Assessing the Perceived Impact of a Local, Community-Engaged Mural Project on Preservice Art Educators in Foundational Coursework

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Assessing the Perceived Impact of a Local, Community-Engaged Mural Project on Preservice Art Educators in Foundational Coursework

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University

By

Caitlin Black
Master of Arts, Boston University, 2015
Bachelor of Arts, James Madison University, 2011
Abstract

ASSESSING THE PERCEIVED IMPACT OF A LOCAL, COMMUNITY-ENGAGED MURAL PROJECT ON PRESERVICE ART EDUCATORS IN FOUNDATIONAL COURSEWORK

By Caitlin Black

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2023

Directors: Dr. Courtnie Wolfgang, Associate Professor of Teaching + Learning + Art + Design, Rhode Island School of Design

Dr. Ryan Patton, Associate Professor & Chair, Department of Art Education, School of Arts

This qualitative study merged the methodological frameworks of qualitative case study and narrative inquiry (Sonday et. al, 2020) to assess the perceived impact of a local, community-engaged mural art project (Mending Walls) on undergraduate preservice art educators in foundational coursework. The study was grounded in existing research in three areas: community-engaged murals, community-engaged pedagogy, and community-engaged teacher preparation. These concepts were used to frame the study and provide further rationale for the inquiry. The purpose of this case study was to understand how undergraduate preservice art educators perceived the impact of using a local, community-engaged mural project (Mending...
Walls) in the development of pedagogy and curriculum in their foundational coursework and how they perceived its’ impact on their beliefs surrounding teaching and learning.

This study aimed to explore and build a deeper understanding of using local, community-engaged public art projects in preservice art education. The researcher’s goals for this study included a desire to better understand the course experience with the local, community-engaged mural project (Mending Walls) from the perspective of students; to explore the intersections of community-engaged murals, community-engaged pedagogy, and community-engaged teacher preparation through the perceptions of preservice art educators; and to learn from former students’ perceptions in order to actively reflect on and improve their own teaching practice. 

Keywords: community-engaged murals, community-engaged pedagogy, community-engaged teacher preparation, art education
Acknowledgements

Through an ode to bell hooks I express my immense gratitude...

In Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom, bell hooks (2010) wrote, “Love in the classroom prepares teachers and students to open our minds and hearts. It is the foundation on which every learning community can be created” (p. 163). At the heart of this work is community, and none of this would be possible without the love and support of so many amazing people.

hooks (2010) defined love “as a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect and trust” (p. 159). She noted that “when these basic principles of love form the basis of teacher-student interaction, the mutual pursuit of knowledge create the conditions optimal for learning” (p. 159). This work is collective, and I am forever grateful first and foremost, to my former students for volunteering their time and trusting me to share their stories and experiences. You all inspire me, and it is an honor to learn alongside each of you.

In Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope, bell hooks (2003) described the “life-enhancing vibrancy of diverse communities of resistance” as sources of hope, “where our passion to connect and learn is constantly fulfilled” (p. xvi). I have been fortunate to experience true fulfillment in a vibrant community thanks to Mending Walls co-directors and power couple, Hamilton & Taekia Glass. You are, without a doubt, two of the greatest individuals I know. I feel so lucky to have met you and your family. I admire your vision to make the world a better place, and I am a better person for knowing you both. Thank you for your constant support, guidance, and friendship.
“...envisioning a future of global peace and justice, we must all realize that collaboration is the practice that will most effectively enable everyone to dialogue together, to create a new language of community and mutual partnership” (hooks, 2010, p. 41). Thank you to everyone involved with the Mending Walls project, especially, Lizzie Brown, Jowarnise Caston, Courtney Lebow, Kat Taggart-Jones, and Rachel Weinstein for your collaborative spirit and kindness.

“...joy in our ideas and our willingness to remain students - always lifelong learners” (hooks, 2010, p. 186). Thank you from the bottom of my heart to my cohort partner and friend, Jenna Gabriel. I feel so lucky to not only have had the best support and thought partner throughout this Ph.D. journey, but to have gained a lifelong friend. You are brilliant, and I am grateful to continuously learn from and with you.

“...beloved community can be formed - loving ties of care and knowing bind us together in our differences” (hooks, 1995, p. 263-264). Thank you, Jazmine Beatty, for your friendship, thoughtfulness, and collaboration. Your creativity and brilliance are unmatched. bell hooks’ notion of beloved community will forever remind me of our collaborative work with Mending Walls.

“any radical pedagogy must insist that everyone’s presence is acknowledged” (hooks, 1994, p. 8). Dr. Courtnie Wolfgang, you are the ultimate mentor. There are no adequate words to describe the profound impact you have had on me. You make everyone feel seen, heard, valued, and loved. That love is felt through, in hooks’ words, “a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect and trust” (p. 159). You are and will forever be one of the most influential educators in my life. You have deepened and challenged my thoughts in so
many powerful ways. Thank you for being you. It is an honor and joy to learn from and with you.


“love’s place in the classroom is assured when there is any passionate pursuit of knowledge” (hooks, 2010, p. 160). A special thank you to my Mom & Dad for supporting the passionate pursuit of knowledge and encouraging me always. You are the ultimate role models and I love you both with all my heart. Mom - thank you for always being a sounding board, my educator role model, and confidant. Dad - thanks for putting up with our teacher talk and for always keeping us laughing.

“I share my work most with my sisters…” (hooks, 2003, p. 122). In this case, sister, singular… and by work, I mean mostly fears, anxieties, and frustrations. Thank you, Tara, for always being a voice of reason and keeping it real. You are the best. I love you.

“loving friendships provide us space to experience the joy of community…” (hooks, 2000, p. 133). Thank you to all my friends, new and old, near and far, who have supported me and cheered me on throughout this journey. I appreciate you all.

“our teaching relationship formed and shaped by love extends beyond our time in the classroom” (hooks, 2010, p. 163). Thank you to all my teachers on this educational journey – especially my former professors from James Madison University for my art education foundation and continued, constant support. A very special thank you to Dr. Stephanie Danker for the advice early on to keep a research journal that became key to this dissertation work.
“Engaged pedagogy begins with the assumption that we learn best when there is an interactive relationship between student and teacher” (hooks, 2010, p. 19) Thank you to all my students and colleagues past and present. You have and will continue to shape my journey as a lifelong learner. A special thank you to two former colleagues and forever friends: Maggie Grubb, who’s kind heart keeps me close to my beginnings; and Zenani Mzube, for sharing your infinite wisdom and always supporting my growth… you continually inspire me.

“And yet what we cannot imagine cannot come into being” (hooks, 2010, p. 59). Last, but certainly not least, thank you to all my wonderful dissertation committee members, Dr. Courtnie Wolfgang, Dr. Ryan Patton, Dr. Lillian Lewis, Dr. David Naff, and Dr. Pamela Harris-Lawton, for pushing my thinking and cultivating my thoughts in the creation of this study. Your gracious sharing of knowledge, critical questioning, and thoughtful feedback were invaluable.
Dedication

In loving honor & memory of my

Grandmom & Pop Pop Wallin

My fiercest supporters –

The harder you work, the luckier you get
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Definition of Terms

Community – “…groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations…” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1997, as cited in, Principles of Community Engagement, 2011, p. 7)

Community-Engaged – “the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1997, as cited in, Principles of Community Engagement, 2011, p. 7)

Community-Engaged Murals – inclusion of community members with and in the mural-making process (Greaney, 2002)

Community Engaged Pedagogy – A union between theory and practice that connects teaching and learning with community assets, issues, and needs through the formation of reciprocal relationships amongst teachers, students, and community partners built on collective knowledge sharing, trust, and commitment. (Community engagement workshops, 2022; hooks, 2003, 2013, 2014; Rubin et. al, 2012).

Community Engaged Teacher Preparation – preservice teacher preparation that involves an authentic, asset-based, commitment to working with and in local communities, creating opportunities to forge genuine and lasting connections (Haddix, 2015; Milner, 2020; Zygmunt et. al, 2018)

Creative Placemaking – “a public art practice with community development outcomes that values place – specificity (i.e., projects are tied exclusively to a specific place and its local culture); collaboration (typically between artists, public or nonprofit organizations, and local community development organizations); and participation (i.e., involves a community or the public in the process of art-making)” (Crisman, 2021b, p. 16)

Cultural Gentrification - “changes to a place’s aesthetics which threaten existing inhabitants’ sense of belonging – distinct from but deeply intertwined with economic gentrification...” (Crisman, 2021a, p. 143).

Curriculum – the expectations and plans for course content, lessons, and experiences in a program of study

Learning – “the activity or process of gaining knowledge or skill by studying, practicing, being taught, or experiencing something” (Teaching, learning, assessment, curriculum and pedagogy, 2013).

Mending Walls - Mending Walls is a collaborative, community-engaged public art project based in Richmond, Virginia that pairs local artists of different cultural backgrounds to create murals
that promote empathy, connection, and understanding through critical conversations rooted in social and racial justice. The project uses public art as a catalyst for connecting and engaging diverse audiences.

**Murals** - paintings or works of art applied directly on a wall, usually in a public, outdoor space created with explicit permissions (Kordic, 2015; Mendelson-Schwartz & Mualam, 2021)

**Pedagogy** – the theory, method, philosophy, and practice of teaching; how teachers teach, bridging theory and practice

**Preservice Art Educators** – Post-secondary students seeking licensure in art education grades pre-kindergarten through grade 12; upon successful completion of sequenced coursework and state-mandated requirements, they are able to hold teaching positions in schools, communities, and museums. (*Department of Art Education, 2022*).

**Service-Learning** – “At VCU, service-learning is an intentional teaching strategy that engages students in organized service activities and guided reflection. It is a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in organized service activities that meet community-identified needs” (Virginia Commonwealth University, 2019).

**Teacher Preparation** – “is a state-approved course of study in which the successful completion of the program signifies that an enrolled teacher candidate has met all state educational requirements and training requirements to be recommended for initial certification in an authorized teaching field” (*Teacher preparation program, n.d.*)

**Teaching** – “engagement with learners to enable their understanding and application of knowledge, concepts and processes… [including but not limited to] design, content selection, delivery, assessment and reflection” (*Teaching, learning, assessment, curriculum and pedagogy, 2013*).
Chapter 1: Introduction

We need to talk… this was the original tagline of a local community-engaged public art project, Mending Walls, initiated in the spring of 2020 in Richmond, Virginia. During the course of the 2021-2022 academic year, undergraduate students in the Department of Art Education at a mid-Atlantic university did just that, engaging in critical conversations exploring the local Mending Walls project, all while developing educational philosophies, pedagogy, and curriculum. The Mending Walls project served as a teaching tool in foundational art education coursework providing space for introspection, critical dialogue, and creative expression considering a variety of social theories and contemporary issues in art education, as well as the role of art as a tool in building beloved community through the affirmation of difference, actively acknowledging the complexities of intersectionality, and honoring the unique aspects of our identities that “shape who we are and how we live in the world” (hooks, 1995, p. 265). Such considerations are timely and relevant as research in the field of art education calls for cultivating teachers and leaders who are willing to “befriend discomfort” (Kantawala et. al, 2022), and actively address racial hierarchies, and structural and systemic racism (Kraehe & Acuff, 2021; Knight, 2019).

Mending Walls is a collaborative, community-engaged public art project based in Richmond, Virginia, that pairs local artists of different cultural backgrounds to create murals that promote empathy, connection, and understanding through critical conversations rooted in social and racial justice. The project uses public art as a catalyst for connecting and engaging diverse audiences. In the spirit of critical dialogue and meaningful conversation that the Mending Walls
project encourages, this study merged the methodological frameworks of case study and narrative inquiry (Sonday et. al, 2020) as a means of understanding preservice art educators' experiences and perceptions of including this local community-engaged mural project in foundational coursework. The study aimed to explore what (if any) impact the inclusion of this local community-engaged mural project had on preservice art educators’ beliefs surrounding teaching and learning. The study utilized a narrative framework to understand the case (Sonday et. al, 2020) and aligned with community-engaged best practices, prioritized the creation of a space, promoting co-learning, listening, and mutual respect while emphasizing inclusivity, collective knowledge sharing, and invitations for critical conversations. Before expanding on this study’s details, I explain my motivations for this study through a series of stories that led to my invested interest in this topic. A variety of personal experiences inspired and shaped this narrative inquiry-based case study.

**Background of the Study**

Musings for this study first began in the spring of 2015 while I was still working as a full time elementary visual arts teacher in Winslow Township, New Jersey. After months of preparation and planning, the much-anticipated day of the field trip to the Philadelphia Museum of Art finally arrived. On a sunny, warm, Friday at the end of May, 80 third-grade students excitedly boarded yellow school buses along with their teachers and parent chaperones. Headcounts were taken and best behavior reminders were reiterated as the thirty-mile trip embarked. All was calm as we approached the iconic Benjamin Franklin Bridge crossing the Delaware River into Center City, yet mid-bridge screams of excitement erupted. The teachers,
(myself included), immediately turned to address the commotion, which I initially thought may just be the thrill of crossing the massive suspension bridge. Yet, as my eyes met theirs, they shouted, “Ms. Black! Look, the murals!” It was in that moment that I realized the field trip started far before we entered the institution. As I took in their smiles of joy, I quickly reassured their classroom teachers the screams of excitement were from learning coming to life in their recognition of the murals out their windows. I embraced the serendipitous outburst and captured the bus’s attention to remind students to keep their eyes open as they’d continue to see some of the murals that we studied together in art class as we made our way to the museum. Although this encounter was a brief moment in time, it would serve as defining pedagogical experience that continues to influence my approach to teaching.

Growing up outside of Philadelphia, I was exposed to large-scale murals from a young age. I was always captivated by their beauty and ability to seemingly unite diverse groups of people. I was fortunate to experience the murals as a young student, but it was not until I was an adult that I truly recognized and appreciated their multitude and magnitude, especially compared to that of other cities. I was unaware in my youth that Mural Arts Philadelphia is the largest public art program in the United States (Bender & Steinberg, 2017). When I returned to the Philadelphia area after college as an art educator in 2012, I made it a point to incorporate the murals into my curriculum with elementary students. When I moved cross-country to teach in San Diego, California, exploring the culturally rich murals of Chicano Park, as well as newly flourishing murals in the East Village neighborhood, became critical components of discussions and artmaking with my secondary-level art students.
In November 2019, as part of my professional development as a full-time high school art teacher, I had the opportunity to attend a presentation by acclaimed graphic designer, Stefan Sagmeister, at the Adobe Max Creativity Conference. I was taken by his presentation on beauty and in particular his discussion of the transformation of an underpass under the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway with the commission of two murals (Sagmeister & Walsh, 2018, p. 152). Viewing the various examples Sagmeister shared of public art and architecture, I was drawn to his assertion that “Beauty can transform us. It can change how we feel, and it can change how we behave” (p. 152). Having witnessed positive student interactions and engagements with murals in both Philadelphia and San Diego, I became intrigued to further investigate the impact of aesthetics on communities. Propelled by Sagmeister’s (2018) story of how two murals changed spatial interactions in an underpass, in addition to my own experiences, intellectual curiosity, and passion for art, I once again embarked on a cross-country journey to begin my doctoral studies at a university in Richmond, Virginia.

In May 2020, amidst a global pandemic and forced quarantine, the brutal murder of George Floyd emphasized the realities of deep-rooted systemic and racial injustices experienced daily by individuals within the United States of America. The events provoked a reckoning with public art, particularly monuments, and the overt symbolism of hatred, racism, colonialism, and white supremacy visible in communities both domestic and abroad. In Richmond, Virginia, the capital of the Confederacy from 1861-1865 (Asmelash, 2019) and once home to “the largest number of Confederate monuments in the country” (Vinson, 2021) “citizens took to the streets to
protest racial inequality, police brutality” (Glass, 2020, 0:20) and the then still standing Confederate monuments that lined the city streets.

By the time I arrived in Richmond on July 9, 2020, to begin my doctoral coursework, nearly all of the Confederate statues along Monument Avenue had been removed or were starting to be removed. I was immediately captivated by new murals appearing, what felt like daily, in my neighborhood. Prior to my move, I was informed of the city’s vibrant art scene and numerous murals created through the Richmond Mural Art Project (Murals, n.d.), but these new murals had a different emotional quality. My curiosity was immediately piqued, and not only because I was witnessing the murals literally in progress with open paint cans nearby. Upon investigation, I discovered local artist and activist, Hamilton Glass, and the Mending Walls mural project.

In the spring of 2020, as protests for racial justice erupted in Richmond and across the nation, African American artist and activist, Hamilton Glass, chose to respond by creating a community-engaged mural project called, Mending Walls. As tags were appearing on buildings, walls, and Confederate monuments, Hamilton described his desire to amplify, stating, "...rather than have those tags just power washed over, we further that conversation with making public art that speaks to it" (Coffee With Strangers RVA, 2020, 3:13). The Mending Walls project seeks to advance social justice through collaborative, community-engaged art, connecting community members and artists from different cultural backgrounds in conversations to foster empathy, connection, understanding, and healing. Mending Walls founder and creator, Hamilton Glass, recognized what Dewhurst & Kendrick (2018) expressed, “that any artwork can serve as an entry point for talking about race, identity, and racism” (p. 458); and that “conversation is one of the
most powerful ways to build knowledge, awareness, and empathy, and ultimately effect change” (Livingston, 2021, p. xiii). The Mending Walls mural project is deeply rooted in community, and each of the twenty and counting mural projects are not only developed collaboratively by diverse partnerships of local artists but also include community engagement days and corresponding community-based civic talks. In 2021, Mending Walls additionally partnered with local organizations that work within critical areas in which communities of color have historically been harmed. Focusing on issues including food justice, mental health, criminal justice reform, and housing justice, the mural projects worked to “raise public awareness about local organizations that have served, empowered and advocated for racial equity in the greater Richmond area for years” (Mending Walls RVA, n.d.).

After learning about Mending Walls and attending a civic talk where community members were invited to attend, hear from the artists about the social issues addressed, and add questions and comments, I connected with creator and founder, Hamilton Glass. Through casual conversations with Hamilton, I learned we both grew up in the Philadelphia area and he too was inspired by the Philadelphia Mural Arts program. We discussed the power of art to fuel empathy and connection, particularly in relation to tough but meaningful conversations surrounding racial and social justice and discussed possibilities for extensions of the Mending Walls project in educational settings. While conversing on how physical aesthetic transformations such as murals can activate spaces (promoting community engagement, cross-cultural and therapeutic implications, activism, social justice, etc.), we also discussed differences between the Mending Walls project and other mural projects which subsequently influenced my research interests.
When I initially began this research, I was under the impression that by aesthetically beautifying spaces with murals, the spaces would be inherently changed for the better. Yet, through further research and discussions surrounding creative placemaking and the implementation of public art and murals, my thoughts began to further evolve. As I delved deeper into research, I quickly recognized the complexities associated with art in the public realm; and while it became evident murals have long been implemented in cities and towns internationally in efforts to beautify public spaces, another question arose for me: is the impact of these mural projects inherently positive? Through the literature, I became attuned to harmful consequences when there is more interest placed on aesthetic transformations than on local community involvement (displacement, gentrification, etc.). At the same time, I began to recognize parallels between deficit approaches to creative placemaking (aesthetic spatial transformations lacking consideration and input from the community inhabiting the space) and how deficit approaches are enacted in education (focusing on what students, parents, and communities lack without acknowledgment of their assets, talents, brilliance, and expertise (Milner, 2020)).

As an educator, the Mending Walls project directly influenced acknowledging my vulnerability in approaching dialogue with students, openly addressing my positionality, and inviting and affirming their own unique perspectives. This “purposeful engagement of difference” that is promoted through the Mending Walls project, is also an “equity-focused teaching principle” (University of Michigan, n.d.). Through acknowledgment of variances in “identities, experiences, strengths, and needs” it leverages “student diversity as an asset for
learning” (University of Michigan, n.d.). The Mending Walls project’s intentional interracial pairings of artists; emphasis on direct, local community collaboration; and facilitation of difficult but meaningful conversations on racial and social justice prompted my own critical reflections on my experiences as an art educator and student, while also providing a local, community-based entry point for engaging the preservice art educators in foundational coursework with these complex and sometimes uncomfortable topics.

Community-based service learning was historically part of my university department’s foundational undergraduate art education coursework in the form of after-school student mentorship, but due to the global covid-19 pandemic and restrictions on the preservice educators entering school sites, it required a reimagining and shift in the traditional experiential element of the course. Since the course content encourages the historical, philosophical, and sociological exploration of art education through topics grounded in anti-racist, anti-ableist, and anti-bias curriculum, utilizing the publicly accessible, local, outdoor Mending Walls mural project seemed like a natural fit. With the Mending Walls team's approval, activities were designed and embedded into multiple foundational art education courses providing opportunities for the art education preservice students, to explore, engage with, and develop curricular materials for the Mending Walls project. These culminating experiences ignited my interest in collaborative community murals as a site for learning and have accordingly resulted in this study.

Statement of the Problem

Murals have been recognized for their value in educational settings (Asher, 2006; Bae, 2009; Hemmerich, 2021; Kieffer, 2000; Orr, 2002; Turk, 2012; Zander, 2004). Additionally,
community-engaged experiences in preservice art education have been recognized as powerful and potentially transformative (Schlemmer, 2017; Lawton, 2019). Schlemmer (2017) noted the “pedagogical possibilities created by the inclusion of community arts in the training of preservice teachers” (p. 35). Similarly, Lawton (2019) described, “providing preservice and in-service art educators with access to empowering community-engaged experiences that integrate their artist/teacher/researcher identities can be personally, professionally, and socially transformative” (p. 203). There is a plethora of existing literature on community-engaged murals (Chakravarty & Hwee-Hwa Chan, 2015; Conrad, 1995; Greaney, 2002; O’Connell, 2012; Seiber, Corderio, & Ferro, 2012), community-engaged pedagogy (Chernoff, 2015; Fitzgerald, 2017; hooks, 1994, 2009, 2014; Lawton, 2010, 2019) and community-engaged teacher preparation (Clark et. al, 2021; Dewhurst, 2022; Haddix, 2015; Lawton, 2014, 2019; Milner, 2020; Zygmunt et. al, 2018). This study aimed to place these topics in conversation to bridge and weave connective threads with existing literature, by specifically investigating preservice art educators' perceptions of engaging with the Mending Walls project during foundation coursework.

Donahue (2011) suggested interacting with public art, such as murals, “can ground teachers in education philosophies and practices connected to teaching social justice” (p. 70) Focused on connecting classrooms and communities, Donahue (2011) utilized local Chicano mural art in Oakland, California as a teaching tool with preservice educators (only one was seeking their credential in art). Donahue (2011) suggested that active engagements with public art including murals can assist in preservice teachers' construction and understanding of community funds of knowledge (Moll et. al, 1992). While this study did not seek to replicate
Donahue’s (2011) publication, it was similarly focused on understanding preservice teachers' perceptions of utilizing public art in coursework. However, while Donahue (2011) sought to understand how community-based public art might “shape preservice teachers’ thinking about their reasons for teaching in the humanities” (p. 72), this study offered a distinction by focusing specifically on the use of local, community-engaged murals and the perceptions of preservice art educators.

At this time, there is no existing literature exploring the Mending Walls project’s impact and/or how community members have engaged with the murals. This narrative inquiry-based case study aimed to document preservice teachers’ perceptions of utilizing the Mending Walls project in foundational coursework in the field of art education to explore the impact (if any) and consider relevant connections to the field of education broadly. The case was bounded by the parameters of a specific place and time (Creswell, 2013); the place being enrollment in specific foundational art education coursework at one university and the time being bound by one academic year, Fall 2021-Spring 2022. The participants needed to have successfully completed at least one of two specific foundational art education courses during the 2021-2022 academic year at one university.

**Statement of Purpose**

Community-engaged teaching and learning is something I’ve always strived for, but admittedly it is not something I had explicitly learned about or was very familiar with prior to beginning this research journey. For example, the inclusion of the study of murals in my elementary and secondary art curriculum was by design, as was the Mending Walls mural project
working with preservice educators a decade later. Still, I cannot in good conscience claim I initiated any of these projects rooted in a true understanding of the significance of community-engaged pedagogical experiences. It was not until practicing critical reflexivity and seeking to situate my experiences in research, that I came to this revelation. Upon critical reflection and immersing myself in the literature, I’ve come to realize the impact this experience had on me personally, but I was curious to learn about my former students’ experiences and reflections to explore their perceptions. Did the inclusion of the Mending Walls project impact their teaching and learning beliefs and/or approach to developing pedagogy and curriculum? As an instructor observing their engagement with the content was eye-opening, but I was curious to hear their stories, thoughts, and experiences. Thus, the purpose of this case study was to understand how undergraduate preservice art educators perceived the impact of using this local, community-engaged mural project (Mending Walls) in the development of pedagogy and curriculum in their foundational coursework and how they perceived its’ impact on their beliefs surrounding teaching and learning.

Embedded within the purpose of this study are important personal, intellectual, and practical goals (Maxwell, 2013). At the personal level, the goal of this inquiry was to better understand the course experience from the perspective of students. I was curious if my growth through engagement with the Mending Walls project was solely related to my experiences or if others had their own realizations. At an intellectual level, this study aimed to explore the intersections of community-engaged murals, community-engaged pedagogy, and community-engaged teacher preparation through the perceptions of preservice art educators. Finally, at a
practical level, I sought to learn from former students’ perceptions in order to actively reflect on and improve my own teaching practice. This study provided an opportunity for me to analyze teacher candidates' perceptions of engaging with a local, community-engaged mural project (Mending Walls, Richmond, VA) as a part of their art teacher preparation and to determine if their perceptions in any way informed pedagogies related to the preparation of art educators.

**Researcher Identity**

It is critical to name my positionality and transparently acknowledge my involvement with the Mending Walls mural project both in a volunteer capacity as well as recognize my conscious choice to utilize the project in the development of coursework for preservice art educators. It is also critical as a white art educator addressing issues of race, racism, and social justice, I actively acknowledge my bias and reflect on the ways my embodied experience, limits of my situated knowledges, and lived privilege affect my research (Fine; 2018; Link, 2019). I also recognize as Acuff (2018) notes, “All art educators, but specifically those who are White, have a responsibility to develop a critical consciousness, identify the smog, and counter it with rigorous efforts to destabilize the neutrality and universality of Whiteness” (p. 530). I approach this research as a doctoral candidate in art education, a cisgender white, middle-class woman, educator, a US citizen, and an art-lover. Having been exposed to arts institutions and public art from a young age, the arts and arts experiences were prioritized in my childhood ultimately leading to my decision to pursue a career in the arts that continues to challenge and inspire me.

As I work to critically reflect and better understand my own experiences and questions throughout engaging with the Mending Walls community-engaged mural project, I also aimed to
situate and process my thoughts utilizing existing research. Furthermore, I sought to investigate and discover others' perceptions to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the perceptions of preservice art educators who participated in this foundational coursework. I acknowledge operating in what Dwyer & Buckle (2009) refer to as “the space between” challenging the dichotomy of whether I stand inside or outside the research. In this case, my experience does not fit neatly into a binary, rather it is both/and, and will require working “creatively within the tensions” (Acker, 2001). I have insider experiences engaging with the Mending Walls project, creating curriculum content for foundational coursework, and have various levels of existing relationships and rapport with the preservice art educators who shared their individual perspectives in this case study.

On the other hand, while we share some common ground, I also acknowledge occupying the space of outsider, experiencing the coursework from the perspective of the instructor rather than the student, in addition to various intersectional differences in identity and unique life experiences that shape our individual perceptions. Thus, at present, my reflections, experiences, and inquiries offer only my individual perspective. Through this narrative inquiry-based case study, I sought to deepen my own understanding by listening to others perspectives and experiences and honoring their “dynamic positionalities” (Ryan, 2015, para. 55). Embracing an awareness of multi-positionalities, I sought to “appreciate the complexities and contingencies of the stories that are shared and understood through particular inter-personal interactions in the research encounter” (para. 57).
I approached this research inspired by the mission of the Mending Walls project to bring together individuals from different cultures and backgrounds to collaborate and engage in meaningful conversations and storytelling fostering healing and building connection through empathy and understanding (Mending walls RVA, n.d.). Embracing these tenets, I sought to operate from a space of openness, exercising empathy, encouraging genuine responses from participants, and emphasizing the value in their authenticity.

**Conceptual Framework**

This study was grounded in existing research in three areas: community-engaged murals, community-engaged pedagogy, and community-engaged teacher preparation. These concepts were used to frame the study and provided further rationale for the inquiry. While there is existing literature on each of these concepts individually, this study seeks to put the concepts of community-engaged murals, community-engaged pedagogy, and community-engaged teacher preparation in conversation with one another, weaving connective threads to guide the exploration of preservice art educators’ perceptions of engaging with the Mending Walls mural project. Within this study, preservice art educators are defined as undergraduate students seeking licensure in art education grades pre-kindergarten through grade 12; upon successful completion of sequenced coursework and state-mandated requirements, they will be able to hold teaching positions in schools, communities, and museums (Department of Art Education, 2022).

The overlap in each of these three concepts is the prefix community-engagement. For the purposes of this study, community engagement is defined as “the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special
interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1997, as cited in, Principles of Community Engagement, 2011, p. 7). The prefix of community-engaged, additionally creates distinctions between murals, pedagogy, and teacher preparation on their own. Murals, for the purposes of this study, are defined as paintings or works of art applied directly on a wall, usually in a public, outdoor space created with explicit permissions (Kordic, 2015; Mendelson-Schwartz & Mualam, 2021). Community-engaged murals, however, add an additional distinction involving the inclusion of community members with and in the mural-making process (Greaney, 2002). Pedagogy, for the purposes of this study, is recognized as the theory, method, philosophy, and practice of teaching or how teachers teach, bridging theory and practice. Community-engaged pedagogy, on the other hand, adds an additional layer of involvedness, and for this study is recognized as the union between theory and practice, that connects teaching and learning with community assets, issues, and needs through the formation of reciprocal relationships amongst teachers, students, and community partners built on collective knowledge sharing, trust, and commitment. (Community engagement workshops, 2022; hooks, 2003, 2013, 2014; Rubin et. al, 2012). Similarly, teacher preparation, for the purposes of this study is defined as “a state-approved course of study in which the successful completion of the program signifies that an enrolled teacher candidate has met all state educational requirements and training requirements to be recommended for initial certification in an authorized teaching field” (Teacher preparation program, n.d.). Whereas community-engaged teacher preparation includes the preservice teacher preparation requirements while also incorporating authentic, asset-based, commitments to working with and in local
communities, creating opportunities for preservice teachers to forge genuine and lasting connections (Haddix, 2015; Milner, 2020; Zygmunt et. al, 2018).

