care about deeply."

Open-mindedness creates space for everyone's ideas to be equally heard and acknowledged. This is especially important when working with youth, because, as Austin stated, "their ideas are limitless." We cannot let the close-minded tendencies of our society and education system (hooks, 2003) restrict the possibilities of what our students can accomplish, nor the ways in which they achieve that success. However, this is no easy task. Open-mindedness requires a willingness to expand upon personal thoughts and ideas, it requires flexibility. Austin recalled a collaborative experience in which her collaborator was not very flexible and how they had to talk through their collaboration challenges as a team. This sentiment explains the importance of communication to work through issues and better understand the perspectives of others.

Beyond openness and flexibility fostering understanding, these qualities also make for a more successful and engaging collaborative experience. Jo explained how rigidity makes collaboration miserable, stating, "If you go into any collaboration with like, this is what we're going to do and that's it, you're going to reach a stalemate." When rigidity is gone however, students can let their guard down, and expand their ability to engage with others. Regarding his non-regimented approach to teaching, Khalid stated, "you can tell they're flowing and getting it out. So, when I do collaborative workshops like that and projects like that with the students, they all tend to come together." Encouraging spontaneity welcomes everyone. Along with producing more welcoming environments, an open-minded forum of collaboration can ignite students' desire to learn something new. Austin harped on students being able to learn new skills and how she uses intentional creative outlets in her collaboration with youth to foster this learning. As educators, in my opinion, we must learn new things alongside our students. Regarding this, Jo stated about her Girls for a Change collaboration, "I had to practice and learn how to do things

that we were exposing them to." For individuals involved in any collaborative process, open mindedness and understanding are essential because, as Nadd said, "you're working with someone who is not you."

Trying new things and working with others can be uncomfortable, but creating collaborative outlets for students can help them work through their discomfort. This, in turn, fosters growth throughout the process. KáLyn's collaborative poetry workshopping, for example, enables participants to get comfortable with critique, thus improving their writing skills and creative potential. During her workshops, people shared their work with one another and gave feedback. Developing an ongoing feedback or critique climate like this in the classroom could help students get used to constructive feedback without feeling judged, criticized, or, as Kaitlynn stated, "ragged on."

Kaitlynn talked about developing creative learning spaces that students can feel comfortable expressing themselves in, without feeling like their efforts are not good enough. Students should feel comfortable making mistakes. Austin also touched on this, as collaboration helps students learn how to make mistakes and to be able to fix them and change them. In collaboration, meshing different perspectives can be hard. Collaborative experiences are some of the most difficult situations, especially in a creative environment where everyone wants to be able to freely express themselves, but challenge is good. As Kaitlynn said, "when we challenge youth, they rise to the challenge." To work through challenges, it is important to have the courage to speak up. Austin explained, during her challenging collaborative experience, "me and my collaborator had to sit down and have an honest conversation, and I had to be very brave." The more practice a person has with collaborating, the more comfortable they will get with courageously speaking their mind. Collaboration also requires having the courage to experiment. Jo stated, "I feel like with collaboration you often are challenged to do something that is outside of your comfort zone. So, there's a bit of courageousness to exploring the unknowns in any collaboration." To sum up their ideas, collaboration often entails putting yourself out there to explore

new ideas or learn different skills. It is important to understand that the process may not go as planned, and that it is okay.

Empathetic Conversation

As a society and within our education system there is lack of understanding and empathy. Khalid explained this lack of empathy well when he said, “when you’re removed from a circumstance, you don't realize what people are going through. You know, you just judge them from the perspective of, well, I'm not going through that, so why are you going through that?” Khalid discussed how the narratives in our society seemed to make us incapable of thinking more deeply about another person's circumstance. When teachers do not get to know their students or when artists do not get to know their communities, they may make assumptions about what those students or communities need. On the bright side, collaboration, I believe, can be utilized to improve humanity’s empathetic skillset. Collaboration can induce understanding, which can help us as teachers better respond to our students. In his teaching practice, Khalid builds trust and comfort with his students by meeting them where they are. He regularly conducts *Paint the Moment* workshops both within the community and in schools that embrace this trust building through abstract expressive painting activities. Regarding a high school *Paint the Moment* workshop, he said:

> I was able to reach students that normally are too cool to interact with teachers. You know, I was able to because I met them where they’re at, I’ve been there, you know, we’ve all been there as adults and, you know, and I want to let them know that I’m not forgetting them.

Empathetic communication and conversation are key to developing a solid understanding of others. Austin also really stressed the point of collaboration starting with a conversation. I believe, by conversing with our students, we can reassure them and grow closer to them. Building empathy starts with a conversation. In collaborative making, there are a lot of opinions, perspectives, and experiences

that have to be considered and navigated in a shared creative space. Therefore, the importance of collective effort must be understood to build empathy. Regarding the importance of collective effort for students, Kaitlynn explained, “it teaches them social and emotional skills that you just can't learn on an individualistic basis. You have to be in group settings to understand things that are bigger than you, and to learn compassion, you know, to learn patience.”

Jo discussed the importance of talking and conversation to understand social and cultural struggles that people face. Collaboration has the ability to open up conversations. As a by-product, people can more readily make friends through authentic dialogues. Jo expressed, “I met so many people and even made friends because of [Mending Walls], because of conversations I would have never had prior.” Jo mentioned that projects like Mending Walls help people listen, learn, and understand, largely through conversation. Empathetic conversation resulting from collaboration with students creates space for youth to be heard and seen. Amiri believes, “it is [his] job in collaborative effort with Black youth to give them a voice and inspire them to express their voice and concerns so that they can feel like they're being heard and seen.” Amiri also noted that this is especially important for underinvested youth in low-income communities where they may feel neglected, ignored, or denied the necessary resources to succeed. Their words reminded me of Kaitlynn’s talk about the importance of assuring students that they belong in creative spaces. As art educators, we want students to be able to take ownership of their experiences and foster understanding among others by sharing their experiences.

Being able to work with people who understand you is greatly beneficial to any collaboration. Nadd said it is important that they are “collaborating with people who understand or get it in some sense.” Collaborative artmaking helped Nadd realize that there are other people who understand and relate to their experiences. Working with All City Art Club has allowed Nadd the opportunity to work with people who understand their story. To paraphrase another statement Nadd made regarding this, collaborating with people we are instantly comfortable with is refreshing. Nadd stated, “when

everyone's the most comfortable I feel like that's the best work. And synergy happens when everyone's just comfortable around each other… It's hard to make art when you're uptight." By creating opportunities for discovering and embracing shared cultural experiences, we can foster environments of comfort for our students. I believe, as humans, we become more comfortable expressing ourselves freely when we know the people around us. Nadd said, "The biggest thing I think I want to push is to find your community, because my art practice has been so enriched lately from just reaching out to these people and just getting together." Consistent collaboration and community building makes it easier to relate, connect, and help others. By developing spaces for empathetic conversation, we can find and maintain community with our students.

III. Cultivate Positive Pathways

The third theme, following authentic community engagement, is the cultivation of positive pathways. Once teachers establish the means to add to the existing cultures of these communities, they can enforce positive redirection. This theme came about from the participants' reoccurring comments on the effects of community engagement. By authentically engaging with students, teachers can more readily create opportunities for "exposing students to their wildest dreams," as Kaitlynn worded it. By providing students with the resources and opportunities necessary to discover and explore their interests, we can facilitate in expanding the possibilities for their own futures. Students can take pride in and value who they are through authentic creative expression.

