

TRENDS in ART EDUCATION

THE JOURNAL OF THE TEXAS ART EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

BREAKING UP AND SHAKING UP THE DAILY ROUTINE

President’s Introduction, by Mel Basham

Have you ever heard this in your classroom:

“This is boring,” or, “I’m bored.”

Ever ask yourself why?

Working daily with students brings challenges and there are days when you just want them to be very quiet and work on their assignments. However, if you find your students (and yourself!) being bored more days than not, it’s past time to shake things up a bit.

Don’t always be predictable. Ask yourself what you can do to be spontaneous. If students are struggling with a process, change the assignment for the day. Throw out something totally unrelated to the current project and let your students be creative.

Challenge them to think beyond the art studio. Go outside for a drawing assignment. Send them to the cafeteria to draw the lunch of the day. Ask the dance teacher to let the students draw the dancers as they perform.

My favorite lesson is inspired by Keri Smith’s (2008) book *How to be an Explorer of the World*. Students were asked to bring in an old t-shirt—no explanation given. Those t-shirts were then turned into “Art Explorer” bags. Weekly assignments asked students to collect a variety of items and then write about their collections in handmade sketchbooks. The students did not know what to expect each week, and they were excited and challenged as they observed and documented their environment. Later the collected objects and journal entries were used to create personal artwork. The process was unique and fun, and the resulting artworks were creative and meaningful, with strong student voices evident in each one.

I love students who ask, “What are we doing next week because I am going to be absent.” My response is, “I don’t know what we might be doing tomorrow, let alone next week. Who knows what we might decide to do next.”

Let students take an active part in the learning process by getting their input on ideas for lessons. Break up and shake up the daily routine to keep it interesting. Something as simple as rearranging the art room will keep students wanting to see what their “imaginative” art teacher is up to next. Challenge them, excite them, and open up possibilities, and you will never hear “I’m bored” again.

Have fun, be excited and keep them guessing! Students will take responsibility for their learning. The results will be positive and their artwork will be creative and original.

Reference

Smith, K. (2008). *How to be an explorer of the world: Portable life museum*. New York, NY: Perigee.



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Disrupting the Everyday:

Encountering Awareness and New Curiosities

Editors' Introduction by Cala Coats and Sean Justice, Co-Editors, *Trends* 2018

“Everything you do is music and everywhere is the best seat.”

—John Cage

Welcome to Trends 2018.

Our interest in disruption comes from questions about how art educators negotiate the well-worn ruts that sometimes develop in our everyday lives, both as teachers and artists. Can creative awareness offer new pathways? Maxine Greene (2001, p. 44) wrote, “We are interested in breakthroughs and new beginnings, in the kind of wide-awakeness that allows for wonder and unease and questioning and the pursuit of what is not yet.”

In the pages that follow you will encounter teachers and artists (re)invigorating themselves and their practices by breaking up and shaking up their routines—as TAEA President, Mel Basham puts it in her introduction. At the root of it is a desire for wonder, or an impatience with the status quo. We hope this exploration of creative disruption will renew and refuel your passion for art—as a mode of learning, thinking, and living.

Achieving disruption

How do breakthroughs begin, and how might we cultivate them, especially in what is all-too-often a rigid educational landscape?

Contributors to *Trends 2018* believe that breakthroughs begin with interruptions that invite the new to classrooms, museums, and community spaces, as well as to day-to-day experiences. As a whole they draw attention to the creative potential of our unexamined habits, policies, and relationships.

For example, instructional standards and the ubiquitous teaching statement are reexamined by interrupting the TEKS to spur creative renewal and by making the teaching philosophy into a living document. Other contributors look at relationships and daily habits to explore the liminal spaces of creativity that emerge in schools and homes. In these essays you'll encounter the beauty of walking slowly, the generative potential of uncertainty and longing, and the artistic opportunities inherent to accidents and mistakes — singular experiences through which we encounter emotions that are common to many of us.

In addition to these personal and philosophical explorations, contributors also ask how teachers cultivate students' desire for these

creative interruptions — where do invitations to alter curricula, re-design classrooms and hallways, and reframe administrative codes come from? Their answers include: from an expanded curriculum that moves beyond principles and elements of art to explore the life of sound; from interest-driven student projects; from a choreography gleaned from sidewalks and city pools; and from abandoning the classroom to reflect on borders and boundaries.

The path forward

At its core, we believe that creative disruption is generated by curiosity and passion — by a longing for Maxine Greene's what is not yet. In the aggregate, *Trends 2018* argues that our role as artists and art teachers is to explore and amplify the wonder that fuels that longing, whether we're teaching in classrooms, engaging in research, pursuing cultural change, or helping to develop art and education policy. But perhaps especially in this period of social and political disconnect, where art and education are viewed suspiciously and even undervalued, the path toward achieving that goal is unclear. We realized, in organizing *Trends 2018*, that the heart of the issue (and perhaps the path forward) resides in the desire for engagement that fuels our daily practices: the life of creativity, teaching, and artmaking.

As Lindsay Thomas suggests in her essay (beginning on page 10), “as art educators we have the opportunity to awaken beauty to longing and bridge longing to beauty.” In the quest for what is not yet, the editors and contributors to *Trends 2018* maintain that curiosity and a desire for inquiry are essential, and that social acts of serious play activate the ordinary and unnoticed beauty of our daily lives.

In these pages we hope you'll find moments of wonder that disrupt and renew your art and teaching. We hope these essays become a provocation to empathy, inspiration, and comfort.

“A true experience of things means: giving life meaning, quite simply noticing how important life is, that you are alive.”

—Joseph Beuys

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EDITORS AND REVIEWERS

TRENDS 2018



Editor

Cala Coats is Assistant Professor of Art Education at Arizona State University. She has also taught art in K-12, museum, and community settings. Her research focuses on intersections of ethics and aesthetics with an emphasis on public pedagogy, nomadic inquiry, and socially engaged art.



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Reviewer

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Reviewer

Joana Hyatt is Assistant Professor of Art Education at Lamar University and teaches online for the University of Florida. She serves on the editorial review board for *Art Education* and has published in *Art Education*, *JSTAE* and *Trends*. Her chapter in *The Concept of Materiality in Teaching and Learning*, is forthcoming from Peter Lang, Inc.



Editor

Sean Justice is Assistant Professor of Art Education at Texas State University. His work addresses teacher education in the age of computing and digital networks. His book *Learning to Teach in the Digital Age: New Materialities and Maker Paradigms in Schools* was published by Peter Lang, in 2016.



Reviewer

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Reviewer

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Reviewer

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TEKSUBVERSION: A DISRUPTION MANIFESTO

by Timothy B. Garth

Dear readers,

I have confessions to make.

It has become easy for me to fall into formulaic instructional practices.

Every year, I sit through professional development sessions thinking that I already know all the best practices for curriculum design.

Next fall, I expect an administrative pitch to implement another new fashionable education trend, and

I am. Already. Over. It.

While I can collect and report assessment data about students' work, often, I do not.

I teach some lessons only because they are quick and easy.

I am bored with the repetition of teaching and have begun to forget the discomfort of the novice teacher.

Sincerely,

The Complacent Art Educator

In my years as an art educator, I have gained experiences across the K-18 spectrum, in three different states, and have encountered many different teacher personalities. I offer these confessions as a narrative amalgam intended to voice the feelings I have encountered on my journey. In context, these confessions might not seem especially inflammatory. However, the act of admitting them gives me a chance to evaluate personal growth and stagnation, resituate and renegotiate professional goals, and to be empowered to decide if I want to pivot. Through this acknowledgment, I am able to consider opportunities for change.

Reflections on Practice

Reflecting on the practice of teaching is an aspect of the profession I enjoy; modifying lessons and instruction for my current students based on wisdom gained through past experiences renews my commitment for growth as an educator. Curricular scholars and educational theorists recognize the importance of practical knowledge in the teaching profession and pedagogical decision-making (Note 1). Through practical knowledge, the accumulation of experience deepens our connections to the content of what we teach. For instance, Shulman (1986) acknowledges Pedagogical Content Knowledge as the “subject matter knowledge for teaching” (p. 9), wherein knowledge of and experiences with subject matter drive decisions about structuring content for students. This line of reasoning contends that engaging in reflective practice enables teachers to use their experiences with content in teaching situations to inform pedagogical decision-making processes and modifications for the future.

While I enjoy using reflection to improve instruction, in my own experience I rarely commit to large curricular overhauls for my own classes. One reason for this is because curriculum planning is labor intensive. It is easy to spend hours planning courses; slight curriculum changes mid-term can quickly consume precious free time and planning periods. Therefore, my reflections are generally lesson specific and focused on the ways students respond to content and instruction. In practice, these reflections result in modifications that are often minor, isolated, and reactionary. To break from the comfortable repetition of these typically small-scale teaching revisions, I propose a playful subversion of the policies that guide my curriculum to embrace a broader and hopefully more meaningful reflective practice.

I recently spent several years working with preservice art students in Texas. During their student teaching placements, these new educators wanted to discuss the practical challenges of implementing meaningful curriculum. The students wanted how-to approaches for their teaching. Consequently, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) state standards came up as a component of curriculum design. In these discussions, I began considering ways we could disrupt the language of the TEKS to create opportunities for more complex reflective practices.

Central to experiences in studio settings, disruptive professional development tasks include investigating opportunities for change, embracing uncertainty, and persisting through challenges. Using the TEKS framework for the fine arts, my disruption manifesto uses a strategy of policy subversion for critical self-evaluation and empowerment. In what follows, I modify the text from Texas Administrative Code 19, Chapter 117 (Texas Education Agency, 2013) as a challenge to art teachers to examine their practice. This disruption of the TEKS asks us to consider:

- How do we participate in the art of teaching?
- In what ways do we facilitate art experiences in our classrooms?
- How do we use contemporary artistic practices in our curricula?
- Why is it important to make time for reflection and creative inquiry?

Through this act of policy subversion, I break away from complacent repetition. By critically reflecting on my pedagogical decisions, I feel more connected to my curriculum. By emphasizing contemporary artistic practices, I am energized to take risks with new projects. By reflecting on my own practice as a teacher, I seek openings for disruption in the everyday acts of education. I hope that by engaging with the TEKSubversion Disruption Manifesto, readers are able to create time and mental space to critically reflect on their practice, feel a sense of agency in their pedagogical decisions, and be empowered to seek new approaches.