Through this study, I was curious to further explore these notions focused on preservice art educators’ perceptions of engaging with community-engaged murals created through the Mending Walls project. I was interested in learning more about this specific cohort of preservice art educators’ perceptions considering the strong emphasis on collaboration in the Mending Walls project and if there were any connections to community-engaged pedagogy. I was also intrigued to discover if utilizing the local, community-engaged project in foundational coursework had any influence on preservice art educators’ future consideration of the communities they might work with and in as art educators. I sought to gain more insight into if the Mending Walls project had any influence on the way the preservice art educators’ might approach their work in the future.

The conceptual framework (see Figure 1) visually depicts the grounding of the study considering intersections between community-engaged murals (represented in green), community-engaged pedagogy (represented in blue), and community-engaged teacher preparation (represented in red). At the center of the intersecting circles, is the perceptions of the preservice art educators. Discovering the perceptions of preservice art educators was the focus of this study, as guided by existing research in the three main concepts. Further content and detail about the conceptual framework and existing literature will be discussed in Chapter Two.
Research Design

As aforementioned, this study merged the methodological frameworks of qualitative case study and narrative inquiry (Sonday et. al, 2020). In this case, the system was bounded by the parameters of a specific place and time (Creswell, 2013); the place being enrollment in specific
foundational coursework in the Department of Art Education at a mid-Atlantic university and the
time being bound by one academic year Fall 2021-Spring 2022. The single case study focused on
preservice art educators that successfully completed at least one of two specific courses that
utilized the Mending Walls project within the course curriculum. All interviews and data
collected were based on participants’ previous course experiences. Participation in the study had
no bearing on student grades or performance evaluation. The intent was to better understand the
participants' unique experiences, using a narrative framework to focus on a variety of individual
narratives – i.e., stories of lived experiences across several participants (Medeiros & Etter-Lewis,
2019). This framework allowed for the investigation of individuals’ complex and rich
experiences while also providing space for critical reflection (Webster & Mertova, 2007).

**Research Questions**

This study was guided by the central questions:

1. After the completion of foundational coursework in art education, what are preservice art
   educators’ perceptions regarding the use of a local, community-engaged mural project
   a. in the development of arts curriculum for K-12, museum, or community
      learning?
   b. on how the concept, process, and content of the Mending Walls project impacts
      their insights on teaching and learning?

2. Through the analysis of preservice teachers’ perceptions of engaging with a local,
   community-engaged mural project, what might be determined implications for future
   pedagogies for art education teacher preparation?
For the purposes of this study, I define *curriculum* as the expectations and plans for course content, lessons, and experiences in a program of study and pedagogy as the theory, method, philosophy, and practice of teaching / how teachers teach, bridging theory and practice. I define *teaching* as “engagement with learners to enable their understanding and application of knowledge, concepts and processes… [including but not limited to] design, content selection, delivery, assessment and reflection” (Teaching, learning, assessment, curriculum and pedagogy, 2013) and *learning* as “the activity or process of gaining knowledge or skill by studying, practicing, being taught, or experiencing something” (Teaching, learning, assessment, curriculum and pedagogy, 2013).

**Summary**

In this first chapter, I provided a short introduction to the study sharing how my positionality, identity, and personal experiences directly influenced and inspired this research. I also shared a broad overview of the concepts that inform the study’s framework. Further, I included a succinct introduction to the study’s research design as well as the guiding research questions. In the following chapter, I will share a review of the literature related to the three concepts that form the framework - community-engaged pedagogy, and community-engaged preservice teacher preparation - as well as elaborate on several key terms related to this study.

**Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This review of the literature seeks to situate scholarship about community-engaged murals, community-engaged pedagogy, and community-engaged preservice teacher preparation
in conversation with one another. Referencing a variety of existing literature, this review aims to highlight relevant intersections to provide context for this study. This review explores the pedagogical possibilities for utilizing local, community-engaged murals through embracing community-engaged pedagogy to prepare community-engaged teachers.

**Definition of Terms**

Before focusing on the intersections of community-engaged murals, community-engaged pedagogy, and community-engaged teacher preparation, I will define and expand upon relevant terms for the context of this study and review of the literature. Various definitions of the following terms or concepts exist; using relevant literature, I’ll add depth to the operational definitions of terms introduced in the previous chapter. I’ll begin by detailing the term community-engaged, the prefix of each of the three areas of inquiry included in the conceptual framework (see Figure 1). I’ll then elaborate on the term murals and address related complexities, weaving connections and providing added detail on creative placemaking and cultural gentrification. After laying the additional foundational context, I will describe the distinguishing characteristics of community-engaged murals and connect relevant literature to the Mending Walls community-engaged mural project. Then, I will discuss literature related to community-engaged pedagogy followed by community-engaged teacher preparation.

**Community-Engaged**

An obvious overlap of these three areas is the prefix term community-engaged. Since this term is used broadly and in various contexts, I have adopted a definition for the purposes of this study. As noted in Chapter 1, I’ve adopted the first part of the Centers for Disease Control and
Prevention’s (1997) working definition of community-engagement which defines it as, “…the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people” (as cited in Principles of Community Engagement, 2011, p. 7). Not mentioned in the introductory definition in Chapter 1, but also of significance, the full-length definition goes a step further to note, “It is a powerful vehicle for bringing about environmental and behavioral changes that will improve the health of the community and its members. It often involves partnerships and coalitions that help mobilize resources and influence systems, change relationships among partners, and serve as catalysts for changing policies, programs, and practices” (p. 7). This definition recognizes that communities “are not homogeneous entities; they are made up of diverse groups with different histories, social structures, value systems, and cultural understandings of the world” (p. 10). Meaningful community engagement therefore requires participation of diverse community members through collaborative, reciprocal processes where trust is built through ample opportunities for co-learning, listening, and mutual respect (Janke et. al, 2011; Principles of Community Engagement, 2011). The term community-engaged is focused on inclusivity, collectivity, and equitable involvement amongst diverse individuals that comprise the community.

**Murals**

Referencing the evolution of murals from early cave paintings to present day, Kordic (2015) asserts “murals have been around as long as people, as valuable testimony of life from prehistoric time to today.” The word mural, Kordic (2015) notes, “originates from the Latin word...
‘murus,’ meaning wall” and is presently defined as “any piece of artwork painted or applied directly onto a wall, ceiling or other larger permanent surfaces, flat, concave or convex.” Murals, in the context of this study, are defined as paintings or works of art applied directly on a wall, usually in a public, outdoor space created with explicit permissions (Kordic, 2015; Mendelson-Schwartz & Mualam, 2021). While graffiti and street art are also art forms usually applied to walls in public spaces, the driving motivations and processes delineate clear distinctions. Murals are typically planned and have explicit permission to utilize the designated space, whereas graffiti and street art often lack official authorization and are often executed illegally. Graffiti and street art are ephemeral forms that consequently thrive on the element of mystery while also seeking individual recognition through symbolism and identifying tags (Fuentes, 2018). The literature suggests graffiti and street art stem from purpose driven by self-satisfaction and individual empowerment rather than communal experience (Fuentes, 2018; Daichendt, 2013). While graffiti and street art are valuable art forms for consideration this review will remain consistent with other scholarly contributions excluding the analysis of graffiti and tagging (Mendelson-Shwartz & Mualam, 2021, p. 2). Additionally, this review will not analyze unsanctioned works of street art, instead focusing on works created with explicit permissions. Further, this study focuses on murals on outdoor walls visible to the general public and community. Clarification on the unique characteristics of community-engaged murals will be subsequently addressed.
Creative Placemaking

Mending Walls founder, Hamilton Glass, described the public art project as “creative placemaking at its finest” (VPM, 2021, 23:37). Consequently, I believe it is important to discuss and define the term within the literature. Zicter (2020) adopts Markusen’s (2013) coining of creative placemaking as a “fuzzy concept” pointing out that the term “means different things to different people” (p. 278). Zicter (2020) notes that “since 2010, rapid adoption of the term creative placemaking has led to confusion and consternation over what activities ought to be classified under that rubric and how to measure their impact” (p. 278). Salzman & Lopez (2020) describe that “in the past, community development was considered separate from the arts. Creative placemaking seeks to unite the concepts while inspiring disparate groups to work together” (p. 389). For the sake of this paper, I will adopt Crisman’s (2021b) definition of creative placemaking:

a public art practice with community development outcomes that values place-specificity (i.e., projects are tied exclusively to a specific place and its local culture); collaboration (typically between artists, public or nonprofit organizations, and local community development organizations); and participation (i.e., involves a community or the public in the process of art-making). (p. 16)

Crisman (2021b) points out that despite “creative placemaking’s ongoing ‘fuzziness,’ it nevertheless has successfully come into being a unique intersection where art that is community-based, place-based, collaborative, and participatory is valued as a distinct form of community development” (p. 17). Complexities associated with murals and creative placemaking will be
subsequently addressed. It should be noted that all sources quoted do not operate under the same
definition and therefore creative placemaking has various “fuzzy” interpretations by scholars in
the field (Markusen, 2013 as cited in Zicer, 2020).

Revitalization Disguised: Complexities with Creative Placemaking & Murals

Sagmeister & Walsh’s (2018) notion that, “Beauty can transform us. It can change how
we feel, and it can change how we behave,” sparked my initial interest in investigating murals’
impact on communities (p. 152). As Sagmeister & Walsh (2018) described how imaginative
design transformed a neglected underpass into a joyous location and how spaces can be reworked
to encourage spatial engagement, I became intensely curious to specifically consider murals’
ability to transform spaces beyond the physical aesthetic transformation (p. 159). As I delved
deeper, I quickly recognized the complexities associated with art in the public realm; and while it
became evident murals have long been implemented in cities and towns internationally in efforts
to beautify public spaces, another question arose for me: is the impact of these mural projects
inherently positive? This section focuses on complexities with murals and creative placemaking
in public spaces and begins to highlight harmful consequences when murals are not community-
engaged. I believe it is important to first address ramifications in order to emphasize the
significance of the community-engaged process, and how collaborative community participation
in the implementation of murals can mitigate tensions and conflicts (including issues of
gentrification and displacement) and promote the creation of more inclusive public spaces.

Mendelson-Shwartz & Mualam (2021) note, “existing literature is brimming with studies
on the benefits murals provide to individuals, communities, and cities” (p. 2). On the other hand,
they point out because of the presumed benefits, issues that generate conflict, tensions, and challenges are often overlooked (Mendelson-Shwartz & Mualam, 2021). Burns & Berbary (2021) further this notion stating, “scholarship fails to account for the ways that placemaking is complicit in the historic and pervasive violences of systemic racism, settler colonialism, gentrification, and socioeconomic elitism” (p. 1). There is a growing call for attention to these matters to avoid what has been called the ‘SoHo effect’ aiding in gentrification and residential displacement (Currid, 2009; Rich, M. & Tsitsos, W. 2016). This term specifically derives from the gentrification of the South of Houston Street (SoHo) neighborhood of New York City where artists flocked in the 1960s and 1970s and “attracted capital, reinvestment, and new residents into the area, pushing up real estate values and rents, [eventually] pushing out the artists, and transforming the neighborhood into a high-end residential and consumption mecca for the elite” (Currid, 2009, p. 374). Sometimes gentrification, especially when spurred through artistic alterations, such as murals, can be cleverly disguised; Mathews (2010) points out, “terms such as ‘renaissance’, ‘regeneration’, and ‘revitalization’ direct attention away from the contested nature of urban revival” (p. 661-662). Burns & Berbary (2021) call attention to the fact that research often begins with and centers “positive possibilities of placemaking” even if they “eventually conclude with aspects of more cautionary considerations” (p. 3). Rather than approaching these effects as cautionary afterthoughts Burns & Berbary (2021) call for the centering of such complexities. Bockman (2021) argues the need to look “beyond the conventional actors in policy history – policymakers, planners and developers – to other actors” including art, artists, and art purveyors to understand public housing destruction and gentrification (p. 761). Furtado & Payne
(2022) call for an “inclusive creative placemaking strategy that uses public murals to establish spaces for public expression and community engagement” (p. 1). Furtado & Payne assert inclusive creative placemaking must “elevate community engagement as a critical component in the art-making process and [use] the values and interests of community members as source materials for [the] design and creation of place-based public art” (p. 1). Active community involvement and collaboration in the creation of murals are arguably key to avoiding inadvertently harmful effects.

Toolis (2017) points to the work of Bedoya (2013) noting, “placemaking’s ‘revitalization’ efforts frequently focus on beautifying, cleaning, and regenerating public spaces for promoting development and attracting investment while neglecting considerations of economic and racial inequality” (p. 186). Similarly, Pritchard (2016) suggests gentrification is “often dressed as creative placemaking” (p. 2) and argues a semantic shift to “‘place guarding’ rather than ‘placemaking’...to directly resist the machinations of gentrification” (p. 4). While I opt not to make the semantic shift given that Mending Walls creator, Hamilton Glass, describes the murals coming to life with artists, dancers, poets, and community gatherings as “creative placemaking at its finest” (VPM, 2021, 23:37), I do think it is important to recognize creative placemaking has become somewhat of a trend and buzz word adopted by many projects that present “falsely utopian vision[s]” (Pritchard, 2018, p. 144). As previously mentioned, for the sake of this study I adopt Crisman’s (2021b) definition, which places a strong emphasis on valuing place, local culture, collaboration, and community participation. I believe The Mending Walls project aligns with Crisman’s (2021b) definition, but I also feel it is important to elaborate
on the complexities associated with public art as creative placemaking as I distinguish the unique elements of this particular project.

Bedoya (2013) emphasizes anyone involved with creative placemaking practices “must understand history, critical racial theory, and politics alongside the spatial planning and economic development theories that dominate the discourse.” Bedoya (2013) differentiates between creative placemaking practices that support belonging compared to dis-belonging, noting a need to understand the memories, cultural histories, imagination, and feelings connected to spaces. Bedoya (2013) warns that “if creative placemaking activities support the politics of dis-belonging through acts of gentrification, racism, real estate speculation, all in the name of neighborhood revitalization, then it betrays the democratic ideal of having an equitable and just civil society.” This notion is echoed by Borrup (2017) who notes, “if planners and policy-makers are unable or unwilling to account for the cultural make-up and dynamics of their communities, they cannot effectively resolve challenges across any of the domains of urban planning” (p. 46). Borrup (2017) additionally asserts, “Lack of understanding of the various cultures and ways of life within a city result in policy choices and physical development patterns that privilege some while denying others equitable access to resources and to conduct ways of life that respect and accommodate their cultures” (p. 55). Fleming (2007) also highlights these dangers describing how “the ‘urban revitalization’ movement robbed many urban areas of their built heritage by bringing in bulldozers to wipe them ‘clean’ and replace what was there with a mass of dull concrete” (p. 98). Zitcer (2020) actively recognizes the “potential for creative placemaking to usher in gentrification and displacement” and draws attention to the need for inclusive practices
that embrace diversity, mutual learning, productive disagreement, and inspiration guided by local knowledge and lived experiences (p. 279). To avoid exclusionary practices Zieter (2020) calls for experts “to listen to practitioners, who have local, concrete knowledge of what works in their communities” (p. 287).

The focus on the local community is deeply aligned with the Mending Walls project, which utilizes all local artists through intentional cross-cultural pairings. Mending Walls’ founder and creator, Hamilton Glass, felt the locality was critical to the success of the project. Glass described public art as “the pulse of a city” and noted how local artists, given their involvement in the community, can creatively transcribe communities’ thoughts, histories, and feelings (Glass, personal communication, October 28, 2021). Additionally, Glass explained that local artists' involvement demonstrates their “investment in the public art that goes up in their city” (Glass, personal communication, October 28, 2021). Glass also emphasized the importance of community-engagement stating, “when the majority of the work has to be experienced by local citizens, they should have a say in the work they experience in their neighborhoods and communities” (Glass, personal communication, October 28, 2021). The Mending Walls project is open to the community, including invitations for community-engagement and participation in civic discussions, as well as the physical mural-making process. The project also purposefully selects walls to promote community awareness including highlighting small businesses, local community organizations, and even locations that had been tagged during the 2020 protests where a need for further conversation was visibly evident (Glass, personal communication,
October 28, 2021). While the Mending Walls project seeks to embody the antithesis of cultural gentrification, I believe it is important to define the term to draw attention to the stark contrast.

**Cultural Gentrification**

Crisman (2021a) notes, “gentrification is often only understood as an economic process” (p. 137). Yet, perhaps more importantly, Crisman (2021a) argues is the concept of cultural gentrification or “how transformations in the symbolic sphere can trigger a loss of belonging” (p. 137). For the purposes of this study, I’ve adopted Crisman’s definition of cultural gentrification, which Crisman (2021a) defines as “changes to a place’s aesthetics which threaten existing inhabitants’ sense of belonging – distinct from but deeply intertwined with economic gentrification...” (p. 143). Through a comparative case study, Crisman (2021a) explored two neighborhoods in Los Angeles with differing attitudes towards art and gentrification based on what the author grounds in aesthetics of engagement versus aesthetics of gentrification. In the Boyle Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles, Crisman (2021a) described how the aesthetics of gentrification was “largely associated with the high art world, global art market, and for-profit gallery system” geared towards “wealthier, whiter outsiders” and “failed to adequately align with the historical and contextual forms of art and culture making which were indigenous to the neighborhood...leading to the loss of a sense of belonging” (p. 138). Comparatively, in the Little Tokyo neighborhood of Los Angeles, Crisman (2021a) described an aesthetics of engagement where the art aligned with the history and context of the community, “signaling desired forms of community action, place identity, and urban development rather than cultural gentrification”
which promoted feelings of acceptance and belonging among members of the community (p. 138). Such considerations are also significant in the implementation of murals.

Mendelson-Shwartz & Mualam (2021) address the need to consider themes such as belonging, representation, and artist-audience relationship, when considering potential challenges and tensions associated with installing murals in the public realm. In order to make public art both accessible and inspiring, Zitcer & Almanzar (2020) assert, “cultural expression is linked to citizens’ sense of belonging in a place” and note “one potential remedy for disenfranchisement is a broadly accepting and artistically alive public realm” (p. 1000). Burns & Berbary (2021) contend, “we must ask which people revitalization is for? And if it isn’t for all people, isn’t it just a more palatable term for gentrification?” (p. 11). Sharp, Pollock, & Paddison (2005) stress, “the installation of public art needs to be sensitive to local diversity” (p. 1020-1021). Greaney (2002) emphasizes the significance of the process of creation and the need for community engagement to foster communal feelings of ownership and collective caretaking (p. 39). Through a thoughtful and inclusive process, murals can instill neighborhood pride and have astoundingly positive reverberating effects. Furtado & Payne (2022) further this notion, suggesting “public art, specifically murals that involve community member participation, can positively influence residents’ interactions with one another and build a sense of belonging” (p. 2). Thus, community-engaged murals can conceivably be a tool to engage artists and communities in a collaborative process that encourages not only the physical transformation of public spaces but also stimulates meaningful interactions that take place within them.
Community-Engaged Murals

This study focused on the Mending Walls mural project, in which all of the murals created are community-engaged murals. As a reminder, the term mural, for the sake of this study, is defined as painting or work of art applied directly on a wall, usually in a public, outdoor space created with explicit permissions (Kordic, 2015; Mendelson-Schwartz & Mualam, 2021). However, community-engaged murals, for the purposes of this study, involve the added distinction of the inclusion of community members with and in the mural-making process (Greaney, 2002). Chakravarty & Hwee-Hwa Chan (2016) point out, “Murals are known for their use by communities and neighborhoods to express collective identities. Common themes include endorsement of shared ideals or values, celebration of events or people from history, and political criticism or protest” (p. 406). Yet, even if murals express collective identities, they may not be community-engaged as defined in this study. Community-engaged murals in the context of this study will refer to murals that are created with collective communal participation. In response to the often illegal and egocentric nature of graffiti and street art, murals and community mural arts programs have frequently been created in an effort to mitigate illegal graffiti within neighborhoods. However, simply installing murals in neighborhoods is not the only element in this so-called fix. The inclusion of community members with and in the mural making process is integral; the collective care for the public property is deeply rooted in the collaborative vision and creation (Greaney, 2002). Murals, historically, have grassroots origins ingrained in freedom of expression and community experiences (Golden et al., 2002; Fuentes, 2018). Arguably, the most successful mural arts models remain devoted to the “democratic
creative process” through the active inclusion and engagement of diverse community members (Golden et. al, 2002, p.7). Community-engaged murals have specific features that merit distinction (Sieber et. al, 2012). As noted by Sieber et. al (2012) “murals can have many sources of sponsorship and their production can be a matter of individual, group, or institutional action;” community murals on the other hand, “are fundamentally collective, not individual, works of art” (p. 265-266). Sieber et. al (2012) point out that community murals,

...offer public or community-wide representations, and normally address social critique, often containing assertions of ethnic pride, neighborhood identity, and celebration of social and political struggle. They typically are organized and produced through the initiative of local community artists rather than through state, commercial, or corporate direction, even if sometimes these wider agencies offer financial support; and, they have the grassroots participation of local people in defining themes and often in the actual artistic production. (p. 265-266)

Shroyer et. al (2019) describe how “community engagement and collaborative partnerships across sectors and geographies have long been critical components of place-based revitalization” (p. 6). Boceri (2017) furthers this notion describing creative placemaking as consisting of “the physical and social regeneration of urban spaces through participative creative and artistic initiatives” (p. 642). Bublitz et. al (2019) notes “research on the transformative nature of the arts documents how community-based, collaborative arts initiatives enhance collective identity, build community, and address community problems” (p. 314). Community engagement and accessibility thus play critical roles in the significance and consequential outcomes of murals.

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The creation of a mural for aesthetic purposes only, I am suggesting, is not a community-engaged endeavor as it fails to represent the inhabited space fully and authentically and can contribute to harmful consequences such as cultural gentrification (Crisman, 2021a). Murals’ success and power relies on “collective voice” (O’Connell, 2012, p. xii); thus, community collaboration is paramount to their impact. While not always embraced, it is arguably necessary that community members are included in the mural making process.

Community involvement is a concept rooted in the history of muralism. Murals have often been created in response, critique, and resistance. For example, Rosen and Fisher (2001) note modern Chicano muralism’s desire to reclaim community cultural heritage and community self-pride, specifically developing techniques to allow community participation and underscore community empowerment. Greaney (2002) highlights the significance of muralism establishing public voice in the community specifically referencing the Wall of Respect in Chicago, created by sixteen African American artists in 1967 in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement (p. 16-17). Jarrell (2020) also noted the significance of community involvement in The Wall of Respect project stating, “people in the community were not only afforded an opportunity to witness artists at work, but experienced communal participation by offering comments and suggestions” resulting in feelings of collaboration and partnership (p. 70). Stephens (2006) underscores the significance of such collaborations noting,

By welcoming community members as active partners in the creative process, participatory public art strives to break away from the conventional roles assigned to artists and viewers. Artists become facilitators who oversee art products, while the
community takes on the active part as creative contributor. This redefining of roles encourages artists to better understand the communities for which their work is intended and engages the public in meaning making. (p. 44)

The literature regarding murals as public art reveals murals are most successful when access is equitable, and the community is actively involved and represented. Nikitin (2000) echoes this sentiment declaring, “...public art projects [are] most effective when they are part of a holistic, multi-disciplinary approach to enlivening a city, neighborhood or downtown, and are produced in collaboration with the people for whom they are meant” (p. 44). Sharp et. al (2005), also draw attention to the significance of embracing democratic processes in the production of public art to promote social cohesion and inclusivity. They stress the need to consider “how local participation is structured to give adequate recognition to different local groups and how deliberation is conducted to ensure that these interests are able to have their voice heard and listened to” and note it is “fundamental to the practice of inclusive democratic processes” (Sharp et al., 2005, p. 1020). Bublitz et. al (2019) suggests “collaborative art experiences can transform a community and its collective identity as a result of people in the community working together” (p. 317). Jane Golden, the founder and executive director of Mural Arts Philadelphia, similarly notes, “Community art can knit people together in a way that other things can’t. It has this ability to build consensus and challenge people to think collectively for the greater good” (Hurdle, 2008, p. A19). I am suggesting when murals are created through a process embracing inclusive practices, involving the collective voices of locals, and providing opportunities for collaborative participatory engagement with the community, they can actively intervene, avoiding issues such
as gentrification under the guise of revitalization and problematic issues of creative placemaking. Additionally, community-engaged murals can promote opportunities for social justice, artivism, and create opportunities for cross-cultural connections that promote empathy and connection.

A number of scholars have pointed to the arts as an entry point to consider alternative possibilities, affirm and appreciate difference, and engage in meaningful dialogue relationships (Bastos & Hutzel, 2004; Baumann et. al, 2021; Greene, 1995). As noted by Baldini (2019), “thanks to its special relationship with [the] public, public art has the unique potential to encourage a peculiar modality of discourse where individuals share and debate their perspectives on a variety of issues they care about” (p. 10). Conrad (1995) furthers this notion stating,

The community mural movement serves an important educational role by helping to clarify, expand, and strengthen community values. This is an art form that teaches, provokes, and pleases. Murals can be aesthetically challenging and ask profound questions at the same time; they are expressive as well as didactic. They stimulate community pride and commitment to justice while teaching outsiders about the struggles of traditionally oppressed people. Murals, particularly community murals, are a democratic art form with immense capacity to strengthen and expand multicultural understanding. Community murals educate on many levels. (p. 98)

Greaney (2002) additionally notes, “Community-based murals become common ground for people who might not ordinarily interact. The process of design and painting presents something to discuss, argue about, protest, or praise. Artist and community become engaged in a way that doesn’t often happen without provocation” (p. 38). Schrader (2017) describes community murals
as “one of the most creative tools activists” can employ (p. 519). Thus, the artistic transformation is potentially just the tipping point for a multitude of deep, meaningful, further implications and modes of engagement. When murals are inclusively created involving the collective voices of the community, they can facilitate public discourse and become platforms for social justice initiatives. As stated by Greaney (2002) “the true transformation runs deeper than the artistry of the murals themselves; the real works of art are the changes these collaborative projects inspire within communities.” (p. 8). Greene (1995) argued imaginative capacity is essential to experience empathy, open our minds to different points of view, and decenter ourselves to see otherwise. The collaborative and community-centered construction of community-engaged murals can create space for the facilitation of difficult, yet meaningful conversations. Through active dialogue participants might be challenged and awakened to new perspectives, recognize implicit bias, and shed judgment (Roig-Palmer & Pedneault, 2018). This process can promote what O’Connell (2012) refers to as “aesthetic solidarity;” a “series of generative practices through which people of different religious traditions and socioeconomic enclaves [etc.] learn how to imagine together, to create together, and to build together the kind of communities, city, nation, in which they want to live” (p. 259). As previously mentioned, throughout history, murals have been created in response, critique, and resistance. When implemented purposely and collaboratively, murals can actively stimulate social justice movements while simultaneously building community.

A number of scholars have recognized participatory engagements with public art, particularly community murals, as a means to promote critical discourse, provide opportunities
for self-actualization and build relationships through meaningful, interpersonal connections (Bastos & Hutzel, 2004; Bourgault, 2021; Epstein et. al, 2021; Lawton, 2010). As noted by Moss (2010) “the public consumption of murals is especially significant” in its ability to engage diverse audiences and viewers (p. 374). Moss (2010) additionally points out, “public artwork is central to public discourse because it communicates information, ideas, and feelings” (p. 389). Similarly, Baldini (2019) describes public arts “unique potential to encourage a peculiar modality of discourse where individuals share and debate their perspectives on a variety of issues they care about” (p. 10). Similar to the Mending Walls project, art education scholars, Bastos & Hutzel (2004), pointed to collaborative community art following civil unrest as a means of addressing racial issues through critical introspection and engagement in meaningful dialogue. Knight (2019) called for arts educators “to build better relationships with colleagues and students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds” through the creation of “safe spaces for interracial dialogue” (p. 165). To create safe spaces within art education, Knight (2019) points to the need for opportunities for discussions and creative expression including the creation of murals, spaces for storytelling, and collaborative art making processes (all of which the Mending Walls project includes). Dewhurst (2011) describes how “…many educators are developing strategies to empower young people to take risks, assume community responsibility, and re-envision themselves as active participants in the world (p. 364). Dewhurst (2011) additionally notes that “compelling examples of this work can often be found at the intersection of art, education, and social justice” (p. 364). Helguera (2011) similarly points to natural intersections with dialogue, art, and education, proclaiming, “conversation is conveniently placed between pedagogy and
art.” Helguera (2011) also highlights similarities between collaborative relationships and negotiations that take place between artists and community members, and educators and students. Both artists and teachers, according to Helguera (2011), “must demonstrate respect and sincere interest in their interlocutors” while also encouraging mutual exchanges, contribution of new insights, challenging assumptions, and investment in the process of exchange. In the next section, I’ll elaborate on these natural connections bridging the arts, community, and education, and begin to weave connective threads to highlight the pedagogical possibilities for community-engaged murals.