As teachers engage and connect with their students and their communities, it is important to encourage them to, in Khalid's words, "cultivate positive ways [for them] to express themselves creatively." As Khalid discussed, when people are surrounded by poverty and violence, it is easy to get discouraged and pursue *the path most traveled*, to go down the dangerous, potentially violent tracks that so many others in the same circumstances have gone down because they felt like there were no

other options. Internalizing trauma can limit the direction a person takes in their life. As teachers and creatives, we can help students utilize collaborative artmaking to redirect their energy and efforts in a positive direction. Khalid talked about the struggle of resisting negative mindsets among those living in underinvested communities and posed the questions:

> How do you want to struggle? Like, what is your struggle for and what's the end goal? Is it prison or death? Is it drugs? Is it sexual abuse? What is it? Or is it positive upliftment for yourself? Is it healing modalities for yourself and being an example for your community?

From Khalid's perspective, he believes it can be beneficial to teach underinvested Black youth how to redirect or channel their struggle and trauma towards healing. One way that we do this is by providing outlets for them to express themselves in alternative creative ways and supporting them through that process. Moreover, Kaitlynn discussed the struggle Black youth can have with building up their resilience due to feelings of worthlessness that society has imposed. Therefore, as Kaitlynn stated, "we have to build them up and we have to teach them how to build each other up, [and] build themselves up." Community impact through collaborative making can hopefully help reassure underinvested Black students of their worth, as they realize the power they have to affect change.

Art 180 is a prime example of an artistic learning environment that truly supports their students' creative endeavors. Jo commented on this, explaining an instance when Art 180 helped one of their teenage students who wanted to start a community garden. Art 180 aided the student in putting together a community event with live performances that informed the community about the significance of community garden spaces. Taking actionable steps like this, to support the students, can give them the push they need to continually strive for self and communal improvement. Speaking on his own teaching practice, Khalid said, "my creative approaches will hopefully be an aid to them as they figure out who they are in the world." With the proper support, students can thrive and are better equipped to navigate within society and the world at large.

From what I have learned from my research participants, a collaborative art-making process encourages conversation and helps engage community members in learning about each other. Collaboration promotes group awareness and self-reassurance among students. Nadd said, “It's just that comfort that there are other people who just, they're just existing, kind of the same way that I do.” This comfort in finding commonality with others through collaboration can help boost self-confidence. As Khalid stated, “it’s about feeling comfortable with yourself in the moment.” Amiri expanded on this in his discussion of how allowing students to represent their feelings through collaborative making can help them recognize who they are. By encouraging students to authentically share their lived experiences, in Austin’s words, “nurturing their creativity.” Through nurturing students’ creativity, teachers can help build up their self-worth, creating a space, as Kaitlynn put it, “where we can create and get better without feeling like what we've put forth is not good enough.” We can teach students to appreciate others and themselves. Kaitlynn discussed how collaboration can help develop students’ emotional intelligence. Through collaboration, students can, as Kaitlynn discussed, learn to be more empathetic, to have patience with their peers, and to appreciate people for who they are. This can in turn help them be encouraging and supportive of other people’s ideas, as well as their own, a point Khalid emphasized. Building each other up is especially important in communities that are constantly talked down upon or *ragged on*. As Nadd said, “that's important to see in underserved communities because oftentimes that rhetoric is lost.”

Creative Spaces for Positive Change

Providing opportunities for creating supportive spaces results in positive community interactions. Mending Walls is a prime example of this. From Jo's perspective, participating in the Mending Walls project was “a unique opportunity to be able to create something impactful for the community.” Jo discussed the need to feel as though she is affecting change in her community, and thus

taking actionable steps towards improvement—which Mending Walls helped her do. Through collaborative creative expression, people can come together to make a difference in their communities. Similarly, it is important for students to do the same.

As Austin stated, “I love having young people come in and paint some of the murals that I'm working on because, one, it's not for me, it's for them. It's for the people who are going to be seeing it every day.” Through collaboration, students learn about how their actions impact one another and the communities in which they live. Having students partake in community mural projects not only fosters a sense of togetherness but also taps into and builds onto their resilience. Creative spaces can be a great outlet for exposing students to new and different perspectives. By offering space for students to create, we are developing pathways for them to interact with others, while freely expressing who they are. Community art centers are another exemplary model for providing such space. Amiri discussed his work with Art 180 in “helping underprivileged youths that are excited and want to create and giving them a space to do that.” He and his wife founded a community center called the A.R.T.S Community Center (theartsrva.com), which offers art classes and space for people of all ages to come in and experience the arts. He described community spaces for youth as being similar to recreation centers and gyms, places for children and teens to direct their energy and talents in positive and productive ways.

Jo mentioned that such redirections were utilized in Richmond to celebrate the diverse array of Black creative excellence, such as “Black is ___ 365,” the collaborative exhibitions that Art 180 and workshops organized by the Girls for a Change. In addition, KáLyn has done similar works to develop *Sister Circles* in collaboration with a local high school counseling department. To reinterpret KáLyn’s definition of *Sister Circles*, they are similar to group therapy spaces, and they give students the opportunities to share, discuss, and vent, often through collaborative making activities, such as making coping bags to use when they are stressed (fidgets, calming scents, etc.). KáLyn said, “Our goal is to train other school counselors and people in the community to be able to start *Sister Circles* at high

schools and middle schools in the city." Furthermore, KáLyn touched on the importance of having writing workshops where students can develop their creative writing skills and share their creative expression with peers. Similarly, Kaitlynn utilizes dance as a group language to generate connection and understanding among her students. Through a dance warm-up she calls the *Soul Train Circle*, she engages in a call-and-response activity with her students where the class forms a circle and one by one everyone has to copy what the leader does. As another non-traditional classroom strategy to consider, Nadd incorporates art jam sessions as part of their creative practice, which involves meeting up with fellow artists to make art together. Within their teaching practice, Nadd incorporates a collaborative pass the sketchbook exercise. They explained the activity as follows, "I use the same sketchbooks for each student or for each class, so just find an empty page and each day you get a different sketchbook." Collaborative spaces for creative expression that center the sharing and exchange of ideas, as the few mentioned above, can positively impact students. As Austin stated, "giving them a space, a creative, collaborative project where they can make a difference as well as create something beautiful and expressive and indicative of who they are."

Community Upliftment

As students come to realize their own abilities to affect positive change, they can imagine brighter futures. Doing collaborative projects together can induce creative community upliftment. Collaborative community projects like Mending Walls can, in Khalid's words, "raise the level of positive awareness in the community by doing something that is creatively constructive." In Khalid's opinion, people who have been victimized within underinvested communities may gradually develop negative mindsets that can serve as an obstacle to positive awareness and community upliftment. As Khalid stated, people "might not always have the most encouraging reinforcement" because of the constant

marginalization they have experienced, and society has pushed on them. Kaitlynn also touched on this point, commenting on the ways students can "*rag on*" each other and themselves.

Unhealthy school environments are often a culprit of marginalization and are not uplifting the students, thus furthering their negative self-images. Several interviewees touched on this, including Kaitlynn who stated, "They're in a school system, sometimes that also rags on them. So, it's like we're fighting this monstrosity of the system." U.S. society, and the education system it has developed, have promoted deficit-based narratives about Black people and about low-income communities. These narratives often center violence and crime, implicitly indicating that such environments have no intrinsic positive value (Ginwright, 2016). Such narratives can negatively impact self-image. Khalid commented on this stating, "so many perspectives and narratives we're given in society from the media tend to affect the way that we as a community we see ourselves." We can combat societal influence by expanding the narratives society has promoted and through collaboration, we can expand narratives beyond what society tells us. As Khalid explained, "collaboration can help to take that scope and expand it beyond the narratives we get in the media." By adding and incorporating different perspectives through collaboration, students can positively enhance the ways they see themselves and one another, and their struggles of trauma and violence.