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DISRUPTION MANIFESTO

Original text from Texas Education Code §117.102 is included below. Revised text from Texas Education Code §117.102 is demarked in red with strikethrough formatting. Text added by the author is formatted in green and bold.

CURRICULUM Foundations:~~observation and perception.~~

The **student** **TEACHER** develops and expands ~~visual literacy skills~~ **ARTISTIC PRACTICES FOR STUDENTS** using critical ~~thinking~~ **QUESTIONING**, imagination, and the senses to **observe** **ENGAGE** and explore the world by learning about, understanding, and applying the elements of **art** **LIFE**, principles of ~~design~~ **DEMOCRACY**, and ~~expressive~~ **EMOTIVE** qualities **AS CURRICULAR FOUNDATIONS**. The **student** **TEACHER** uses what the student sees, knows, and has experienced as sources for ~~examining~~ **PLANNING**, ~~understanding~~ **IMPLEMENTING**, and ~~creating~~ **ASSESSING** artworks.

Creative ~~expression~~ **EXPLORATION**.

The **student** **TEACHER** communicates ideas through ~~original artworks~~ **PLAY** using a variety of media with appropriate skills. The ~~student~~ **TEACHER** expresses ~~thoughts~~ **CURRICULUM** and ideas creatively while challenging ~~the imagination~~ **COVENTIONS**, fostering reflective thinking, and developing disciplined effort and progressive problem-solving skills.

Historical **CONTEMPORARY** and Cultural Relevance.

The **student** **TEACHER** demonstrates an understanding of ~~art history~~ **LOCAL** and **GLOBAL** cultures by analyzing ~~artistic styles~~ **COMMUNITY RESOURCES**, ~~historical periods~~ **CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS**, and a variety of cultures ~~AL~~ **PERSPECTIVES**. The **student** **TEACHER** ~~develops~~ **PROMOTES** global awareness and respect for the traditions and contributions of diverse cultures.

Critical **REFLECTION**, ~~evaluation~~ **VULNERABILITY**, and Response.

The **student** **TEACHER** ~~TAKES RISKS~~, responding to and analyzing ~~THE~~ **artworks** **CURRICULUM** of self and others, contributing to the development of ~~lifelong skills~~ **PROFESSIONAL GROWTH**, of making informed **AND REFLECTIVE** judgments, and reasoned evaluations. (Texas Education Agency, 2013)

Note: for more information on reflection and how it affects classroom practice, see Clandinin 1986; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Elbaz, 1983; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007; Schön, 1983; Schwab, 1970/2013; Shulman, 1986, 1987, 2004.

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Beauty in Longing

by Lindsey Thomas

The sweetest thing in all my life has been the longing — to reach the Mountain, to find the place where all the beauty came from — my country, the place where I ought to have been born. Do you think it all meant nothing, all the longing? The longing for home? For indeed it now feels not like going, but like going back.

— C.S. Lewis, 1956 (p. 75)

Till We Have Faces by C.S. Lewis (1956) is one of my favorite books.

It opens the door to the possibility of something beyond myself that calls to me: a place that pulls my inner self toward where I truly belong, where I get to be who I really am. Longing for something larger than who I am right now can open a door to a greater ability to internalize things that are beautiful around me. But without the initial longing I might not have a chance to experience beauty on that deeper level. What would happen if I were to cut that longing short due to impatience, lack of fulfillment, stress, or anything else that might separate me from the experience? Joy gets suppressed, hope becomes nostalgic, and the desire to connect seems futile.

How can we all become awakened to a greater capacity to encounter beauty and minimize what keeps us from living with eyes wide open?

Nothing to Give

When I had been teaching for three years I got pregnant with our first child, who arrived a month early. Our daughter had trouble eating, difficulty keeping her temperature level, and had major acid reflux. My husband and I were terrified. We took turns holding her throughout the night for the first three months. By five months she was starting to stabilize and the fear subsided. It was around that time that I found out we were pregnant again, already two months along. My son came just two weeks after my daughter's first birthday. Within a day of his life he contracted a respiratory virus called RSV. We realized he was very sick at just five days old, which sent us back to the hospital for a spinal tap, x-ray, steroids, and oxygen. He was fighting for his life.

Thankfully we made it past RSV, but we spent the next six months in fear of more trauma. We were always exhausted. Life was a blur, especially when I went back to work teaching hundreds of kids. We did everything to survive those insane days of no sleep and lack of outside connections, barely making it out of the house. Where were call-in groceries on the go when we needed it? My art suffered—ok it was non-existent—and my joy of teaching art started to flounder. Our day-to-day was in full-force survival mode.

In that place of desperation, a friend suggested that I attend an event called The Garden, a day of reading my Bible and meditating. We sat in silence, listening for peace to reveal itself. I had been going full-speed ahead for so long that those few moments of silence helped me realize that I needed to focus on myself—and at that moment my world of crying babies and students desperate for my attention came to a head. It was clear that I needed to do something. In that moment of longing, a slice of beauty broke through. My heart felt hope and motivation to do something about my emptiness. I thought back on earlier times and remembered late nights in the studio during my college days. Those times were filled with active skill-building and experience-seeking. There was a comradery then because we were all searching for beauty, so hungry to learn. My eyes were awakened in that moment to beauty. It was just a sliver, but it was enough for me to see what needed to happen so that my inward being could come alive again—

I needed to create artwork on a daily basis, just for me.

Awakening

The thought of completing large installations sounded daunting so I simply bought a sketchbook and put pen to paper. The sketchbook process can take on so many different forms. Personally I started with expressions of my heart, visual words with doodles and splats of watercolor, very much like a visual journal. I had to accept the idea that I might not end up with a finished piece. But the process became the most important part. As a child I used to doodle in order to think about what I was feeling—so why not do that as an adult? Moving ahead to the next page was part of the process to not stop creating. I found joy in those moments, and that joy brought even more longing. I wanted to be fully alive, able to experience the beauty around me and to communicate it with my art.

I had an experience one day that inspired me to create a finished work in my journal. We were visited my parents' house during the summer when the birds arrived. Cardinals had built a nest next to my parents bathroom window. The week before I got there two eggs had hatched. When I first laid eyes on the baby birds they were all skin, eyes sealed shut. My mom and I perched ourselves at the window each day, filled with wonder about the process of creation.



The babies’ loud chirping provoked the parents to respond with food, and the babies grew. By the end of the week the baby birds had feathers and wide open eyes. It was stunning to see how fast the process was unveiled before us. One morning we witnessed one of the birds looking restless, chirping loudly. The mother arrived with wriggling worms, but the little bird’s drive for adventure outweighed its hunger. The bird hopped past its mother and onto the ledge, and then went right off to the ground. My mother and I saw the mother bird look over with an expression that we sympathized with, as if to say, “Oh boy here we go, adolescence!” We ran outside and watched for over an hour while the adult birds went into full parenting mode—giving flying lessons, pecking and searching for food, and directing their babies out into the world.

Centering

That experience led me to draw an image in my journal that I will forever hold dear to my heart. The image is of three generations of motherhood: the pansies represent my grandmother, the cardinals represent my mother and myself, and the worm represents the passing on of mothering. As I centered myself in my own expressions I was able to dig deeper, to feel wider, and to awaken my soul to the beauty around me.

As a result something remarkable happened: my teaching opened up to joy again, and my students found life in the wellspring of my creativity. But this was more about their well-being than me teaching the elements and principles of art. Rather it was about helping them to feel and see the beauty that surrounded them. I brought in my sketchbook and included my students on the process. I encouraged them to create outside the art room. We tested different art mediums together, and I discussed ways to incorporate their passions into their projects. My classroom was filled with wonder and curiosity that seemed to bring life to all that entered.

One student was asked why she liked coming to art class, and she said that it felt like coming home. I believe that this atmosphere of comfort and care emerged as I became comfortable in my own artistic pursuits and pulled them into the classroom.

Since then, my sketchbook awakening has continued opening up to other pursuits and passions, such as creating children’s books. In fact, I am well on my way to finishing my first one, an accomplishment that would never have been possible without listening to that longing in my heart and acting on it.

Mapping Vulnerability

One of the things I do to keep living whole-heartedly is try to be aware. When I find myself pulled into stress, I list the sources of that stress, no matter how simple they might be. Then I create an idea board for ways to proactively combat those stresses, both in the classroom and in my personal life. For example, one year I realized that getting meals for my family was a huge stressor. In the summer I made a plan for meal prep so my work-week would run smoothly, and then followed through on that plan when school started.



These days, I dedicate a few hours on Sundays to make mason jar salads, kid’s lunches, and a few hot meals. Taking those proactive steps removed the meal stress from my schedule. In the classroom, an example of stress came from the way students lined up to leave my room. Students would gather in a wild looking line, which wasn’t really a line at all, perhaps because it was confusing for them to know what “get in line” actually meant. They would gather up directly in front of the door without leaving room for me to talk with their teachers. Instead of living in that stress I made vinyl squares and applied them to the floor so students always know precisely where to stand, and then I taught my students a line-up song.

I also make space in my calendar to create art of many forms, such as making feather hair clips and gardening in my backyard. When I pursue those other avenues, they circle back to my sketchbook. I draw birds, flowers, and the lizards that leap around my yard. And when I find myself in the busy parts of the year, I set alarms that remind me to create, reflect, meditate, work out, and explore the inner parts of the heart. Sometimes it takes blocking out time for isolation. Or, when I know I won’t be able to be kid-free, I will include them in my artmaking process.

Additionally, I try to reach out to fellow art teachers and artists. When I awoke to my emptiness, I could have concealed it instead of openly pursuing change. It took vulnerability to make that choice, but

deciding to live vulnerably
has helped me grow.

Allowing others to share those changes with me has made the struggle more bearable, and has provided more opportunities to make connections—which has guided my creative process and helped us inspire one another. This is why I include my students in my creative process, allowing their input to hold me accountable and to stay genuine. Including them also inspires their own growth.