**Community-Engaged Pedagogy**

Building community and creating ample opportunities for engagement are arguably key elements in the development of effective learning environments. Thus, it is perhaps unsurprising that these two components have been inextricably linked in the field of education. Christensen (2015) posits the classroom provides a unique forum for community engagement, providing access to a wide array of voices, and creating space for the inclusive representation of diverse voices in decisions (p. 14-15). Engaged pedagogy, a term coined by activist and scholar, bell hooks, is foundational to building classroom community (hooks, 2009). Stemming from personal experiences as an educator, hooks calls for education as the practice of freedom, noting the need for a progressive, holistic approach to education that engages students beyond the surface level, taking time to harness emotional intelligence and build relationships (hooks, 2009). Engaged pedagogy, according to hooks (1994, 2009, 2014), requires mutual participation (both teacher and student) embracing a radical openness, welcoming of wholeness, willingness to take risks,
and honest vulnerability. It calls for various opportunities for engagement, making an inclusive space for everyone, valuing student expression and diverse ways of knowing to enhance individuals’ capacity to live fully and deeply. Engaged pedagogy acknowledges the power of each student’s unique voice and honors all capabilities (hooks, 1994, 2009). This includes meaningful contributions through dialogue as well as active listening; engaged pedagogy recognizes silence can also add to classroom dynamics, providing opportunities to see and hear others (hooks, 1994, 2009). Engaged pedagogy demands self-actualization placing emphasis on the well-being of both teacher and students (hooks, 1994, 2009). This pedagogical approach provides opportunities for students and teachers to make valuable contributions to the learning process by exercising choice, independent thinking, responsibility, and cooperation. Further, it aims to create an atmosphere of trust and commitment, where individuals feel comfortable sharing their hopes and dreams (hooks, 1994, 2009). It engages both heart and mind in celebratory, collective learning. As noted by hooks (2009), “engaged pedagogy makes us better learners because it asks us to embrace and explore the practice of knowing together, to see intelligence as a resource that can strengthen our common good” (p. 22). By resisting a hierarchical approach to teaching, engaged pedagogy values all participants as valuable contributors and members of the community (hooks, 2003). Jefferson, Guiterrez, & Silverstein (2018) summarize Payne's (2003) notion that “communities have shared history and knowledge, yet that history and knowledge is often divorced from the knowledge transmitted by schools” (p. 744). The authors call attention to the possibilities for liberation and justice through education that centers the local community; they highlight the need for “tools, questions, ideas, and
collaborative opportunities” needed for empowerment in this community-engaged pedagogical approach (p. 744).

In the field of art education, Lawton (2019) called attention to acquainting students with “the theory and practice of community-engaged pedagogy” as a means to connect students “with democratic concepts of civic responsibility and social justice” (p. 215). Fitzgerald (2017) framed these democratic learning environments as “community-centered pedagogy” and highlighted while the emphasis on “reciprocity, dialogue, critical thinking, and process-oriented experiences” share many characteristics with socially engaged art practices, a key distinction “is that rather than focusing on a student’s ability to make meaning of his or her experiences within an educational system, community-based arts promote creativity, reciprocity, and the construction of knowledge beyond the borders of classroom settings” (p. 2). Bolin (2000) asserts art educators should strive to empower students to make “critical connections between what they encounter outside of class, and what they see, do, and learn in the art classroom” (p. 4). Lawton (2010) furthers this notion stating, “one very effective way to make these critical connections is providing students with the opportunity to engage in community-based/public art endeavors” (p. 7). Embracing this community-engaged pedagogy in the field of arts education “can help solidify the practice of teaching as something dynamic, evolving, and critical” (Chernoff, 2015, p. 108).

Further, this pedagogical approach aligns with an asset-based based community development (ABCD) framework. As pointed out by Campana (2011), “The work of a community-based artist/educator/activist shares many traits with assets-based community development” (p. 280). The ABCD framework counters a need-based or deficit approach,
shifting the focus from problems, needs, and risks to the already existing but often
unacknowledged strengths, capacities, skills, and assets of communities (Kretzmann &
McKnight, 1993; ABCD, 2018). ABCD is citizen-centered, promoting mobilization and
affecting change from within, building on the community’s unique resources and talents (ABCD,
2018; Forrester, Kurth, Vincent, & Oliver, 2020). Thus, there are notable intersections with
education, as well as public art since both are integral parts of community life (Forrester et. al,
2020; Hutzel, 2007).

Historically, in the field of education, research focused on communities and schools has
often been approached through deficit-based discourses and perspectives. These deficit
narratives are situated in fixing and identifying needs and typically fail to acknowledge existing
strengths as well as the structural and systemic forms of oppression that have led to the existence
of such inequities in the first place (Flint & Jaggers, 2021). The asset-based approach to
community development directly parallels asset-based pedagogies that seek to stand in
opposition to deficit-based approaches in education. As pointed out by Flint & Jaggers (2021),
“asset-based pedagogies place value on students’ insights, languages, and cultural practices, as
well as seek to critique injustices, oppression, and other social-political issues” (p. 255). Key
eamples of such pedagogies include culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995) culturally
responsive (Gay, 2000; Hammond, 2014), culturally sustaining (Paris & Alim, 2016), culturally
and historically responsive literacy (Muhammad, 2020, 2023), and funds of knowledge (Moll et. al, 1992). In the field of art education, Hutzel (2007) implemented an asset-based community art
curriculum recognizing public art as a tool to nurture and emphasize community assets while
also serving as a catalyst for social change. Hutzel (2007) noted the benefits of the asset-based approach for art educators, and the importance of understanding and learning from the communities in which they teach. Epstein et. al (2021) also recognized community-engaged arts as a means to “synergistically advance strength-based narratives, promote critical dialogue…and champion social justice” (p. 92S). Similar calls for promoting an asset-based approach have been made within the field of education broadly. Milner (2020) argues in order to more effectively meet the needs of students, it is imperative that educators recognize and acknowledge the expertise, talents, and assets of the communities where they work, he notes, “all communities – regardless of zip code – are deeply rich in human capital” (p. xiii). Emdin (2021) furthers this notion by avowing, “teaching is about being in touch with the youth and the communities they are from and being humble enough to learn from them as you engage in your work” (p. 19). This need for recognition of assets and authentic community engagement converges with community-engaged teacher preparation.

**Community-Engaged Teacher Preparation**

As described by Lawton, Walker, & Green (2019) service-learning develops “civic responsibility through community engagement” involving “reciprocal” and “experiential learning” through organized experiences embedded in the curriculum to address actual community needs (p. 10). While many universities encourage community-engaged learning and require service-learning hours, Brudney & Russell (2016) note that “hours alone are not enough to measure the value of such projects for the community” (p. 277). This notion is echoed by Haddix (2015), who declared community engagement must be more than a checkbox with a
“journal entry or reflection essay about the experience” (p. 67). Haddix (2015) called attention to the risk of further rectifying “deficit perspectives and ideologies” when service-learning opportunities fail to provide spaces for critical dialogue, thinking, and questioning, specifically addressing issues of racism, power, and privilege (p. 66). Haddix (2015) asserts it is necessary for students to explore their own positionalities and critically examine what it means “to be of service” considering important questions such as,

- How do they understand their role? How do they understand the position and role of people from this community? What do they bring to this community? What do they take from this community? How do they develop a community partnership that honors the “funds of knowledge” of the community members (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2013)?
- How do they critically and purposefully engage in questioning who they are by addressing any assumptions they might have of people and communities that are different from them and from what they know? (p. 66)

Thus, Haddix (2015) called for a semantic shift to “community-engaged teacher preparation” moving away from the negative check-off associations that lack nuanced understanding and critical dialogue, challenging “university structures to recast and reframe service-learning in ways that highlight its potential for ongoing community partnership” (p. 66). Milner (2020) emphasizes, “engagement in the life of a community, as opposed to mere participation or observation is the key” (p. 237). Engagement, as described by Milner (2020), requires true and lasting commitment. With community-engaged learning, the goal is to facilitate experiences that
are more than a class-obligated drop-in but rather meaningful experiences that provide opportunities to forge genuine and lasting community connections.

Zygmunt et. al (2018) suggest a community-engaged model of teacher preparation focused on authentic community engagement that privileges the expertise of communities can “develop educators who are critically conscious of the power dynamics shaping teaching and learning and who recognize that honoring and affirming children’s lived experience is requisite to their success as educators” (p. 136). Within the specific context of art education, Lawton (2019) asserts that providing educators “access to empowering community-engaged experiences that holistically integrate their artist/teacher/researcher identities can be personally, professionally, and socially transformative” (p. 203). Similarly, Dewhurst (2022) discussed creating coursework to facilitate opportunities to help future art educators “identify specific tools to get to know their students, themselves, and the communities in which they would be working” (p. 8). Dewhurst (2022) noted an increasing need for “radical love” calling on educators to dedicate ample time to truly connect with and recognize the specificity and complexities of their students and communities, following the aftermath of the unprecedented year of 2020.

As stated by Howard (2021), “the upheavals of 2020 created a reality that many educators never could have envisioned” (p. ix). The impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic and racial unrest propelled by the brutal murder of George Floyd, significantly altered life in a way that prohibited a return “to business as usual” (p. ix). The “new normal” as Howard (2021) describes as “the current moment of academic, social, and emotional distress” requires “a more thoughtful, caring, and community-informed” approach to teaching and learning (p. ix). There is a heightened need
and awareness for teachers that embrace an asset-based perspective that values, honors, and privileges the wisdom and expertise of their students and their communities (Howard, 2021). This need aligns with community-engaged teacher preparation, which, as noted by Haddix (2015), “can get at issues of race and racism, equity and inequity, and social justice and injustices more pointedly than reading scholarly articles, learning new methods and pedagogies, or completing student teaching placements” (p. 69-70). Further, Cooper, Hsieh, & Lu (2022) highlight that the arts can serve as a vehicle to nurture empathy toward people from different cultures and backgrounds while critically examining individual biases and assumptions. Through art, Cooper et. al (2022) argue students can “understand current racial/social issues and challenges, creatively voice and/or propose solutions for the voiceless, and eventually advocate for social justice in a global world with diversity, respect, and harmony” (p. 23). Art educators, according to Knight (2019), must “build better relationships with colleagues and students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, as our collective future is connected, and all are harmed as a consequence of racial hierarchies and structural racism” (p. 165). Art educators are thus well-positioned to create safe spaces for interracial dialogue (Knight, 2019) and center and support creative engagements with equity and justice-oriented work (Patel & Wells, 2022).

In art education, Schlemmer (2017) spoke to “community arts as pedagogy” as a means to “supplement school-embedded practice” and create meaningful and relevant learning experiences beyond the formal K-12 settings in preservice art education. Through engaging in community-based art projects that encourage active participation and collaborative community encounters Schlemmer (2017) asserts preservice educators have the capacity to “connect content
develop reciprocal relationships and a heightened sense of awareness, as well as build new social connections (p. 34). Schlemmer (2017) notes, “community arts can broaden our perspectives of art and education by establishing connections between art and life that allow us to better understand, celebrate, and build upon the local community” (p. 34) with the capacity for transformative impact.

Germán (2021) points out that community-driven teaching requires consideration of individual positionality, the community one is teaching in, and the ways in which this might influence the curriculum. According to Dalmage & Martinez (2020), this understanding of positionality and individual social location provides an opportunity for questioning, opening a liberatory space for critical dialogue “with an explicit focus on injustice and contradictions” to challenge existing dominant narratives (p. 128). This critical and honest self-reflection on race and culture and willingness to examine ways of knowing and acknowledging “unique skill sets and knowledge bases” students bring to the classroom is “an essential aspect of culturally competent teaching” (Howard, 2019, p. 115). Additionally, Furniss (2019) posits that “by tapping into their own lived experiences, creative practices, and local resources” preservice educators can draw new knowledge and understanding of the arts (p. 49). Community-engaged practices can encourage educators to consider how they can further “their knowledge of community” (Milner, 2020, p. 235) and utilize it to inform their pedagogy and instructional goals and better support their students.

In order to facilitate genuine experiences for thoughtful engagement, a “community-centered teacher” is aware of community happenings and student interests and views the
community as an asset, full of valuable resources to drive curriculum (Germán, 2021). Chernoff (2015) calls “for artists and educators who want to ‘belong’ to the communities with whom they work…[to] take stock of ongoing community strengths, and approach people and places as partners rather than sites of improvement” (p. 107). Howard (2019) highlights the necessity for educators to “operate from a paradigm of possibility” (p. 144). Further, he posits that “central to empathetic teaching is the eradication of deficit-based thinking” (p. 48). Empathetic teachers, according to Howard (2019), must hold students accountable despite difficult circumstances, recognize students’ unique potential promise and possibility, tap into students’ cultural capital, view learning as a reciprocal process taking time to listen and learn from students’ experiences and develop critical and complex teaching practices to actively engage students as problem solvers (p. 49). Cooper et. al (2022) additionally emphasize guiding and engaging preservice art educators in the exploration of difficult social issues “is essential to nurture empathetic attitudes and further develop advocacy” (p. 22). In order “to bridge the knowledge, caring, and empathy gap that exists in many schools”, Howard (2021) calls for the preparation of teachers that see “community as vital” (p. x). I would additionally assert, educators must embrace what Wilkerson (2020) refers to as “radical empathy.” Empathy, according to Wilkerson (2020), “is commonly viewed as putting yourself in someone else’s shoes and imagining how you would feel” and while Wilkerson notes this could be “seen as a start” it is not enough because “empathy is no substitute for experience itself” (p. 387). More than just empathy, radical empathy, Wilkerson (2020) explains,
means putting in the work to educate oneself and to listen with a humble heart to understand another’s experience from their perspective, not as we imagine we would feel. Radical empathy is not about you and what you think you would do in a situation you have never been in and perhaps never will. It is the kindred connection from a place of deep knowing that opens your spirit to the pain of another as they perceive it. (p. 387)

Personally, as an educator, the Mending Walls project served as a tool to approach topics such as radical empathy in the attempt to educate myself, build classroom community, and learn from and with students. This study sought to better understand students’ perceptions of engaging with the Mending Walls project in the pursuit of their professional teaching credentials.

**Conceptual Framework**

Ravitch & Riggan (2012) define a conceptual framework as “a grounded argument about why the topic of study matters to its various and often intersecting fields…” (p. 39). As noted in Chapter One and expanded upon in this review of this literature, this study was grounded in existing research in three areas: community-engaged murals, community-engaged pedagogy, and community-engaged teacher preparation (see Figure 1). These concepts were used to frame the study and provide further rationale for the inquiry. While there is clearly existing literature on each of these concepts individually, this study sought to put the concepts of community-engaged murals, community-engaged pedagogy, and community-engaged teacher preparation in conversation with one another, weaving connective threads to guide the exploration of preservice art educators’ perceptions of engaging with the Mending Walls mural project.
The overlap in each of these three concepts is the prefix community-engagement (see Figure 1). Which as aforementioned, for the purposes of this study, is defined as “the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1997, as cited in, Principles of Community Engagement, 2011, p. 7). As previously noted, the prefix of community-engaged, additionally creates distinctions between murals, pedagogy, and teacher preparation on their own. As a reminder, murals, for the purposes of this study, are defined as paintings or works of art applied directly on a wall, usually in a public, outdoor space created with explicit permissions (Kordic, 2015; Mendelson-Schwartz & Mualam, 2021). Community-engaged murals, however, add an additional distinction involving the inclusion of community members with and in the mural-making process (Greaney, 2002). Pedagogy, for the purposes of this study, is recognized as the theory, method, philosophy, and practice of teaching or how teachers teach, bridging theory and practice. Community-engaged pedagogy, on the other hand, adds an additional layer of involvedness, and for this study is recognized as the union between theory and practice, that connects teaching and learning with community assets, issues, and needs through the formation of reciprocal relationships amongst teachers, students, and community partners built on collective knowledge sharing, trust, and commitment. (Community engagement workshops, 2022; hooks, 2003, 2013, 2014; Rubin et. al, 2012). Similarly, teacher preparation, for the purposes of this study is defined as “a state-approved course of study in which the successful completion of the program signifies that an enrolled teacher candidate has met all state
educational requirements and training requirements to be recommended for initial certification in an authorized teaching field” (*Teacher preparation program, n.d.*). Whereas community-engaged teacher preparation includes the preservice teacher preparation requirements while also incorporating authentic, asset-based, commitments to working with and in local communities, creating opportunities for preservice teachers to forge genuine and lasting connections (Haddix, 2015; Milner, 2020; Zygmunt et. al, 2018).

After analyzing and coding a group of preservice teachers’ notes, questions, and reflections on three local Chicano murals in Oakland, California, Donahue (2011) suggested “interacting with public art can ground teachers in educational philosophies and practices connected to teaching for social justice” (p. 70) as well as “shape preservice teachers’ thinking about their reasons for teaching in the humanities” (p 72). Donahue (2011) additionally recommended utilizing public art to help preservice teachers “understand a community’s funds of knowledge” (p. 77). Through this study, I was curious to further explore these notions focused on preservice art educators’ perceptions on engaging with community-engaged murals created through the Mending Walls project. Considering the strong emphasis on collaboration in the Mending Walls project, I was interested in learning more about this specific cohort of preservice art educators’ perceptions and if there were any connections to community-engaged pedagogy and hooks (2009) notion of embracing and exploring “the practice of knowing together, to see intelligence as a resource that can strengthen the common good” (p. 22). Considering community-engaged teacher preparation, I was intrigued to discover if utilizing the local, community-engaged project in foundational coursework had any influence on preservice art
educators’ future consideration of the communities they might work with. Milner (2020) notes, “curriculum informed by community knowledge honors, addresses, and draws from community history, wisdom, preferences, needs and practices…[and] allows teachers to shape, reconstruct, and build their practices in more informed, relevant, and meaningful ways” (p. 220). Through this study, I sought to gain more insight into if the Mending Walls project had any influence on the way the preservice art educators’ might approach their work in the future.

As I’ve ruminated on utilizing the Mending Walls project as an instructor of foundational art education coursework, each of these concepts have been instrumental in the synthesis of my own thoughts and reflections. The conceptual framework (see Figure 1) visually depicts the grounding of the study considering intersections between community-engaged murals (represented in green), community-engaged pedagogy (represented in blue), and community-engaged teacher preparation (represented in red). At the center of the intersecting circles, is the perceptions of the preservice art educators. Discovering the perceptions of preservice art educators was the focus of this study, as guided by existing research in the three main concepts. The conceptual framework seeks to make visible my interpretive process (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012) as well as provide a grounding for the data collection and analysis.

**Conclusion**

This review of the literature and detailed description of the conceptual framework sought to make visible the intersections between community-engaged murals, community-engaged pedagogy, and community-engaged teacher preparation and detail the foundation for this study. This study aimed to apply community-engaged teacher preparation to the field of art education,
exploring community-engaged pedagogy through a local, community-engaged mural project called, Mending Walls. This review of existing literature reveals the intentionality and care that goes into the creation of community-engaged murals are also necessary for enacting community-engaged pedagogy and community-engaged teacher preparation. In the creation of murals, aesthetic changes alone without careful consideration of the community that occupies the space as well as the history of the space can have potentially harmful consequences (Bedoya, 2013; Borrup, 2017; Burns & Berbary, 2021; Crisman, 2021a, 2021b; Fleming, 2007; Mendelson-Shwartz & Mualam, 2021; Pritchard, 2016, 2018; Toolis, 2017; Zicter & Almanzar, 2020; Zicter, 2020) just as service-learning projects without critical authentic engagement with communities (Haddix, 2015; Zygmunt et. al, 2018) or discussions of systems of oppression including systemic racism impacting the communities do not engage the skills needed to develop effective, culturally responsive teachers (Haddix 2015; Howard, 2019, 2021; Knight, 2019; Milner, 2020; Zygmunt et. al, 2018). The next chapter will detail the research methods and design of this study.
Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter, I will explain the research methods and design for this study. I will discuss the parameters that were used in the participant recruitment and selection process as well as the methods of data collection and analysis. Ethics and trustworthiness together with limitations and challenges will also be discussed.

Research Design

This study is qualitative study merged the methodologies of case study and narrative inquiry (Sonday et. al, 2020). According to Creswell (2013), a qualitative case study is defined as the investigation of “a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case themes” (p. 97). In this case, the system is bounded by the parameters of a specific place and time (Creswell, 2013); the place being enrollment in specific foundational coursework in the Department of Art Education at a mid-Atlantic university and the time being bound by one academic year Fall 2021-Spring 2022. The single case study focused on preservice art educators that successfully completed at least one of two specific courses utilizing the Mending Walls project within the course curriculum. The specific boundaries of this case study limited data collection to focus on understanding participants’ perceptions of prior coursework and related experiences. As noted by Merriam & Tisdell (2015), qualitative case studies involve “the search for meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data
collection and analysis, an inductive investigative strategy, and the end product being richly descriptive” (p. 37). Collecting and analyzing various forms of qualitative data, this study aimed to develop an “in-depth understanding” (Creswell, 2013, p. 98) of preservice art educators' perceptions of utilizing the local, community-engaged, Mending Walls mural project in foundational coursework. The intent was to better understand the participants' unique experiences. This study embraced a narrative-inquiry approach to frame the case study (Sunday et. al, 2020). A narrative case study focuses on a variety of individual narratives – i.e., stories of lived experiences across several participants (De Medeiros & Etter-Lewis, 2020).

A narrative approach to this case study was intentional, for as noted by Webster & Mertova (2007), narrative inquiry “is well suited to addressing the complexities and subtleties of the human experience in teaching and learning” (p. 1). Narrative inquiry “provides researchers with a rich framework” for investigating “the ways humans experience the world depicted through their stories” (p. 3). Narrative inquiry can provide “illuminating detail” (p. 14) and “powerful insights” (p. 15). It is also helpful in evaluating course content and determining if any experiences had a significant impact on participants (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Trahar (2013) asserts, “a much proffered reason for using narrative inquiry is that it supports silenced voices to be heard and that it has an overtly political purpose – to challenge or trouble established ways of thinking” (p. xiv). While I found value in engagement with the Mending Walls content in the course, I approached this study with an open awareness that it was very possible my students did not. I was interested in assessing my former students’ perceptions of their experiences after intentional engagement with the Mending Walls project as a part of their required coursework. I
acknowledge the potential bias of the responses as favorable toward the experiences with the community-engaged mural project, as I was the person conducting the interviews. Therefore, I present the findings as considerations for future practice and not generalizable evidence for or against the use of community-engaged art projects for teaching and learning. Further, in alignment with Mending Walls mission and community-engaged practices, narrative inquiry calls for an emphasis on care and collaboration (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). A narrative approach to this case study allowed for the collecting and analyzing of the stories of experience of the preservice art education participants in this study (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). I acknowledge that given my observations as instructor during students’ engagements with the course content and that participation in this study was completely voluntary, it did present a likelihood that our experiences may align. However, it is also important to note that this study did not seek to prove effectiveness, but rather sought to provide narratives directly from participants to suggest the possibility of positive outcomes of engagements with local, community-engaged art projects.

This study utilized Ollerenshaw & Creswell’s (2002), three-dimensional approach to narrative inquiry focusing on personal experiences and interactions with others. The three aspects of the three-dimensional approach are “interaction, continuity, and situation” (p. 339). Interaction, according to Ollerenshaw & Creswell (2002) involves the researcher analyzing “transcript or text for the personal experiences of the storyteller” as well as interactions with other people who may have “different intentions, purposes, and points of view on the topic of the story” (p. 339). In this case, the participants or storytellers recounted their personal experiences
and perceptions of the coursework, and each contributed their own unique story and perspective. Continuity involves the analysis of past experiences, present experiences, and consideration of future events or actions. Participants exercised continuity reflecting on their past experiences in the foundational art education coursework, sharing their present thoughts, feelings, and perceptions, and considering how it may influence their future practice as an art educator.

Finally, situation looks at “context, time, and place situated in a physical landscape or setting” (p. 340). This case involved examining participants’ experiences or stories within the confines of one university, in one academic year, in two foundational art education courses. The participants recalled their experiences and shared their individual stories.

Participants

Participants had to meet the required criteria: Participants needed to have successfully completed at least one of two specific foundational art education courses during the 2021-2022 academic year that utilized the Mending Walls project within course curriculum at a mid-Atlantic university. The 2021-2022 academic year was the first time the local, community-engaged mural project, Mending Walls, was included in foundational art education course content. All interviews and data collected were based on participants’ previous course experiences. At the time of the interviews, none of the participants were enrolled in the courses I was teaching. Participation in the study had no bearing on student grades or performance evaluation.

Participants' names were de-identified and replaced with their chosen pseudonyms. When selecting pseudonyms participants were reminded not to select a nickname or anything that could
risk identification. The interview did include one question that asked for any demographic information the participant would like to share (race, gender, age, nationality, etc.), however, they were not required to disclose any information. For the purposes of this study, a demographic overview is shared only to demonstrate participants differed in gender, race, and age. At the time of the interviews, participants disclosed ranging in ages from 21-25 years old and all identified as having U.S. or dual citizenship. The participants self-disclosed gender identities of female, male, and nonbinary, and racial identities of Black, Latinx, Mixed-Race, and White.

**Recruitment**

This study employed purposeful selection, deliberately recruiting individuals based on the defined inclusion criteria to provide feedback on their individual perspectives and experiences in foundational coursework in art education that incorporated the Mending Walls project into the course curriculum (Maxwell, 2013; Terrell, 2015). The goal was to interview 10-20 individuals to document their unique perspectives as well as to identify if any common patterns exist (Palinkas et. al, 2015). Purposeful sampling provided an opportunity to explore participant perceptions in this case in-depth and in detail (Patton, 1999). The goal behind the purposeful sampling was to achieve representativeness (Maxwell, 2013). All individuals who completed at least one semester of coursework with the Mending Walls project embedded into the curriculum during the Fall 2021 and/or Spring 2022 semester(s) were invited to participate. Participants were asked to designate if they completed one or two semesters of coursework when interviewed to determine if any trends exist with the length of time involved.
Eligible participants were provided the study information sheet (see Appendix A) attached in the initial recruitment email (see Appendix B). Interested individuals were directed to contact the investigator directly, and upon individual expressed interest via email response, they were provided a digital copy of the semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix C) to review. After reviewing the semi-structured interview protocol, another email communication was exchanged to schedule a date and time to participate in a recorded interview. Participants were provided options to meet via videoconference or in-person, but all participants selected the Zoom platform video conference option. The conducted interviews varied in time based on participant feedback, but all were completed within a one-hour window.

At the onset of recruitment, it was determined, in conjunction with the department chair, that there were 30 eligible individuals that could be invited via email to voluntarily participate in this qualitative case study. All 30 identified individuals were invited via a direct, undisclosed, and bcc’d invitation sent by the department chair to their university email, once a week for five weeks beginning on November 28, 2022. Of the 30 individuals originally determined eligible, it was later determined two were no longer enrolled at the university and one had switched majors. Additionally, seven individuals who did not connect to set up an interview before the end of the Fall 2022 semester were no longer eligible at the start of the Spring 2023 semester since, by that point, I was assigned as their instructor for another course. Although this study focused on perceptions of past course content, it was determined any student enrolled in a course in which I was the instructor would no longer remain eligible as an added measure of ethical participant protection to ensure participation had no bearing on student grades or performance evaluation.
These circumstances accordingly dropped the final total number of eligible participants to 20. My original goal (when the eligible number was still believed to be 30) was to interview 10-20 participants. Given the circumstances and various time constraints, I was able to successfully complete semi-structured interviews with 11 total participants.

**Data Collection**

This section will detail how data was collected in an effort to answer the research questions. As a reminder, this study sought to explore the following research questions:

1. After the completion of foundational coursework in art education, what are the perceptions of preservice art educators regarding the use of a local, community-engaged mural project
   a. in the development of arts curriculum for K-12, museum, or community learning?
   b. on how the concept, process, and content of the Mending Walls project impacts their insights on teaching and learning?

2. Through the analysis of preservice teachers’ perceptions of engaging with a local, community-engaged mural project, what might be determined implications for future pedagogies for art education teacher preparation?

A variety of methods will be utilized to “reveal the unique complexity of the case” (Stake, 1995, p. 63). Qualitative data collection methods including semi-structured interviews, document analysis, visual narrative analysis, and field notes, will be described, and data collection procedures will be detailed.

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Data Sources

Semi-Structured Interviews

This case study utilized conversational, semi-structured interviews with a set of structured but open-ended questions and ad hoc follow-up probes to gather participant perceptions. These interviews served as an important research tool to gather accurate and valid information documenting detailed accounts of participants’ firsthand knowledge and experiences (Ahlin, 2019). The interviews aimed to capture participants’ unique perspectives, capturing their descriptions and interpretations as well as observations that may be otherwise missed (Stake, 1995). As noted by Dewhurst & Desai (2016), interviewing “viewed through an educational lens” can be a pedagogical tool serving “as an important process for fostering inquiry, empowerment, and critical analysis” (p. 51) and can serve as “a platform for collaborative learning” (p. 55). The semi-structured interviews were used as a tool to investigate individuals’ complex and rich experiences as well as to provide space for my own critical reflection as a researcher.

Field Notes

Following the guidance of Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault (2016), I recorded detailed field notes after each participant interview. Field notes, as noted by Maharaj (2015), are “an integral part of documentation and analysis in qualitative research” (p. 114). Field notes were written immediately following each interview session. I intentionally scheduled interviews with time blocked out for immediate reflection noting keywords, phrases, initial reactions, and thoughts
(Taylor et. al, 2016). The field notes were reserved for immediate reflections distinct from memos, which were documented after time and space away from the interviews. The field notes provided essential context to inform the data analysis as well as served as a space for initial reflection, identification of biases, and preliminary ideas for coding (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). By immediately documenting reflections, the field notes worked to improve the depth, trustworthiness, and rigor of the findings (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018).

**Document Analysis**

A variety of existing documents were included in the analysis of this study. Documents including a reflexive researcher journal (initiated in 2020), course calendars for the Fall 2021 and Spring 2022 foundational art education courses, and the Fall 2021 visual journal prompts (see Appendix D) were analyzed throughout the course of this study. Embracing an arts-informed research approach, the course calendars and visual journal prompts were analyzed and discussed with participants during interviews to develop “new understandings of process, spirit, purpose, subjectivities, emotion, responsiveness, and the ethical dimensions of inquiry” (Knowles & Cole, 2008, p. 59). All participants were provided with links to view the course calendar(s) and visual journal prompt documents at the start of their scheduled interview.

A researcher-generated document (reflexive journal) was used as an additional source for data analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher-generated reflexive research journal was carefully analyzed and compared to data collected throughout this study. Documentation in the reflexive research journal started at the beginning of my (the researcher’s) doctoral
coursework (in September 2020) as a way to process my thoughts as well as to practice transparency and critical self-reflection in the research process and design (Ortlipp, 2008).

**Visual Narrative Analysis**

Riessman (2008) points out that while narrative research often relies on spoken and written discourse, artist rendered imagery can similarly communicate meaning. Thus, Riessman contends it can be valuable to interpret images “alongside spoken and written text” (p. 141). Similarly, Bach (2007) asserts visuals can “add layers of meaning to stories lived and told” (p. 5). Accordingly, all 11 participants were invited to submit up to ten visual images each for inclusion in this study through a secure REDCap survey (see Appendix E). After completing their scheduled interview, participants were provided with a link to a survey administered online through the secure REDCap survey platform and invited to complete the survey within a two-week period. The survey was optional, and participants were not required to engage with it or share or upload any files.