Adding to the discussion above, Khalid said, "they can use creativity and art to help abate some of those struggles and…find empowerment." Perhaps elaborating on this, creative expression can also help students tap into their struggles and initiate healing (Kraehe & Acuff, 2021). Collaboration can empower youth to imagine new possibilities for themselves. While this is not the case for all students living in low-income communities, as no one group can be put into a monolith, one perspective Jo shared is that of "low-income Black students [who] oftentimes see one way of life, and it is hard to imagine thriving outside of working a 9-5, probably not exceeding a large income." Jo stated that collaboration expands students' worldview by saying, "Collaboration opens up the ability to imagine

more because if you can't even imagine more than you can't be more, you cannot become something you cannot believe in." By collaborating with students on creative projects as Black artists and teachers, all my interviewees are helping their students imagine beyond their circumstances. Serving as a role model or creating opportunities for meeting people who look like them and can relate to their experiences is essential for students to feel uplifted. This level of engagement allows teachers to make what seems impossible possible. Going back to Jo's point in Theme One about the lack of exposure, underinvested Black youth often were not given adequate opportunity to witness a variety of positive figures and outcomes in their communities. For them, the manifestation of a positive outcome, as Jo stated, "only happens in imagination." Therefore, by bringing in community resources, collaboration can produce cultural upliftment and expose students to the work and accomplishments of other Black people. Jo said that exposure can provide "empowerment and again, opening up the possibilities, the imagination of what you can be, to let you know that nothing can stop you." Positive reinforcement helps students continually strive for greatness and realize their imaginations through asset-based community engagement.

Khalid talked about the importance of having students give back to their communities in positive ways and how art can be utilized to facilitate that. Art can serve as inspiration to evolve past negative circumstances. By focusing on ways students can bring positive changes to their communities, asset-based community engagement inspires them to imagine brighter futures. This strategy allows underinvested communities to value their cultural assets and push those visions into everyone inside and outside of their communities. Pulling from Khalid's comments, I gathered that both self-advancement and community advancement are essential components to underinvested Black youth imagining more for themselves and making that a reality. As Khalid stated, "the positivity that [teaching artists] add to [the] community through collaborative, creative creativity is important for [community] morale."

Asset-based community engagement is a collaborative effort that allows students to take hold of their environment, providing them with a sense of ownership in facilitating positive experiences in their community and enabling them to see their value. To combat negative mindsets, teachers can help underinvested youth in building their morale, helping them see their worth, and motivating them to push forward. As Khalid put it, collaboration "[lays] the groundwork for more positive perspectives that can help infect your community." Several of my research participants touched on the significance of community garden spaces, and I think that community gardens can serve as a metaphor for this infection of positivity. Community engaged collaboration is like tending to a garden. With the proper care, nutrients can grow and flourish. Having students infuse art into their community spaces can, as Amiri put it, bring color to the "desolate dull and desaturated." He mentioned that creating community gardens can be an artistic outlet for beautifying underinvested neighborhoods. This is not to say, that underinvested communities are void of color and beauty, they just are not properly cared for. Like Khalid stated, "Workshops or the mural projects or the music projects or dance or gardening projects, whatever they bring to these marginalized communities, they're just adding on to what's already there." He exclaimed that the "human potential to create" is deeply rooted in these communities and just needs to be cared for properly. This sentiment can best be explained through the following analogy Khalid made:

> If you're planting vegetables, if you have a soil that is rich in a lot of different nutrients, it's going to just grow, the vegetables and things will grow. Sure. If you have a few in there, they'll grow based on that. But the more anything is exposed, the more exposure something gets, the greater its ability to receive and create"

Pride

Creating environments where students can be heard and seen and feel proud of themselves, as Amiri put it, restores the pride within the community. Restoring community pride is crucial for underinvested communities that lack it, as society so often seems to diminish the achievements of socially marginalized groups, such as those in low-income communities (Carter, 2003). The inward views of people within underinvested communities can vary greatly, from those who may believe in separating themselves from their community to achieve success and feel that the two can't co-exist, to those who may have a self-deprecating mindset, to those full of pride. A restoration of pride, or more appropriately, a reinforcement of pride, can mean building onto the esteem and hopefulness that many already have and spreading it to others. The authentic community representation, as outlined above under Theme II, that comes about through collaborative making can validate the self-worth of the students in these communities and, as Amiri stated, "give them a sense of pride and ownership" over positive community contributions that will hopefully carry them into the future.

As Austin stated, through collaborative community artmaking, students can, "feel proud of something that they've accomplished." For example, during a high school mural project, Austin encouraged her students to paint what they cared about. This direction resulted in the students showing, in Austin's words, "a ton of school spirit, [and] a ton of school pride" as they painted their favorite teachers' names and other things that they loved about their school. Through this mural project, the students were able to take ownership over their school community. Also, through collaborative artmaking students can freely express parts of themselves and share that expression with others. To expand on points Austin made, by doing the work within their communities, art educators are creating opportunities for students to take pride in where they live. Which in turn will motivate them to strive for greatness in all areas of their life now and as they continue to mature and experience the world. By having students tap into the things that they love about their community and amplifying those

through creative forums, Austin's work as a community teaching artist, and others like her, can promote enthusiasm and pride among students.

In addition, collaborative projects that center personal experience can induce a sense of community ownership because people working on the project have a stake in what is being created. Recalling her favorite collaborative experience, Kaitlynn said, “My favorite experience to date probably had to be the Second Street Festival because it was right in my hometown, in Jackson Ward.” The attachment to one’s own culture and community is one of the most impactful factors of collaborative community engagement and can cultivate pride in collective efforts. When detailing the Second Street Festival experience, Kaitlynn talked about the effort of her collaborators, stating, “we showed out, it was really fun and I was really proud of everyone. I just remember going home and being like we did it.” The internalized feeling of accomplishment is one aspect of the pride that collaboration can induce for students.

Last but not least, having tangible takeaways can also help promote a sense of pride that students can refer back to. So that, as KáLyn put it, “when they're feeling like, I don't feel very good about myself today, they can go back in that [project] and remember, oh, I wrote this poem, I wrote this story, or I did this piece of art.” The physical manifestation of collaborative artmaking is just as important as the process. As KáLyn stated, “it's important to display the artwork of students throughout the school because that gives them a sense of pride of their work and also a pride of their environment.”

Summary of Findings

In summary, the seven participants talked about the benefits of collaborative artmaking on underinvested Black youth in Richmond that not only validated the need for collaborative artmaking, but also exemplified present-day occurrences of collaboration in Richmond. Through analyzing the

interview transcripts, I was able to pinpoint three major themes that progressively outline the necessary components of beneficial collaboration.

Theme one, Cultural Struggles, was uncovered due to every participant's mention of the experiences of Black people in America and how the obstacles they face affect Black students. The participants, in their explanations of the significance of collaborative artmaking for underinvested Black students, discussed a variety of systemic issues that affect the experiences and perspectives of Black students and validates the ideas of Critical Race Theory and educational inequity.

Theme two, Authentic Community Engagement, dives more deeply into developing relationships as a means to combat cultural struggles, and ensure openness and empathetic understanding. The interview research supports that a large part of effective collaboration is the development of opportunities that foster understanding and empathy. Empathy is also something that came up often with the participants.