The Vitality of Longing

As professional educators we have a mandate to keep longing alive. As art educators we have the opportunity to awaken beauty to longing and bridge longing to beauty, opening the eyes to see past individual circumstances. If we cannot keep that door to hope alive in our own connections, how will we do it for our students? My goal is to keep making room for engagement, vulnerability, growth, joy, failure, hope, and even despair—in such I am truly alive.

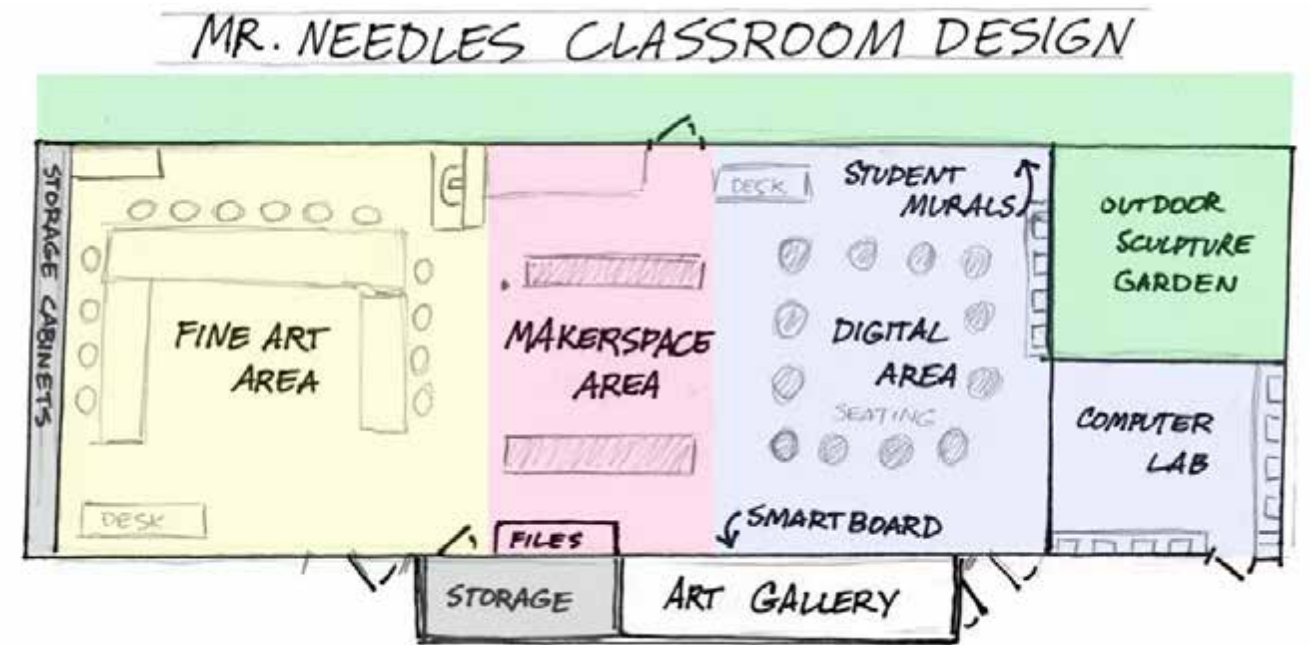
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Lindsey Thomas teaches middle school art in Dripping Springs, Texas. Previously she taught K-5 art for 11 years.

Re-Designing the Learning Environment: The Classroom Project

by Tim Needles



Design has been a consistent, central presence for the last 20 years of my career teaching public high school art on Long Island, NY. But as I've grown as a teacher, I've departed from traditional pencil and paper lessons in favor of real design problems that require students to explore authentic issues and find creative solutions. The transition developed organically as I became more comfortable taking risks in the classroom. And as I searched for ways to make assignments more relevant, I let students take the lead in choosing their content, and found ways for the end products to live on beyond the classroom.

The preeminent design challenge, in terms of relevance, occurred when we chose to take on our learning environment itself and redesign our classroom along with underutilized areas in our school. This design problem empowered students, giving them permission to change the environment around them, but it also asked big questions about how they learn best and, in the process challenged the larger educational system itself, disrupting our status quo.

Wayfinding Through Practice

We began with a series of creative experiments and mock-ups to explore how the bland, off-white spaces of classrooms and hallways changed with different colors and images. I borrowed prompts from "Learning to Love You More", an online participatory art project created by Miranda July and Harrell Fletcher (July & Fletcher, 2002), and students created impromptu inspirational banners that were installed in hallways, and we paid attention to how the space responded. Then, based on what we learned, we created our own design experiments to promote a positive environment, such as inspirational sculptures for the classroom.

After those experiments we started painting small murals in the classroom, each based on an inspirational word. I painted the first mural with the word "create" and, using the experience as a model for the class, we began filming and sharing the process on social media. I then invited each student to design and paint their own mural during class and continuing after school. Each was completed in the span of a week. The atmosphere in the classroom was changing at this

point, attracting the interest of other classes who worked in the room. The disruption was overwhelmingly positive, however, because as they observed the transition, students started to feel more creative and more present to their experience, perhaps because they found themselves surrounded by art in a variety of colors, and perhaps because they began to feel a sense of ownership of their workspace.

As we were painting, we were also researching educational and professional creative spaces, and discussing environments that amplified innovation. We looked at images from professional offices at Google, Facebook, Adobe, and Wieden+Kennedy. During this process, students came across images of murals from English artist Jon Burgerman, whose work I had previously shared with the class. In fact, I had met Jon at a Brooklyn gallery opening a few years earlier, and when I learned that he was living in New York, I reached out to see if he would be interested in working with us. Happily, he was open to collaborating with the students, so we began planning a mural project that would foster teamwork between him and my students.

Inviting Guidance

The planning took a number of weeks as I had to secure funding for the mural, research and buy supplies, teach the students about mural painting, and organize details such as travel and timing. As we began fundraising we discovered that our efforts would be supplemented by a grant from the Smithtown Children’s Foundation, a local nonprofit, and the class was overjoyed that their project was coming together.

After learning about Jon’s work and creating their own murals, the students were excited for the project. During his visit, Jon painted a mural in the classroom alongside theirs, and spent an hour sharing creative advice and details about his career. We then spent the remainder of the day collaborating on two large Earth Day murals for the school courtyard. For my students, the experience of working alongside an artist they respected was a terrific learning opportunity—and seeing our final paintings right next to each other was a proud moment for all of us.

Uncomfortable Pivots

The next stage of the project was a turning point for our class because that’s when we began to redesign the classroom itself. We turned away from the desks-in-rows approach and towards a makerspace. As students researched classroom designs and began using computer technologies to create models of seating elements for both the classroom and the courtyard outside, where the murals were, we progressed beyond mere decoration into true design.

And that’s when creative disruption started to divide the class.

Basically, some students were uncomfortable with the lack of structure and didn’t enjoy the rigorous creative thinking that the redesign project brought with it. This discomfort manifested in various ways: some students procrastinated and avoided work, waiting for classmates to take the lead, and others spoke frankly about their concerns. Making functional changes in how the classroom worked required difficult philosophical conversations about how we learn best, and many students began asking for more traditional, concrete assignments. Additionally, as we thought about moving beyond models and making our new classroom designs a reality, we encountered obstacles that were beyond our reach, primarily because they required greater budgets and administrative permissions. And then, as we were navigating these difficulties, we learned that our classroom would be re-appropriated as a computer lab. To transform disappointment into a teachable moment, I turned our focus to what we had learned through the process, and emphasized how what appeared to be a setback could also be viewed as an opportunity. The project was becoming a real life lesson as we expanded beyond design to focus on

how to deal with discouragement and make the most of the situation.

Pausing Tradition

As a teacher I learned a great deal from our classroom redesign project. It was exciting to observe students working on an authentic design problem that affected them directly, one that required them to implement 21st Century learning skills like creativity, innovation, collaboration, flexibility, initiative, environmental literacy, and problem solving (Framework for 21st Century Learning, 2009)—skills that aren’t always evident in traditional drawing projects. But this kind of project is definitely more work for the students, who need to research and explore philosophical questions, and the teacher, because it requires more risk-taking, time, individualized work with each student, and a collaborative atmosphere that some teachers might not be comfortable with. The benefit of all that additional work, however, is that authentic design projects engage the entire community, improve the learning environment, and induce valuable growth and learning for everyone.

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Disrupting the Classroom through



Members of the Border-land class discussing their findings at the Santa Ana Wildlife Refuge along the Rio Grande. Photograph by Jason Reed.

Inquiry-Driven and Collaborative Art Projects

by Ryan Sprott and Jason Reed

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.

—Richard Shaull, foreword from Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (2008, p. 34)



Near Presidio, Texas, from Mi Voz Project. Photograph by Jesus.

Today’s schools exist in an era fraught with decreasing public education funding, continued emphasis on standardization, and dwindling civil discourse and empathy. The essential purpose of education sits at a paradigmatic crossroads between knowledge reproduction and emancipatory action. Thus, the ideas of Paulo Freire, a noted Brazilian educator and philosopher, hold particular relevance for contemporary educational contexts. Freire (1998) often alluded to schools as places where inequitable power structures are reproduced and ingrained within young minds through the continuance of social and educational conformity in what he termed “the bureaucratizing of the mind” (p. 111). In resistance to this functional oppression within the classroom, Freire’s pedagogical philosophy emphasized combining dialogic practice with social action within a reciprocal learning environment. Guided by these concepts, we began Borderland Collective in 2007 to infuse inquiry-driven and collaborative art into classrooms as a means to disrupt dominant, marginalizing narratives about whose voices matter and what types of curriculum and instruction are valid. We started by asking:

As artists and teachers, how are we complicit in perpetuating unjust and limiting narratives? How can the significant but often ignored narratives of young people’s histories and ideas come forward? And, what role can we play in creating spaces for exchange and collaboration?

To address these questions, we have worked not only to critique the systems of oppression within our schools and communities, but also to actively collaborate with young people to build a counter-archive, including photographs, writing, maps, and drawings. These tangible items represent diverse viewpoints and provide avenues for students to produce new streams of collective knowledge. The work has been shared publicly through exhibitions and publications, ensuring that the counter-archive becomes part of broader dialogues. Borderland Collective is about education and art, two fields where dialogue and practice hold the potential to be reciprocal, transformative, and emancipatory for both individuals and societies.