The secure REDCap survey asked participants if they would like to upload any images of their visual journal entries from coursework with a yes or no response option. If they selected no, the survey was complete. If they selected yes, they were prompted to determine if they agreed to the potential sharing of the uploaded imagery in publications. If they selected no, their images were used only for review for the purpose of the study and never shared or published. They then had the option to upload a minimum of one, maximum of ten images. If they selected yes, participants were prompted with three options for identification if selected for publication. The options stated: 1. Not identified 2. Identified by Chosen Study Pseudonym 3. Identified by
Identifiable Name. If participants selected number one, this and any future publication will state an anonymous artist. If they selected number two, this and any future publication will credit the participants by their chosen study pseudonym. If they selected number three (to be identified by an identifiable name), they were prompted to write how they wanted their name to be displayed and as requested, will be recognized accordingly in this and all future publications. This was designed with the Institutional Review Board’s (IRB) guidance to give participants autonomy over what they shared and how they were credited as the artists of the work. The REDCap survey also allowed for secure collection, management, and storage of documents collected. Five of the 11 total study participants opted to share images for analysis in this study. A total of 27 images of artwork were submitted, analyzed, and thematically coded.

**Data Collection Procedures**

The interviews for this study all took place via the encrypted online video conference platform, Zoom. An in-person or phone option was available, but all participants selected the Zoom video conference option. Through initial correspondence, a preferred mode of communication was determined, and a date and time was scheduled. Additionally, a detailed study information sheet, designed with IRB approval, was shared that clearly stated the study’s intentions (see Appendix A). Maxwell (2013) notes that research is always “to some degree, an intrusion into the lives of the participants in your study… [and it is a] primary ethical obligation” to try to understand how participants will perceive and respond to your actions (p. 92). By openly sharing the study’s objectives beforehand, I sought to address all questions and mitigate any concerns that might arise.
It was my goal to create a safe space where participants could express themselves freely and respond authentically. Although interviews were semi-structured, and questions could be re-ordered or adjusted to adapt to the flow and direction of the conversation, I opted to remain on script for every interview conducted. Interviews took place beginning December 8, 2022, through January 27, 2023. For consistency, all participants were posed the same 17 semi-structured interview questions with probes. Every interview question and every probe were posed to each participant in the same order. The participants had the interview questions and probes for their reference prior and during the interview. I reiterated their ability to skip any questions or stop at any time, but all the participants opted to answer every question and probe. I also emphasized there were no right or wrong answers, and that I was strictly interested in their opinions and experiences. I maintained the order of questions for each interview so that the participant could clearly follow along and feel comfortable knowing what I would ask next. I also informed the participants beforehand, that I would not be responding to their answers, and would be generally keeping to the script, so they would not be alarmed, as well as to maintain as much neutrality as possible in each interview. In some cases, I asked additional questions for clarity and to ensure my understanding of participants’ responses, but otherwise, it followed the exact order and format of the semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix C).

Once the interviews were transcribed, each participant was provided with the transcript shared with restricted access directly with their university password protected, two-part authentication Google account through my faculty configured secure password protected, two-part authentication Google account and made an editor. Participants were asked to member-
check their session transcript and were given the opportunity to edit or delete anything from the recorded interview. They were asked to complete their review within a ten-day window. Six of the 11 total participants elected to make edits and provided notification when their transcripts were ready for coding.

I wrote field notes in conjunction with the interviews and all interviews were recorded for transcription. Themes were noted, and data was analyzed utilizing ATLAS.ti software. There were scheduled, recorded, and transcribed interviews for each participant. Through the interviews, I sought to better understand the perspectives of those involved and their stories (Stake, 1995).

Data Analysis

This section will discuss how data was analyzed to make sense of what has been collected. All collected data was intensely analyzed. Following the recommendation of Merriam & Tisdell (2016), the process of organization, management, and analysis began early (p. 196). Careful, reflexive, and critical analysis was employed throughout in an effort to find answers to the research questions.

Coding Procedures

A codebook with themes was developed and utilized to code the transcriptions for each participant (see Appendix F). Throughout the coding process, memos were made to practice critical reflexivity and reflect on potential bias in the interpretations of the data. The memos differed from field notes in that the field notes were immediate reflections while the memos involved space & time away from the initial interview. Memos were added as I read and reread
transcripts to document considerations for further reflection and to reduce the potential for biases. The data was analyzed utilizing ATLAS.ti software. Interviews were coded after they were member-checked so themes could continuously be compared and inform the research throughout.

This case study utilized both inductive and deductive approaches for the development of codes, following Braun & Clarke’s (2006, 2021) six phrase process for reflexive thematic analysis data engagement (see Figure 2). As noted by Braun & Clarke’s (2021), reflexive thematic analysis is flexible and is well-suited for both deductive and inductive approaches. All data sources, including the transcripts were read and reviewed several times, embracing the reflexive thematic analysis process, immersing myself “in the data, reading, reflecting, questioning, imagining, wondering, writing, retreating, returning” (p. 332). This was not a quick or easy process and time and space with the data was required to develop a nuanced analysis with rich and complex themes (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The analysis began as an inductive process as I familiarized myself with data, generated initial codes, and searched the transcripts for themes accordingly. After reviewing, defining, and naming themes, I began writing the report.
At the conclusion of each semi-structured interview, I wrote field notes on participant responses that struck me, and as I interviewed more participants, I also used the field notes as a reflective space to begin devising possibilities for codes. After reading and rereading the transcripts multiple times, I developed 11 codes (see Appendix F); I then coded the transcripts utilizing ATLAS.ti software, spending time reading and rereading each individual transcript. A line-by-line review was conducted in ATLAS.ti, and codes were applied individually to each of the participant’s transcripts. Memos were also made throughout and documented in ATLAS.ti to reflect on potential biases in the interpretations of the transcripts. Appearances of the codes were tallied to recognize patterns and generate themes. For the purposes of this study, I follow Braun & Clarke’s (2006) definition of a theme. A theme, according to Braun & Clarke (2006), “captures something important in the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (p. 82). The overarching five
themes: community, local artists, public art, social justice, and documentation (see Table 3) all had “prevalence across the entire data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). In this case coding frequency played a large role in the determining of themes, and final themes were determined as a result of researcher judgment (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Each individual semi-structured interview transcript had an average of 22-23 codes applied, ranging from a minimum of 17 codes to a maximum of 32 codes. This range was largely based on the length of responses participants chose to share. The semi-structured interviews ranged in length from 22:05 minutes to 51:53 minutes, and the longest interview had the most codes (32). Since the participants did have the semi-structured interview questions in advance, some expressed they had reviewed the questions and thought about their responses beforehand, while others expressed, they were participating in the interview with little to no prior review of the questions.

Data that constituted a theme was developed from field notes, memos, and frequency of coding. Five main themes (see Table 3) were generated that captured multiple complex facets (Braun & Clarke, 2021). It is important to note that these themes are referred to as generated throughout rather than emerged following Braun & Clarke’s (2006) assertion that language like emerged, “denies the active role the researcher always plays in identifying patterns/themes, selecting which are of interest, and reporting them to the readers” (p. 80). Thus, themes in this study were researcher generated through “a creative and active process” (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 343). Braun & Clarke (2021) describe that in reflexive thematic analysis, “meaning and knowledge are understood as situated and contextual, and researcher subjectivity is
conceptualized as a resource for knowledge production, which inevitably sculpts the knowledge produced, rather than a must-be-contained threat to credibility” (p. 334-335). My closeness to the experiences and stories participants shared was valuable in that it aided in the development of “thick descriptions” (Nowell et. al, 2017). However, in order to increase credibility, member checking, audit trails (Nowell et. al, 2017), and other measures of ethics and trustworthiness were employed.

Ethics & Trustworthiness

Consent & Confidentiality

All research activities related to this study followed ethical principles to assure the protection of all human subjects. This case study was determined to be an exempt study by the IRB (Institutional Review Board). Informed consent consistent with federal regulations is not required for exempt studies, however following the university’s IRB guidelines, participants were provided with a detailed study information sheet (see Appendix A). The study information sheet included a clearly stated purpose, intent, and other relevant information and was provided to all individuals who were recruited for the study by email invitation. All interested participants were provided the information sheet again as well as the semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix C) upon replying to the invitation and expressing interest. Before each interview, I once again shared the study information sheet and semi-structured interview protocol and reminded participants of the study's goals and reviewed the information on the form to determine if there were any questions before the start of the interview. Additionally, when the interviews were recorded, participants' names were removed and replaced with their chosen pseudonyms,
and recordings were saved using a numeric identifier on a password protected device. Once transcripts were created and approved by the participant, the recordings were deleted. As an added measure of protection, participants could opt out of the study in any format they wished - verbally, written, email, etc., as long as they provided notification before the linked key was destroyed. Upon request to opt out, any data participants provided would be destroyed immediately.

All data was coded to remove direct identifiers by utilizing participant selected pseudonyms and a study-specific subject identification (ID) pattern with letters and numbers. The ID was not derived from or related to any information about the subject. The key that linked the subject ID with the subject's email and name were kept in a document that was stored separately from the research data and was only accessible by the PI and lead student investigator. The linked information was stored separately in a secure, two step authenticated password protected faculty configured Google Drive folder that was titled using an agreed upon letter combination followed by a randomized number. The key was destroyed upon closure of the study with IRB.

**Member Checking**

Member checks according to Lincoln & Guba (1985), “is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314). Member checks sometimes referred to as respondent validation (Maxwell, 2013), were used to accurately capture participant perspectives and to ensure all participants had an opportunity to address any misunderstandings or potential errors. All participants received copies of their interview transcripts with time to edit and make any desired
adjustments. Of the 11 total participants, six participants made edits to their original transcript. The edited version was used for coding. Additionally, if any questions arose in my understanding of the transcripts, I reached out to participants directly for clarification to ensure I was adequately representing their perceptions. Participants' coded interview statements were shared with them prior to publication of the dissertation for member checks as an added measure of trustworthiness and validity. Participants received an email (see Appendix G) and were invited to weigh in and report back if they felt there was anything that may have been misinterpreted or if they believed the themes appeared more times than indicated. Only two participants responded to this email invitation, and both participants stated everything looked accurate.

**Triangulation**

Triangulation involves the use of multiple sources and methods to enhance the credibility of the study (Maxwell, 2013; Terrell, 2015). Triangulation is a natural approach for a case study as multiple sources of evidence are needed to accomplish the goal of “an in-depth study of a phenomenon in its real-world context” (Yin, 2018). Since this case study relied on multiple sources (coded semi-structured interview transcripts, field notes, document analysis, and visual narrative analysis) as well as methods to double-check findings (such as member checking) triangulation was built into the data collection and analysis process (Miles & Huberman, 1994).
Limitations & Challenges

Limitations

This qualitative case study did have limitations. The sample size was small, limited to 11 participants who successfully completed specific foundational art education coursework at one university during the 2021-2022 academic year. While at the onset of recruitment for the study there were 30 eligible individuals, due to extenuating circumstances the final total number of eligible participants dropped to 20. Further, this study was limited as it was focused locally in one city and specifically focused on engagement with one community-engaged public art project, Mending Walls.

Time and financial constraints also played a role in the limitations and challenges of this study. The research had to happen within the timing of my supported scholarship funding, and I did not have external funding to support compensation or even raffle compensation for study participants. With no external funding and the quick turnaround, I was also unable to incorporate peer reviewers. That being said, I do think the fact that 11 of 20 eligible participants volunteered an hour or more of their time to be involved with no compensation demonstrates a level of commitment and interest in the Mending Walls community-engaged work.

Due to the locality and the small number of participants, this study does not provide any generalizability but rather sought to explore and build a deeper understanding of using community-engaged public art projects in preservice art education. Recommendations will be made for continued research in the field.
Plausible Threats

As with most qualitative research, this does present plausible threats including research bias and reactivity, and respondent bias. To address threats of validity and ensure credibility I employed member checking or respondent validation (Maxwell, 2013) with participants providing copies of recorded transcripts that they could edit and adjust as they felt necessary. To avoid respondent bias, I was careful not to ask leading questions that could have caused participants to think the alternative was wrong or that I was seeking a certain result. I was also cautious of my tone and word choice to present questions in a neutral manner. This research took place a full year after I had been in the position of instructor, however I acknowledged the relationship of power as a former instructor of the students even though the grading cycle had ended and took care with my approach in requesting participation. The request for participation was sent by the department chair, with directives to contact me via email if interested (see Appendix B). Throughout the process I sought to actively practice reflexivity and self-awareness, making a conscious effort to stand outside the research process and continuously critically reflect (Adeagbo, 2020). I documented reflexive thoughts and notes throughout.

Summary

In this chapter, I described the qualitative, narrative-inquiry-based approach to this case study. I explained recruitment methods and that participants were interviewed about previous experiences in foundational art education coursework that took place during the 2021-2022 academic year. I discussed methods of data collection, including semi-structured interviews, field notes, and document analysis as well as data collection and analysis procedures. I specified how
I maintained ethics and trustworthiness as well as noted the potential limitations and challenges of this study.

**Chapter 4: Findings & Analysis**

The purpose of this study was to assess the perceived impact of a local, community-engaged mural project, Mending Walls, on preservice art educators in foundational coursework. This study merged the methodological frameworks of qualitative case study and narrative inquiry (Sonday et. al, 2020). This case was bounded by the parameters of a specific place and time (Creswell, 2013); the place being enrollment in specific foundational art education coursework at one university and the time being bound by one academic year, Fall 2021-Spring 2022. The single case study aimed to capture an intensive, holistic description and analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) of the perceptions of preservice art educators that successfully completed at least one of two specific courses that utilized the Mending Walls project within the course curriculum. All interviews and data collected were based on participants’ previous course experiences. The narrative inquiry framework was employed to better understand participants' unique experiences through first-hand accounts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and analyze those stories of lived experiences across several participants (De Medeiros & Etter-Lewis, 2020). The narrative inquiry framework allowed for investigating individuals’ complex and rich experiences while also providing space for my own critical reflection as researcher (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Thus, in accordance with Connelly & Clandinin (1990) in the narrative approach I was not merely “scribe” but also “storyteller” and “story liver” (p. 12). This analysis merges as a collaborative, “mutually constructed” story created out of the stories and lived experiences of
both myself (as researcher) and my participants (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 12). This story seeks to “move beyond the telling of the lived story to tell the research story” (p. 10) and hopes to inspire new possibilities and new stories from those who read it (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

As discussed in detail in Chapter 3, after determining the eligibility criteria and conducting recruitment through purposeful sampling, 11 total participants agreed to participate in this study. All participants successfully completed specific foundational art education coursework during the Fall 2021-Spring 2022 academic year. Of the 11 individuals that participated, ten completed the full year of coursework (two total courses) and one was involved a single semester (one total course). At the time of the interviews, participants disclosed ranging in age from 21-25 years old and all identified as having U.S. or dual citizenship. The participants offered various gendered and racial perspectives, with representation from participants identifying as female, male, nonbinary, and Black, Latinx, Mixed-Race, and White.

As described in Chapter 3, all interviews were conducted and recorded using the Zoom video conferencing platform between December 2022-January 2023. For consistency, all participants were posed the same 17 semi-structured interview questions with probes and were provided the semi-structured interview protocol to review beforehand as well as during the interview (see Appendix C). Once the interviews were transcribed, each participant was made an editor and able to make any changes or edits they desired.

A variety of sources were consulted in conducting this analysis. Data analysis was informed by prolonged engagement and intensive review and coding of transcripts from 11 semi-structured interviews, field notes (completed by the researcher after each semi-structured
interview), document analysis (including course calendars, visual journal prompts, and reflexive researcher journal), as well as visual images including 27 images of artwork that five of the 11 total interview participants opted to submit for use in this study. Chase (2011) points out that while, “narrative researchers move beyond interviews” (p. 426) using oral or written texts such as field notes and/or documents, visual images are also highly important to narrative research (Bach, 2007; Chase, 2011; Riessman, 2008). As noted by Bach (2007) visuals can “add layers of meaning to stories lived and told” (p. 5).

As detailed in Chapter 3, this case study utilized both inductive and deductive approaches for the development of codes, following Braun & Clarke’s (2006, 2021) six phrase process for reflexive thematic analysis data engagement (see Figure 2). As noted by Braun & Clarke’s (2021), reflexive thematic analysis is flexible and is well-suited for both deductive and inductive approaches. The coding and categorizing of data began as an inductive process, familiarizing myself with data, generating initial codes, and searching the transcripts for themes accordingly. It then moved to a combination of inductive and deductive approaches reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes, and beginning to write the report.

At the conclusion of each semi-structured interview, I wrote field notes on participant responses that struck me, and as I interviewed more participants, I also used the field notes as a reflective space to begin devising possibilities for codes. After reading and rereading the transcripts multiple times, I developed 11 codes (see Appendix F); I then coded the transcripts utilizing ATLAS.ti software, spending time reading and rereading each individual transcript and applying the designated codes as I saw fit. Each individual semi-structured interview transcript
had an average of 22-23 codes applied, ranging from a minimum of 17 codes to maximum of 32 codes. This range was largely based on the length of responses participants chose to share. The semi-structured interviews ranged in length from 22:05 minutes to 51:53 minutes, and the longest interview had the most codes (32). Since the participants did have the semi-structured interview questions in advance, some expressed they had reviewed the questions and thought about their responses beforehand, while others expressed, they were participating in the interview with little to no prior review of the questions.

From the initial coding of the 11 participant transcripts, I identified five themes and subthemes. The development of these themes was derived from terms and concepts that were reflected in the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Five themes and subthemes felt like a manageable (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and justifiable number through their numerous appearances across several transcripts (see Table 1). The five initial themes (see Table 1) all had “prevalence across the entire data set” and appeared most frequently in the coding of the semi-structured interview transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82).
Table 1

Initial Organization of Themes and Subthemes (Semi-Structured Interviews)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Number</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Involving Community in Education (57)</td>
<td>Sense of Community / History of Community (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Local Artists (52)</td>
<td>Meeting the Artists (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Accessibility of Public Art &amp; Public Art as a Teaching Tool (39)</td>
<td>Standing at the Mural (39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Social Justice in the Art Classroom (39)</td>
<td>Affirmation of Differences / Empathy (41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Visual Journals Impact (23)</td>
<td>Project Documentation (podcasts, documentary) (20)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Upon completion of coding the transcripts, I sent each individual participant a copy of their coded transcript along with the initial identified themes and subthemes (see Appendix G). They were provided an opportunity to review their report to ensure they felt I properly interpreted their experiences and so that they could comment and suggest “fine-tuning to better capture their perspectives” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 246). I encouraged participants to respond with feedback regarding potential misinterpretations, missed information, or questions about the proposed themes. This member check was incorporated to assure I was as close as possible to participants’ understanding of the experience (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In the visual narrative analysis of participant submitted artwork, interpretation remained constant, reading the images and incorporated text for meaning related to the research (Riessman, 2008). I spent time visually analyzing each of the 27 submitted images, reading, and rereading them similar to that of transcripts. I reviewed every entry multiple times and decided
to code the images similarly to coding the transcripts. After reading and rereading the images, I
created a visual analysis transcript where I documented written notes embedded within the
visuals depicted as well as imagery notes. Using ATLAS.ti, I began coding the visual analysis
transcript using the original 11 codes in addition to three more I felt necessary to add upon
review: healing, conversation / dialogue, and collaboration (see Appendix F). While there are
similarities between the codes and themes, it is important to note their distinctions. As Braun &
Clarke (2012) point out, codes are “the building blocks of the analysis” and provide labels for
data that could be potentially relevant to the research question (p. 61). Whereas themes are
generated from relevant patterns (Braun & Clark, 2006). Through the coding of the visuals, five
themes were generated (see Table 2).
Table 2

Initial Brainstorm of Visual Analysis Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Number</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>History &amp; Future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Conversation &amp; Dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Community &amp; Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Healing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Empathy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As I actively reflected on and reviewed the analysis, I recognized although there was not an exact overlap with my initial semi-structured interview themes, there was a strong correlation between the themes. In order to more clearly represent the connections and keep the themes of the case study more manageable (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), I determined it would be best to create one table (see Table 3) that encapsulated all of these findings. This aligns with Braun & Clarke’s (2006) assertion that the creation of themes should be based on prevalence but also incorporate researcher judgment. Upon the final organization of themes and subthemes, I once again reviewed the semi-structured transcripts, field notes, my research journal, and the participant artistic submissions as well as my own artistic reflections for visual analysis. Accordingly, the key findings and analysis presented in this chapter are organized thematically into five major themes, each with two to three subthemes (13 subthemes in total) (see Table 3).
Table 3

Final Organization of Themes and Subthemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Number</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>1.1 Sense &amp; History of Community&lt;br&gt;1.2 Involving Community in Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Local Artists</td>
<td>2.1 Meeting the Artists&lt;br&gt;2.2 Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Public Art</td>
<td>3.1 Public Art as Teaching Tool&lt;br&gt;3.2 Accessibility of Public Art&lt;br&gt;3.3 Standing at the Mural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Social Justice</td>
<td>4.1 Social Justice in the Art Classroom&lt;br&gt;4.2 Affirmation of Differences &amp; Radical Empathy&lt;br&gt;4.3 Healing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Documentation</td>
<td>5.1 Visual Journal Impact&lt;br&gt;5.2 Project Documentation (podcasts, documentary)&lt;br&gt;5.3 Conversation &amp; Dialogue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Within each theme and subtheme category, direct participant quotes are shared to aid in the understanding of my interpretations as well as to demonstrate the prevalence of themes across several participants (King 2004; Nowell, 2017). As an added measure of consistency (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) I also build connections through entries from my research journal and participants’ artistic visuals. As noted by Nowell et. al (2017), a reflexive research journal “can help researchers systemize, relate, and cross reference data”, provide space “to keep a self-critical account of the research process”, and document
methodological decisions, rationales, and personal reflections (p. 5). Moreover, according to Riessman (2008), “working with images can thicken interpretation” (p. 179); this is similarly echoed by Bach (2007) who notes visuality can enrich narrative inquiry. To further support the analysis, I additionally weave in relevant literature with the findings throughout (Aronson, 1995; Nowell, 2017).

**Theme 1 – Community**

In the analysis of the semi-structured transcripts, “community” revealed itself as one of the most frequently occurring terms appearing 333 times. Since my questioning was included in those transcripts, I was curious to determine how many times the word “community” was brought up through my questioning versus through participant response. Upon review, the word appeared 12 times on my semi-structured interview protocol and therefore (multiplied by 11 interviews) 132 of those 333 appearances are likely attributed to me. However, this also means participants responded using the term “community” 201 times for an average of 18x per interview. In previous chapters, I defined community-engagement as, “the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1997, as cited in, Principles of Community Engagement, 2011, p. 7). Yet, while community-engagement is discussed and organized under this theme, I purposely present this category broadly for wider implications. Community, for the purposes of this study is accordingly defined as “…groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations…” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1997, as referenced...
cited in, Principles of Community Engagement, 2011, p. 7). Community was the most prevalent theme in all materials consulted in the analysis (with related codes appearing 70 times in the semi-structured interview transcripts and over 20 times in the visual analysis). The term was also highly visible in my reflexive research journal. This study was derived from my critical reflexivity to better understand the course experience with the local, community-engaged mural project (Mending Walls) from the perspective of students, as well as to explore the intersections of community-engaged murals, community-engaged pedagogy, and community-engaged teacher preparation through the perceptions of these preservice art educators. After conducting the semi-structured interviews and reviewing participants’ visual submissions, I revisited my own research journal. I was pleasantly surprised to see my reflection after attending my first Mending Walls civic talk (a virtual talk where community members are invited to engage in discussions with the artists and partnering organization(s) about the mural and social issues being addressed) nearly three years prior on September 16, 2020, included community art and community-engagement (see Figures 3 & 4).
Figure 3

*Researcher Generated Reflexive Journal Visual*

Figure 4

*Researcher Generated Reflexive Journal Visual*
Over a year later, in September 2021, the visual analysis revealed my active reflection on the significance of community involvement focused on murals, but not yet reflecting on the intersections with education (See Figure 5). Yet, by August 2022, I had actively started reflecting on the intersections of community-engaged murals, community-engaged pedagogy, and community-engaged teacher preparation. My collage pieces detail “researchers are drawing inspiration from the students and community life” (see Figure 6)
Figure 5

Researcher Generated Reflexive Journal Visual

Figure 6

Researcher Generated Reflexive Journal Visual

Sometimes I read these pages back later and think WOW that was good but it always just feels like an outlet in the moment. My hand sometimes cramped but I like the pen to pop my eyes sting staring at the screen all day. One thing that reminded me of was saying YES to moments that feel like I should be writing or researching. The most profound moments came in the hands-on volunteering with Mending Walls. The behind the scenes work: the prepping, the planning, the painting. The conversations... the connection. Talking with students at the wall. Its Mending walls were on emmy! And was certainly in Forbes or TASS. Did I mention the NY times?!
By early January 2023, with seven semi-structured interviews already completed, my collage had more intentional recognition of the relationship between community engagement and art education and many of the themes identified in this study were visibly present (see Figure 7).

**Figure 7**

*Researcher Generated Reflexive Journal Visual*

I share the personal visual evolution in my research journal to demonstrate that this analysis was an evolving process, years in the making. My thoughts and ideas evolved in community alongside and with the participants in this study, and many of my initial interests in the themes of community and community-engagement were propelled by viewing their visual journal entries in the Fall 2021 semester. Reviewing the participant submitted visual journal images for this study, the theme of community was evident (see Figures 8, 9, 10). For example, one participant features Mending Walls and community, detailing public art invites community interaction,
community creates change, communities create meaning, and growth together (see Figure 8). These details are presented in a bird’s eye view of intersecting streets with sidewalks, a community garden, and school bus (see Figure 8). Another participant highlights community involvement in art, posing the question, “Community members’ lives are interconnected one way or another, why not make art and strengthen that?” (see Figure 9). Additionally, they note art informs people what is going on in the community and makes the community more beautiful (see Figure 9). These details are in an intricate circle with connecting strings (see Figure 9). Another figure questions, “How can the community work together to keep the conversation going?” (see Figure 10).

**Figure 8**
*Participant Visual Journal Submission*

![Visual Journal Submission](image)

*Note. Artist credit: Anderson Bowles*
Figure 9

Participant Visual Journal Submission

Note. Artist credit: Susu Johnson

Figure 10

Participant Visual Journal Submission

Note. Artist credit: Juanita Zapata Orrego
The visual analysis of the submissions revealed that the role and inclusion of community in connection to art making and Mending Walls was actively considered by some participants in the Fall 2021 coursework. However, similar to my own initial visual collages, the direct connections to art education were not immediately evident. As an added layer, the semi-structured interviews were designed to invite participant feedback to assess if the course content on the local, community-engaged Mending Walls project had any impact. As noted by Haddix (2015), in the preparation of community-engaged teachers, instructors must also listen to students “to experience them as they are” and honor their cultural and community knowledge (p. 70). When students were prompted to reflect on their experiences of engaging with the Mending Walls project and course content, thematic connections to community continued to emerge.

Questions number 2 and 3 on the interview protocol (see Appendix C) asked participant’s thoughts on the relationship between community engagement and the arts, and the relationship between community engagement and education. Participant responses were varied but all felt both relationships were important, and demonstrated interesting contrasts based on personal experiences. For example, Jane described the value of community engagement and the arts in creating opportunities for individual expression, exploring identity, and building connections. Jane stated, “The relationship between community engagement in the arts… the arts are really valuable for community engagement, because they're a way for community members to express themselves, their identity, and it allows people to connect.” She then connected the relationship to education with a personal experience prior to entering the university and her hopes for community-engaged experiences for future students, stating:
I think it's definitely important, because, again, it connects students with their community, and it also might provide students with opportunities that they might not otherwise have had… they meet a certain person or something like that. I know, in my experience personally, community engagement was how I found what I love to do. I was volunteering at a botanic garden helping students doing art projects. And that community engagement really allowed me to know what I wanted to do. And I would hope that for future students as well.

Another participant, Maria, vividly described community engagement and the arts as working towards a common goal of unity, inclusivity, moving forward, problem solving, and achieving mutually beneficial goals. She shared,

I would describe the relationship between community engagement in the arts as an active conversation relationship between artists, creators, curators, creative directors, and creatives as a whole to work towards a common goal of unity. Community engagement in the arts is constantly moving forward. By this, I mean moving forward in a way where both actions and making decisions for the whole of the community are made so that they take every person into consideration regardless of their neighborhood race, religion, color, or sexual orientation. The two work together to find local resources, programs, internships, scholarships, funding, or whatever it might be to help their communities reach their goals and find solutions to their problems.

Maria then detailed that she never thought about community engagement and education related to one another prior to beginning university coursework. She described how her perspective
changed and her belief that community engagement is essential and important to her teaching practice and philosophy, encouraging every educator, regardless of subject matter, to look to their communities. She stated,

So honestly, I never really thought about community engagement and education related to one another until I got to [the university] just because during my high school years, I looked at it in a way where everything art related or creating related was always more of just a curiosity. And I didn't think of it so much as a method to a teaching practice, rather, just looking at an opportunity or a project outside of the school to get in contact with other like-minded people who wanted to create or look at art as well. Now since getting to [the university], the perspective is different in a way where I say it's more essential and important to my teaching practice and philosophy. Every educator, regardless of what they teach, should look outside of the school to provide ideas and support for their students. Because it can be impactful, it can be beautiful, it's beneficial to all the voices in the community, especially for students in the schools, because then they can see how what they're learning is not just information being thrown at them, but rather it can be applied to what they're seeing outside of school as well in their homes, in school or just in their community. So, it's just two different perspectives, but it's evolved over time.

Trixie described community engagement and the arts as inherent, noting that artwork is often consumed by the public and specifically mentioned Mending Walls as an example of community engagement and the arts. Trixie said,
Community engagement, I think, is inherently part of the arts because depending on what kind of art is being created, it's typically consumed by the public, but specific art that is geared towards community engagement with it include public artworks like murals like Mending Walls.