The final theme, Cultivation Positive Pathways, is the end result and future hope of collaboration. The participants emphasized the impact of collaboration on community creating safe space that empowers Black children and underinvested communities. As teachers, we must utilize collaborative learning and teaching strategies that provide positive reinforcement to help students continually strive for greatness and make their imaginations reality. In the next chapter, I will discuss the implications of my research findings and how the discoveries explained above can be communicated to educators across the Richmond community.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Implications

Review of Study

In this research project, I explored the benefits of collaborative artmaking for underinvested Black youth in Richmond. Through a series of seven one-on-one interviews with Black teaching artists in the Richmond community, I was able to uncover how collaboration has and can continue to improve the well-being and livelihoods of Black students in Richmond. Also, by tapping into the local Mending Walls mural project, I was able to make a tangible connection between the Richmond community, art, and collaboration. In response to the findings of my research, detailed in the previous chapter, this final chapter will summarize the research, discuss limitations and potential future research endeavors, explicitly answer the research questions of this study, and thoroughly outline the community impact of the curricular guidebook that resulted from this research.

The seven interviews, or "recorded dialogic conversations" of this research took about two months to conduct. It took about another month to transcribe all the interviews verbatim and then a few weeks to code them and decipher patterns. From those patterns, I developed themes which I believe encompass the answers to my research questions. My approach to analyzing the data (i.e. the interview transcripts) strived to capture the heart of the participants' thoughts and ideas—picking out keywords and phrases, anything they repeated or emphasized, as well as statements that resonated with me in terms of connection to my research questions, and my personal desires within art education. The themes naturally emerged based on the similarities and overlaps between the seven interviews. Once I deciphered the themes, I looked back at my research questions to see where each theme fell into answering those and it became very clear that there was a flow and order to the themes which I have summarized as Acknowledgment, Engagement, and Upliftment.

The participants encompassed a variety of artistic fields and styles. Benefiting from our rich conversations, I was able to take all the interviews and combine the concepts discussed into collective ideas and approaches that are more practically outlined in the resultant guidebook, which I will explain in the later sections. Due to the predominantly Black school populations of RPS (Public School Review, 2021), the guidebook has direct implications. RPS students are not getting the education that they deserve (Stoney, 2022). Their experiences, perspectives, and needs demand more attention. There is so much potential to unpack the conditions and experiences of our students within their education. Specifically, within art education, there is so much freedom in creative expression, as Khalid discussed often in our interview conversation, but it often does not feel like that is the case. The rigid structure of the education system limits the extent to which student learning content acknowledges the circumstances students face in their lives. On the flip side, there is also a rich artistic creative community in Richmond, but it is not an active part of the education system. The community in which students live is not actively addressed in their learning environment and I believe that should be a fundamental piece to curriculum development. Representation and having tangible examples that students can latch onto is so important, which immediately makes me think of the Mending Walls project as an essential piece of Richmond art education curriculum. Students can physically see these murals in their communities, they can interact with these artists and with the concepts that they address and understand them because they are about relatable human issues—race, acceptance, belonging, understanding, etc.

I want to create ways for teachers to begin to understand the needs of the underinvested Black youth they serve and become inspired by the research that I have uncovered regarding the benefits of collaborative artmaking and potential ways of utilizing it in the classroom, not to replicate it but to be inspired by it. I anticipate the practical interpretation of this research and the guidebook being utilized as an entry point for teachers to explore collaborative making, to explore the Mending Walls project,

and to have reference points for community engagement. Beyond teachers, schools and school boards could implement contemporary local art projects into their art education curriculum.

Answers to the Questions

Throughout this writing, I intentionally use the first-person possessive terms *we*, *us*, and *our*, to emphasize community and collectivity. Referring to possession and belonging, the issues discussed in this research belong to the Richmond community, they belong to human society. The possessive word use is directed at anyone reading this research, particularly people within the Richmond community, to make the claim or emphasize the point that everyone has a responsibility to affect change in the community—which I believe starts in the education system. It is, in my opinion, all of humankind's responsibility to positively impact student learning. As educators, artists, and other Richmond community members read this thesis, I want to foster care and a sense of ownership over the content discussed. The problems belong to all of us as a community, and the solutions live within all of us as well. I want all readers of this thesis to feel a sense of responsibility in affecting change within education, to feel like they are essential contributors to this conversation, like they have a stake in the topics discussed, and like they are a part of this content. The use of first-person possessive helps mitigate the chance of readers feeling like outsiders unaffected by or disjointed from the impact of collaborative artmaking on Richmond youth. In the following sections, I will answer the three research questions:

1. What opportunities are there for educators to utilize collaborative artmaking to heal, reform, and transform student learning?
2. How can educators utilize collaborative art making help Black students be culturally rooted and academically successful?

3. How can educators utilize collaborative artmaking to evoke cultural understanding among an entire school/learning environment?

Culturally Rooted and Academically Successful

Based on what I have learned from my participants and uncovered through this research, I have determined that collaborative artmaking can help Black students be culturally rooted and academically successful by acknowledging their cultural experiences within learning content and embracing their cultural assets in learning outcomes. As shown in many examples done by my participants, an acknowledgment of students' cultural experiences provides validation for who they are and what they have experienced. The findings suggest that, in effective collaboration, teachers should utilize pedagogical strategies to take students' daily lived experiences into account. In keeping with Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings,1995), beneficial collaborative learning strategies for underinvested Black youth in Richmond should address and respond to real-life issues students care about, relate to issues in their community, and bring in people and resources from within their community. Collaboration brings the perspectives of everyone together. It forces us to listen and respond to one another in order to achieve shared goals.

Rather than telling students how to be and what to do, collaborative art making helps Black students be culturally rooted and academically successful. As educators, we can allow space for students' agency over the learning content. We can do this most effectively by listening to what they like and what they need and incorporating or integrating those attributes into their learning content. We can also be flexible in the learning content, respond to what they need at any given moment, and create the space to make changes. Collaboration allows students and teachers to share creative space with one another and become more willing to embrace the unique perspectives and experiences that each individual brings (Lawton et al., 2019). As exemplified in Khalid Thompson's *Paint the Moment*

workshop, students gain comfortability when they are accepted, acknowledged, and considered in their current state, no matter how much, how little, or in which ways they are able to contribute. It is important to let students reflect on or respond to their life experiences in the classroom. By meeting students where they are, teachers can more readily gain their trust (Lawton, 2019). As they get comfortable, students can open up and unlock parts of themselves, and freely express those parts. In Khalid's *Paint the Moment* workshop, students were able to openly express themselves, which made them more receptive. Vulnerability and personal connection are not apparent focal points in the conventional structure of our education system (Ginwright, 2015), but by centering learning around these components, we can create more open environments where students are motivated to learn.

The learning outcomes of collaboration for underinvested Black students exude resilience, hope, and healing. Collaborative projects reassure students of the value of their perspectives and contributions, which are often disregarded by society (Ginwright, 2015). The high school mural projects Austin Miles has done are a prime example. With such validation, students can come to believe in the positive impact their contributions can have on others and on their community. The creative output resulting from reflecting on their lived experiences exemplifies the impact of culturally responsive learning (Hanley et al., 2013). Effective collaboration can provide students with opportunities to showcase who they are and what they think and value. It enables them to share what they have created and see real-life outcomes to their learning that positively impact others. Identity should always be a central piece of collaborative learning, as the blending of identities can bring us into deeper community with our students. Beyond the classroom, it is important to bring youth into community projects in ways that allow them to represent themselves. Self-representation within community projects can foster reciprocity between students and the Richmond community. Through projects like Mending Walls, students can add value to their community while feeling validated by contributing parts of themselves. Confidence in who they are will drive their motivation to learn, to feel worthy of new knowledge, while

understanding the value of their own knowledge and experiences. When students are grounded in who they are, they may be more willing to embrace new perspectives. Collaboration embraces difference. By embracing the unique qualities and ideas of students, we can help them value their personal differences. Developing an educational environment that encourages difference can serve in direct opposition to the normative structure of education, which promotes and reinforces homogeny (Spring, 2018). This, in turn, allows students to appreciate their unique attributes while freely embracing the perspectives of others, which will help foster a more receptive, mutually beneficial learning environment.