Developing Counter Narratives

One of our earliest projects, *Mi Voz* (2009), took place in the border cities of Presidio, Texas, and Ojinaga, Mexico. There, we worked with 8th graders who called both sides of the border home. We invited them to make photographs and maps that framed important parts of their daily world straddling the U.S.—Mexico border. Sometimes they returned with pictures of the physical borderland itself, but often they made pictures of life’s quotidian moments, such as being a teenager with their family, which didn’t signify the border in any direct way but became significant as a way of showing what the border actually looked like. For example, the creative gesture of something as simple as a personal mental map or a photograph of a sister hiding her face on the pink living room carpet had the ability to shift our understanding of how this political line was perceived by those living on it, which in turn contributed to new ways of understanding the borderland as a rich and multifaceted place. As part of that project we made small on-demand books for all the students and their communities, as well as postcard sets that provided a counter-view of the U.S./Mexico border driven by student knowledge and expertise.

In a subsequent project titled *Newcomers* (2010), we worked closely with refugees displaced from their home countries—Somalia, Iraq, Burundi, Rwanda, and Burma. All of the students in those classes lived near one another in non-descript 1970s apartment complexes in a North San Antonio neighborhood. Guided by elementary teacher and community organizer Kerry Hauptert, we collaborated with nearly 80 young people over the course of a summer and subsequent school year, using photography to explore ideas of self, family, and culture in the context of their dislocation. As an interruption of norms, we bridged the classroom and the living room by inviting participation from extended family members, enriching the culture of reciprocity between the families and the school. As with the *Mi Voz* project, the pictures made by the *Newcomers* students and their families pointed to the significant people and places in their lives, and forged a collective lyrical narrative about cultural experience, trauma, and resilience. At the end of two years we created 3,000 sets of curriculum cards using the pictures made by these youth, which have been shared across the globe in an act of collective education.



Mi Voz Postcard Sets, Photograph by Jason Reed.

Fostering Global Citizenship and Civic Engagement

Recently, we have begun to investigate contemporary, polarizing dilemmas such as criminal justice, immigration, and energy policy with students at the International School of the Americas, a public high school in San Antonio. By exploring these topics from a variety of perspectives, we want to disrupt education frameworks that focus on binary thinking, or on black and white, either/or bubble tests. That is, as opposed to top-down models of schooling which preference clear, predetermined answers, we pursue a Freirean approach that might open opportunities for students to embrace ambiguity.

For instance, in the *Border-land* (2015) course, a year-long project focused on immigration, students engaged in dialogue with law enforcement officials, academics, activists, journalists, artists, and immigration law students, asking everyone the same question: “What is the purpose of a border?” This approach encouraged listening across perspectives, and the range of responses illuminated the complexity of the issue, building the students’ empathy for a broad spectrum of people who live with the realities of a post-9/11 border paradigm. That is, by meeting people with varied experiences of the border and immigration processes, the project humanized both the Guatemalan mother fleeing gang violence as well as the Border Patrol agent tasked with detaining her. In this way, dialogue helped transcend a combative “us” versus “them” narrative and instead moved students’ toward social action like policy reform and community volunteer work. The final outcome of the *Border-land* collaboration was a newsprint publication, a collective class border manifesto, and an accompanying exhibition, all of which explored multiple angles on the border and tried to find inspiration in the margins between art, journalism, history, and education. Through artistic inquiry, student-led dialogue, and conversations with people who represented a broad range of perspectives on the topic, *Border-land* students disrupted prevailing binary modes of thinking and immersed themselves in the complexity of this contemporary, multifaceted issue.

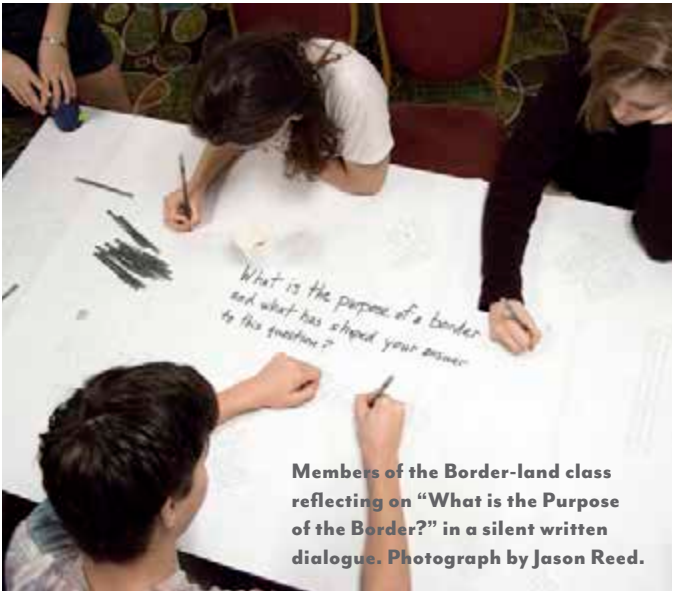
Most recently, we applied similar principles in a project-based course titled, Oil-land (2017), where 35 students, also from the International School of the Americas, are investigating issues related to energy policy. Students have heard from many people including a Native American rights advocate, a mineral rights lawyer, a solar lobbyist, and researchers at the Bureau of Economic Geology. As part of the course, students traveled to the Permian Basin in West Texas where they explored energy policy first-hand by making photographs of their experiences, collecting notes in collaborative field journals, and writing reflective prose. As in the Border-land project, art practices in Oil-land created spaces for students to grapple with the complexity inherent to contemporary dilemmas, thus moving students toward being active creators of knowledge rather than participants in a factory model of schooling where knowledge is simply passed down from teacher to student. In this way, arts integration, when used as a tool to explore ambiguity, supports the development of skills and dispositions needed for effective civic engagement in the increasingly complex and rapidly changing 21st century global society.



Arts Integration as a Disruptive Practice

Artists and educators hold significant power to disrupt conventional social and educational paradigms that curb young people’s potential. To challenge these restrictive templates, it is essential for adults in these positions to critically analyze how their work either reproduces existing inequities or opens space for more inclusive and open-ended narratives about our communities. We hope the work of Borderland Collective is generative, sparking conversation in schools and inviting educators and artists to examine their individual positions in relation both to their students and to the larger communities in which they work.

Through inquiry-driven and collaborative art in education, we believe that teachers can foster transformative and even liberating learning experiences and artistic creation that disrupts injustices and leads toward a more just and compassionate world.



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TRAILBLAZING: Mindfulness, Art-making, and a Blind Dog

by Betsy Murphy

I only went out for a walk, and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out, I found that I was really going in.

– John Muir

I have always recognized the value of going out for a walk.

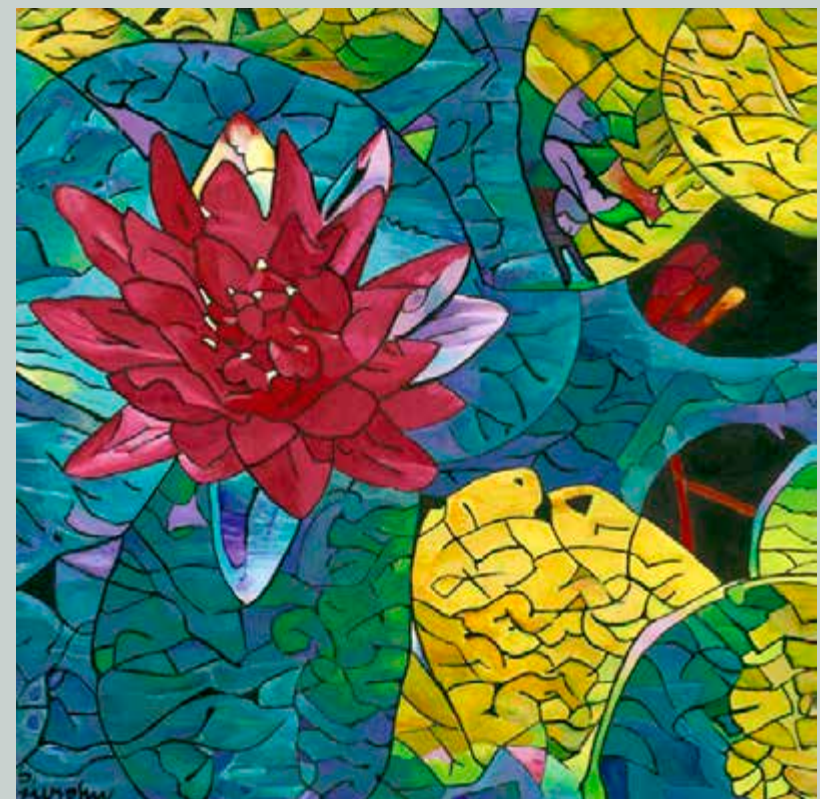
Taking a brisk stroll outdoors after a busy day of teaching is my favorite way to decompress. For years, after-school walks with my dog added some much-needed cardio to the many miles I had already walked around my art classroom. Passersby would often joke about “who was walking who.” My dog, Dozer, was such an enthusiastic participant that he dragged me along behind him at break-neck speed. Nevertheless, we both looked forward to getting outside for our exercise.

A couple of years ago, however, Dozer began to lose his eyesight. Although he still enjoyed our walks as much as ever, things had definitely changed. For instance, his sense of smell, already extraordinary, began to dominate. Rather than charging after deer 100 yards away as he had before, he became engrossed with sniffing each and every shrub or clump of grass. The pace of our walks slowed, and I became annoyed with Dozer’s insistence on lingering. But try as I might, there was no hope of raising my heart rate. Instead, I could almost feel my blood pressure rising along with my sense of frustration. After a few weeks of increasing exasperation, it became clear to me that Dozer was not interested in returning to his hurried pace, and it was I who needed to adapt my attitude. Gradually, I came to understand that this tempo was our new normal.

Finally accepting the slower pace, I noticed that I was becoming more aware of my surroundings and my own place in the natural environment. In addition, I became increasingly conscious of my breathing, my movements, and my posture. By purposefully slowing down I was able to take pleasure even in the shrill sound of a raven’s call, the sudden sight of a snake sunning itself on the pavement, the perfume of Mountain Laurel trees heavy with pollen. As I became aware of each wonderful distraction, I would take it in and then once again bring myself back to the present moment as I refocused on my walking and breathing. As Dozer walked, I walked. When Dozer lingered, I breathed deeply and observed my surroundings, becoming more present while the fog of my busy day lifted. Without realizing it, I was developing a practice of mindful walking.