When asked to comment on the relationship between community engagement and education Trixie interestingly contrasted not feeling connected to the local community in her educational experience, noting a greater focus on standards. In a follow up question, Trixie noted her experiences were based in U.S. K-12 public schools. She said,

I believe that there is not enough of a relationship between community engagement and education. Personally, in my experience being educated, it did seem very regulated by the state and the federal levels and felt pretty removed from my local community. Even in art class, it felt like what we were learning was pretty regulated. And I think a closer relationship would be beneficial for the community and for students’ learning.

Similarly, Kash described community engagement and the arts as impactful and went on to describe a moment of impact when sharing information about a Mending Walls mural in the community while working with younger students. Kash stated,

I would say that it's impactful… I recently went to the Children's Museum with my students. And Once Upon with Love [a Mending Walls mural] is like, right there. So, I was telling them about the mural because we were just sitting outside, and they were so amazed by it, and like all the colors and everything. And I was like, oh, they actually like it and want to engage with it.
When asked to describe the relationship between community engagement and education, Kash also offered a contrast based on experience, noting limited community engaged experiences in their K-12 education (also based in U.S. K-12 public schools). She shared,

I know sometimes in education, you don't really have a lot of community engagement. Since being in college personally, I've had it, but before in like, elementary school and just K through 12 in general I didn't have much of it and I know a lot of people who also didn't.

Participant responses demonstrated seemingly enhanced connections between community-engagement, the arts, and education. Every participant noted a relationship between community-engagement and the arts and community-engagement and education despite varying prior experiences. Multiple participants specifically referenced Mending Walls in their responses. One research participant, Maria, went as far as to claim that because of coursework, they now felt community-engagement was “essential and important” to their teaching practice and philosophy. This closely aligns with Milner’s (2020) assertion that “understanding students and their communities is essential to the teaching and learning process” (p. 235). Milner (2020) calls for the building of “community knowledge to inform practice” (p. 234) and urges educators to “consider the community as a dynamic site for learning (people, places, history)” (p. 253). Although the words “history” or “sense” of community were not included in the semi-structured interview protocol, the concepts also generated as a subtheme.
Subtheme 1.1 – Sense & History of Community

Throughout the semi-structured interviews, participants revealed community connections tied to both the past and present. These connections align with relevant research that suggests community-engaged experiential learning can aid in students’ understanding of themselves in relation to others and the world, enhancing their sense of community connection (Kuh, 2008; Noel-Elkins et. al, 2019). In my own research journal in December 2021, I noted a key concept I had been reflecting on was belonging, specifically thinking about how Mending Walls provided me a sense of community and belonging in a time where I was brand new to a city, and in person connection was generally discouraged due to the global covid-19 pandemic. During the semi-structured interviews participants revealed similar sentiments. For example, Mango, who relocated to the Richmond area to attend the university, noted engaging with the murals was a good learning experience not only from an artistic standpoint, but also to physically “map” the city. They stated,

And I'm not local to the Richmond area. So, it was a good learning experience for me, as well as kind of like, using it in multiple ways, whether it be just appreciating the art or analyzing the art as we did, or analyzing the people that came up with the mural, or even using it like physically kind of as a way for me to map out the city. I found it useful.

From another perspective, Kash, who grew up local to the Richmond area, described that engaging with the Mending Walls project showed them there was more to the city than they previously knew. She stated, “Mending Walls really just showed me that there was more to Richmond than what I knew, originally.” Kash also noted she felt it was important for educators
to engage the community because despite living in the city, they felt that she hadn’t learned a lot about it before attending the university. Kash shared,

   I think it's very important because even for myself, I moved to Richmond when I was 12 and I didn’t learn much about Richmond until starting college... So, I feel like learning about things going on in your community from a young age will get you more involved as you get older.

Mimi expressed that learning about the Mending Walls project gave her a greater sense of community and awareness of the city. She additionally reflected on the project providing new and valuable insight to the history and culture of the city. She stated,

   …so, I came as a new student, this was my first in person class at [the university] because I transferred. And it really made me feel much more at home…I felt awareness of the city… learning about Mending Walls. It was a great insight to the history of Richmond and the culture of Richmond that I wasn't aware of. And I think it's so important to go to these walls, go to these places, and experience the walls in person. And it just made me more enriched in the city of Richmond as a new transfer student. So, I'm really grateful for the class and being in it.

Yellow also articulated a realization of local individuals making community impact and described reflecting on what individuals are deemed as important in curriculum. Yellow discussed thinking about honoring local community leaders. They said,

   …when they're teaching you about people, they teach you about people that had a huge impact on like, hundreds of thousands of people across the country, but like, not really
talking about those that have an impact on a smaller community because I like that has more of an effect on you directly than what like one person decides for like, a larger collective. So, it just made me think about I guess who I think it would be important to honor.

I posit these participant responses indicate interacting with the local community-engaged mural project, Mending Walls, pushed their thinking in recognizing the significance of local community history and developing a sense of community in general. Through engagement with the public art project, it prompted the imagination and enactment of “new vision[s] of political participation and citizenship grounded in the particularities of their own social location” (Bell & Desai, 2011, p. 291).

This critical thinking was also evident in visual journal responses. For example, in this participant artistic submission (see Figure 11) in response to visual journal prompt eight, “Pinpoint an ideal location in a city/town of your choice for potential creative placemaking opportunities (mural, sculpture, etc.) - carefully consider the characteristics of the targeted neighborhood”, the participant described,

I chose my local courthouse and the first Black men to serve as judges from my county: Travis Williams and Curtis Hairston. I didn't always have the words to express my ideas about the community, but I could paint, draw, color and more. We also did walkthroughs looking at each other's visual journals and could discuss how we interpreted the prompts differently. There was a sense of relief from knowing others share the same sentiments as me. I felt a stronger connection with my peers, and it offered a more personal look at
people through the way they illustrated their ideas. This all goes right along with Mending Walls. That is why I chose two important Black men from my county’s history. Having monuments erected in their honor would memorialize and celebrate their achievements. If I hadn’t completed the visual journal, I would have never known about them.

Figure 11

Participant Visual Journal Submission

Note. Response to Visual Journal Prompt 8 (see Appendix C); Artist credit: Susu Johnson
The participant responses additionally highlight the beginnings of critical thinking surrounding the disconnect between community and school (Jefferson et. al, 2018). Milner (2020) points out in order to develop effective community relationships educators must not only “work to learn about and build relationships with people in a community but also…build knowledge about and relationships with community in the abstract” (p. 235). Milner (2020) prompts questions that participants were seemingly beginning to ponder through this experience such as, “What do we know about the history of the communities in which we teach and our students live? From what sources do we build this knowledge?” (p. 235).

Throughout the analysis, reviewing the Mending Walls website, scrolling through the murals, I reflected on the many stories embedded within the murals. Murals, as noted by Chakravarty & Hwee-Hwa Chan (2016) “are known for their use by communities and neighborhoods to express collective identities” (p. 406) and murals representing and celebrating people and events from history are common. Mending Walls is no exception, many of the walls honor individuals and community members. As I reflected on participant responses and analyzed the artistic visual journal submissions, I recognized many of the murals seek to bring historical stories from the margins to the center and honor ancestors (see Figure 12).
There is a lot of rich community history embedded into the Mending Walls project, and yet I found it intriguing that all eleven participants described no true familiarity with the project prior to beginning their required coursework. Six of the 11 participants described maybe having seen the murals, but none were aware of the project. This further propelled my reflection on how public art can act as a medium for storytelling, but often in the hectic pace of life, we do not slow down to notice and investigate what is around us. What stories are in our surroundings? What are the histories of the spaces we inhabit? Milner (2020) emphasizes that curriculum informed by community knowledge must honor, address, and draw from “community, history, wisdom, preferences, needs and practices” (p. 220). Milner also voices “community knowledge allows teachers to shape, reconstruct, and build their practices in more informed, relevant, and
meaningful ways” (Milner, 2020, p. 220). The next subtheme will address involving the community in education.

**Subtheme 1.2 – Involving Community in Education**

The day after my first phone conversation with Mending Walls founder and creator, Hamilton Glass, I wrote in my research journal, “Hamilton stressed the importance of community involvement in murals … you can tell he has a strong grasp on the pulse of the community.” (C. Black, personal communication, September 26, 2020). I also wrote, “I have a vision for furthering community involvement including local teachers, students, and preservice teachers in art education at [university]. This would be a great opportunity to expand the meaningful conversations to local classrooms, community centers, etc. and encourage deep dives and artistic expression” (C. Black, personal communication, September 26th, 2020). In the years since, through critical reflection and embedding the project in preservice art education curriculum, I’ve come to recognize the experience’s impact on my insights on teaching and learning; more specifically, involving community and working with community. While I initially noticed an apparent influence on the preservice art educators in my Fall 2021 course through classroom dialogue and their visual journal responses, reviewing and visually analyzing the visual journal submissions for this study it was once again evident. In response to the tenth visual journal prompt, “What have you learned throughout this experience? Moving forward, how might you use this experience to inform your teaching practice?”, one can begin to see the preservice art educator participant reflecting on how arts need communities and communities need art, art belongs in public spaces, and art allows us to heal and grow (see Figure 13). In
another entry (see Figure 14), the participant visually described symbolism is valuable, communication goes both ways, my voice matters, unify the community, think critically, be engaged, learn from, and accept others’ differences, focus on the process, create what you want, not what you think others will accept. Having initially seen these entries when submitted for coursework in Fall 2021, I was curious to hear participants’ reflections through the semi-structured interviews a full year later.

**Figure 13**

*Participant Visual Journal Submission*

*Note. Artist credit: Anderson Bowles*
Through the semi-structured interviews, participants expressed Mending Walls influence on their teaching philosophy. For example, Yellow described how engaging with the Mending Walls project inspired them to look to community and create lessons that encourage the celebration of identity and communities stating,

Definitely, it made me think more about looking to the community and wanting to create lessons that are in response to like, what the students want to see or having them talk a little bit more about their identity. Like who they are and where they come from, because I feel like there could be a lot of disconnect with that when you get into school … like we accept it, but there's not really a celebration of it, I guess, you know?
Jane described learning about Mending Walls as the most valuable takeaway from the foundational art education coursework, sharing that it taught her to focus on the local community, local art, and artists to create more engaging projects. She said,

And I think learning about Mending Walls was really helpful in that sense, because it taught me how to create projects that are more focused on the local community, which wasn't something I had thought of before learning about this project. And I think that's probably like one of the most valuable takeaways is just incorporating local art and artists into your course load can really engage students in a way they otherwise wouldn't be.

Further, when discussing the relationship between community engagement and education, multiple participants described the need to involve the community and to not only better understand where students are coming from, but also to consider ways to engage for the betterment of the community as a whole. Mimi said, “we must involve community in education because this is where we are, where we live. We should look at the resources that are right outside our door, and the people that are around us.” Max noted, “I think that since none of us live in a bubble, that we need to learn about the community that we are surrounded by. Educators need to teach their students how to interact, and better the communities around them.” Trixie stated,

I think it's extremely important because the student population is part of the community. And without an understanding of the context of where students are coming from, it would be difficult to educate them in the way that will best suit their needs.
This recognition is significant as it connects to asset-based (McClure & Reed, 2022), culturally sustaining (Paris & Alim, 2017), and culturally relevant (Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995) pedagogies. McClure & Reed (2022) stress “a potentially powerful method of disrupting our deficit perspectives is to immerse ourselves in the community” (p. 68). Paris & Alim (2017) contend that by enacting culturally sustaining pedagogies we can “support student expression through the arts and other community-rooted forms of expression” (p. 134). Likewise, they note focusing on the arts “our pedagogies can engage our students’ daily realities in healthy, life-affirming ways that do more than sustain their cultures, but sustain their lives as well” (p. 135). Culturally relevant pedagogy is deeply rooted in community, as Ladson-Billings (1995) describes it is “specifically committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment” (p. 159). Hammond (2015) further this notion making explicit connections to neuroscience noting the importance of considering aesthetics and symbols and its influence on our brain’s sense of well-being. Hammond (2015) points to bringing “murals and other community art into the classroom” and even recommends partnering with local arts organizations (p. 145). Relatedly, participants also revealed thinking about local art and artists; this theme will be explored in the subsequent section.

**Theme 2 – Local Artists**

The Mending Walls project exclusively worked with artists local to the city of Richmond. Since the project’s start, there have been more than 50 local artists involved with the project. The project intentionally pairs artists of different cultural backgrounds to work together and collaborate, not only to create art, but to engage in difficult conversations around social and
racial justice to fuel empathy and connection. As an educator new to the area, the project provided an entry point to discovering a variety of local artists. Both myself, and the other foundational art education course instructors incorporated assignments that encouraged students to explore the artists and consider ways they might be able to incorporate their work into art education curriculum. The responses from the semi-structured interviews demonstrated the locality of the artists had a strong impact on participants.

Participants noted engagement with the project opened their eyes to the number of artists working locally in the area. Even participants that grew up local to the area, described not being familiar with local artists beforehand. Kash explained how learning about local artists provoked thought about how they would have engaged with the content from an earlier age and the benefits of exposure to local art. She said,

… I wasn't familiar with like any Richmond art beforehand. I thought about while I was in school myself, and taking art classes, like how would I have engaged with learning about this? If that happened while I was still in school, I feel like it would have been, of course beneficial, because I would have had an early start to know and even as I go around Richmond, I will be able to identify things like oh, yeah, I learned about that, or I know about that. And be able to have conversations with people that I know about the things I had learned.

Yellow similarly noted that they felt incorporating local artists into art education curriculum was important, remarking, “I think it's super important because if I had seen local artists that looked like me, I would have put a lot more value in my work a lot earlier.” Although Mango recalled
looking at public art in middle and high school, they expressed wishing there was more explicit
discussion about who made it and if the artists were local to the area. Mango expressed that
Mending Walls made them appreciate it more and their hope that more schools will look to local
art and artists for teaching material. Mango said,

   I do wish that, you know, looking back on high school, middle school, that it wasn't just
   like, hey, there's, there's graffiti or there are murals or there's this kind of public art that's
   out there, you guys. I wish that it were more like, Hey, here's this specific art local to us
   by this artist. Here's where you can find them. Here's why it was made. So, I guess
   Mending Walls has made me appreciate more and kind of hope that maybe more schools,
   whether it be like college or grade school, use that like local material because it's there.

Max described not realizing how many local artists from different backgrounds and identities
existed prior to engaging with the Mending Walls project and discussed his desire to focus on
public art and artists from different backgrounds in his future role as an art educator. He stated,

   I definitely want to focus more on public art, activism, and art from artists of many
different backgrounds. I didn't realize just how many artists there were, that were local
and from between, and they had so many different backgrounds, and they had so many
different identities, that they were all able to collaborate on all of these projects.

Max additionally noted how the Mending Walls project opened his eyes to how active artists can
be in the community, sharing the various community-engaged project elements that enhance the
impact the local artists have on the community. He said,
I think that Mending Walls opens up your eyes to just how active artists can be in the community. It's a huge project. And it's run by a lot of people that like they all contribute to it. And it's such a thought-provoking project, because not only are there community members painting the murals, but there also are talks with community members meeting and they're discussing what the mural is about and how this affects them as a community. It's really cool to see just how much of an impact the artists are having.

Mango described that the local accessibility of the artists made for an instant connection, stating, …but the local accessibility of the artists, I think, again, kind of what I was saying is just added an element of like, oh, wow, they're right there with us. That's cool. What can I learn about them? How long have they been here? Something about locality just provides an instant connection to people, I think.

Moses similarly described realizing he could connect with the artists, and its influence on recognizing this is possible in whatever community you find yourself located in. He shared, …like listening to the podcast, I kind of realized, oh, if I really wanted to, I could hit up these people, like any time on Instagram. And I just really, I think at least from my point of view, it’s kind of like… you can get out there, no matter where you're at, and do something in your community. So honestly, I think it's really inspiring…

Trixie described the importance of sharing local artists with students to demonstrate that amazing work exists everywhere. She shared,
I think it's extremely important because it helps students understand that artists that create amazing work exist everywhere. We don't just have to focus on artists who get the widest acclaim, because that doesn't necessarily equate to the value of their work.

Max similarly voiced the importance of having lessons on local artists to validate that creating impactful artwork can happen within students’ own communities stating,

I think that having lessons on local artists is inspiring to students that want to be involved with the arts and show them like hey, you don't have to be famous. You don't have to move away, to make it. You can make it right here. They did it, you can do it too. It's really cool to see.

Kash also expressed that she would want to connect with local artists in her future role as an art educator in order for students to see representation of local artists and recognize art being made locally in their area. Kash said,

I would think that once I have my own classroom that I could connect with local artists, for my students to be able to see that, there's art being made, where they are, and also that they'll have that connection so that as they go on, they'll also know about these people who live in the same area as them.

Jane conveyed similar sentiments describing how when she learned about artists, they felt untouchable and inaccessible, but through engaging with Mending Walls she realized incorporating local artists provides opportunities to work with them and engage students with them directly, potentially inspiring them to see themselves as working artists in the future, stating,
Learning about the artists, they felt very untouchable. And like, I couldn't, I would never get to know really, their inside thoughts on anything. But if you incorporate local artists, then there's that opportunity to work with them. And I think that will help kids feel more engaged or feel more positive about possibly being an artist themselves, you know?

Maria articulated wanting to find as many local artists as possible in her future role as an art educator to provide community-engaged experiences and collaborations for her students. She shared,

And I think this is what I need to work on myself and my teaching practice and exploring and finding as many local artists as I can, because I want to be able to give that community engagement to my students and collaborate with them, and maybe get them to collaborate with each other. And I think it's just really important because they can state their experience of living within the same community and city and combine it in ways where they're each a different human being, but they know they share similar environments and experiences and they can make it into something beautiful.

Yellow described their biggest takeaway of the foundational art education coursework being the ability to engage with contemporary local artists making meaningful work in their communities and that this can be brought into the classroom. They stated,

I think the biggest thing for me honestly, was that just sort of I can talk about artists that are alive and creating right now, it doesn't have to be people from the past that have been talked about into exhaustion. There are so many people creating artwork with meaning and making changes in their community through expressing themselves. And I would just
like to know more about it... because I don't know, I didn't think about it before Mending Walls.

Jane also selected this notion as her biggest takeaway, sharing that engaging with the Mending Walls project opened her eyes to creating learning experiences focused on the local community, local art, and artists. She remarked,

I guess just how to be engaging with students, and how to find things they care about, because that was always something, I kind of wondered how I was going to do that, because... you can't force someone to care. But you can create projects that are just more interesting and more involving. And I think learning about Mending Walls was really helpful in that sense, because it taught me how to create projects that are more focused on the local community, which wasn't something I had thought of before learning about this project. And I think that's probably like one of the most valuable takeaways is just incorporating local art and artists into your course load can really engage students in a way they otherwise wouldn't be.

Lawton (2014) pointed out that art educators seldom “include local, community-based artists/artwork in their curriculum” (p. 423) but goes on to state that including these experiences can encourage pride and meaningful connections. Walker (2001) suggested “constructing knowledge through dialogue with local artists” (p. 264) can help preserve community values as well as provide an avenue for teachers to understand the local community and their students. The next subtheme that generated was the impact of the artists not only being local to the community but having the opportunity to meet and speak with the artists directly.
Subtheme 2.1 – Meeting the Artists

One of the final questions of the semi-structured interview protocol was: Are there any final comments on the Mending Walls project within your foundational art education coursework you’d like to share? I was surprised that multiple participants felt compelled to add the experience of meeting and speaking with artists connected to the project as leaving a lasting impression. Max shared enjoying getting to meet Mending Walls founder, artist, and co-director, Hamilton Glass. He described Hamilton’s energy and passion as contagious and inspiring, stating,

I really, really enjoyed getting to meet Hamilton Glass. It was really, really cool to meet him. And he's a very inspiring person. He filled up the room with his energy. And it was really cool to see artists working in Richmond. And it's inspiring me to make more community work. Because he's so passionate, I just sort of picked up on that passion.

Maria also discussed meeting Hamilton and his wife and co-director of Mending Walls, Taekia, as an impressionable moment. She said, “When we saw Hamilton and Taekia Glass [Mending Walls co-directors] come in the spring for class, it felt like a celebrity moment.” Quinn also highlighted this moment as impactful, recalling how Hamilton had answered questions she had and her respect for him engaging with the university students as part of the community-engaged work, stating,

And then talking to Hamilton Glass when he actually came to our class, like that was really cool to see, because I had some questions about the mural, we were doing a video
project on, and he answered them…it was really cool that [Hamilton] involved himself with student work…bringing the whole community part into it.

Maria additionally shared that it was powerful to see the local artists openness and willingness to engage with the community. She discussed interviewing one of the artists for a project in her foundational art education course in the spring, and how that experience opened her eyes to reaching out and connecting with people in the future, stating,

I never knew that there were so many artists in Richmond until Mending Walls… it was really, really cool to talk to and see how open and willing local artists were to get into the project and work with complete strangers and artists in the community on an important mission of bringing important public issues and problems to public art. I think it was eye opening for them, but also for me in knowing that we shouldn't be scared to reach out to random strangers, but rather take a leap of faith that there are good beings in the world, there are good humans that want to work together to push this next generation forward.

The participant responses indicated meeting and working with local artists was influential for the preservice art educators. Walker (2001) recommended “as art teachers search for methods of making art relevant to students’ lives” they consider locating community artists, as they can share cultural knowledge and fill educational voids not covered in traditional curriculum (p. 260). Such interactions with local artists are collaborative in nature, and collaboration was another subtheme evident in the analysis.
Subtheme 2.2 – Collaboration

Near the end of the 2021 semester (as the course this study’s participants were in was wrapping up) I reflected in my research journal that I wanted to “focus on collaboration and collective work as a catalyst for positive change and the common good” (C. Black, personal communication, December 7, 2021). This shift in focus for me personally, was based on my personal experience with Mending Walls and observing students engage with the project in the course. Lawton (2014) asserts, “one effective way to foster a sense of self, sense of place, and sense of community in students is through collaborating with the local community on public art projects” (p. 424). The Mending Walls public art project fosters collaboration in a variety of ways (the purposeful cross-cultural collaborative pairings of the artists, collaborations with community-members, collaborations with local organizations, etc.). Lawton (2014) also noted, “Creative endeavors provide the ideal opportunity to teach the benefits and positive outcomes of effective collaboration” impacting individuals’ “professional and leisure lives” (p. 422). As I reviewed the visual artistic documents submitted for this study, the theme of collaboration clearly materialized. For example, one artist depicted hands coming together and stated, “the way forward is to build bridges together” (see Figure 15). Hands were a recurring symbol connected to collaboration, in another submitted artwork the word collaboration is written out with hands holding one another (see Figure 12). Another artist, detailed the concept of collaboration writing, “Collaboration – how can community work together to keep the conversation going? How can we collaborate to create artwork with a variety of different artists?” (see Figure 11).
The topic of collaboration was also discussed in the semi-structured interviews. Mango communicated that the act of sharing the visual journals as a collaborative practice that provided opportunities to strengthen connections with peers, they said,

…it's like having a little window into your peers' brains with what they're thinking of certain subjects. And I really think that that only strengthened my relationship with all of them, because... sure we're in the same major, so we're bound to talk more. But I just feel like that was the perfect setting to kind of bring the classroom together as a community in that way, too.

Kantrowitz (2022) describes the physical act of drawing as a connective process, connecting marks and considering relationships. It was interesting to listen to Mango describe how the collaborative act of sharing that creative practice with others similarly strengthened connections and built community within the classroom setting.
In the semi-structured interviews, Kash applied the collaborative nature of the Mending Walls project to thinking about future collaborations in the classroom as an art educator. Kash noted the Mending Walls project would be a good example for students to engage in similar collaborations aimed at working together and connecting. She stated,

It would greatly impact it because all students come from different cultures and backgrounds. So, I feel like for Mending Walls, having two different people collaborate on one thing. It would be a really good example for students who are pairing with other students in their class for something that they're going to work on together. Because everybody comes from different backgrounds, and different cultures. So, I feel like having that as an example of like what people were able to create, even though they're
like totally different from one another, can be something that's like really valuable and beautiful.

Maria similarly highlighted the collaborative nature of Mending Walls as a means to propel movement forward through conversations, sharing hopes of addressing biases to foster love and unity, stating,

…because there are two different experiences. There are two different stories. And there are different opinions. And Mending Walls is one of those beautiful organizations of making sure that the next generations to come move forward with these conversations that we don't build these generations with the same biases as our parents or generations before but rather, we learn to love each other and come together in unity.

Within Maria’s reflection on working with local artists, she highlighted wanting to provide her future students with community-engaged, collaborative experiences. She said,

And I think this is what I need to work on myself and my teaching practice and exploring and finding as many local artists as I can, because I want to be able to give that community engagement to my students and collaborate with them, and maybe get them to collaborate with each other.

Max, similarly, described collaborating with others as his biggest takeaway from engaging with the Mending Walls project. Max expressed a desire in his future role as an art educator to work with artists of different backgrounds and provide opportunities for students to feel seen and supported in the classroom, stating,
My biggest takeaway is that I would like to collaborate with others and hopefully get more experienced doing so. And hopefully I can use what I learned from working with other artists and help me in my classrooms. Especially for students that I might not understand their background quite so much. To make it better for them to feel more safe and comfortable in my classroom.

Another participant opted to share a collaborative zine they designed (see Figure 16) for an art education course outside of this study that was centered around cultural diversity in art and society. The zine was created for the midpoint assignment to assess engagement with assigned readings for the course. Having engaged with chapters 1-14 of the bell hooks’ text, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, the participant opted to connect bell hooks’ quotes directly to three different Mending Walls’ murals. They make references to collaboration noting, “conversations take work and must be had by ALL! CANNOT BE DONE ALONE!” (see Figure 16). They also purposely have open “notes” pages next to each of the Mending Walls murals and bell hooks quote pages to encourage collaborative engagement. Although bell hooks’ text, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, was influential in my review of the literature and undertaking of this research study, I never previously discussed bell hooks work with these participants. Lawton (2014) contends collaborative community-based education experiences can inform art educators teaching practices and ultimately enrich their curriculum. To see this participant also make direct connections to bell hooks in relation to the Mending Walls project and apply the Mending Walls project to a completely separate course, I believe, demonstrates the possibilities for public art as a teaching tool, which also generated as a theme.
Lawton (2010) described engagement with community-based/public art endeavors as a way to actively promote critical connections. This notion is further emphasized by the Americans for the Arts’ Public Art Network Council, which stated “public art stimulates learning and thought about art and society, about our interconnected lives, and about the social sphere as a whole” (as cited in Poulin & Walsh, 2015, para. 5). In this study, under the thematic umbrella of public art, three subthemes appeared: public art as a teaching tool, the accessibility of public art, and direct interaction with public art, physically standing at the murals.
Subtheme 3.1 – Public Art as a Teaching Tool

Donahue (2011) suggested, “Through interactive learning from public mural art, preservice teachers gain a model of how to challenge passive routines of teaching and passive acceptance of, or resignation to, building curriculum disconnected from their students’ lives” (p. 71). Donahue (2011) also contended public art can provide opportunities to make relevant connections to this “culture, history, and stories of a community” (p. 77). My desire to incorporate the Mending Walls community-engaged public art project into foundational art education curriculum was rooted in my belief that public art, and in this case murals, are uniquely situated to build and scaffold meaningful interdisciplinary and intergenerational connections. While Donahue (2011) was working with preservice educators in the humanities, similar revelations occurred in this study with preservice art educators. For example, Yellow shared that prior to engaging with the Mending Walls project they did not realize you could use public art in the classroom. They stated,

Before I started working with Mending Walls, I didn't even realize that you could use public art in the classroom. And now I think that it's important to talk about because we can't just focus on high art or art of the past.

Yellow shared that as a result of engaging with the Mending Walls project, they intend to utilize public art, street art, and local, contemporary artists in their future classroom. They shared,

I definitely imagine myself talking about more local artists, contemporary artists, looking at public art and street art, even just talking about like, even hobby artists, which I didn't
consider bringing into the classroom, things that just traditionally haven't been used for lessons.

Moses described that the Mending Walls project expanded his horizons on engaging with and discussing art and how it makes you feel. He said, “I think it kind of expanded my horizons of how we can engage others with art, and just have simple discussions about art and how it makes you feel.” Jane likewise reflected upon engagement with the Mending Walls project inspiring her to incorporate more public art, local art, and local artists in future curriculum development, sharing how impactful it was for her and her hopes it would be similarly impactful for future students. She stated,

…it definitely made me want to incorporate more of the public, local art and artists in my coursework, because reflecting on how engaged I was in it, because it was local, and something that was part of my community, I would imagine that that would be a similar effect on students.

Max described how engagement with the Mending Walls project changed his view of art and its’ role in community, sharing his desire to incorporate community and public art in his future curriculum, stating,

Mending Walls definitely changed my view of art and its role in the community. I definitely want to focus on having my students learn about the way in which art can affect us here and now, not in some museum. And I want to make sure that my students get a wide range of role models and artists that they know of, that they can appreciate.
Trixie stated her belief that public art is an amazing teaching tool and specifically credited the Mending Walls project for grounding her in that conviction. She shared,

I think public art is an amazing teaching tool. Personally, I really enjoyed working with Mending Walls and learning about Mending Walls, and it definitely grounded me in the place that I am. It helped me learn a lot about art, how to incorporate artists in my teaching practice, but also it was grounded in what I was referring to before, the context that was really helpful and would be really exciting for students in Richmond public schools, for example.

Trixie additionally articulated including public art and local art in her future teaching practice as her biggest takeaway from the foundational art education coursework. In her words,

I think the biggest takeaway that I got from engaging with Mending Walls as it relates to my future classroom and teaching practice is that I want to include as much public and local art as it would make sense to.

Similar to other participant responses, Maria noted that she had never considered public art as a teaching tool until engaging with the Mending Walls project. She shared she wished she had been exposed to the concept earlier in her education, but expressed she plans to utilize public art as an educational tool in her future role as an art educator. In Maria’s words,

I honestly never really thought about public art as a teaching tool until getting introduced to Mending Walls. I really never thought about public art or public murals as an educational tool, until we really got into the nitty gritty of the meanings behind the murals. And I think it's a beautiful idea of incorporating murals into the arts. I wish I got
introduced to it earlier on in school. But since being introduced to it …and looking at public art as an educational tool within the art classroom, I hope to do the same with my students, whatever age that they might be. Public art is placed in certain spaces so that it reaches a large majority of people, so why not talk about it? Why not talk about the public art that citizens are coming across and investigate as to why it was put there? Maria also referenced public art being in spaces that can reach a large number of people. The accessibility of public art was another theme that developed throughout the semi-structured interview conversations.