Cultural Understanding within School Environments

Through this research project, I also determined that collaborative artmaking can evoke cultural understanding among an entire school or learning environment by developing a climate that fosters reciprocity and recentering learning outcomes around collective effort. Collaboration allows people to embrace everyone's unique contributions, while an environment of reciprocity can develop a place where everyone is learning from each other on an equal playing field. Teachers should be encouraged to learn with their students and from their students. Referring back to Khalid's Paint the Moment workshop, the classroom teachers worked alongside their students to create abstract expressive paintings. Thus, improving teacher engagement within the learning environment. Expanding on direct teacher engagement, learning should continue between students, among teachers, across classrooms, throughout the school environment, and outside in the surrounding community. The ways in which collaboration allows for this kind of reciprocal teaching-learning environment go against the normalized structure of education that claims teachers as the all-knowing authority figures and students solely as receivers of knowledge (Acuff et al., 2021; Fenner, 2020).

My research participants witnessed that collaboration can dismantle traditional hierarchical structures in schools and transform students' educational experiences for the better. I think the kind of engagement Khalid was able to produce in his *Paint the Moment* workshops, where the teachers were also actively collaborating in the activities, should be a regular part of all education environments, in all school curriculums. Having teachers actively engage in projects as co-learners with their students fosters relationship building. By having a more horizontal hierarchy, we can break down the walls of distrust that Black underinvested students often have towards their school environments (Ginwright, 2015; hooks, 2003). By mixing up the power dynamics, a flow of mutual learning and teaching is cultivated, and as we learn from one another, we begin to develop bonds of trust (Lawton et al., 2019). This mixing of power dynamics also enables students to be co-teachers. Allowing students the space to be givers of knowledge alongside their teachers and peers provides them with a sense of agency and ownership over their learning, which in turn makes them more receptive to learn. An exchange of ideas between teachers and students initiates a greater willingness among everyone to learn from and understand others. Collaborative artmaking can open school environments up to new discoveries and alternate perspectives (Foster, 2016) that foster greater understanding and empathy among the school community members.

As we are all learning from one another through collaboration, we must find a way to combine what we have learned, utilizing our unique assets together. Just like the Mending Walls project, upon combining everyone's efforts, it becomes evident that the project or outcome cannot belong to any one particular person; ownership is shared. Collaborative artmaking projects create opportunities for sharing and integrating ideas. When sharing a creative space, it is important that everyone feels represented. Through collaboration, people learn to set aside their egos, as Nadd Harvin discussed during our interview, and actively incorporate and appreciate the contributions of others.

Developing a collaborative climate of cultural understanding in schools requires an unlearning of the individualistic, competitive mentality of capitalist American society that the U.S. public education system is founded on (hooks, 2003; Spring, 2018). Within education, we must learn to think beyond individual growth and achievement. We need to instill in our students an understanding of collectivity and authentic community. Students must come to understand the impact they can have on their school and community as individuals, and the impact their community can have on them. Beyond the value of individual people and their productivity in society (Spring, 2018), understanding and appreciating the communal, human value of people can be beneficial to the future of humanity (Ginwright, 2015; Kraehe et al., 2021). While we each matter as individuals, we also matter as a collective.

Through the shared efforts of collaboration, school communities can expand the scope of what students believe is possible for their future. Hopefully these educational changes can help create a more anti-racist, joy-inducing, caring-instilling society where all people can be their authentic selves and aspire to greatness. Ultimately, collaboration breeds a kind of collective energy that brings people together in solidarity, as a community. When we bring this energy to the classroom, students can consciously and unconsciously begin building community with one another—just as Nadd Harvin has done through their Pass the Sketchbook activity with students. Through community building, students can take pride in not only their own efforts but also in the work of others. We must develop a climate of care for our students that encourages the advancement and achievement of everyone. In doing so, we can remove the disdain that many people have towards education (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Ginwright, 2015; hooks, 2000, 2003) and help push healed humans out into the world who are able to follow their dreams, live up to their potential, and pass on the care they have received to others.

Heal, Reform, and Transform Student Learning

Lastly, this research helped me understand that the opportunities for collaborative artmaking to heal, reform, and transform student learning lay in the centering of student experiences and the removal of rigidity, in an effort to have a greater impact with meaningful repercussions. Collaborative artmaking creates outlets for expressing vulnerability and sharing in various lived experiences. Though not specifically related to art education, KáLyn Coghill's *Sister Circles* provide a basis for providing students with a collaborative space to share and reflect. Often, in schools, we tell students that there is a set standard of what is supposed to be learned or what is worth knowing, and in doing that, we exclude so many banks of knowledge and ways of knowing that are not dominant White, Anglo ways (Spring, 2018). Thus, leaving marginalized learners, such as Black underinvested students in Richmond, with a lack of representation within their learning—making it harder for them to imagine what is possible for themselves because the learning content may not be relevant to them. We can talk all day about creating more "culturally competent," "trauma informed," and "beloved community" learning environments as promoted by RPS (Richmond Public School, 2022), but if we are not changing the foundation of what is being taught, no real improvement is being made.

The foundation of U.S. education does not represent the populations of many students it serves (Spring, 2018; Walter, 2001). By adding more inclusive language use to an already ineffective system, we are not truly creating learning environments that will benefit our students. Recent changes within RPS include the use of poignant terms and the Dreams4RPS strategic plan (Richmond Public Schools, 2022), which is admirable. However, these changes are not acknowledging that the foundation is faulty. They talk about relevant learning in a broader sense, but the restructuring of learning content and teaching strategies around students' lived experiences remains unclear. I understand that curriculum needs to be broad enough that different teachers can put their own twist on it, but I think there needs to be more specific naming and calling out of what students are experiencing and community resources that can be

utilized to address those experiences. For example, developing learning content that centers healing modalities for the violence, poverty, and trauma happening in their communities and bringing organizations like Art 180 into classroom spaces to help students creatively reflect on their experiences. In my opinion, the changes need to be deeper than they currently are, and collaborative artmaking can assist with that because it enables students and teachers to explore alternative ideas and perspectives. We must expand our own and our students' understanding of what knowledge is worth knowing, beyond what is traditionally taught in schools (Acuff, 2013).

Through the centering of collaboration, educational approaches can let go of society's rigid standards, combating individualistic tendencies. Teaching students *the exercise of letting go*, as Khalid discussed, will give them the freedom to express themselves. The rigidity of the education system has caused harm to BIPOC and other marginalized student populations that the education system was not designed for (Kraehe et al., 2021; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Rigidity has devalued student learning because it limits what is possible in a learning environment, therefore closing off what students can envision for themselves, their education, and their future. It has caused harm to Black and Brown students by not acknowledging or centering their experiences and by forcing all cultures outside of the dominant White Anglo norm to assimilate into a monoculture in order to excel or succeed in school. Therefore, removing the implicit monoculture and allowing space for other narratives and bodies of knowledge to be valued within education can create opportunities for underinvested Black students to see themselves represented within their education and therefore imagine possibilities for their futures. Collaboration inherently centers students' stories and experiences. Collaboration also inherently requires an emerging and flexible structure because it is defined by the shared efforts of a group of people, which means a lot of perspectives and ideas are at play and evolution throughout the process is likely inevitable. Collaborative artmaking can enable students to use their imagination in ways that the

traditional education system has not allowed them to do. It expands their knowledge base and what they are able to accomplish because it is a group effort.