Mindfulness

As the seasons changed, I became more aware of variations in the environment, particularly the plant life. I noticed that the first tiny Bluebonnets emerged in late autumn; Cedar Elm trees were the primary host for Mistletoe; Antelope Horn milkweed attracted butterflies; and that orange fungus grew on decaying tree stumps after prolonged rainy periods. I continued my leisurely dog walks with a renewed sense of deliberate mindfulness and a connection to my surroundings. Often, I returned to snap a photograph of a particularly interesting specimen. Collecting these photographs became part of a daily ritual that included posting plant images on Instagram and Facebook. I titled those collections Green Feed, since they were nature-friendly posts on social networking feeds. My growing curiosity about native plants fueled my desire for inquiry. When friends asked about the purpose of these photographs I replied that I knew they would find their way into my art work eventually, but I wasn’t in a hurry to settle upon exactly when or how.



Artmaking

Throughout history, nature has been a source of inspiration for many artists, and painting a way of examining the natural world. For me, investigating a specific element by deconstructing it—and then reimagining it through shape and form, highlight and shadow, pattern and rhythm, and most importantly color—is critical. Ultimately, the photographs I had collected for my Green Feed albums became subject matter. In the studio on my computer, I cropped, enlarged, and applied filters until I had captured the most interesting composition, retaining the square format typical of social media platforms. Drawing is the foundation of my paintings, so preliminary sketches were developed and then transferred to wood panel. Then, as drawing evolved into painting, all of my up-front planning gave way to a more intuitive approach, where colors were often mixed directly on the panel. I strove to develop a surface teeming with pattern by using an amped-up, saturated color palette. As I developed each painting I reminded myself that perfection was not the goal, rather an emotional connection to the piece was what I was after. In this way, through a combination of realism and abstraction, each botanical painting became an interpretation of an encounter with nature that nodded to old-world craftsmanship while embracing the creative opportunities of digital technology.

Blazing the Trail

According to the dictionary, trailblazing (as a verb) is defined as discovering new outdoor trails or marking outdoor paths to communicate information about the trail. As an adjective, trailblazing is explained as something innovative or new. While I negotiate my identity as an artist, researcher, and teacher, I often feel that I am walking a new path. The artist in me frequently seeks a fresh way to see or interpret my experiences. The researcher in me constantly asks questions that don't always have an obvious answer. And the teacher in me often longs to share guidance from lessons learned along the trail.



The most important lesson I learned came from my blind dog: If I slow my pace and allow myself to be fully in the moment, I will discover that thing that feeds my spirit and guides me down a new and exhilarating pathway.

For More Information
Texas Master Naturalist Program <https://txmn.org/> | Native Plant Society of Texas <https://npsot.org/wp/>

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DISRUPTING THE MOTHER/DAUGHTER RELATION

by Kate Wurtzel

Small bits of Legos and applesauce twist off tops.
Your baby sister's old pacifier sitting on the counter for weeks at a time.
Sticks and grass that you placed in my pocket one day.
A discarded water bottle.
Old birthday cards, broken toys from the thrift store, a pine cone you once collected.
Small treasures holding their own stories.
You and me – finding, discovering, unearthing our world together as we sift through the small objects that are lost, broken, discarded and given a new purpose, a new story a new love.



The Bell Moment

I sat on the broken-down treadmill that was now splattered with paint, chalk, and blobs of glue, and looked at the tiny bell in my hand. We, my six-year-old daughter and I, had worked on a collaborative artwork in the garage together for hours. We were covering an old table and chairs with found and discarded objects. The once discarded tiny bell in my hand was haunting me. I did not know where to place it. A tiny gold bell—it seemed like a simple matter, but it stumped me nonetheless. My daughter, however, had the answer.

“Mom, let’s put this piece of lace under the bell and glue both of them to the seat of the chair, but don’t hot glue the bell to the lace on the ground, because then the glue will go through the lace and stick to the garage floor.”

Of course, why didn’t I think of that! In that moment, and in subsequent moments, we were working together to conceptualize, drive, and resolve our artwork. In what I lovingly refer to as the “bell moment” my role (or position) as her mother and my experience as an elementary art educator were present but not at the forefront of our conversation. Instead, I was momentarily interacting with her in a space where those parts of myself that usually took on an expert-like role felt suspended. My body and mind felt completely open to her suggestion and direction. As I looked at her and responded with, “Oh, ok, sounds good to me” I recall feeling relieved. I was relieved because she had come up with a workable solution, and because I did not feel the need to interject an alternative idea; it was as if we met somewhere between mother/daughter. In that fraction of time, we came together in a creative in-between space where our everyday roles were suspended, where we took on new forms or new relations.

**We were still mother and daughter,
but we were also something else as well.
Metaphorically, it was as if our two hands
came together and touched, resting palm
to palm but with unwoven fingers.**

A Space of Love and Openness

I’ve thought about this moment often. I’ve played it over and over in my mind trying to determine what factors contributed to our ability to stand within that openness, to briefly exist differently with one another and disrupt our everyday binary mother/daughter relationship. As I hit repeat on that moment, and other similar ones we have had since then, I am drawn to the words love, trust, and openness. Samuel Rocha writes that “love, true love, begins with letting myself die, getting over my pride and self-pity—even my self love” (2011, p. 143). He is not saying that we should not engage in acts of self-love, but that to love means to remove the self. The phrase Rocha uses is “indifferent to self” (p. 143), which feels very appropriate to me, but I would also add openness to that definition. To love is not just to remove the self or get over the self, but also to open up the self—to open oneself up and let go of your agenda, your position of power, as much as possible, even if for only a moment. This, I believe, allows us to hold space for each other while not collapsing or intertwining to such an extent that we lose ourselves.

Coming from a place of love and openness is so important, but not always easy to achieve at home or in the classroom. As a former elementary art teacher, I recall having “bell moments” with my students where I would feel so engaged that I would momentarily forget I was the teacher. In hindsight, I can see that these moments only occurred when I was fully present with my students and did not feel the need to be the





expert or to keep a distance between us that reinforced my position of power as their teacher. Just as my relationship with my daughter had been disrupted and suspended, my relationships with my students would be altered for fractions of time.

Many educational theorists have studied and discussed this relational characteristic of teaching, and whether or not the gap or distance between students and teacher is needed. For example, Nel Noddings (2005) has extensively explored the importance of interhuman relations in educational settings and the relationship between teacher and student as it relates to the topic of caring. While she emphasizes the need for teacher and student to establish a trusting relationship, she also argues that the unequal relation between teacher and student is necessary. For me, that unequal relation was needed at times because it created a gap between student and teacher that held each of us in our respected positions. However, when it was not there, either absent or suspended, I could almost feel an openness in my body and in our energetic exchange. For example, there were moments when I would be sitting with a student, working to solve a new process or medium, and the student would scream out, "We did it!" and high five me. Just as with the bell moment with my daughter, there would be a brief sense or feeling that the everyday binary between us had been momentarily disrupted. These were some of my finer and more memorable experiences of teaching, times with students that I could metaphorically hold onto and keep in a drawer for when I needed a dose of inspiration.

The Liminal Disruption

Teaching in that in-between space, somewhere between the everyday teacher/student relation and collapse of that binary, can be described as operating within a liminal state. The word liminality originally comes from anthropological discourse describing rituals within small communities. It was introduced by the French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep in 1908 as a way to describe moments where an operating structure or framework was absent, either on the individual level or on a societal level. For example, on an individual level, liminality described the point at which a male, who had been pre-determined as a leader, transitioned from being a child to a king. That in-between transitory time was identified as liminal. On a societal level, the word was used to describe a period of time when a society lost their leader and had not yet transitioned to a new leader. As performance scholars Kim Skjoldager-Nielsen and Joshua Edelman (2014) explain, those in-between transitional times, where there was an absence of some sort, created a space where new customs or norms could be established.

By the 1970s, the idea of liminal space or liminality began to be associated with more than just rituals in small communities. The concept was explored by disciplines such as education, psychology, and even visual and performance art. In these areas, liminality did not necessarily represent transitions between two points, but instead stood for marginalized in-between spaces that existed independently, involving the suspension of social norms. For example, in the context of education, liminality was and continues to be discussed as unanticipated moments in teaching that arise when students and teachers learn or discover something unexpected about the world or themselves. As Sharon Todd (2014) understands this kind of event, the teacher and student are not transitioning between two points per se, but rather are experiencing a disruption and suspension of their everyday norms. This disruption opens up a space for new ways of knowing and being with one another. For my daughter and me, the act of art making enabled us to discover these fissures in our everyday lives. As we worked diligently and playfully to create our work of art, we found our in-between, liminal space, where we could temporarily suspend our mother/daughter labels.



The physical space of the garage echoed this state of liminality, and perhaps even reinforced it. Ordinarily, our garage does not house cars. Instead, it is a mash-up between a crossfit box, an art studio, and a music performance space. There are tools, bicycles, and mops on the wall, along with further embellishments such as the ever-so-random Theremin sitting in the corner next to a tub of collage and print making materials. Our garage is a creative, generative space that is shifting in function constantly.

It is an ambiguous space that does not have a fixed purpose.

This ambiguity, plus the fact that it exists between the house and the outside world, creates a sort of liminality that invites playfulness and openness on a regular basis. This was particularly true for my daughter and me as we worked on Stuff, of World.

The title, *Stuff, of World*, was chosen by my six-year-old daughter. After we had completed our artwork she came up with the name on her own. From my experience as an elementary art teacher, the desire to label or title a work of art is not uncommon. However, witnessing her thinking about the title was unique for me. According to her, the placement of the comma in the title was very important. She said, “Mom, it has to be stuff, comma, of world.” While I am not sure why the comma carried so much weight for her, I followed her directive nonetheless.

Stuff, of World was submitted to an exhibition about art and education at the University of North Texas in the Fall of 2017. Before we could submit the work however, we had to come up with an artist statement. We chose not to write it together, but instead created two separate statements that appeared on one wall label. My statement focused primarily on the experience of creating the work of art with her. Her statement read as follows:

This artwork is made out of things. We liked these things because they are cool and make us feel happy. We titled it Stuff, of World because it is made out of stuff from the world that has been passed on from different people. Making the artwork with mommy was nice because I was with her and we helped each other.