Subtheme 3.2 – Accessibility of Public Art

As stated by the Americans for the Arts, Public Art Network Advisory Council (2014), “Public art is uniquely accessible and enables people to experience art in the course of daily life, outside of museums or other cultural institutions. Public art provides everyone in the community direct and on-going encounters with art” (p. 2). The notion of accessibility is a theme that materialized throughout semi-structured interview responses, artistic visual submissions, and my own research journal. For example, in the visual journal artistic submission below considering similarities and differences between public art and art in museums, you can clearly see the word “accessible” displayed on the sidewalk in front of a wall with art that states, “public art invites interaction” specifically referencing Mending Walls (see Figure 17).
In my own research journal on March 24, 2021, I wrote down a keyword “democratizing access” as a concept connected to public art that I wanted to personally explore (C. Black, personal communication, March 24, 2021). The notion of access was also present in the semi-structured interviews. For example, Moses shared that the experience working with the Mending Walls project was his first true experience engaging art outside of a classroom setting. In his words, “…it was like my first experience kind of engaging art outside of a classroom.” Mimi focused on the accessibility of murals, specifically referencing the financial cost barrier sometimes associated with museums. Mimi reflected on local public art providing public access for engaging learning experiences in the arts, stating,
So, I obviously love Mending Walls and how much it connects to the city of Richmond. And I think it's important for students to have accessible learning...accessible learning that's free. And the murals are free and we just all walk there, and it was not like a big trip, it wasn't a drive or anything. We could all just go there. And I think that's really valuable and accessible learning for students. As I know things cost money to go to...especially museums are expensive, but having local art is free. And I think that's a great way as an educator to ensure your students are all getting a learning experience that's equal. So local art is a great way for students to have accessible learning in art.

Max relatedly expressed leaning towards public art due to cost free accessibility within community and pointed out how it can provoke community-engaged thought, sharing,

I think that there is a time and a place for art in museums, but I lean towards public art because no one has to pay to see it. Everyone has the ability to see it, get an understanding of it, and seek to maybe change something about the way that they think or try and change something about the way that they live, like in your community.

Jane described one of the most influential parts of engaging with the Mending Walls project was recognizing the accessibility of the murals and being able to view them in person in the community. She noted that viewing the murals in person was much more impactful than a photograph, stating,

…but I think what had the most influence on me was just how accessible they were being able to just walk around the city, especially after looking at the website and knowing what the project's about, I could look at a mural and say, oh, I know all about this, and
stand and look at it. Instead of like trying to sit at like a computer or something looking at, like a photograph, it was much more impactful, seeing it in person, seeing it in my community in locations that I frequent regularly, that I know where they are…

Likewise, Maria commented on the impact of physically being able to access and engage with the murals that are embedded within the community. She also described wanting to create these opportunities for future students within her own teaching practice, sharing,

…it really is impactful and beneficial for people to dig deeper at their surroundings because it's really easy for them to walk down the sidewalk and just say like, Oh, that's beautiful, but if they can look deeper into its meaning and to the creators behind it and their mission, it only makes it more beautiful and makes them want to stare longer and think longer and I hope to do the same within my teaching.

Along with the cost-free, community-based access of public art and murals, the physical act of seeing the murals in person was also a recurring theme.

**Subtheme 3.3 – Standing at the Murals**

Donahue (2011) suggested “interacting with public art, like the murals near the campus where I teach, can provide insight for teachers into questions and topics that are important to study the humanities and relevant to the communities where they teach” (p. 70). With multiple Mending Walls murals within a mile from campus, I designed a walking tour to take place during class on September 14, 2021. Towards the end of the semester on December 7, 2021, I reflected on that class day as one of the most influential days of the semester for me personally (C. Black, personal communication, December 7, 2021). On August 2, 2022, I also noted in my
research journal the importance of “saying YES to the moments I feel like I should be writing or researching” sharing that for me, “the most profound moments [have] come in the hands-on … volunteering with Mending Walls, the behind the scenes work, the prepping, the planning, the painting, the conversations… the connection, talking with students at the wall” (C. Black, personal communication, August, 2, 2022). The semi-structured interview responses revealed the participants also had similar sentiments.

Reflecting on the experience of engaging with the Mending Walls murals in person, Mango described the experience as one of their favorite parts of the course, stating,

That was probably one of my favorite parts of the class, just going up as a unit as you know, all of us going to the murals together and having that kind of group. Hey, what does everyone see? Like plainly what literally what do you see? And then what could this mean metaphorically, and I thought that that was very fulfilling, especially it goes along with getting a connection with people because you can see how differently others are thinking from you, like how they're interpreting things.

Other participants described standing at the murals and seeing them in person as a totally different experience and one that could not be compared to seeing them on a screen. Yellow designated the experience as powerful, stating,

I think with any art piece that you see in person, it's a totally different experience. It's like, just visually capturing something on like a paper or on the computer, it's not the same effect as when you see it in person, and you get to actually see it at its actual scale.
And like how the colors actually look, if there's texture, you can actually see all of that and stuff. So, it was a lot more powerful of an experience.

Max articulated a more personal connection, describing,

And it didn't compare at all, when it was just on the screen, it was something to be looked at, admired for what it looks like, you can't get it, unless you go there. And if you are in person, it is so much easier to go in deeper and notice all of the symbolism, and the way that it makes you feel how you react with it is just a lot more personable.

Trixie expressed the impact of experiencing the community surrounding the murals, noting,

It couldn't really be compared. Seeing images of the murals and hearing the corresponding podcast episodes was definitely still a great experience. But engaging with the ones I got to see in person was a little bit more impactful because one of the things that I enjoy the most about murals is their scale and seeing the community around where the mural is on the way there.

Yellow expressed feeling a sense of wonder experiencing the beauty of the art that was just a short walk from campus. They also described the discussions at the wall as an important part of analyzing the works, specifically referencing recognizing gaps in knowledge, stating,

My first thought...was kind of like wonder, I guess, to look up and see how beautiful the work was, all the time and effort that they put into the work... and you don't have to go somewhere special to see it. Like, you get to enjoy that beauty, just walking down the road. And then it was interesting when we were talking, discussing some of the symbols in the murals. So, it was just a good way to get us to think about the message behind the
works. And also, the gaps in our knowledge that you don't know that you have until you try to analyze something.

Elaborating on these so-called “gaps”, specifically referenced a moment standing at the Mending Walls mural titled, *Voices of Perseverance*, created by artists Jason Ford and Ed Trask (see Figure 18). Yellow went on to state,

It was nice. Especially like the first mural we saw, and we were looking at some of the historical Black figures in the mural, and not being able to recognize them. And it was something like in the back of my head, I was like, they never teach me about stuff like this. But like, actually, I guess, when they illustrated these people in the murals, it's kind of like putting that fact in front of you, like making you confront that. And I think that's a good thing.

The moment at this mural it turned out was voiced as influential for multiple participants in this study. Moses described it as emotional and recalled noticing peers become emotional as well, noting,

It just kind of rang home. And it was very emotional. I remember, I'm not gonna name names … [other] people getting emotional as well. And it was, I think it was just a very good experience, just with my own racial experience, kind of seeing that.

Quinn recalled feeling curious at this mural and felt the experience was particularly impactful being surrounded by peers, sharing,

So the murals that we saw they, at least that first one, it just made me feel...it made me feel a little bit curious, it made me very curious. As like, who the people were, and which
parts of the mural actually had deeper meaning. And I honestly think that since we were with the class, just having that continuous discussion surrounding it, that we could spark different ideas in each other. It helped me a lot and impacted me more than if I was just going to view it on my own.

Maria recalled this moment at the wall as shocking, specifically referencing when a classmate mentioned it was sad that everyone had difficulty recognizing some of the historical civil rights activists featured. Maria described it as a sad moment wishing the education system was more inclusive but also noted it as an impactful moment recognizing the important work that still needs to be done, stating,

It was kind of a shocking moment when [anonymous] had said, ‘Isn't it funny how we're all standing here, but we can't recognize a lot of these people on the wall.’ And it was true because I was one of those people, I recognized some, but not all of them. And unfortunately, growing up, I've grown up most of my life here, and I haven't been introduced to a lot of these people. And I wish I was... it's kind of like, a sad moment where you wish the education system was better, was different, was more inclusive and mindful of the history of where certain schools and communities are at, especially in Richmond. It's beautiful, it's kind of like a museum moment, but it's also impactful in a way where we do have a lot of work to do.
Figure 18

Mending Walls Mural, Voices of Perseverance

Note. Photo credit: Katrina Taggart-Jones

Mimi also recalled this moment at the wall and listening to classmates’ stories that were different experiences than her own, sharing it was very powerful. She described, “and hearing their stories, how it's different than mine, and just hearing stories, and I think it was just like being at the wall…the whole experience was just, it was very powerful.” I was genuinely surprised how many participants described this specific moment when discussing what it was like to experience some of the murals in person. Though I knew that moment was powerful for me personally, I was not aware how impactful others also found it. At the end of that semester, when I was still exploring ideas for possible research in my journal I wrote:

I have learned A LOT by watching my students in [foundational art education course] engage with the art and think about how they would incorporate lessons into their future
classrooms. Their visual journal responses were really powerful. The moment in particular that stands out to me was when we went on a field trip to Jason Ford & Ed Trask’s mural on Broad Street – Voices of Perseverance. The wall features multiple generations of civil rights icons including the younger generation in the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests. As we discussed the wall, I asked students to share historical figures they recognized. The wall features John Lewis, Dorothy Height, Ella Fitzgerald, Jesse Owens, Muhammad Ali, and Shirley Chisholm. While students were able to figure out who some of the individuals were, they did not know them all. One student pointed out it was telling and a shame that we were standing at the wall unable to name and unfamiliar with those important figures in Black history because in our education system there is often more focus on slavery than Black joy and celebration. Beyond Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks many important and influential individuals are not discussed. It really made me think about this need for a pedagogical shift towards JOY highlighting triumphs and considering Afrofuturist approaches. So, I am beginning to shift my thinking to implementation in schools and community-based learning. (C. Black, personal communication, December 7, 2021)

Muhammad (2023) addresses these notions stating, “When students see themselves manifested in our curriculum in diverse and positive ways, we observe their joy. If students only see a single narrative of who they are – wrapped in slavery, for example – what kind of joy would that elicit?” (p. 70). Muhammad (2023) also notes that joy involves “advancing happiness and elevating beauty in humanity, as well as embracing truthful narratives and representations of
diverse people of the world” (p. 70). Art, and specifically public art can be a catalyst for creating opportunities for elevating joy including hard truths. As Bell & Desai (2010) point out,

The arts can help us remember, imagine, create, and transform the practices that sustain oppression as it endures across history and locality. When tuned to that purpose, the arts play a vital role in making visible the stories, voices, and experiences of people who are rendered invisible by structures of dominance. (p. 288)

Muhammad (2023) relatedly emphasizes, “Even when Black folks were fighting oppression through music and art, we had joy in our creativity and collectivism – joy that is largely untaught” (p. 43). Donahue (2011) contends, “Because public mural art represents the wealth of history, stories, and symbols in a community, it is a means of including voices and perspectives often excluded from curriculum” (p. 70). And Muhammad (2023) avows “curriculum and instruction allows us to be artists, and reflect on and respond to the social times” (p. 121). The critical conversations that took place engaging with the Mending Walls murals provoked considerations for teaching for social justice. Social justice was another overarching theme that surfaced in this study.

**Theme 4 – Social Justice**

Bell & Desai (2010) argue “the arts ought to be a critical component of social justice practice” (p. 287). Further, Donahue (2011) suggested, “Interacting with public art can ground teachers in education philosophies and practices connected to teaching social justice” (Donahue, 2011, p. 70). This seemingly rang true for participants interacting with the Mending Walls public art project. Ideas surrounding social justice were visible in the artistic visual submissions.
For example, one visual journal entry reflected on colonialism, inequities, power, privilege, and racism (see Figure 19). Another entry considered advocacy, citizenship, designing a better society, sustainability, protecting the planet, and the need for immediate action (see Figure 20). Moreover, throughout the semi-structured interviews the theme of social justice as well as affirming differences and connecting through empathy appeared.

**Figure 19**

*Participant Visual Journal Submission*

Note. Artist credit: Trixie
Figure 20

*Participant Visual Journal Submission*

*Note. Artist credit: Trixie*

**Subtheme 4.1 – Social Justice in the Art Classroom**

One concept that stood out to me in this study was the number of participant responses that described how the engagement with the local, community-engaged mural project, Mending Walls, influenced their approach to social justice in the classroom. While the Mending Walls project undoubtedly furthered my thinking on the topic, I was very surprised to learn just how many participants had not considered or feared approaching these topics with future students. Mango, for example, shared our engagement around social justice issues made them realize it was OK to talk about in a classroom setting, stating, “maybe just the fact that we were engaging with it in a classroom... not really influenced my thoughts, but just kind of made me realize,
okay, this is something we can talk about in a classroom setting.” As a follow-up I asked if they felt like they could talk about social justice issues in the classroom prior, and they responded, “I don't think it really felt like I could have talked about it before.” Jane also shared that engaging with the Mending Walls project brought social justice to the forefront and was not something that she had truly thought about prior. She shared making connections to the historical roots of art and activism and stated that she would be including social justice in her curriculum as a future art educator. She stated,

I think it definitely brought that to the forefront as something I thought about, I guess I had never really thought about it before. But art has a history of being a lot about social justice. And so, teaching students about that with different artworks, whether it be historical or current, I think is really important context for the artwork itself. So, it's definitely something I really want to make sure I'm thoughtful and include in my teaching about art.

Moses described using art to address social justice issues including but not limited to racial inequality and ableism as his greatest takeaway from the foundational art education coursework, sharing,

…things like ableism, and social justice and racial inequality, like all of that can be addressed through art. And that I think, it kind of made me realize, art is something more than like, a talent or hobby or pretty thing to look at like, it's a part of how the world functions whether people admit it or not. So, I think that's been my biggest takeaway.
Trixie shared that the Mending Walls project provided a tangible example of utilizing a public art project in lessons and that it allowed her to gain comfortability in engaging in difficult conversations. She also noted that it helped her understand ways she could include social justice and advocacy in her teaching practice and have it well received by superiors. Trixie shared,

Engaging with this project has provided for me a tangible example of a project that I could use in my own lesson plans and in my own practice to share with students and inspire discussions and allowed me to become more comfortable with all of the dialogue surrounding these sensitive issues. It has definitely helped me to understand that there are ways that I can make sure to include social justice and advocacy in my practice in a way that would be received well by my superiors.

The notion of fear of addressing social justice issues and the Mending Walls project influence in overcoming that fear was also evident in the semi-structured interview responses. For example, Yellow mentioned engagement with the Mending Walls project made them less afraid to address social and racial justice issues in the classroom, stating,

… it makes me less afraid to address like social justice and racial injustice issues in the classroom because it's obviously an issue in America and it needs to be addressed and us saying nothing about it or like being afraid of it continuously it's just going to let the problem like grow so something has to be said, so I will be brave.

Max also addressed previous fears of bringing in social justice to the classroom prior to engaging with the Mending Walls project, expressing apprehension around potential pushback from administration, parents, and even students. He described engagement with the Mending Walls
project prompting a shift, stating his recognition of the need for engaging with social justice issues through critical conversations. Max explained, in order to move forward as a society, hard truths must be acknowledged. In Max’s words,

I was worried about incorporating activism and incorporating themes of social inequality injustice into my classroom, worried mostly that it would upset administration or parents or students themselves. And I feel like that is not the way to do things. Like, if you don't speak about it, it's just going to get worse. You got to acknowledge stuff. And acknowledging it in the classroom makes it that much more real for students. So that they understand that there are these injustices, they can speak about it, they can talk about it, they can communicate with each other, unify, just see it, and make sure that they can get rid of it where they can.

Likewise, Maria voiced that she would not be afraid of higher ups restricting conversations surrounding social justice in the classroom. She too noted that in order to grow, these issues must be addressed, sharing,

I don't want to be afraid of any higher ups in the school restricting me from engaging in important conversations about social justice... They are conversations to be had and not to be dismissed... We're never going to grow as a country if we don't address these issues within the classroom and help these students get past certain biases that have been in institutions for generations and decades and hundreds of years.

Although my initial reaction to these responses was one of surprise, upon reflection and analysis, I recognized it was a direct reflection of the current times. Will (2023) wrote many teachers are
“walking on eggshells” scared, anxious, and worried. I realized I had previously reflected on this exact notion in my research journal back in 2020, writing, “A system of FEAR exists. In many cases, teachers fear their principals and principals fear their supervisors and the cycle is vicious. Leadership is CRUCIAL!!! So, how can this cycle be disrupted?” (C. Black, personal communication, December 11, 2020). According to a 2022 national survey that “polled nearly 2,400 K-12 teachers and about 1,500 principals and found that 1 in 4 teachers were told by school officials or district leaders to limit conversation about race and racism in their classrooms” (Love, 2023). Will (2023) also referenced this study and stated teachers are opting out of discussing present-day and historic racism as a result of widespread confusion, fear, and uncertainty. Yet, as Love (2023) underscores, “When teachers don’t talk about race and racism in the classroom, they are still teaching about race and racism. The absence of conversation speaks loudly, telling students what histories, people, and contributions matter, and, ultimately, who belongs in society.” The Mending Walls public art project was designed to intentionally propel these difficult but necessary conversations.

The Mending Walls project seeks to creatively and actively address many of the exact social justice issues that initiatives across the country have been working to restrict in school curriculums. It also welcomes and affirms differences to inspire empathy and connection and strengthen community. Building and strengthening community, through the creation of safe spaces to become comfortable with uncomfortable conversations, is arguably a critical skill for all future educators to engage with in preparatory coursework. In specific connection to art education, Knight (2019) states, “If art education continues to evade critical interracial dialogue
and the challenging discussions it incites, we run the risk of reinforcing the current racial divide by forgoing truthfulness and authenticity in tackling difficult issues in US societies past and present” (p. 166). Further, in today’s climate, I’d argue it is also imperative that future teachers have opportunities for community-engaged preparation to increase their comfort in navigating these realities and learn ways to advocate for themselves in potentially difficult situations. The same national survey that described teachers walking on eggshells, also highlighted “the power of community” specifically highlighting “parental influence over decisions of school or district leaders and school board members” (p. 16). As Link (2019) stated, “We cannot shield our students from a world built on inequity, but we can provide them with tools to disrupt, challenge, and unravel it in their own hearts and communities” (p. 25). Two potential tools critical to recognize in embracing social justice in the classroom are affirmation of difference and radical empathy (Wilkerson, 2020) which also generated as subthemes in this study.

**Subtheme 4.2 – Affirmation of Differences & Radical Empathy**

The Mending Walls project uses art as a tool in building beloved community through the affirmation of difference, actively acknowledging the complexities of intersectionality and honoring the unique aspects of our identities that “shape who we are and how we live in the world” (hooks, 1995, p. 265). As aforementioned in Chapter One, as an educator, the Mending Walls project directly influenced acknowledging my vulnerability in approaching dialogue with students, openly addressing my positionality, and inviting and affirming their own unique perspectives. It also served as a tool to approach topics such as radical empathy (Wilkerson, 2020) in the attempt to educate myself, build classroom community, and learn from and with
students. This study revealed students’ also perceived connections to affirmation of difference and radical empathy engaging with the Mending Walls project. In the visual artistic submissions, the word empathy (see Figure 21) and radical empathy (see Figure 16) were included. Empathy, according to Wilkerson (2020), “is commonly viewed as putting yourself in someone else’s shoes and imagining how you would feel” and while Wilkerson notes this could be “seen as a start” it is not enough because “empathy is no substitute for experience itself” (p. 387). More than just empathy, radical empathy, Wilkerson (2020) explains,

- means putting in the work to educate oneself and to listen with a humble heart to understand another’s experience from their perspective, not as we imagine we would feel.
- Radical empathy is not about you and what you think you would do in a situation you have never been in and perhaps never will. It is the kindred connection from a place of deep knowing that opens your spirit to the pain of another as they perceive it. (p. 387)

The working to acknowledge and appreciate others’ perspectives with a humble heart while positively affirming various intersectional differences were evident in the semi-structured interview responses.
For example, Mango expressed how engaging with the project reinforced that it is good to be
proud of your identity and that it is important, specifically in the art classroom, that people have
opportunities to feel seen, supported, and valued, stating,

And that just kind of served as a reminder to me that it's, well, number one, it's good to be
proud of who you are and where you came from. And to try to incorporate that into your
lessons will make people feel seen. And I think that that is very important. Their
experience within the classroom, specifically the art classroom and at that young of an
age can really impact how they see art through like the rest of their lives. And yeah, but
that also goes with community building…
Kash described that engaging with the Mending Walls project in foundational art education coursework has left them more open-minded in their teaching practice, focused on considering every unique individual in the classroom and building a caring community. She said,

I feel like it will help me have a more open-minded teaching practice. Because even before starting the education program, like of course, all I know is my experience in life…so, that's what you lead by. But then I feel like once starting education courses learning about all the different experiences… people coming together from totally different backgrounds, and I feel like just being open minded and just always considering everything, everybody in your classroom will really help benefit the overall relationships you have with your students and the care that you have in like your classroom.

Maria described although she has always wanted to create an educational space where people are considerate and empathetic, the intentionality of the Mending Walls project further encouraged this desire, stating,

And if we bring artists from different cultures, we can better educate our students of how they can be considerate, and how they can be empathetic towards their peers, towards their coworkers. I think that I've always known that I wanted to do that. But looking at how Mending Walls intentionally did this only encouraged me more because you see it, and you hear it, especially with the documentary and the podcasts, how artists, Black artists, Latino artists, they each bring their own voice and it combines in beautiful way where it creates a beautiful piece in each mural, and it creates a beautiful message to those in Richmond.
Jane described the significance of seeing multiple perspectives in the Mending Walls project and how she would facilitate future discussions around engaging difference to encourage students to learn about one another, sharing,

I really liked how they did that in all the murals because you got to see kind of multiple perspectives. And I think it's important to work with people from different cultures, because different ideas and experiences combined with a willingness to work together leads to more engaging discussions and usually a better project as a result. So, as a facilitator, I would just kind of facilitate positive discussions about differences in experiences, lifestyle, you know, race, wherever you're from, and then encourage the students to learn about each other, because that's something they're going to encounter as they become an adult, in the workplace, and so on.

Mimi shared similar sentiments, sharing how she would apply this to future classroom settings encouraging students to talk with people with differing opinions to seek a bridge to work together and make something powerful, noting,

I love that they did the pairings in Mending Walls, like [taking artists] from different backgrounds and pairing them. I think like I would do this similarly, in my classroom, like maybe somehow, pick a partner that you don't really know very well… or just talk to people who have different opinions than you. And that's okay. And then find that bridge between you to where you can work together and make something powerful. I think that could be a really good way to have people work together and learn from each other because we're all just trying to learn from one another and have a conversation and learn.
Quinn described the need to participate in hard and/or uncomfortable conversations on critical issues such as race, and listen to multiple perspectives, as her biggest takeaway from the foundational coursework. She noted the potential for a ripple effect, sharing that one conversation could spark community-wide impact. In Quinn’s words,

My big takeaway is that some conversations can be hard to have or uncomfortable to have, especially something like race, but if you're just open to listening and hearing each other out and hearing other's perspectives, then the conversation could extend further than just that one conversation, it can extend to a whole community, and it could spark something within someone else.

Trixie, similarly, shared a big takeaway from engaging with the Mending Walls project in foundational art education coursework was to try to understand others’ experiences without judgment and with compassion, recognizing and affirming differences. She responded,  

I would say the main takeaway that I got from learning about that type of collaboration was that we should always be asking questions and trying to understand each other's experiences without judgment, and with compassion and curiosity, especially when working with people who are extremely different from us.

Jacob (2016) contends “to observe with compassion and a willingness to understand is to practice empathy, which artists and community members can experience through art projects” (p. 301). In addition to empathy, the arts evoke imagination and creativity that according to Caracciolo & Weida (2017) can inspire “momentum to return education to a place of healing”, which was another theme that arose throughout this study.
Subtheme 4.3 – Healing

The Mending Walls project was purposefully designed as a healing arts project. According to Stuckey & Noble (2010), creative expression can open pathways to emotional healing, offering an outlet to express emotions that may be too difficult to put into words. In the case of Mending Walls, “the healing and life-enhancing power of art are closely tied to relationships with other people” through intentional community-engagement with diverse audiences (McNiff, 2004, p. 51). As McNiff (2004) notes art heals by “connecting us to others, to places, and to ourselves in life-affirming ways” (p. 51). Within the semi-structured interviews, participants referenced the notion of healing in relation to the Mending Walls project. For example, Quinn referred to the cross-cultural collaboration as a healing process, specifically referencing the summer of 2020 Black Lives Matter movement protests in the community. She stated,

I think the fact that each pairing had two people from different cultures, I think that it just made the bond and the healing process and just the overall discussion surrounding race...and especially after the Black Lives Matter movement...it made that discussion even more interesting because we got different perspectives. And it was all coming from like a place of love and a place of healing for the community. So, I think that in the future when I'm leading art projects, I definitely want to incorporate people and artists in my lessons from different cultures and different backgrounds.

Kash also described how the Mending Walls originated as a result of the conversations and protests sparked by the murder of George Floyd. Although Kash did not specifically reference
the word healing, she detailed a comforting feeling knowing that people were coming together in an attempt to foster positive change in the community through art. Kash said,

…the Mending Walls project itself, started during a time that was like a very hard time for everybody. And I felt like even thinking about the fact that during that time… just knowing that people were thinking on the positive side and trying to have a positive change in the community through art, and everything was really wonderful.

Healing was also referenced in numerous of the visual artistic submissions. For instance, one entry describing what they learned from engaging with the Mending Walls project details “art allows us to heal and grow” (see Figure 13). Another visual journal entry collaged “art & creativity for healing” (see Figure 21). A different visual journal submission makes reference to “chain reaction of creativity, inspiration, and healing” as well as describes “public art healing trauma in the Richmond community” (see Figure 22). In the collaborative zine artistic submission (see Figure 16) a bell hooks quote (2003) on the need for recognizing and speaking about the truthful and difficult events of the past to healing is included,

It is my deep belief that in talking about the past, in understanding the things that have happened to us we can heal and go forward. Some people believe that it is best to put the past behind you, to never speak about the events that have happened which have hurt or wounded us, and this is their way of coping -but coping is not healing. By confronting the past without shame we are free of its hold on us. (p. 119)
Community-engaged public art provides opportunities for the “interplay of personal healing and expression” that allows for the development of meaningful connections (Mohatt et. al, 2013, p. 200). As noted by Mohatt et. al (2013), community-engaged public murals can change both the physical and social environment, promoting healing, and the sharing of community narratives. The documentation and dissemination of stories and narratives within the Mending Walls project, was another main theme in this study.

**Theme 5 – Documentation**

The Mending Walls project was well-documented from its initiation. Nearly all the community-engagement days were photographed, real-time footage was captured in 2020 by a locally based production company, and there are corresponding podcasts episodes interviewing
the artists on the experience of creating every single mural. The podcast episodes also feature interviews with key behind the scenes players and everything is easily accessible via their website and social media platforms. As noted by Gressel (2016), providing people with accessible information empowers them to discuss public art “in a more informed way” (p. 371). Throughout the foundational art education coursework, participants engaged with these free materials, and throughout this study, the documentation was referenced as a means for deeper engagement with the project.

**Subtheme 5.1 – Visual Journals Impact**

As part of the exploration of the Mending Walls project, I developed ten visual journal prompts (see Appendix D) for students to explore and respond to throughout the semester. Given this was the first time implementing this assignment, I only had one visual journal entry example I’d created for reference and provided general instructions for each entry to be composed of a two-page spread using approximately 50% images and 50% text creatively interpreting the prompts with mixed media (See Figure 23). I encouraged the students to enjoy this opportunity to express themselves and to have fun with the process. While I was hopeful the exercise would prove to be a valuable therapeutic and creative outlet, I was unprepared for what a profound impact students’ responses would have on my own pedagogy and teaching practice, as well as strengthening our classroom community.
Reviewing students’ entries and observing student interactions during gallery walk days, sharing our responses as a class, was eye-opening. What I began to recognize through their thoughtful reflections and conversations was how the visual journals focused on the local, community-engaged art project invited imaginative inquiry acquainting students with “the theory and practice of community-engaged pedagogy” (Lawton, 2019) as well as assisted in their construction and understanding of community funds of knowledge (Moll et. al, 1992; Donahue, 2011). Hash (2021) similarly recognized visual journaling as a critical reflection tool to enact hooks’ (2010) engaged pedagogy providing opportunities for “nonlinear and nuanced ways to reflect” (p. 2) and spaces for students to “see course content and themselves in ways they might not when solely using alphabetic text to compose, leading to disruptions and developments in their knowledge that could promote change in themselves and the world around them” (p. 3).
Participant responses throughout the semi-structured interviews also validated the visual journals’ impact. Moses shared that the visual journals allowed him to creatively reflect on what he was learning. He said, “I liked the visual journals because they definitely kind of gave me a chance to, again, reflect on what I was learning and just kind of create and express myself.” Max also described the value in the reflective practice the visual journals promoted, slowing down and processing the project in greater detail, stating,

I think the visual journal assignments were really helpful because they allowed me to sit on a lot and think about just how important something might be to this project or how important this project might be to a community. And it slows me down to stop and think of all the different ways that I could represent that or how the project represented that in the murals.

Trixie also shared that the visual journals provided additional time for processing and reflection for greater understanding of the project. She even noted that it sparked her to engage in conversations with her family, sharing,

I would say that creating art in response to things that I'm learning always solidifies them a little bit more in my mind and helps me remember and understand them better. And spending more time with the murals that I was incorporating into my visual journals really helped me reflect a lot more with that extra time that I was spending. Rather than just kind of quickly listening to a podcast or going through a reading, I was sitting with it and creating. So, it definitely helped me understand it better. And I would listen to the
podcast, the corresponding podcast episodes, multiple times, and it sparked discussions with my family and things like that.