In American society, value is often put on what people are able to accomplish on their own. When situations are portrayed as though someone has done something by themselves, that is applauded. There is a "no handouts," "pick yourself up by your bootstraps" mentality that we have as a society and therefore communal efforts are often looked down upon (hooks, 2000; Kraehe et al., 2021). This mindset remains true within our education system, but collaborative artmaking can help us to reframe that and imagine anew together. I believe the reframing collaboration ignites can improve student learning because there are more points of access to knowledge, not just the teacher. For example, Kaitlynn Davis' use of *Soul Train Circles* creates low-stakes opportunities for students to lead a class activity and learn from one another. Ultimately, we must be willing to let go of the restrictive standards society and the traditional education system have taught us and instead advocate for reciprocity and centering collective efforts that value lived experience and community assets. The community efforts of the participants in this research, and others like them, show that not only is beneficial collaboration possible, but it is being done. If we can tap into and expand upon this work, we can transform approaches to education in ways that necessitate students' lived experiences and local community attributes to the forefront (Lawton, 2019). Collaborative artmaking can free us from assumptions about the ways education should be, and experiences that should be valued. Collaborative artmaking can free underinvested Black students from these assumptions as well and create opportunities for them to imagine limitless possibilities for their own futures, for others, and for the world.

Implication: The Guidebook

The main objective of this research was to develop a practical, tangible, and creative output from the research outcomes in the form of a curricular guidebook. Based on the themes that developed, I used those as chapters in the guidebook and based on the murals that the participants discussed, I matched those murals to a particular chapter. The book is basically a creative and practical reflection of my research. It intertwined with the thoughts, feelings, and ideas of my seven research participants, whom I am utilizing as points of representation for Black artists and Black students in Richmond. To stay in keeping with the arts-informed research design I intended for this project, I took the creative ideas from the participants' responses to the murals and incorporated them into the design of the resultant guidebook. For convenience reasons, most participants chose to respond to the second part of the interviews—the mural reflections—in the Zoom chat or orally. There was one participant, however, participant 4 (Nadd Harvin), who sent the photo of their responses in a journal, so I am glad I allowed options to make each participant most comfortable.

With a grounding in BFT, my research findings resulted in a collaborative effort between the participants and myself, via the curricular guidebook. The guidebook takes the ideas outlined in my findings and presents them in a way that centers practical strategies for implementing collaboration with underinvested Black students in Richmond. Each chapter starts with a brief explanation of each theme, then goes through a series of suggested activities that respond to the theme—as discussed by the research participants. The activities are paired with a particular mural, in accordance to which mural ideas best resonate with that particular activity, as discussed throughout participant interviews (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Screenshot of Guidebook

Note. Image Courtesy of Katrina Taggert- Hecksher | Artwork by Jowarnise Caston & Ian C Hess[1]

For the guidebook, I pulled out quotes, key words, and phrases from within each of the themes outlined in chapter four and utilized visuals of each Mending Walls mural discussed by the participants, allowing more space for the murals mentioned most frequently throughout participant responses. My hope is that this guidebook can be used to inspire art teachers across Richmond to develop and implement collaborative artmaking strategies with their students that directly engage with their lived experiences and community culture. As Khalid said, gaining an understanding of the "economically

[1] Caston, J. & Hess, I. C. (2020). *Spirit of Sankofa* [Mural]. Mending Walls, Richmond, VA. https://www.mendingwallsrva.com/walls/spirit-of-sankofa

marginalized" conditions and experiences of trauma faced by underinvested Black students can help educators more authentically engage with the local community to cultivate positive pathways for their students' futures. This book provides educators with an entry point into the Richmond art community by centering practical curricular content around the Mending Walls project. As for teachers' references, this book also includes community resources pulled from various collaborative projects that my participants mentioned from their own experiences of being teaching artists.

After investigating the benefits and opportunities collaborative artmaking has brought to underinvested Black students and communities, I designed and proposed a curricular guidebook encompassing my three major emerged themes, "acknowledgement, engagement, and upliftment," to center Black lived experiences in collaborative artmaking. From the arts-informed research I was able to conduct, I discovered associations between 11 Mending Walls murals participants identified and the three themes that emerged. These associations were used to provide visual aids for the guidebook. While I am sure any of the murals could be implemented into any of the themes, as I mentioned before, there is a lot of overlap. I made the executive decision, for the purposes of my research goals, to categorize them in the following way.

I started off theme one with *Spirit of Sankofa*, along with *African American Gothic*, *Voices of Perseverance*, and *I can/can't breathe* (see Appendix D) because the participants' comments on each of these murals acknowledged how the racialized history of America has affected Black people. For theme two, I chose *In Conversation*, *New Growth*, *Together We Rise*, and *Blackwell Drip* because they all address our need to understand the experiences and perspectives of others and engage or respond accordingly. The murals selected for theme three were *Liberty Leads her people*, *The Golden Hour Neogenesis*, *Finding Tomorrow*, and *Blackwell Drip* again (see Appendix D) to reflect on positive affirmations and reinforcement for Black communities. I incorporated *Blackwell Drip* under both theme two and three because it was referenced most by participants (with four of the research participants

referencing it in their responses) and I felt it was important to add extra emphasis to the impact of that mural, since so many participants reacted to it. I closed the book out with an emphasis on ideas that exude a feeling of hope for the future, to envision something greater than current or past circumstances.

Cultural Struggles

Section one of the guidebook, reflecting Theme One of my research findings, Cultural Struggles, breaks down the importance of acknowledging the life circumstances and experiences of underinvested Black students. Reading this section, educators can gather the essential pieces to understanding the cultural struggles of underinvested Black students determined by my research participants and I: The navigation of trauma as well as the lack of representation access and exposure. These areas of lack can be addressed and filled through the incorporation of suggested collaborative activities laid out in each of the subsections to the cultural struggles section of the guidebook. This section of the guidebook also outlines why it is important to acknowledge students' cultural struggles, explaining that an acknowledgement of such can help us as educators more effectively reach our students, address the concerns of their daily lives, and create spaces for growth exposure and healing.

Following this explanation, section one then outlines various collaborative activities art educators can utilize to address trauma, representation, access, and exposure in ways that directly correlate with a select Mending Walls mural—though many of the ideas are interchangeable (see Appendix D). Just to give an example. The *Spirit of Sankofa* mural inspires one activity outlined in the section. Sankofa means to go back and retrieve. When considering ways of navigating trauma with students, an important aspect to consider is calling on the ancestral strength of the Black community, particularly in Richmond, who have stopped at nothing to achieve success and fight for freedom (including John Mitchell Jr, Maggie Walker, Arthur Ashe, Bill "Bojangles'' Robinson, etc.). To honor the

past and deep cultural roots within our Black students, art educators can work with their students and elders of the Richmond community on a collaborative movement piece that incorporates song and dance, tapping into intergenerational community engagement. Students are thus given the opportunity to collaborate with the older generations of their community and retrieve bits of their wisdom through dialog and collective effort as both elders and youth must move as one unit.