Asking her to come up with an artist statement on her own provided further insight into her thinking and reinforced what I had been feeling throughout the process. Her words echoed the sensation that we had somehow disrupted our everyday relation and come together as co-artists and co-creators during our time in the garage.

Since my daughter and I created *Stuff, of World*, we have continued to make art together. From nature walks where we discover and document the textures around us, to painting representations of the solar system, I find myself looking for bell moments. I am searching for small pockets of time—cracks and crevices in the everyday that carry the possibility of new ways of knowing and being with other another. Moments of disruption in our day-to-day existence are becoming more noticeable, or perhaps I am simply becoming more aware of them. Either way, I believe that disruption and suspension are valuable for my relationship with my child, for the art we make together, and for the field of art education at large. Is the gap between teacher and student, or parent and child, necessary for learning to occur while making artwork?

How might we intentionally create disruption in our everyday lives and discover this potential feeling of love and openness?

I don’t have the answers, but I intend to continue investigating, exploring, and playing with these questions.

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A Case for Reflective Practice: My Sound Art Journey in Art Education

by Marie-Claire Valdez



The Quandary

What gets us through the busy school day? Is it seeing joy emanate from students when they learn a new technique or recognize their own creative genius? Is it the sound of sharpeners, pens scribbling, paper being flattened and cut—that orchestral melody in the art room?

What drives art educators to be more innovative?

Is it contemporary artists who push boundaries? Is it our own curiosity about why students make what they make that drives us to make more authentic and innovative lessons? Why do I love teaching art and how can I reinvent it to feel more current?

My first year teaching I started keeping notebooks. On my lunch breaks, I wrote and mused over hard questions. I scribbled and pondered from cover to cover, wondering why I teach art and how I could teach it better.

Trajectories

One of the dangers I have noticed with art in schools is the curricular trajectory we place students on. A student takes art in middle school,

then a hierarchy of classes in high school like Art 1, 2, 3, 4, and perhaps AP or dual credit to get a head start in college. A typical Art 1 class is a survey of basic drawing, painting, mixed media, ceramics, architecture or vocational applications, and finally photography and Adobe products like Photoshop.

My Art 1 students were misfits. They did not see themselves studying art in school or even taking any art class again. Many just needed the fine arts credit. However, they did not want a watered-down version of art that was so basic it was boring. Art 1 lessons were always my biggest conundrum when I was planning. I kept asking myself: How can I bring more play into Art 1? What new kinds of lessons can I teach? I know my students have skills, they may just not be in the traditional realms of painting and drawing. What can I do to facilitate these new emerging artists?

An answer came unexpectedly before winter break. My students had just finished a watercolor color wheel project and I was using an iPad to make a video of my class to add supporting documentation to my Texas-Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) domains about classroom environment and instruction. I walked around the room recording students painting. It was peaceful, and students were working. In the background, I was playing a Miles Davis album. I asked one of my students how she liked art so far this year. She said:

“Making stuff is okay. I like being in the art room. I like the way it sounds, like people can really unwind and just be themselves here.”

“How does the art room sound?”

“I don’t know, like pencils, and paper, music, conversations... like that relaxing white noise stuff.”

“Well, do you think those sounds could be art?”

“Like music?”

“Yeah in a way. Sound art has musical qualities, but it is an art all on its own.”

“Naw, I could never do that. I never learned any instruments or nothing.”

“I think there is something to what you’re saying.... hold on a second.”

I went over to my desktop computer and typed “art of noise” into YouTube. I was expecting sound art installations, something with John Cage, or an installation of sonic sculptures. Instead I got a funk and lounge music video by a new-age group. The bell was going to ring in 5 minutes, so I told everyone (as soon as they cleaned up) to watch the video with me.

Two unexpected things occurred. First, one of my female students started to say words and phrases to beats in the song. Then a few students started tapping a beat with their pencils while others hummed. Second, there were spurts of images and text in the video. The images looked like the examples I used for the portrait grid drawing lesson. The text in the video was made up of single words like “breathe” or “love,” which we had used in a calligraphy quote project. I let the video play and students began to notice that parts of the video looked like pieces we had made in class. I stopped the video and asked

what if we did all of that as a performance in a gallery or a public space?

If we made sounds from objects and our voices, then projected images in the background—what would that be? A few students said emphatically, “art!”

That was my last class of the day. During my conference period, I reflected on what had happened. Something felt different. The students were excited, joyful, and ready to embrace something new. I wanted to create lessons that drew from that experience.

Tangents

Over the course of the year, I tried various sound art lessons whenever I could. Some were extremely successful—and others bombed. The best came during a unit about ceramics and identity. We spent a great deal of time sculpting autobiographical masks which spoke to our diverse races, ethnicities, and world views. As it turned out, the critique for that project happened

during testing week, so we had an extra 45 minutes in our class period. I decided to have students introduce their final ceramic pieces by pulling up a song online. The class sat silently in the dark and listened to sounds, trying to visualize correlations between visual language (elements of art and principles of design) and possible meanings of the sounds from popular music. The exercise proved to be a new way for students to introduce artwork and created a productive dialogue around artist intent.

Not all of my attempts to integrate sound art into my classes were as successful as this one, though. A less successful attempt was when I started class by appreciating the sounds our bodies make. Specifically, I asked students to use clapping to express how they were feeling. In high school, the majority of my students associated clapping with slapping, so the melodic concept I envisioned turned into fits of giggling and knee slapping.

Transformative Disruption

I studied sound art as an undergraduate student at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2011-2013, but before last year it had never dawned on me to introduce sound art like I would introduce shading or grid drawing.

Is there space for sound art in our curriculum?

Can we push art education to dwell in the conceptual and abstract as well as in the concrete? I realize that sound art has a unique skill set that situates itself outside of traditional music and fine arts practices. But I believe sound art should be taught in art classes because of the possibilities for open-ended

inquiry. For example, the web-based archive called <https://freesound.org/> has thousands of sound clips students can play with for free. Many phones now come with free music/sound making programs like GarageBand or PocketBand, where students can record sounds or voices and effects. Students might make sculptures that can be played as instruments, or sound suits informed by cultural fashions, or use the human body as a performative instrument, or the voice as an art piece—perhaps even using the collective voice of an entire class.

Art teachers are creative pioneers who are brave enough to ask and dwell on difficult questions about how art might go beyond the visual. What can art sound like? By embracing my own students’ questions, I found a niche that might transform my art teaching practice. My hope for my fellow art educators is that we ask our students, “What is the next great art form?” Art teachers inspire and mold the next great artists and creators. Let’s make some great sounding history together.

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Community Collaborations

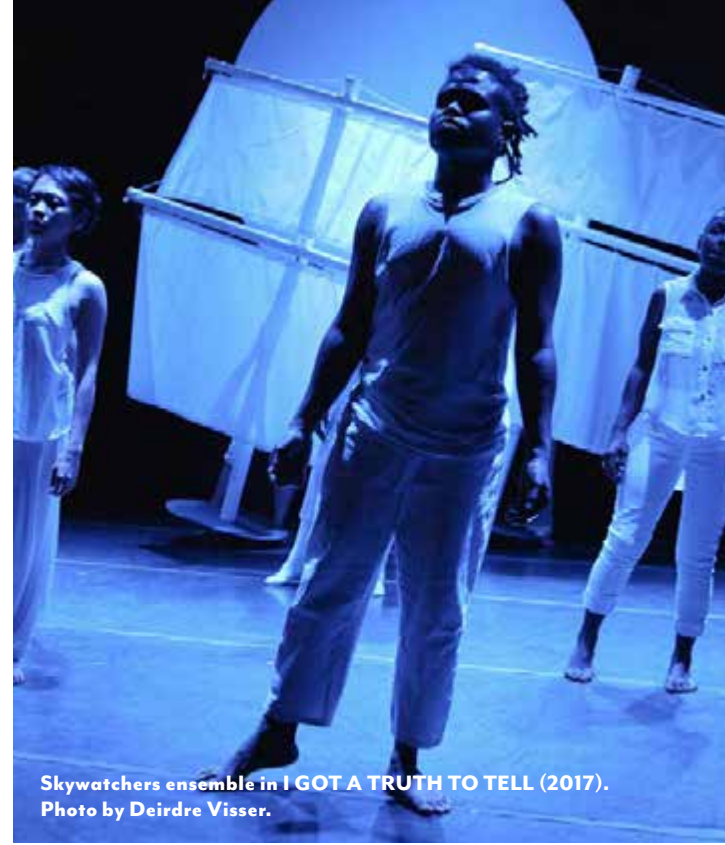


Forklift Danceworks' Bartholomew Swims (2017).
Photo by Amitava Sarkar.

as Creative Disruptions

by Clara Pinsky

Across the country from one another, community-based choreographers Anne Bluethenthal and Allison Orr have developed parallel practices creating dances “of, by, and for” unconventional performers, as the performance theorist R.O. Geer has put it (1998, p. xxv). In San Francisco, Bluethenthal founded Skywatchers, a community arts program that brings homeless and formerly homeless residents into partnership with professional artists to create and perform original dance-theater works based on stories, life experiences, and talents of community members. Orr, as Artistic Director of Austin-based Forklift Danceworks, has been making dances with city workers—firefighters, trash collectors, electric lineman—for the past 16 years. Alongside co-director Krissie Marty,



Skywatchers ensemble in I GOT A TRUTH TO TELL (2017).
Photo by Deirdre Visser.