According to Yellow, the visual journals were helpful to express ideas visually in a way that wasn’t limited to words. They noted,

I think it was really helpful because you get so used to just writing out your thoughts and you don't necessarily have all of the words to express those ideas. And that every like feeling can be expressed through words. So, it was really helpful to be able to, like illustrate my responses. And also think about how I would express myself in a way that wasn't just limited to words.

Maria said the visual journals influenced her ideas and biases and allowed her to engage in meaningful discussions with her classmates. She described the act of sharing the visual journals as a tool in opening each other’s hearts and minds to differing perspectives. In Maria’s words,

They influenced me, my ideas, and my biases, in that I had to really dig deep into my own opinions, my experiences, and take into account the stories that were being introduced to us from the Mending Walls' murals, podcasts, and artists. So that was one thing now for the assigned coursework... It was beneficial assigned coursework in the way where it didn't feel like just reading textbooks, and then we discussed it in class. It was more beneficial because I truly do feel that I heard the voices from each of my classmates, I heard their experiences, I heard their opinions. Sometimes we would have discussions, sometimes there would be some disputes of… did you think this was right? Or did you think this was wrong? So, it was eye opening to really get deep down into the
conversations with my classmates of how their journey or experience was in certain situations, how their sketchbook related to what they were feeling, and how it related to their experience and voice. But I will say it was a beautiful reflection in a way where we all came out with open eyes and open hearts. And I hope that everyone got something from everyone else and applied it to their thinking and biases.

Mango described the visual journals as their biggest takeaway from the foundation art education coursework. Similar to Maria, Mango also referenced the act of sharing visual journals with peers as a way to affirm differences and appreciate individuality, while also building classroom community. Mango stated,

But yeah, the thing that's immediately coming to mind would be visual journals. And us going through the classroom and walking around and seeing what everybody made, I feel like again, was just such a perfect time for it's like a kind of like a mix and mingle, we can all you know, we all have other classes and everything… But now we get to go around and see what people are making and why they made it that way. Here's the same prompt, and they tackled it so differently than I did. So, I don't know, it kind of brought us together, but it also highlighted everyone's individuality.

Throughout the creation of the visual journals, students often engaged with podcast episodes, the website, and other project documentation. Throughout the interviews, these elements also surfaced as a subtheme.
Subtheme 5.2 – Project Documentation (podcasts, documentary, etc.)

Documentary films can capture student attention and provide multi-sensory experiences that support the retention of information (Vaughan-Lee, 2015). Additionally, as Howard-Sukhill et. al (2021) point out “a number of studies have outlined the usefulness and efficacy of podcasts as pedagogical tools” (para. 7). Towards the end of the Fall 2021 semester, I reflected in my research journal wondering about “the importance of documentation and how the podcasts and documentary provided deeper opportunities for engagement” (C. Black, personal communication, December 7, 2021). Consequently, I was curious what, if any, influence the podcasts, documentary, and website had on participants’ understanding and engagement with the project.

The semi-structured interview responses indicated overall, the podcasts, documentary, and website increased understanding and engagement with the project. Yellow described how the podcasts offered insight into the artists’ experiences and the meaning behind the artwork. They also mentioned the website provided more context, featuring photos of every mural and the mission behind the project, stating,

So, the podcast helped me understand the project a lot more because Hamilton was interviewing the artists in the podcast. So, it was just like, having listening to them and their first-hand experience with how some of their ideas behind the murals that they were working with some of the symbols that they were choosing to use in the murals, what it was like to collaborate with each other on the project. And just like, maybe like some of
the possible obstacles that they dealt with, and things like that. The website was also really helpful for giving me a way to look at the murals when I can't just go see them in person. And also, the website gives you a little bit more information on the mission behind the project.

Moses said the podcasts helped him better understand the murals and that he enjoyed how they provided more context and a backstory about the people behind the creation. In his words,

I really like both semesters when listening to the podcast for whatever mural we were doing. I think it was nice to just have context….it just very nice to like, get like a little more backstory about not just like, what the mural is about, but like, who the people are… And yeah, I really, I think podcasts definitely helped, kind of helped me understand more about the murals in the projects.

Likewise, Kash shared that the podcasts were influential in her understanding of the murals. She expressed the value in hearing the artists discuss the process, stating,

The podcasts had the greatest influence on me because getting to hear the artists talk and like hearing their process and everything about how they went about making it because it's easy to see the final product but to hear about the process of it really helps you imagine it more.

According to Trixie, the documentary piqued her interest in the project, but she too felt the podcasts had the biggest influence on her understanding and engagement with the project. She noted that it is not typical to have such insight into the process behind works of art you see. In Trixie’s words,
The documentary definitely piqued my interest, but I would say the podcasts had the largest impact on my understanding and engagement with the project because having an understanding of where these artworks came from, projects that I see regularly, was really satisfying and exciting. And I think that's a rare thing to be able to basically have a window into the artists’ thoughts based on those podcast episodes. When you're looking at art in a museum, you don't typically have that kind of insight.

Maria shared how impressed she was on the detailed documentation of the project, crediting the Mending Walls’ project creator, Hamilton Glass. She discussed how the documentation influenced her thinking as a future educator about not only admiring the work, but actively reflecting to promote growth and change, stating,

[Hamilton made] sure that he thought about every detail, every podcast, every documentation very, very well so that he could let the community know what he's talking about and working on these important issues going on in our community. It impacted my thoughts where we can only move forward from this especially as our mission as educators that we can't just admire it and dismiss it. We need to really think on it and require ourselves to use this in our teaching, we can't just say it's beautiful and move on, but rather we must push ourselves more to act and reflect on what we learned from each mural and podcast so that we can grow and move forward from it.

Maria additionally detailed the experience of listening to the artists discuss their process in the documentary and podcasts episodes. She discussed how listening to these conversations
propelled conversations in the classroom during the coursework as well as influenced her thinking about how to meaningfully engage with the work as a future art educator. She shared,

I loved hearing the conversations between two artists, where I got to hear their voices during the creating process of the murals, and it's beautiful to relate it to the discussions that we had in the classroom. Because there are two different experiences. There are two different stories. And there are different opinions. And Mending Walls is one of those beautiful organizations of making sure that the next generations to come move forward with these conversations that we don't build these generations with the same biases as our parents or generations before but rather, we learn to love each other and come together in unity. You hear it through the documentary, you hear it through the podcast, you see it in the documentary when they bring kids from the community, you see it when they brought in families that have been impacted from racism or discrimination in any way... so I think it influenced a lot and only made my engagement with my Mending Walls all the more meaningful, all the more important, and all the more impactful for me as an artist and as an educator.

The participants' responses specified that much of the value they found in the podcasts and documentary stemmed from the ability to listen to conversations and learn about conversations the artists had during the creation of the public artwork. Conversations and dialogue were the final subtheme that materialized in this study’s analysis.
Subtheme 5.3 – Conversation & Dialogue

As mentioned in Chapter One, the Mending Walls public art project began with the motto, “We need to talk…” From the start of the project, founder and creator, Hamilton Glass, centered the goal of necessary authentic dialogue. In the projects, the artists modeled this by engaging in interracial dialogue and physically creating a mural with members of the community. Glass described the art itself as a tool to bring people together to engage in critical conversations about social and racial justice (H. Glass, personal communication, October 28, 2021). Livingston (2021) asserts providing people from diverse backgrounds with “difficult challenges to overcome while relying on one another” (in the case of Mending Walls, having tough conversations about social and racial justice while also creating a mural) “can go a long way toward bolstering solidarity and improving intergroup attitudes” (p. 220). Further, as highlighted by Bell & Desai (2011) public spaces can provide “avenues for democratic dialogue and collective action” (p. 291). The goal of the community-engaged public art that generated from the Mending Walls project collaborations, was to further conversations throughout the community. (H. Glass, personal communication October 28, 2021). Given the conversations and reflections that took place both during this foundational art education coursework and throughout this study, the Mending Walls project arguably achieved its goal.

In the visual artistic submissions, emphasis was placed on the “We Need to Talk” motto of the project as well as the importance of conversations (see Figures 10 & 24).
Throughout the semi-structured interviews, the “We Need to Talk” concept was also mentioned. Mimi applied the importance of engaging in uncomfortable conversations to the classroom and directly referenced the project’s tagline, stating,

And I think in the classroom, that's really important to have uncomfortable situations and have conversations… it's necessary, because we need to, we need to talk about and that's literally what [the Mending Walls project] said, they're like, ‘We need to talk’.

Mimi elaborated on her visions for her future classroom being centered in opportunities for student led conversation. She described wanting to address critical issues and fostering a space where individuals approach dialogue with an open mind and willingness to learn. In Mimi’s words,
I think it's really important that we talk… I think it's important that the class is very student led, student centered conversation. So, allowing students to be the ones to speak, and talk. And it's important as an educator to inform your students information, things that are happening in our world right now. The injustice is racism, everything, issues, it's important to talk about it, and then allowing your students to talk. And I think that's just the number one priority. As a future educator, I want my students to be the ones speaking and talking and me just fostering a space where people can talk and it's, we're all just learning at the end of the day, and you're it's okay to make a mistake. And it's okay to say the wrong thing, as long as you're open to learn, and that's, yeah, that's my classroom.

Kash described that engaging with the Mending Walls project allowed her to think about how she might approach conversations with students in her future classroom. She described the Mending Walls project as a positive conversation starter and expressed her own engagement with the project has influenced the way she’s approached conversations with friends. Kash shared,

I feel like it will allow me to look back on the conversations that I had about Mending Walls itself. And even like the topics, like social justice, if those topics were to come up in my classroom, where like, if I was teaching something that was, along those lines, I feel like Mending Walls would be like a great example for me to show. Also, it would allow a conversation that is fluid and is kind of beneficial for the students. And so, it's like a positive conversation starter. And yeah, it also I feel like has allowed me to think
more about how I would approach conversations about that even just thinking about like how I've had conversations about it with my friends and stuff.

Likewise, Trixie talked about the Mending Walls project as providing a tangible example of how to inspire discussions amongst students. She also shared engagement with the Mending Walls project allowed her to become more comfortable participating in dialogue on sensitive issues, stating,

Engaging with this project has provided for me a tangible example of a project that I could use in my own lesson plans and in my own practice to share with students and inspire discussions and allowed me to become more comfortable with all of the dialogue surrounding these sensitive issues.

Maria specifically indicated conversations with her classmates related to the Mending Walls project were eye opening. In her words,

So, it was eye opening to really get deep down into the conversations with my classmates of how their journey or experience was in certain situations, how their sketchbook related to what they were feeling, and how it related to their experience and voice.

Max noted this project specifically made him think about ways to bring students into conversations, sharing,

I feel like in the setting of the art education curriculum and the coursework, it really helped me to stop and think and understand the ways in which, like, these artists and these communities... they're not just some distant thought, but something that you can address in the classroom and bring students into the conversation.
Max also shared that the Mending Walls project opened his eyes to how collaborative possibilities can create space for conversation, and art as a method to facilitate conversation with students. He said,

I didn't think that art could be so collaborative, but seeing how they paired artists together, and how that opened up more conversation, I feel like that's something that needs to be talked about in the classroom where using art as a method, to facilitate conversation, how that might be used outside of the classroom, it's really cool to see like students using art to make it therapeutic.

According to Livingston (2021), research shows “people become connected on a neural level during conversation and that even imagining conversation with others can increase the likelihood of cooperation in difficult social situations” (p. xiii). Further, hooks (2003) stated, “conversation is the central location of pedagogy for the democratic educator” (p. 44). Milner (2020) asserts, “language is perhaps the most important mechanism we have to construct relationships” (p. 224). Thus, it was interesting to listen to these participants imagine engaging future students in meaningful conversations. Overall, participant responses suggested, not only did the Mending Walls project provide opportunities for them to engage in authentic dialogue as students in foundational art education coursework, but it also shifted their thinking about approaching conversations with students in their future classrooms.
Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusion

This qualitative narrative inquiry-based case study (Sonday et. al, 2020) aimed to document preservice art teachers’ perceptions of utilizing the Mending Walls project in foundational coursework in the field of art education. The purpose of the study was to understand how undergraduate preservice art educators perceived the impact of using a local, community-engaged mural project (Mending Walls) in the development of pedagogy and curriculum in their foundational coursework and how they perceived its’ impact on their beliefs surrounding teaching and learning.

My goals were to better understand the course experience with the local, community-engaged mural project (Mending Walls) from the perspective of students; to explore the intersections of community-engaged murals, community-engaged pedagogy, and community-engaged teacher preparation through the perceptions of preservice art educators; and to learn from former students’ perceptions in order to actively reflect on and improve my own teaching practice. The study was guided by eleven preservice participants’ reflections on their experiences engaging with the Mending Walls project in their foundational art education coursework during the 2021-2022 academic year. Through semi-structured interviews, visual narrative analysis, document analysis, and field notes, five major themes were identified. The analysis and findings of the data presented in Chapter 4 inform the discussions, implications, and recommendations offered in this chapter. This study seeks to offer a conceptual lens through which others may be able to explore the intersections of community-engaged public art, pedagogy, and teacher preparation. This study seeks to add to the literature through explicitly connecting community-engaged murals,
community-engaged pedagogy, and community-engaged teacher preparation, as well as documenting the perspectives of preservice art educators that engaged with Mending Walls project in their foundational art education coursework.

**Summary of Key Findings**

In the introduction of hooks’ (1994) book, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, she describes her collection of essays as “multilayered” (p. 11). I kept coming back to this term as I processed this case study and reflected on engagement with the Mending Walls project. The Mending Walls project itself is multilayered – with community-engaged murals, cross-cultural artistic collaborations, detailed documentation (podcasts, documentary, photographs, etc.), and civic talks centered around racial and social justice. My research journal was multilayered, beginning with initial thoughts and ideas, steadily building layers recognizing the complexities associated with community-engaged work. Participants visual submissions were multilayered exploring a variety of concepts through an assortment of artistic mediums. The semi-structured interviews were multilayered with 11 different participant experiences and perspectives. Together, these entities revealed multilayered themes, centered around community, local artists, public art, social justice, and documentation (see Table 2).

Reflecting on engagement with the Mending Walls project in foundational art education coursework, participant responses indicated multilayered impact on their insights on teaching and learning. In relation to developing arts curriculum, participants described how the experience influenced their thinking about involving the community in education and taking time to get to know the communities in which they are teaching. Participants also shared wanting to
build safe classroom communities for their students, embedding opportunities for conversation, dialogue, and student voice in curriculum. In designing supportive educational communities of care, participants acknowledged the need for affirmation of differences, honoring of diverse identities and intersectionality, and cultivating spaces for empathy and connection. Participants expressed their intention to incorporate local artists, contemporary artists, and public art into their future curriculum. As a result of engaging with the Mending Walls project, participants conveyed intentions to design curriculum that actively addresses social justice issues in the art classroom.

As discussed at length in chapter four, there is evidence to suggest that engaging with the outdoor, public art project, multiple participants pushed their thinking about the accessibility of art and creating meaningful, accessible opportunities for students. As Mimi stated, “the murals are free and we just all walk there… And I think that's really valuable and accessible learning for students.” Likewise, Max expressed, “...I lean towards public art because no one has to pay to see it. Everyone has the ability to see it, get an understanding of it.” Participants also reflected on their own engagement with physically viewing and interacting with the murals in person and described wanting to provide similar experiences for their own students someday. For example, Maria commented on the impact of physically being able to access and engage with the murals that are embedded within the community and stated, “…it really is impactful and beneficial for people to dig deeper at their surroundings…I hope to do the same within my teaching.” Many participants referenced the Mending Walls’ project documentation (podcasts, website, documentary, etc.) in furthering their own understanding of the project as well as appreciation
for the space to creatively reflect on that within the visual journals. Trixie shared, “the podcasts had the largest impact on my understanding and engagement with the project.” She added, the podcast episodes provided “a window into those into the artists’ thoughts.” Trixie also noted that as a result of the visual journals, she was truly spending time with the podcasts stating, “Rather than just kind of quickly listening to a podcast or going through a reading, I was sitting with it and creating.” Kash shared similar sentiments stating, “The visual journals made me think deeper about the murals themselves and the podcasts to go along with them also gave me more insight into the process of the mural.” Some participants shared future plans to incorporate different modes of engagement and visual journals in curriculum. Maria shared, “I hope to do the same with my students one day, where we can look at murals in person and make them have that same feeling.” Further, Jane stated, “I really enjoyed visual journals… it's definitely given me some ideas for projects and stuff I want to do with my students like field trips, getting out of the classroom, that kind of thing.” The feedback from these participants was more valuable than I could have imagined. The analysis of these preservice teachers’ perceptions pushed my own thinking on implications for future pedagogies for art teacher preparation.

Muhammad (2023) contends, “If we listen closely to our students, they will tell us who they are and what they need” (p. 79). My prior reading and personal experiences with public art and teaching suggested that engagement with the Mending Walls project was impactful for the preservice art educators I worked with, I learned more than anticipated through the semi-structured interview process. I was incredibly impressed with participants' willingness to voluntarily share their ideas, and the depth and rich quality of their responses in the interviews,
which were conducted months to a full year after being enrolled in the foundational coursework. The recall from coursework suggests the lasting impact these experiences had on the participants’ considerations of teaching and learning. Although the interview was semi-structured and more formal, it provided an opportunity to pose questions that may not have organically transpired otherwise (Milner, 2020). Hearing the critical ways in which the preservice art educators had already applied their experiences with the Mending Walls project to their philosophical educational beliefs was personally powerful and moving. It also prompted relevant implications for practice when working with preservice educators, and more specifically, preservice art educators.

**Implications for Practice**

This study provides evidence that community-engaged experiences can act as sites for meaningful learning. Further, it illuminates arts and culture as expressions of community, thus art, particularly that in the public sphere, provides spaces for collaboration, imagination, resistance, and critical thinking (National CAPACD, 2023). Public art can act as a teaching tool, prompting thoughtful engagement with communities. As this study implies, it is critical for instructors of preservice educators to consider ways we might center community engagement as a component to our pedagogical practices. All of the participants in this study were largely unfamiliar with the Mending Walls project before being prompted with coursework, despite living, working, and learning amongst them. The findings from this study beg to ask further, “how might teachers encourage the visual exploration of the space around us? What stories are in our surroundings? What stories can we tell? What are the histories of the spaces we inhabit?”
There was a lot of rich community history embedded into the Mending Walls project. Important community figures past and present were featured in the murals and many of the murals intentionally connect to their locations. Each of the Mending Walls murals tells a story, but as these participants noted, their understanding was enhanced through listening to the stories and process behind these works through the podcasts and documentary. Additionally, participants described the visual journals as spaces to creatively process their learning. This highlights the significance of documentation and different modes of engagement. How can we propel student thinking by fostering opportunities for personal investigation?

Relatedly, participants noted the value in sharing their personal investigations with each other to recognize similarities and differences in their approaches to the various visual journal prompts. They also pointed to the value of becoming comfortable in engaging in uncomfortable conversations with peers. Thus, as instructors of preservice educators, it is essential to provide opportunities for discussions and classroom talk to help build cross-person knowledge and understanding (Milner, 2020, p. 227). And while these notions are not new, they are perhaps important to reiterate as politicians drive fear over “divisive concepts” in schools. hooks (1994) stated the need to affirm students’ presence and right to speak in multiple ways on diverse topics and Milner (2020) reiterated discussions provide opportunities for students to develop voice and perspectives (Milner, 2020).

Public art tells a story, and thus engaging with public art can prompt topics for discussion and deeper investigation. In the case of Mending Walls, many of the murals make local and historical connections with numerous acknowledgements of ancestors. Yet, even if public art
doesn’t exist, carefully examining communities can provide opportunities to consider the history of spaces. Sometimes we can learn more from what is missing. What narratives have been excluded? How can we bring stories from the margins to the center? What artistic representations can be imagined? As many participants expressed through engagement with the Mending Walls project, without acknowledging the truth of the past we cannot move forward.

Along the same lines, although Mending Walls had clearly articulated connections to social and racial justice, the examination and investigation of public spaces (with or without the presence of public art) could be utilized to consider elements of social and racial justice including who and what is represented and why? Or again, perhaps more importantly, who and what are not represented and why? Another important consideration is the how. In the case of Mending Walls and this study, community-engaged murals were used as a teaching tool to consider how members of the community were included in the process of the art that was being created and displayed. Yet, whether or not the work was a result of a community-engaged public art project, there are possibilities to facilitate conversations amongst students to consider differences in approaches. Discussions of community-engagement, especially in relation to public art, can increase community awareness. How might you imagine or reimagine art for more inclusive public spaces? (Black, 2022). What differences exist when community is or is not included in the process?

The Mending Walls project is rooted in social and racial justice, but it is also deeply tied to the community where it exists. Thus, it may serve as a catalyst for other communities to consider the important work that is already happening within their communities and the ways in
which public art can serve as an asset to highlight that important work. The Mending Walls does this in multiple ways; one way is by utilizing the local artists for the creation of the artworks. This is an important consideration for preservice art educators and instructors. How might we encourage the investigation of local artists in the community? What might it look like to include a local artist in the development of the curriculum for an arts program? How is the work of local artists being documented? Might students conduct interviews, create educational materials, or host a podcast? Another way Mending Walls highlighted community assets was by amplifying the work of organizations already in existence. While there may not be art that directly ties to work happening in your community, how might one encourage preservice educators to learn about community activists and the work of local community organizations? How might one provide community-engaged experiences that promote recognition of community’s existing strengths and assets? How might one prompt preservice art educators to imagine artistically amplifying local community organizations doing the work? How can one model that through engaging curriculum and allowing students to create and build their own connections? How will those experiences translate to their future role as an educator? How might one turn to community knowledge to inform practice? In what ways can we dive deeper into authentic, community-engaged work?

After conducting this research, I believe there are implications specifically for teachers in higher education of preservice art teachers. This study suggests the importance of invitations for inquiry and ignition of critical curiosities through meaningful engagements with the local community. For art educators, I recommend investigating the local community’s public art
landscape or the lack thereof, as a tool for prompting critical conversations and diving deeper into considerations such as the history of spaces, whose perspectives, voices, and ideas are invited and included in the creation of public works of art, the stories public art tells, the audiences public art seeks to engage, and other complexities associated with art in the public realm. Through discussions of such considerations, I suggest parallels can be drawn between asset and deficit-based approaches in both public art and education. For example, public art can be created in a number of ways, but how the work is created and what and who are valued in that process shift. As one participant in this study noted,

I really liked comparing the Mending Walls' murals to those of the Richmond Mural art project. Because it went back to how there's public art and then there's meaningful public art and how the Mending Walls organization really dug deep into including the voices of people in Richmond and making sure that they felt heard. Whereas, if you looked at any murals from the Richmond mural project, their mission was leaning more towards bringing in tourism and making Richmond a destination spot for tourists or vacations… and that's nice and everything…they're beautiful murals. However, if you look at the meanings behind both, I think I would choose Mending Walls over and over and over again, just because it makes my heart full, it makes me happy to know that the people from this community helped create that mural. Their stories, struggles, and experiences are included in the art that we see…
Similarly, as Paris & Alim described in an interview with Ferlazzo (2017), all teachers create and adapt curriculum, but culturally sustaining educators work with students and community members to curricularize, carefully considering and honoring community voices and sources of knowledge. Paris & Alim state, “Being and becoming a culturally sustaining educator is dynamic; it’s about critically learning with community; it’s about, together, sustaining who youth and communities are and want to be; and it’s about doing all of that with respect and love” (Ferlazzo, 2017). Examining public art (and especially community-engaged murals) can provide accessible and engaging entry points for preservice art educators to build recognition of asset based, community centered, and culturally sustaining (Paris & Alim, 2017) approaches to art and education. Authentic engagements with local public art can support preservice art educators in developing realizations of the significance of working with community, working with, and incorporating local artists into curriculum, working with, and centering the communities they teach in, and recognizing that every community has assets. These engagements with public art also provide entry points to a plethora of other relevant topics including accessibility and social justice issues.

Within investigations of local public art, I encourage instructors of preservice art education teachers to consider ways to propel student thinking by facilitating opportunities that allow for creativity and expression. Based on the participant feedback in this study, the preservice art educators appreciated the making and sharing of visual journal assignments as a space for in depth creative reflection, as well as an opportunity to build classroom community. Creating safe spaces that encourage vulnerable discussions and sharing varied perspectives
(including varied artistic responses to prompts) provide opportunities to increase awareness, challenge traditional ways of thinking, and aid in the development of new understandings and **radical empathy** (Wilkerson, 2020). Further, the participants in this study pointed to the significance of viewing the murals in person. As Mango stated,

> I'd say this was the first more hands-on public art teaching tool experience that I've had. I've had other professors or teachers that would cover public art as like part of a unit, or like a lesson one day…but it wasn't as hands on, when I think teaching tool, I don't just think…here's your reading…when I think teaching tool, I think something that the students will be directly interacting with and kind of continuing to digest and use to our advantage, I guess. So, this was my first experience with such a direct interaction.

Mango additionally noted, “…physically going there definitely gave me a different feeling, it removes that disconnect, that boundary…”. Max described the feeling of seeing the murals in person, stating, “It made me feel inspired…pumped up, energized.” Accordingly, it is recommended that engagements with local public art, such as murals, also take place beyond the confines of the classroom. Muhammad (2020) references James Forten’s notion of the “power of doing”, stating “our classroom spaces and instruction should be tied to action. Students need opportunities to put their learning into action and practice” (p. 111). Providing “doing” opportunities for preservice educators is especially important as they consider ways they might bring learning to life for their future students.
As the instructor of preservice art educators, one does not have to approach community-engaged work with all the answers, in fact it is imperative that all involved enter embracing engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994) with open minds and a willingness to learn. Engaging in learning alongside students, teachers of preservice art educators can model best practices and disrupt hierarchical tendencies. Through purposeful engagement working with local community members, organizations, artists, etc., course instructors have the opportunity to exhibit what centering community looks like in action alongside and in collaboration with the preservice art educators. Again, drawing parallels between different approaches to the creation of public art and different approaches to designing art curriculum, instructors can highlight the value of collective work as well as ways “our curriculum and instruction allows us to be artists, and reflect on and respond to the social times” (Muhammad, 2023, p. 121).

At the outset of this study, I was interested in the intersections of community-engaged murals, community-engaged pedagogy, and community-engaged teacher preparation. Through in-depth review and analysis of the responses of the preservice art educators, it became clear to me that the overlaps are embedded in the artistic process, the art of public art and murals, the art of pedagogy, and the art of teacher preparation. Further, each of these art forms embraced a community-centered process. bell hooks (2010) reminds us, “when we are free to let our minds roam it is far more likely that our imagination will provide the creative energy that will lead us to new thought and more engaging ways of knowing” (p. 62). The analysis of this study implies the community-engaged practices and exploration nurtured preservice art educators’ creativity and criticality. The criticality, as Muhammad (2020) points out, is necessary to name and critique
injustice and develop agency to build a better world. The imagination and creativity, as hooks (2010) notes, is needed “to create and sustain the engaged classroom” (p. 59). Community-engaged murals, community-engaged pedagogy, and community-engaged teacher preparation, all embrace the process, which is key to art, teaching, learning, and building community.

**Implications for Research**

hooks (1994) stated, “Seeing the classroom always as a communal place enhances the likelihood of collective effort in creating and sustaining learning community” (p. 8). Future research might investigate how embedding community-engaged practices in preservice art teacher preparation influences future art teachers’ engagement with their local communities as well as how it translates to the building and formation of their own classroom communities. Does exposure and authentic engagement with community-engaged experiences influence practice as well as philosophical and pedagogical beliefs? Additionally, use of community-engaged teacher preparation specifically applied to the field of art education provides a number of avenues for future research exploration.

The focus of this case study, The Mending Walls public art project, was grounded in culturally relevant and socially just approaches to artmaking. Further research might explore if the nature of the project makes a difference when utilizing public art as a teaching tool. For example, would engaging with street art in general or murals generally created without explicit focus on social justice issues still allow for recognition of asset-based approaches (McClure & Reed, 2022) and community funds knowledge (Moll et. al, 1992)? Additionally, the artists in the Mending Walls project were all local to the area. Other research might explore if the locality of
the artists involved in the community-engaged artwork presents similarities or differences. The Mending Walls public art project also partnered with local organizations engaged in social justice work, future research might explore the value of partnerships within public art projects and how public art can serve as a creative tool to highlight important work already happening within communities. An additional element that was highlighted in this case study was the significance of the Mending Wall’s project documentation of the process (podcasts, documentary, etc.), future research might investigate differences in opinions about public art before and after listening to the process and context. Moreover, research might also explore the value of project and process documentation connected to community engagement and educational purposes. The use of visual journals in building an understanding of both public art and community is another potential avenue for further research and inquiry.

Generally, this study indicates that future research might investigate public art as a means to explore interdisciplinary and intergenerational approaches to art education with preservice art educators. Further, future research might investigate other community-engaged mural projects to explore if similar intersections between community-engaged murals, community-engaged pedagogy, and community-engaged art teacher preparation exist.

**Challenges and Limitations**

It is critical to note this qualitative, narrative-inquiry based case study did have its limitations. Although from the outset of the study, I knew the sample size would be small (with only 30 eligible participants initially), my teaching assignment in Spring 2023 as well as two students’ departure from the university, lowered the final total number of eligible participants to
Further the recruitment for this study started around the Thanksgiving holiday, and then continued during Fall 2022 final exams, winter break, and the start of the new Spring 2023 semester. These were particularly busy times for the eligible participants, and without external funding to offer compensation or even a raffle for compensation, it was a tough time of year to recruit participants. Yet as aforementioned in Chapter 3, I do think the fact that 11 of 20 eligible participants volunteered an hour or more of their time to be involved with no compensation demonstrates a level of commitment and interest in the Mending Walls community-engaged work.

As detailed in Chapter 3, time and financial constraints also played a role in the limitations and challenges of this study. The research needed to take place within the timing of my supported scholarship funding, and with the quick turnaround, I was unable to incorporate peer reviewers. Had I not been working within tight time and financial constraints, I would have incorporated peer reviewers for an added measure of trustworthiness.