Community Engagement

Section two of the guidebook reflects Theme Two of my research findings, Authentic Community Engagement. This section expands upon section one by moving beyond acknowledgment into the next phase of implementation and engagement within the present time. Educators can develop an understanding of how important it is to center the cultural assets of underinvested Black students and foster opportunities for various parts of the Richmond community the students reside in and authentically or accurately represent their communities—which becomes easier to do once educators validate and understand their students' cultural struggles. The authentic community engagement section of the guidebook is about carrying the knowledge of the past into current-day actions. The activities outlined in this section can be utilized to uncover ways of connecting with the Richmond community and creating spaces for relationship building, openness, and empathetic conversation.

For example, one of the murals referenced in this section, *In Conversation*, is about coming together to understand difference. Through this mural, educators can engage in a reciprocal exchange with students and encourage the sharing of stories. *In Conversation* explores the linkages between the two collaborating artists and their differing childhoods, one Black urban, the other White suburban. Engaging with this mural can help art educators dismantle the US educational system, prolongedly dominated by white supremacist ideals (Kraehe et al., 2018), learn more deeply the experiences of their Black students, and thus more appropriately respond to their needs. Incorporating this mural in the

guidebook emphasizes the importance of getting to know our students and their communities. The activity outlined in response to this mural is a series of collaborative reflections. To be specific, the activity entailed teachers giving prompts to their students that have them recollect various childhood memories, write the memories on a wall, then form small groups and go around to each person in the group to have them describe and explain their memory. The purpose of the activity is to spark conversation between students that help build their connection to and understanding of others. This activity can be a great way to start a class and get students to know one another.

Positive Pathways

The final section of the guidebook, Cultivating Positive Pathways, coincides with the third theme of my research findings. Through this section, readers can orient their thinking about the topics, ideas, and activities previously discussed in sections one and two towards the future. After understanding how to acknowledge cultural struggles in the art classroom and how to engage with cultural assets, art educators can then explore ways of uplifting the cultural identities and experiences of underinvested Black students. This section ensures that students can imagine positive and prosperous futures for themselves, one another, and the world through centering community impact and cultural pride. The implications of community impact discussed in this section can help teachers affirm students' ability to affect positive change in their community. The activities and murals discussed in this section can also be utilized to celebrate the cultural attributes of our students and the neighborhoods they live in. Through this, students are provided a sense of validation that will foster positive self-development and communal encouragement.

For example, the *Blackwell Drip* presented in this section communicates the effects of community upliftment. Blackwell is a neighborhood on the Southside of Richmond, a predominantly Black, low-income area. The Blackwell community has a rich cultural history and strives for community

engagement and upliftment (historicblackwell.wixsite.com/hbna-1). The figure depicted in the Blackwell Drip mural is a representation of both Yemayá, goddess of the sea, and an artist/rapper local to Blackwell as a metaphor for the rich cultural strength of the Blackwell community. A collaborative activity illustrated in response to this mural is using the vacant space around the mural as a community platform to host and support other artists across the city. It is important for students to be able to step outside their typical classroom setting to expand their learning experiences and more authentically connect their learning to their local surroundings. By utilizing the physical space around the *Blackwell Drip* mural as a communal gathering space to expose students to a variety of working artists, teachers can create opportunities for students to feel represented and see the achievements of others like them take form.

In summary, through engagement with these three thematic sections, we as art educators can build healing and transformative communities with our students. that can fundamentally improve their educational experiences, truly reflecting how they experience the world. Based on my findings, I have discussed how centering Black students' lived experiences and wellbeing in an art education curriculum empowered them and their neighborhoods. My hope is that art educators will be inspired by this guidebook and can utilize the recommended collaborative project ideas with the corresponding murals to foster a forward-looking positive community future.

Limitations of the Study

While this research effectively explored the perspectives of seven Black teaching artists in Richmond who actively engage in collaborative artmaking with underinvested Black youth, it was only able to encompass a small range of experiences and ideas and did not directly involve art-based research practices with the participants, as initially planned. During the second part of the interviews, the creative reflection, the research participants were supposed to create visual journal reflections in

response to select Mending Walls murals. Instead, however, everyone ended up writing, typing, or talking out their responses. Thus, there was no visual creative output by participants in this research. Since not all the participants were visual artists, I did not want them to feel pressured to draw. Subsequently, I chose not to limit their responses to solely combined written and visual reflections to ease the comfortability of each participant. The instruction I gave of written and visual response was interpreted more as an either-or option, and I did not push to redirect them. The lack of redirection was to avoid accidentally compromising the research by asserting myself into the participants' response process. As a result, the guidebook does not include any participant-made artwork. Instead, the murals serve as a visual aid to the ideas and activities discussed by the participants. In hindsight, I feel that the research questions were effectively addressed without participant-made artwork, and the incorporation of such could be an entirely separate project. Therefore, moving forward, I could see an extension of this research being the creative output by participants that I was unable to conduct in this project, to add to the ideas that were uncovered.

An additional limitation to this research was that I was not able to speak directly with Black youth in Richmond, who are the centerpiece of this research. They are who this research is for, but due to time restraints with the IRB approval process and master's thesis requirements, I had to avoid using minors in my research. However, in the future, given more time to plan out my research process I would directly involve underinvested Black students into this research, to have them directly address their needs and concerns, and how their education can be made into a space of joy, safety, and comfort.

Future Research

Through the curricular guidebook, people can learn about the benefits of collaboration for underinvested Black youth by introducing them to Mending Walls murals as an entry point into community engaged collaborative artmaking. As a follow up to this resultant guidebook, an additional

booklet of reflective art making done by artists, educators, and students could be made in response to the ideas discussed and the murals highlighted in the guidebook I have produced here, to exemplify the creative output that is possible through collaboration in the art classroom that engaged Mending Walls.

Another aspect that could be addressed in future research, though never intended for this project, is the perspective of art educators in RPS schools because they can speak to the ways the education system currently operates and how best to maneuver in it to implement strategies for utilizing collaborative artmaking to heal, reform and transform learning for Black students across the underinvested communities of Richmond, VA. The ideas and strategies uncovered by the community teaching artist participants, in collaboration with the input of RPS teachers could speak volumes to transforming art education. Community teaching artists, like the artists involved in this research, are important assets for classroom teachers to utilize because they can relate to the students' experiences as Black people, and as Black students in their youth. Many of the participants also directly understand the circumstances of growing up in underinvested communities. Cultural representation in combination with practical understanding of how the public school system functions can inform an expansion into this research that more directly implements the strategies uncovered in this study, into real art classrooms.

Appendix A

Research Participant Information Sheet

VCU IRB PROTOCOL NUMBER: HM20023270

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

STUDY TITLE: Mending Art Classrooms: An exploration of the benefits of collaborative artmaking for underinvested Black students/ Richmond Youth

VCU INVESTIGATOR: Art Education Master's student Jazmine Beatty

You are invited to participate in a research study about on the benefits of collaborative artmaking for underinvested African American students, defining underinvested as those living and operating in low-income communities. Your participation is voluntary.

You will be asked to engage in 45-minute, semi-structured dialogue over Zoom with the researcher about collaborative artmaking and African American students in order to contribute to a collaborative curricular guidebook.

In this study, you will be asked to do the following things:

1. Read through and sign the Interview consent form
2. Participate in a 30-minute dialogic interview (questions listed below)
3. After the interview, partake in a series of three brief art exercises for 15 minutes. The art exercises will be drawn and/or written responses to images of select Mending Walls murals. You will need drawing and/or writing utensils of your choice (tablet; pencil and paper; etc.)

Interview Questions:

- What have been the most influential collaborative art project(s) you were a part of and why?
    - What parts of collaborative artmaking could be most influential for African American students?
- What do you think are the most important elements of collaborative artmaking?
    - What do you think is the significance of utilizing collaborative artmaking for African American students in low-income communities?
- What are some go-to and/or favorite examples of collaborative art activities?
    - What are some collaborative art activities you would recommend for African American students living and operating in low-income communities [to take pride in their cultural identity]?