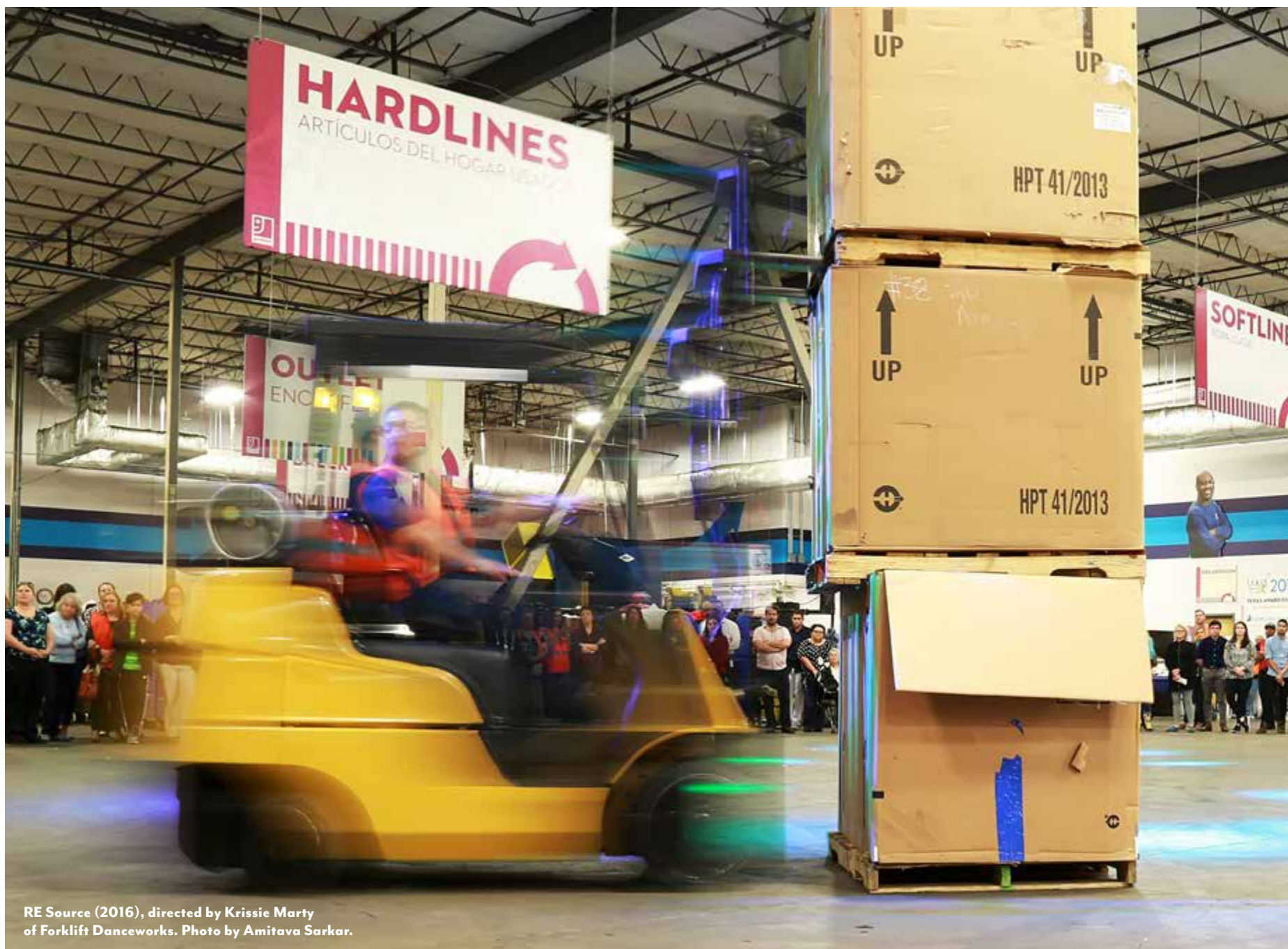
Orr sources choreography (developed and performed by the workers themselves), from the movement of labor in order to illuminate the invisible choreography of daily life. Though the underpinnings of their methodologies are quite similar—for both, relationships based on lots of listening are central, and showing up regularly (and never without snacks!) is key—the resulting works are vastly different. Both artists have recognized the opportunity to use their community collaborations to disrupt and spark change in their respective communities. Having worked closely with both artists, I brought them together in December, 2017, to talk about their practices and the disruptive and transformative potential of their work.

Clara Pinsky: What led to your current artistic practices, which, for both of you, are focused on community and collaboration?

Anne Bluethenthal: My roots are in dance and choreography, but also in political engagement and activism. I was raised in Greensboro, North Carolina during the civil rights era sit-ins, so from a very early point in my training, I became interested in the politics of the body and the politics of crafting choreography. For a long time, I was creating dances based on whatever urgent social or political issue was burning for me at the time. After a few decades of making dances with political content, my work had grown in scope and community engagement, but I was dissatisfied with the amount of resources going into a very short production period and the depth of relationship with and impact on communities and audiences. I was looking to work in the community in such a way that the people whose lives were affected by the issues were also co-creators, performers, and witnesses.

Allison Orr: I danced much of my life in a traditional sort of way but did not really think about having an artistic practice or having any professional capacity until I decided to pursue an MFA in choreography in my late 20s. But I came at it from a background in anthropology, public health, and social work, and I was thrilled to learn that community-based work existed. I did not know that I could actually meld my love of dance with being with people and fieldwork and cross-cultural immersion—which I did a lot of as a younger person.

I never felt quite comfortable making dance on dancers. I could not get excited about it. But in my second year of grad school, I made a series of dances with the campus employees—the maintenance crew and the grounds crew. And that is when I felt like I had figured out a way to make something that felt authentic to me—and it was about featuring people’s expert movement from their daily life.



RE Source (2016), directed by Krissie Marty
of Forklift Danceworks. Photo by Amitava Sarkar.

CP: Yeah, that is an interesting similarity, that making work in a traditional way became unsatisfying...

AB: I mean, similar and different because whereas Allison never really liked making dances on dancers, I loved that. But my core was also in social change. And there was no potential for social change in the work I had been doing, except in a subtle way that only a very narrow section of the world was going to understand.

CP: Right. The theme of this issue of *Trends* is creative disruption...which could mean a lot of things. How do each of you understand creative disruption in the context of your work?

AB: I am thinking about multiple levels of disruptions. First, there is disruption when I, as a middle-aged, white, Jewish, female artist, walk into the Tenderloin, into a supportive housing building*, and place myself in the tenant lounge. Both the disruption that I feel internally—that uneasiness and unsettled-ness of being an outsider—and the disruption that my presence brings to the environment I have just entered. This is a really important kind of disruption—a transgression that we are not supposed to make. But, although it is uncomfortable, if there is any hope for change in this world, it is necessary.

Then there is the disruption of placing people on stage who are not ordinarily on stage, and of amplifying stories that are not ordinarily heard by an art-going audience. For example, our current project involves taking those stories into the hallowed halls of government, into boardrooms, to press conferences, and creating visibility and voice with that art by speaking out with love, celebration, and song.

AO: There are a lot of connections to what we are doing at Forklift in what you just said, Anne, in terms of who is on stage and whose stories are being heard or featured, and the impact it has on audiences. I saw that when I was working on my performance with the campus employees. It was a whole different audience who showed up, particularly other campus employees who had come to see their fellow employees perform. In the audience I saw the possibility for connection between students and campus employees who had never shared a space this way.

What is also really exciting to me is the disruption of putting dance or performance in a context where it normally is not, and for a community to get to play with what that brings to them, both the fear and the opportunity. There are always people who have their heads down and won’t make eye contact and say, “I don’t want to be a part of this.” But that often evolves into a disruption of people’s discomfort at being part of an artistic process—because that discomfort comes from feeling like, “I am not good enough,” or “I am going to mess it up,” or “There is no way I could be anything anybody would want to watch.” With art-making and performance we are trying to contradict or offer an alternative to those feelings.



Dancer improvises at a Skywatchers open mic & community gathering (2016).
Photo by Deirdre Visser.

AB: Right, in Skywatchers we often talk about reflecting people back to themselves. We will have a normal conversation and then turn it into a creative process by just reflecting back what was said in an artful way. It is the daily miracle of our work because it never stops having this effect—where the person to whom you are reflecting back is filled with delight. Like, “That was something that I said, and it is actually beautiful. It is important, and it is worthy of being rendered in some way.”

AO: Yes! Yes.

AB: It speaks to taking inspiration from the everyday, the thing you do amazingly, Allison, in making the everyday extraordinary. The everyday is never ordinary, really, you know? There is a Kafka quote about just having to sit and the world rolls itself out at your feet...

AO: Yes, if you can just sit long enough.

AB: It just rolls before your feet. And I think that is what we do. We sit and we talk and ultimately poetry falls out of people’s mouths, or choreography falls out of their bodies. Suddenly they are embroiled in telling a story, and they have actually created a dance in front of you, either through actual physical movement or through the images in what they are saying. Noticing that, and helping others notice that, is a creative disruption.

CP: You are also both currently working on projects where art and performance are functioning as tools—interventions—to disrupt the norms of city agencies and community organizations. For example, Allison is partnering with the Aquatics program in Austin, and Anne is working in advocacy around housing and homelessness policies in San Francisco. What do you think makes artistic interventions so useful in those civic realms?

AO: The more I work collaboratively in communities, the more I believe that creativity—the creative process—is one of the most useful tools for making change. What I notice, first of all, is that there is vulnerability. I think when people make something together they have to be vulnerable, to take risks, to try something outside of their normal interactions in a particular context. It creates a sense of closeness, a sense that “we have been through this together,” and people open up their hearts to each other. It is a very intimate process. And it is fun. And I think it’s something that is often missing. I was an activist as a young adult, and there were points where I thought, “This is really hard, difficult work, and where is the fun in it?” That is the remarkable thing about art-making: it is fun. It can be. It should be.

AB: And we are drowning in verbal discourse. We are a culture that has so privileged the word that you cannot escape it, and that part of our brain is numbed from overstimulation, you know? We are starving for communication of the heart, which is where the art comes in. Nothing cuts through the tension in a room better than someone bursting into song or switching into poetry or moving. So, it isn’t just that art can have a role, it’s that art is a necessary tool. For the disruption, for the change, for the awakening. The whole globe has fallen asleep, and I believe art is the primary tool with which to wake people up.



The Trees of Govalle, Forklift Danceworks (2015).
Photo by Leon Alesi.

AO: What happens in the verbal discourse is that we start with blame or other negative things, and I find that people shut down. We have to find a way to be able to listen to each other. I think art is the way for people who do not think they have anything in common to find some kind of a connection. That is why I get excited about making this kind of work, because I see people in the audience, again, who are not necessarily with each other in any other place, and at least in that moment they are sitting next to each other and experiencing something together.