Finally, while many powerful themes generated throughout the analysis, I did actively look for data that supported alternative explanations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). While the responses overwhelmingly indicated positive impacts on the preservice art educators’ insights on teaching, learning, and development of curriculum, there were some responses where I questioned if the experience had not gone far enough to fully dispel deficit thinking. For example, when asked about the experience of seeing the murals in person, one participant shared,

Oh, like I said, it's just, it's a whole different experience, in the areas that they are, you wouldn't expect like this beautiful mural, it was just like, impactful. Because like, most of
it was on Broad Street, and it's like the last place you expect something beautiful to be, it's a crazy area.

In this response, the participant notes the impact of seeing the mural in person, but also describes not expecting to see something beautiful in that area and describes it as “crazy”. I should have followed up with a question about why they described it as a “crazy” area, but I did not. I was taken aback and couldn’t help but feel I had failed to fully get asset and strength-based thinking across. I believe the participant may have been referencing the people experiencing homelessness and houselessness in the area, though I cannot be certain. Beyond that, it should not have been unexpected to see a mural in that area since it is technically branded as the city’s arts district. I want to be clear; I pull this quote not as a critique of the student, but rather a consideration for future adjustments to approaching course content. Upon critical reflection, I realized that I had not truly delved into issues such as cultural gentrification (Crisman, 2021a) and the development of arts districts leading to gentrification and residential displacement (Currid, 2009; Rich & Tsitsos, 2016) until I was learning alongside these participants. Thus, these issues, in parallel to well-intentioned but problematic approaches to education may be interesting to explicitly address in future coursework.

Another critical alternative I noticed was participants expressing involvement in the community potentially from a more one-sided perspective. Again, I want to make abundantly clear, I analytically examine this quote not as a critique of the student participant but rather to raise considerations for how teachers of preservice teachers address historical implications of what the arts “do” for underserved communities (Kraehe & Acuff, 2013). Kraehe & Acuff
(2021) call for the need for reimagining the “good teacher” (p. 139). They call attention to “the good teacher as helper metaphor” visible in numerous Hollywood movie plots where there is a White teacher that helps save non-White students (p.139-140). According to Kraehe & Acuff (2021) this “helper metaphor can lead teachers to band-aid solutions to deeply entrenched problems caused by institutional racism” (p. 140). In one participant's response to the relationship between community engagement and education, they described community engagement as a way to help other people and bring the community together. They stated,

I think it's important because as educators, I think we should be teaching, not just in the classroom, but outside of the classroom too and involving the community, within our passions for teaching art, could really help other people. And I think that yeah, like, just because you're an educator in the classroom doesn't mean you can't use your skills outside of the classroom to like, bring the community together.

While this is certainly important, upon later critical reflection I questioned if the nature of the response was from a one-sided “teacher as helper” perspective (Kraehe & Acuff, 2021, p. 139-140). I wondered if they recognized how engagement with the community is mutually beneficial, the significance of resisting the hierarchical tendencies and truly recognizing the brilliance and expertise of community members. I did not ask a follow-up question at the time but would be interested to further investigate that notion in future. I similarly questioned if there was a one-sided and othering position in this participant response on the relationship between community engagement and education. They said,
I think it's extremely important because the student population is part of the community. And without an understanding of the context of where students are coming from, it would be difficult to educate them in the way that will best suit their needs. Again, honoring and appreciating student identity and involving the community is of critical importance. Yet, I couldn’t help but wonder if the reciprocity of the community engagement was being fully recognized (i.e., it not only being helpful to build relevant and meaningful lessons for students but also to learn with and from community members). These critical considerations and reflections on alternatives have provided ideas for adjustments in the development of future course content as well as ideas for directions for future research.

**Directions for Future Research**

After teaching the foundational course in the Fall 2021 semester, I revised and edited the course structure based on student feedback for the Fall 2022 semester. I continued to utilize the Mending Walls project but was able to secure a grant to provide students with the opportunity to take a bus tour to see four murals that were further from campus. On the trip, we were accompanied by the project’s founder, two of the project’s artists, and a leader of a partnering organization. I also had more intentional discussions on asset-based approaches to teaching (McClure & Reed, 2022), community funds of knowledge (Moll et. al, 1992), and conducted a community asset mapping activity using the Mending Walls murals in class. Furthermore, I was more intentional in emphasizing community knowledge to inform practice and purposefully modeled this calling in community folks as guest speakers. Although I didn’t explicitly explain that purpose to students, I hoped by inviting other local project organizers to speak to the class
that it challenged hierarchical notions of education and emphasized the value of community expertise (Clark, et. al, 2021).

While there were intentional changes that were incorporated into the foundational art education course in Fall 2022, my colleague who picked up the work in the spring sequential foundational coursework the year before left the university at the end of spring semester 2022, and therefore this cohort of students did not continue with Mending Walls related course content in the spring semester of 2023. Accordingly, while this would be a new and different case study, I am interested to utilize the same semi-structured questions to interview the 2022 cohort to understand their perceptions of utilizing the Mending Walls project in foundational art education coursework. I’d be interested if similar or different themes are generated.

Due to time constraints, I was unable to conduct second follow-up interviews with this study’s participants. As I reflected, I did develop some lingering questions. In the future, I may invite participants to answer follow-up questions to summon further thought. A few questions that surfaced were: Did students enjoy this semi-structured interview as an opportunity to reflect? Did the removal from the course (months to a year) prove valuable or did it make it harder to remember and reflect? What if “Mending Walls” didn’t exist in the community they were entering, how might they engage community or public art? Based on some responses, I also wonder if there was enough emphasis placed on valuing the expertise of the community. There was a clear articulation of engaging community, but it was unclear if this stemmed from a desire to help or truly engage with community. I’m also interested in perceptions on how engaging
with me in this process and knowing I was conducting research influenced thoughts on garnering student feedback.

I’d additionally be curious to reconnect with these participants in the future (years out), to investigate if they successfully incorporated the various elements they discussed once active in the field. Belle (2019) points out that in approaching social justice issues in education “everyone initially agrees [to do the work]. But agreeing and implementing social justice pedagogy are two different things” (para. 6). I’d be interested to see how students enacted social justice in the art classroom as well as how they incorporated local artists, engaged the community, etc. Did they feel equipped with tools to advocate for themselves if others questioned their approaches? While this study demonstrated their thinking and orientation to incorporating those elements, future research might explore if it was purely philosophical or subsequently applied. Once these preservice art educators enter the field, future research might solicit feedback on how the community-engaged practice prepared them for the realities of teaching and potential ways to advocate for themselves. Did the theoretical and philosophical translate to practice or was there a disconnect? Further, did they utilize public art as a teaching tool? If so, did they enact similar feedback driven research strategies with their own students? How might this research case study also potentially serve as an example for working PreK-12 art teachers to investigate the impact of community-engaged practices and interacting with public art in their own classroom settings? How might educators seek feedback from students to assess the perceived impact of lessons?

Future research might also explore intersections and differences between public facing street art, graffiti, and murals as teaching tools. Specifically looking at the murals, an emphasis
on how the murals were created might be used to spark conversations on creative placemaking and community engagement. As I reviewed participants’ visual artistic submissions (see Figures 25 & 26), I wondered if we dove deep enough into this reflection. I think the intersections are complex and perhaps not as simple as designated in responses. I would also be curious to use the 2022 Mending Walls mural project, titled Transcending Walls as a specific case study (see Figure 27). This mural would present an interesting deep dive as it began with discussions of graffiti abatement, sought community input and storytelling (specifically unearthing an enslaved dwelling on the adjoining property), but was tagged with a question shortly after its unveiling (see Figure 28). Quadri (2016) noted, “Literature on public art usually addresses one particular field of art in public space with little reference to the others and this wider web of practice is rarely considered as a whole” (p. 36) and called for more attention to interactions between various genres in public space (including street art, graffiti, etc.). Thus, the complexities of public art and intersections with art education present many opportunities for future research (within this project alone and not to mention countless others both nationally and internationally).
Figure 25

Participant Visual Journal Submission

Note. Artist credit: Anderson Bowles

Figure 26

Participant Visual Journal Submission

Note. Artist credit: Juanita Zapata Orrego
Figure 27

*Mending Walls 2022 Mural, Transcending Walls*

*Note.* Photo credit: Kat Taggart-Jones
Conclusion

Stommel (2020) called attention to the need to begin by trusting students, asking them when and how they learn, and “to stop having conversations about the future of education without students in the room” (para. 24). This narrative inquiry-based case study was inspired by engagement with students in foundational art education coursework. The study was designed to invite more intentional conversations about coursework to learn directly from students’ perceptions and experiences. Engaging with these preservice art educators in reflective conversations about their perceptions of coursework provided space for my own critical reflection as an educator. As noted by Hood & Travis (2023), “For educators, the development of critical consciousness through self-reflection around issues of race, class, gender, and other sociocultural
aspects of teaching and learning is an important part of ongoing self- and professional development” (p. 28).

Through the in-depth analysis of semi-structured interviews, field notes, document analysis, and visual narrative analysis of participant submitted artwork, five major themes were generated: community, local artists, public art, social justice, and documentation (see Table 3). Participant responses along with corresponding document and visual analysis indicated engaging with the local, community-engaged public art project propelled preservice art educators’ thinking about the importance of involving community in education as well as honoring community expertise. Further, it revealed how engagement with the project provided opportunities to learn about the history of the community as well as harness a sense of community and build an overall greater community connection.

The data also indicated meeting and working with local artists involved in the local, community-engaged Mending Walls mural project was highly influential. The preservice art educators described how engagement with the artists prompted their thinking about the inclusion of local artists in their curriculum and how they might engage or collaborate with local artists in the future. The purposeful collaboration between the artists and community in the Mending Walls project also sparked ideas for the potential to design collaborative experiences. Along with the inclusion of local artists in the curriculum, participants specifically emphasized how engagement with the Mending Walls project established their recognition of public art as a valuable teaching tool. They expressed how their engagements with public art opened room for conversations about what constitutes art as well as considerations of the accessibility of art. The
physical act of seeing the murals in person was also addressed as a powerful learning experience, and the preservice art educators denoted the desire to design similar engaging experiences for their students in the future.

Analysis of the data suggests engagement with the local, community-engaged mural project, Mending Walls, influenced the preservice art educators’ thinking on approaching social justice in the art classroom. They discussed the necessity of addressing social justice issues in curriculum and their desire to move through fear and create safe spaces for their students. According to hooks (2003) this process of moving through fear to find out what connects us and appreciate differences is necessary to build meaningful community. The preservice art educator participants described the importance of affirming differences and practicing radical empathy in building and strengthening communities.

Lastly, participant responses indicated that the overall documentation of the Mending Walls project, including the podcasts, documentary, and website, increased their understanding and connection to the coursework. The preservice art educators discussed how the dissemination of stories and narratives of the process behind the creation of the artwork in the Mending Walls project, was refreshing and enlightening. By listening to the artists discuss their process, participants also indicated the desire to invite dialogue in their future teaching practice. This is important, as hooks (2003) points out, “Our dialogues together stimulate us. They lead us back to the drawing board and help us strengthen our ideas” (p. 111). Thus, not only did the Mending Walls project provide opportunities for the participants to engage in authentic dialogue with their
peers during this foundational art education coursework, but it also ignited their thinking about engaging students in dialogue in the future.

Through this process I’ve recognized community-engaged murals can act as sites for meaningful learning experiences. Engaging with the Mending Walls community-engaged mural project with preservice art educators, I’ve come to recognize the power of stories in mobilizing others into action for social change (Riessman, 2008). The stories of the Mending Walls murals inspired me and my participants in profound ways. Public art presents opportunities for instructors of preservice art educators to consider possibilities for community engagement and the centering of community within pedagogical practices. Through listening to the participants' reflections, I was also reminded of the need to “become more intentional with infusing joy into curriculum and instruction” (Muhammad, 2023, p. 72). According to Riessman (2008), “Case-centered models of research generate knowledge that, over time, becomes the basis for others’ work” (Riessman, 2008, p. 13). It is my hope others might connect to ideas or concepts investigated in this study and embark on their own investigations with students in community together. In the words of hooks (2010),

The ability to be awed, excited, and inspired by ideas is a practice that radically opens the mind. Excited about learning, ecstatic about thoughts and ideas, as teacher and students, we have the opportunity to use knowledge in ways that positively transform the world we live in. (p. 188)
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Appendices

Appendix A

Email Recruitment Script

Email Subject Line: Seeking Participants for Mending Walls Art Education Study

To: undisclosed recipients
Bcc: [removed]

Hello,

I hope this email finds you well and that your fall semester is going well! As most of you know, in addition to my role as an instructor I am also a doctoral student in the Department of Art Education. As part of my coursework, I am conducting a study investigating the perceived impact of a local, community-engaged mural project (Mending Walls) on preservice art educators in foundational coursework. Since you engaged with the Mending Walls project in ARTE310 Fall 2021 and/or ARTE311 Spring 2022, I would like to invite you to participate in this study. I am looking for participants who will meet with me, in person or via video conferencing, for an approximately 45 min to one-hour recorded interview. Participation is completely voluntary, and your answers will be de-identified (I will remove identifying information). If you choose to participate you will also be given access to an optional online secure REDCap survey where you can opt to share visual/visual images for the purposes of this study (for more details please see attached study information sheet).

I am attaching a study information sheet for your review. If you are willing to participate, please connect with me via email—[removed]—I’d love to schedule a time to chat. Thank you so much in advance for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Caitlin

Caitlin Black, M.A.
[proposed: student/here]
Doctoral Student & Graduate Assistant (Instructor [removed])

Department of Art Education
[Removed] University
Appendix B

Research Participant Information Sheet

VCU IRB PROTOCOL NUMBER: HM20025494

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

STUDY TITLE: Assessing the Perceived Impact of a Local, Community-Engaged Mural Project on Preservice Art Educators in Foundational Coursework

VCU INVESTIGATOR: Caitlin Black, Doctoral Candidate, Virginia Commonwealth University

VCU FACULTY SPONSOR: Dr. Ryan Patton, Chair & Associate Professor, Art Education

OVERVIEW & KEY INFORMATION
You are invited to participate in a research study investigating the impact of a local, community-engaged mural project (Mending Walls) on preservice art educators in foundational coursework. Your participation is completely voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study. If you do participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time. Your decision to take part or to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Please ask the investigator to explain any information in this document that is not clear to you. All information collected will be deidentified (I will remove any identifying names). In this study, you will be asked to do the following:

1. Identify a date and time to participate in a recorded interview (video conference or in-person).
2. Participate in a video conference or in-person interview, which may last one hour or slightly longer, depending on how much you wish to share. The interview will be recorded for the purposes of transcribing the conversation. The recording will be deleted after transcription and will not be shared or used for any other purpose.
3. Review the researcher's findings to confirm their interpretations of your interview.
4. A second interview may be requested and conducted in person or via video conferencing should you wish to share additional information or if the researcher requires clarification or additional information. This second interview will be scheduled in the same manner as the first.
5. You will be provided access to an online secure REDCap survey where you will be given the option to share visual journal images for the purposes of this study. You are not required to share or upload anything. If you do opt to share, you will be prompted to note whether or not you agree to the imagery being included in possible publications. Additionally, you will be given autonomy to designate if and how you’d like to be identified as the artist.

QUESTIONS, CONCERNS, COMPLAINTS
Please contact:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Contact</th>
<th>Secondary Contact</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caitlin Black</td>
<td>Dr. Ryan Patton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral Candidate, VCU</td>
<td>Associate Professor &amp; Chair, Art Education, VCU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:blackcvm@vcu.edu">blackcvm@vcu.edu</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:rpatton@vcu.edu">rpatton@vcu.edu</a></td>
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Appendix C
VCU IRB PROTOCOL NUMBER: HM20022494

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

WELCOME

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research project is to gain an understanding of preservice art educators' perceptions of the impact of using a local, community-engaged mural project, Mending Walls, in foundational art education coursework.

Pre-Interview Protocol

I have a few questions I'm going to ask you about your identity, your future aspirations, and your experiences with engaging with the Mending Walls in your foundational coursework. [removed]. There are no right or wrong answers, please know your honesty and authenticity are valued and appreciated. I am only interested in your opinions and individual experiences. Remember, this interview is completely voluntary; you can skip any questions at any time and/or choose to opt-out at any time. I am grateful for your willingness to share your insights and perceptions with me.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

You are being asked to verbally state your consent to participate in this research study. Please do not do so unless your questions regarding the study received satisfactory answers. You will be asked to read the statement below at the start of the recorded interview. Reading this statement is your consent to participate. When prompted, please read aloud the following:

“I have read the information sheet and consent to participate in this study about preservice art educators & the Mending Walls community-engaged art project.”
VCE IRB PROTOCOL NUMBER: HM20025494

Preliminary Questions for Students

1. What pronouns do you use? For example, I use she/her.
2. What is the pseudonym you would like to use? This is a name you will be referred to in all research-related work. You can make up your own name. I will de-identify all information using this pseudonym to keep your identity anonymous.
3. Tell me about yourself. What degree are you pursuing and what are your hopes and future aspirations upon completing your degree?
4. How do you identify? For example, some of my identities include white, cisgender, 34-year-old woman, U.S. citizen, artist, educator, doctoral student.
5. What courses did you take that involved coursework on "Mending Walls"? (For example, [removed])

Interview Questions

Considering time will have passed since participants have engaged with the course content they are being asked to reflect upon, students will have access to copies of relevant course materials they can access and choose to review as they reflect including the course calendar, and visual journal prompts, etc. These questions (apart from the probes) will also be provided in advance of their scheduled recorded session.

1. How would you define community engagement?

2. What do you think is the relationship between community engagement and the arts? Can you give an example?
   • Probe- How might you engage the community through the arts in the future?

3. What do you think is the relationship between community engagement and education?
   • Probe- How important do you think it is for educators to engage the community?

4. What were your experiences with community art projects (art projects that involve the members of the community where they are being created) and murals prior to beginning this coursework?

5. What are your thoughts on public art as a teaching tool?
   • Probe- How did engaging with the "Mending Walls" project impact these thoughts?
6. How familiar were you with the Mending Walls project before the start of the foundational coursework?

- **Probe** - What did you know about the project?

7. How did the visual journal assignments influence your reflection on and understanding of the Mending Walls project and assigned coursework?

- **Probe** - (Providing Visual Journal Prompts) If you had to select one or two of the prompts you felt were most valuable which would you choose, and why?

8. What, if any, influence did the podcasts, documentary, website, and local accessibility of the artists and murals have on your understanding and engagement with the project?

9. What was the experience like seeing some of the murals in person?

- **Probe** - How did interacting with the murals make you feel?

- **Probe** - How did this experience compare to viewing online or in the classroom?

10. What, if any, impact do you think the centering of local artists had on the Mending Walls project and in the community?

- **Probe** - How important do you think it is to incorporate local artists into art education experiences?

- **Probe** - What do you think are the differences when outside artists are used?

11. How do you feel the intentional cross-cultural collaborative pairings of local artists in Mending Walls might impact your future role as a facilitator of art and educational experiences?

- **Probe** - What is your big takeaway from that aspect of the Mending Walls project?

12. The Mending Walls project placed a specific emphasis on fostering dialogue and building community using art to actively address issues focused on social justice and racial
injustice... Describe how engaging with this project has influenced how you will approach dialogue and community building in your future role as an art educator?

- **Probe:** In what ways (if any) did engaging with the Mending Walls project and the assigned course content influence your thoughts on addressing social justice in your future role as an art educator?

13. How might engaging with the Mending Walls project impact your pedagogy (methods/teaching practices) in your future classroom and/or teaching practice?

- **Probe:** What, if any, ways did Mending Walls influence your teaching philosophy and/or are there any takeaways that you’ve applied since?

14. Are there any final comments on the Mending Walls project within your foundational art education coursework you’d like to share?

**Conclusion**

15. If you had to describe your most valuable takeaway from this coursework, what would it be? (You may reference course calendar if it is helpful)

16. Is there anything else you’d like to add or share with me that we have not addressed?

17. Do you have any questions for me?

**WRAP-UP**

Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts with me. If you think of anything else you’d like to add to this conversation, you are always welcome to email me.

My next steps will be to transcribe this interview and deidentify it by replacing your name with your chosen pseudonym. I will be reviewing your feedback and processing what you’ve shared. I’ll also be interviewing other participants. I’ll provide you with a copy of the transcript so you
VCU IRB PROTOCOL NUMBER: EM2025494

can check that I have everything recorded accurately. You will be able to make any changes
you'd like at that time. I will then be sharing my interpretations for your feedback, and I will
explain that in more detail later. Do you have any final questions?

Thank you again, I am so grateful for all you’ve shared with me today!

GENERAL PROBES

While these probes are not listed within each protocol question, they may be utilized as needed:

- Why?
- How?
- Could you elaborate on that?
Can you give me an example?
Appendix D

Fall 2021 Visual Journal Prompts

MendingWalls Website
MendingWalls Documentary Clips / Trailer
2 Minute Breakdown Visual Journals vs. Sketchbooks

Throughout the course of this semester, you will dedicate 10 hours to the service-learning component of this course. This semester we are teaming up with an amazing local art organization, Mending Walls, created by Richmond artist, Hamilton Glass. As future art educators, you will design and create engaging suggested activities utilizing one of the local Mending Walls murals. Additionally, you will create 10 visual journal entries using the prompts below. Each entry must be a two-page spread using approximately 50% images & 50% text creatively interpreting the prompts with mixed media. Enjoy this opportunity to express yourself and have fun with it!

PROMPTS

1. What are your initial thoughts, feelings, and ideas as you familiarize yourself with the Mending Walls mission and murals?

2. Listen to one of the podcast episodes (not one of the 3 previously covered in class) and create a visual journal reflection based on the selected episode (please note the episode somewhere visually in the text).

3. Read the Mending Walls poem by Robert Frost and respond in your visual journal. You are encouraged to further explore the metaphor.

4. Choose a big idea explored by Mending Walls to artistically explore in your visual journal (i.e. Food Justice, Mental Health, Criminal Justice Reform, Housing, Worker Rights, Empathy, Connection, Activism, Racial Injustice, etc.) Justify your artistic choices.

5. Reflect on the significance of community involvement in art.

6. Consider similarities and differences between public art and art on display in museums.

7. Explore similarities and differences between graffiti/street art/murals.
8. Pinpoint an ideal location in a city/town of your choice for potential creative placemaking opportunities (mural, sculpture, etc.) - carefully consider the characteristics of the targeted neighborhood.

9. Compare and contrast Mending Walls murals to another mural of your choice (within Richmond or a city of your choice... perhaps one from the Richmond Mural Art Project / Richmond Region Mural Map / Richmond Street Art Guide). Be sure to include text designating your selected murals.

10. What have you learned throughout this experience? Moving forward, how might you use this experience to inform your teaching practice?
Appendix E

REDCap Survey

Optional Visual Journal Imagery & Permissions

The following questions pertain to sharing your visual journal entries. This is completely optional and you are not required to share or upload anything. The purpose of this survey is to provide you with the option and autonomy to determine if and how you’d like to share images from your visual journal created in ARTE310 - Foundations of Art Education during the Fall 2021 semester. If you recall, there were 10 total visual reflection entries. You may choose whether you’d like to share any for the purposes of this study.

If you elect to share imagery, you will be prompted with additional questions regarding permission to potentially include the uploaded imagery in publications. If you are open to sharing for possible publication, you will be prompted with options for how you’d like to be identified (i.e., anonymous, your study selected unidentifiable pseudonym, or by your identifiable name). Please be aware that by opting to be published identifiably as the artist, you risk being linked to the study.

By default all survey responses are collected anonymously, so, if you do wish to be identified, you will need to provide the information in the prompted questions. If you do not wish to share any imagery, simply opt-out by selecting NO in the first question. If you have any questions please contact:

Primary Contact - Darlin Breek, breek@wou.edu
Secondary Contact - Dr. Ryan Patton, rpatton@wou.edu

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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
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<th>No</th>
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<td>Would you like to upload any image of your visual journal entries from ARTE310 - Foundations of Art Education, Fall 2021?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you agree to the potential sharing of the uploaded imagery in publications?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>If you selected YES, how would you like to be credited if your imagery is selected for publication?</td>
<td>Not identified</td>
<td>Identified by chosen Study Pseudonym</td>
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<td>If you opted to be identified by an identifiable name please write how you would like your name to be displayed</td>
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If you would like to share any of your visual journal entries from ARTE310 Fall 2021 for the purposes of this study please upload here.

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## Appendix F

Codebook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CODE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>EXAMPLE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility of Public Art &amp; Public Art as Teaching Tool</td>
<td>Participants discuss or allude to the accessibility of public art or thoughts on public art as a teaching tool</td>
<td>“Before I started working with Mending Walls, I didn’t even realize that you could use public art in the classroom. And now I think that it’s important to talk about because we can’t just focus on high art or like art of the past.” - Yellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirming Differences</td>
<td>Participants discuss valuing diversity or the importance of recognizing differences</td>
<td>“I would say the main takeaway that I got from learning about that type of collaboration was that we should always be asking questions and trying to understand each other’s experiences without judgment, and with compassion and curiosity, especially when working with people who are extremely different from us.” - Trixie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>Participants discuss open-mindedness, understanding, and the importance of recognizing various perspectives or specifically note empathy in conversation</td>
<td>“And if we bring artists from different cultures, we can better educate our students of how they can be considerate, and how they can be empathetic towards their peers, towards their coworkers.” - Maria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get to Know Community</td>
<td>Participants discuss the significance of getting to know the community, feeling a sense of community, or recognizing the history of community</td>
<td>“I think that there’s a relationship when it comes to learning about not just the people around you, but when you’re learning about, like the history of the area that you’re in, is not everybody knows each other. But there can be a lot of shared experiences.” - Yellow</td>
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<tr>
<td>Involving Community in Education</td>
<td>Participants describe the importance of involving and engaging community in education &amp; educational experiences</td>
<td>“Yeah I feel it made me think more about looking to the community and wanting to create lessons that are in response to this, what the students want to see or being them talk a little bit more about their identity. Like who they are and where they come from. Because I feel like there would be a lot of disconnect with that when you get into school. Like not that they don’t like they’re like, um, like, we accept it, but it’s like there’s not really like a celebration of it. I guess, you know?” - Yellow</td>
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<td>CODE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local Artists</td>
<td>Participants discuss the impact of the artists being local and/or considerations of utilizing local artists in future teaching practices</td>
<td><em>&quot;But if you incorporate local artists, then there’s that opportunity to work with them. And I think that will help kids feel more engaged or feel more positive about possibly being an artist themselves, you know?&quot;</em> - Jane</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting the Artists</td>
<td>Participants address the experience of meeting and/or talking to the artists directly</td>
<td><em>&quot;...but the local accessibility of the artists, I think, again, kind of what I was saying is just added an element of like, oh, wow, they’re right there with us. That’s, that’s cool. What can I learn about them? How long have they been here? Something about locality just provides an instant connection to people. I think. - Mango</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podcasts</td>
<td>Participants describe the podcasts as a useful tool in developing their understanding about the project</td>
<td><em>&quot;The podcasts had the greatest influence on me because getting to hear the artists talk and like hearing their process and everything about how they went about making it because it’s easy to see the final product but to hear about the process of it really helps you imagine it more.&quot;</em> - Kash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice in the Art Classroom</td>
<td>Participants describe the project's influence on their comfortability and desire to include social justice topics in their future teaching practices</td>
<td><em>&quot;I think that would be it makes me less afraid to address the social justice and racial injustice issues in the classroom because it’s obviously an issue in America and it needs to be addressed and as saying nothing about it like being afraid of it continually it’s just going to be the problems like grow and something has to be said, so I will be brave.&quot;</em> - Vivien</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standing at the Murals</td>
<td>Participants describe positive impact of experiencing the murals in person</td>
<td><em>&quot;it was a lot deeper because, of course, like talking about it, is a lot different than actually like standing in front and experiencing it&quot;</em> - Kash</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Visual Journals Impact      | Participants describe visual journal assignments as helpful in their understanding of the project and/or how they might incorporate visual journals in their future teaching practices | *"I think the visual journal assignments were really helpful because they allowed me to sit on a lot and think about just how important something might be to this project or how important this project might be to a community. And it slow me down to stop and think of all the different ways that I could represent that or how the project represented that in the murals."* - Max
<table>
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<tr>
<th>CODE</th>
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<th>EXAMPLES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Healing</td>
<td>Participants verbalize or visually represent healing as a concept considered due to engagement with the Mending Walls project</td>
<td><img src="art1.png" alt="Image" /> Artist credit - Trixie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversation / Dialogue</td>
<td>Participants verbalize or visually represent the need for conversation, the importance of discussion, dialogue, etc. due to engagement with the Mending Walls project</td>
<td><img src="art2.png" alt="Image" /> Artist credit - Juanita Zapata Orrego</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Participants verbalize or visually represent the importance of collaboration and working together due to engagement with the Mending Walls project</td>
<td><img src="art3.png" alt="Image" /> Artist credit - Anderson Bowies</td>
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Email Subject Line: Mending Walls Study Follow Up
To: Directly to Individual Participant University Email

Good Evening Participant Name,
Thank you so much again for participating in my study. I have completed analyzing all of the transcripts and wanted to share my initial findings with you. Currently, I have identified 5 themes and 5 sub themes as you will see in the table below. I have coded your transcript and identified where I believe these themes emerged. I am sharing the coded findings with you. At your earliest convenience, please review your report and let me know if you think there is anything I have misinterpreted or if you believe the indicated themes appear more times than I’ve indicated. I ask that you please review the document linked here in the next 10 days and please contact me with any questions, concerns, or requested changes or alterations.

Thank you!

Sincerely,
Caitlin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Organization of Themes and Subthemes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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Member Check Email Invitation
VITA

Caitlin M. Black is a visual arts & design educator currently based in Richmond, Virginia. She received her BA with a major in Studio Art & minor in Art History from James Madison University (2011) and her MA in Art Education from Boston University (2015). She is presently pursuing her Ph.D. in Education, with an emphasis in Art Education at Virginia Commonwealth University. Caitlin has a variety of professional experiences in both museum and classroom settings. She worked at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and taught visual art in public schools for 8 years, working with students’ grades PreK-12 in New Jersey and California. Caitlin currently works with undergraduate and graduate preservice teachers in the Virginia Commonwealth University Department of Art Education. Her research focuses on the transformational power of the arts in cultivating more inclusive communities. She is interested in the significance of community engagement and accessibility in creating meaningful arts opportunities that promote empathy, connection, and healing rooted in social justice.