Art Activity Prompts:

For each mural selected, the participants will respond to one of the following prompts:

1. Think- What you believe(know) the main idea to be
2. Feel- How the piece makes you feel
3. Do- A collaboratively art project idea you'd want to do in response to the piece

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about this study now or in the future, please contact Jazmine Beatty, 202-246-7653, beattyjm@vcu.edu.

Page 1 of 1

Appendix B

Interview Participant Consent Form

Interview Participant Consent Form

Thank you for your willingness to be my interviewee. The purpose of this interview is to explore actionable curricular ideas around the benefits of collaborative artmaking for underinvested Black students in the Richmond area. Your contributions will be combined to help construct a collaborative curricular guidebook centered around the Mending Walls RVA Mural Project. The form details your rights as a participant.

- I _____ agree to participate in this study.
- I agree to my interview being audio/video recorded (these recordings will not be shared with anyone).
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that the interview content will be used as part of master's Thesis work.
- I understand that the information I share during the interview session will be utilized for constructing the curricular guidebook
- I understand that signed consent forms and original recordings will be retained in a password protected mac computer owned by master's student Jazmine Beatty until the end of Summer 2022.

I have read and fully understand my rights as a participant. All of my questions concerning the interview have been addressed and answered. I will receive a copy of this form. I hereby agree to participate in this research study.

Signature of the participant

| --- | --- | --- |
| Name of participant (Printed) | Signature of participant (Printed) | Date |

Signature of the researcher

| --- | --- | --- |
| Name of researcher (Printed) | Signature of researcher (Printed) | Date |

If you have any questions in the future about this study, please contact Jazmine Beatty at 202-246-7653 or beattyjm@vcu.edu.

Appendix C

Mending Walls Murals

(drive.google.com/file/d/1itTBiED4VV--x29drUVikNz11RhJfyoL/view?usp=sharing)

Photo credit to Katrina Taggart-Hecksher & courtesy of Mending Walls RVA

VOICES OF PERSEVERANCE

THE GOLDEN HOUR NEOGENISIS

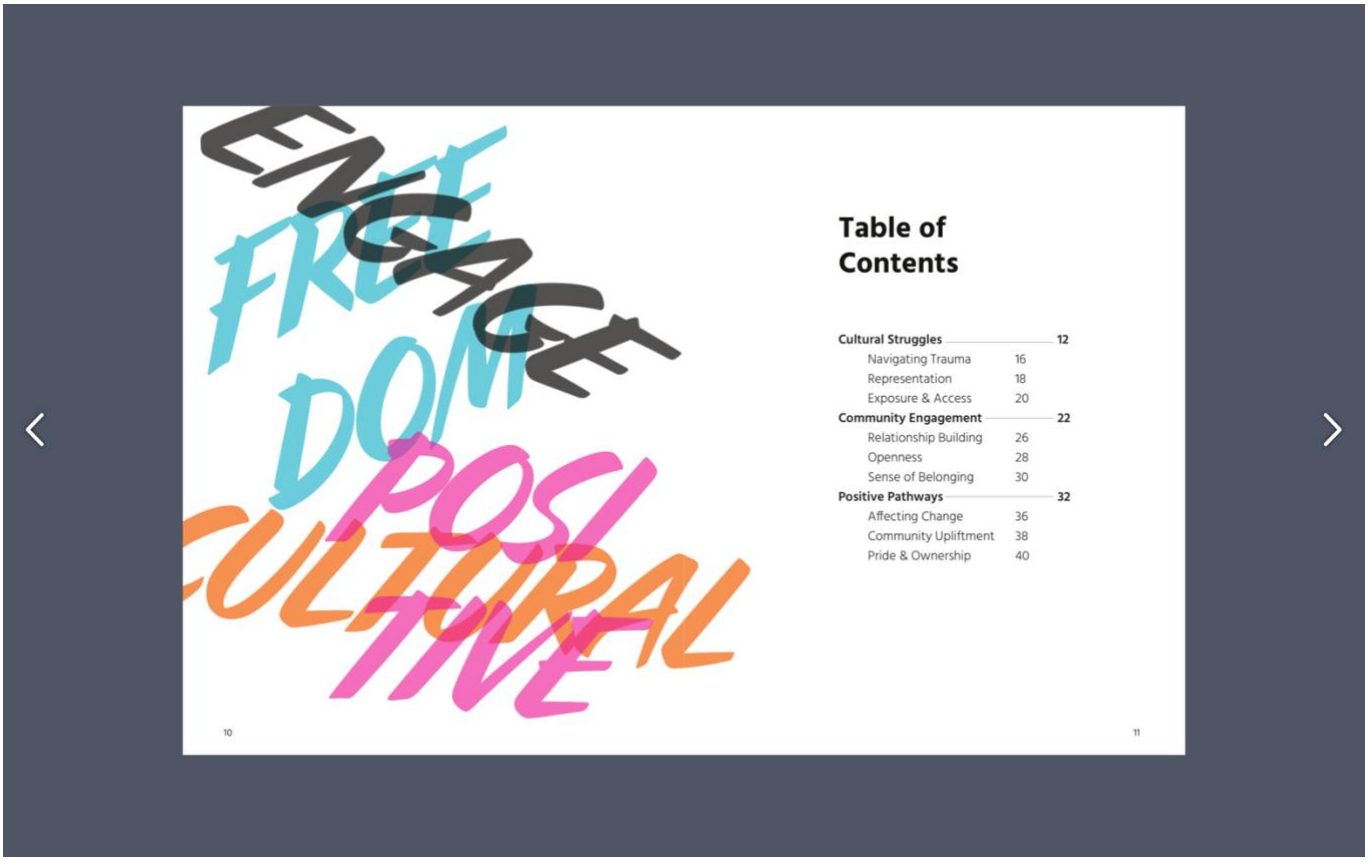
SPIRIT OF SANKOFA

ONCE UPON WITH LOVE

Appendix D

Curricular Guidebook

(https://www.flipsnack.com/9DDDD788B7A/mw-thesis-guidebook_part-1.html)



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Vita

Jazmine Michelle Beatty graduated from Texas State University in May 2020 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Communication Design. Throughout her time in undergrad, she gained an array of experiences in art & design and teaching. Some of these experiences include summer jobs between 2017-2018 working as an intern for the Art League and an assistant art teacher for an Abrakadoodle franchise in Northern Virginia. As well as, volunteering as an art teacher for students at The Phoenix Learning Center, an alternative high school in her college town of San Marcos, TX. During her time at Texas State, she completed an undergraduate thesis project between 2019-2020 centered around a virtually-held collaborative Fine and Performing Arts event for adolescents (https://jazminebe15.wixsite.com /website). The ideas of this undergrad research were expanded upon within her graduate studies, which have focused on creating collaboration-based curricular strategies for helping teachers engage with disability and race in the art classroom. Jazmine has presented her curricular ideas for cultivating the well-being of Black children and other underinvested groups at state (VAEA) and national (NAEA) art education conferences, as well as at the Adding Voices Conference in Philadelphia, PA. Within the local Richmond community, Jazmine has taught her own curricular ideas at Art 180, the Visual Arts Center, and will begin teaching at the Pine Camp Cultural Arts and Community Center in January 2023. Additionally in 2023, Jazmine's conceptual design work will be published in *The State of Black Design: An Anthology of Blackness* by Terresa Moses and Omari Souza.