CP: And what you both do well is infuse joy and celebration into the artwork, no matter what. In Anne's case, you are working with one of the most disenfranchised, impoverished communities in San Francisco and yet the performances that you make are full of joy. And similarly, Allison, with the city pools project in Austin, you could have easily told the story of the most decrepit pool that needs the most work. But instead, your focus was on reminding people of the childhood joy of swimming pools. That is such a magnificent tool.

AO: In the current landscape of contemporary performance, I do not think joy is necessarily "in." I think there is definitely some discrimination in the art world toward any outward display of happiness. And yeah, I think it is radical—disruptive—to look at joy.

AB: The difficulties and the challenges and the horror and the tragedy that are a daily reality can be immobilizing. So the trick in doing art about difficult subjects is to face the harshest truths, to not turn away from them. But also, to not simply replicate them in a way that retraumatizes or shames your audience. You want to have a vision and you want to have hope, and you need celebration and joy that is infused with the fearless confrontation of truth.

AO: And I feel like ... every time I make a dance it's a bit of falling in love with the people I'm working with. I feel like that happens for the participants with each other as well. And it happens for the audience, even, for the hour or so that they witness the show. Everybody who touches the show, I think, gets a little bit of that. What we so desperately need is to care about each other.

AB: I think love is an under-utilized word in our field, and I totally relate. I absolutely fall in love with the subject, with the people, with the collaborators. Skywatchers is centered on the idea that the relationship is the site of social change—we like to say that large-scale change begins with interpersonal exchange. So, in the end, if the audience feels like they are in relationship with us, then we have done our jobs. That is when we know we are effective—if the audience feels they were transformed and can relate to everyone on stage. They fell in love. Just what Allison was saying about how vulnerability and the risk-taking create human connection. That is what we are about, too.

CP: So what advice do you have for other artists or students entering into community collaborations and disrupting the everyday on these many levels?

AB: You have to start from not knowing. That is my advice: practice your beginner's mind and see the world's wonders that are rolling before your feet all the time.

AO: Yes, beginner's mind, curiosity, absolutely not knowing. And let's see... I always have to realize what I am getting out of it and acknowledge that, too, my world personally is richer because I get to do this work with people. It's not charity, you know? It is how I figured out to be in the world of service and also use my mind in the biggest way possible. I would say to ask yourself: how can I push myself out into the world in a way that challenges me? So, it's a disruption for you as an artist also. It is vital to stay connected to that.

*Note: In San Francisco, supportive housing combines affordable housing for very low-income residents with social services and case management. It is designed to help those with complex challenges, including mental, behavioral, and physical health issues.



Skywatchers neighborhood procession
led by vocalist Melanie DeMore (2017).
Photo by Deirdre Visser.

For more information and videos of the artists' work, visit:

www.abdproductions.org/skywatchers

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Seeing Art Through Their Eyes

by Aisha Barnes



After visiting the junior high classroom of a colleague who was taking project-based learning (PBL) to the next level in Katy ISD, it seemed plausible that art too could be advanced in this way. For me, the difference between the “next big thing” in education and PBL is that you can see the effects of PBL working in your classroom in less time. The idea with PBL is that students are invested in their own learning in the form of self-guided projects. PBL moves away from the traditional “sage on a stage” role of the teacher. Project-based learning is also connected to Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB). The official TAB website credits Massachusetts classrooms with its development over the past 35 years (Teaching for Artistic Behavior [TAB], n.d.). TAB allows “students to experience the work of the artist through authentic learning opportunities and responsive teaching” (TAB, n.d.).

Traditional studio art classes call for projects and various assignments along with building basic skills in our students. As art educators, we find ourselves assigning projects based on our own style of artwork, the Texas

Education Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), other artists, ideas from the internet, and so on and so forth. My students spent a majority of the school year completing projects assigned to them based on criteria given. The projects had to be of a certain size, use specific materials, and include a style of some sort. With the knowledge gained from *Cultivating Curiosity in K-12 Classrooms* by Wendy L. Ostroff (2016) about challenging students to explore and experiment in the classroom, “20% Time” was born.

20% Time

The concept was simple enough. Students would spend 20% of their time in my classroom (roughly 1 class period a week) working on an art project of their choice. They had to present their initial idea to their classmates for feedback, complete a list of questions each week that served as a “check-in” to make sure they were on track and progressing, and present their final project (if applicable) to their classmates. The check-in questions that students answered each week also

served as an assessment. There were two things I made sure to stress: a) this is about you trying something in the realm of art that you normally do not get to do in the classroom, and b) the final project may not be successful, and that is okay.

I gave the students a full week to figure out what exactly they wanted to explore. Surprisingly, many students wanted to make baked goods. Some of them had a real interest in cooking and beautiful plating—and I’m sure the rest were just hungry. Quite a few students were interested in computer animation. One student wanted to do ice carving. The one that I was most curious about was the student that wanted to do glassblowing. Their ideas ranged from way too simple to “I’m not sure an eleven-year-old is allowed to do that but I strongly encourage you to ask anyway and tell us about the conversation.” I only told one student that their idea was not realistic—the one that wanted to do ice carving. Ice carving was only out of the question because there was no place to store it, or for the student to work on it.

The energy and curiosity that this project awakened in my students was unlike anything I had ever seen in my career, including when I was an art student myself.

Making the System Work

After week two we had a system down. The students would work on the required assignments that I would normally give them Monday through Thursday, and on Friday they would work on their 20% Time project. Any outside materials needed for Friday would be brought in to me at some point during the week, and I would keep them safe until Friday. On Monday we would begin the schedule again. Throughout the process, some students had to adjust their project because they could not find enough research on it to fit into their presentation, or because the materials were not available to them. Other students had to add to their projects because they did not have enough information to successfully complete their presentation. Two of the students who worked with clay ran into issues with the clay falling apart because they had tried to join a wet piece of clay to a dry piece. Of course, there were students that had nothing to show week after week, so it was hard to gauge their progress.

From the students that cooked, we enjoyed different types of cookies, cupcakes, cake, mini cheesecakes, and even pot stickers! A few students did calligraphy, a couple tried different makeup techniques, there was a mosaic, acrylic painting, 3D pieces, glassblowing, wire working, comic strip, stop motion animation, and much more.

I must admit I was skeptical of the students that never brought in any materials, but many of their projects turned out great. When it came time for presentations (which were used as a final assessment), students had the option to give a poster board or PowerPoint presentation. They had to tell us why they picked their project and some history behind what they were doing. At the end of the presentations, the floor was open to constructive questions. I found that all of the students were very supportive of one another during their presentations and throughout the making of the individual projects. While the students were presenting, I took notes on the back of a rubric that listed categories: creativity, organization, productivity, perseverance, and presentation. Depending on how much each student displayed in each category, they fell under Student (lowest), Intern, Apprentice, and Master (the highest). Since these projects were completed during the second semester of the school year, students had already learned how to treat each other with respect and support. My goal throughout the school year had been to foster a sense of community in each class period. I did this by telling students to ask their tablemates for input about their projects, which allowed them to bounce ideas off each other. After a while, they began doing this on their own, without my intervention.

“Ah! I love it!” exclaimed a student admiring her tissue paper tutu pinned proudly on a mannequin. She had spent a solid six weeks working on it

(with a little help from grandma at home), and it was in its final stages of decorating. Her piece was one of two that I submitted to the Katy Independent School District’s Spring Art Show, an annual exhibit of student work each April. The tutu took home an extremely high award—Judge’s Choice—meaning it was a favorite among the judges. My classroom’s second submission, a clay dragon created by one of my sixth graders, earned a red ribbon.

Reflecting Forward

I found that providing a hard copy of the weekly check-in questions worked well, in the sense that I knew exactly where they were in their projects even if no physical evidence was present on that particular day. Telling students up front what they were being graded on—weekly questions and the final presentation—also worked, because students were able to balance their time between their project and answering the weekly questions. Also, before students purchased materials, I searched the art room and storage areas for alternative materials that would function in the same capacity. What did not work as well was the number of questions students answered each week—an entire sheet of paper! After listening to many complaints about the number of check-in questions, I decided to shorten them for the following school year.



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A PAUSED POINT: THE MOST SERIOUS THING I DO IS PLAY

by Jorge Lucero

Explaining yourself

Annually, teachers are asked to explain themselves through teaching statements. We write them in our undergraduate courses, preparing for licensure, applying for jobs, making our websites and portfolios, in graduate school, for annual reviews, going up for National Boards, applying for grants, or even when we are nominated for an award. Because teaching is so ephemeral, these statements help tell the story of our work, revealing our intentions, and—sometimes—showing evidence of how we engage with teaching as a creative task. In this sense, teaching statements are dynamic, changing as the teacher and the work changes. For the last twenty years, as a Chicago Public School teacher and now as a university professor, I've reworked my statement anywhere from two to three times a year.

Recently I was challenged to write a jargon-free teaching statement for readers who were completely unfamiliar with the field of art education. It was difficult, but I wrote about how my teaching practice is a conceptual art practice. I wrote about how I think of my prep time, my office, my engagement with students, the bureaucracy of the institution, the banalities of the teacher-life, and my actual curriculum and pedagogy as an artistic material. I demonstrated how the history and discourses of conceptual art give permission for this blended teaching/art practice.

For this issue on “disrupting the everyday”, I present a version of this plain-spoken statement. In this modified version for *Trends* I have included images. Although “read” differently, they are equal to the words. The images are not illustrative, rather are meant as visual hesitations in the face of having to be counter-intuitively plain-spoken.



The Permissions of Conceptual Art

My teaching is conceptual Art. Eschewing expressive and media-centric art forms, conceptual artists prioritize ideas. The most notorious example is Duchamp's factory-made, tersely autographed, ceramic urinal presented as a proxy for a porcelain fountain. His provocative gesture—still—challenges art's preoccupation with craft, beauty, labor, and authorship. John Cage's 4'33, the so-called “silent” musical score, becomes an amplifier for ambient sounds coming mostly from the space, the circumstances, and the audiences attending the performance. The everyday—attended to—becomes art. More recently Tania Bruguera's Tatlin's *Whisper #6* is an empty podium with a microphone guarded by two people dressed as Cuban police. The public is invited to say anything at the lectern for one minute. Some make political statements. After one minute, the guards remove the speaker, frequently interrupting justifiably inflammatory statements. Unexpectedly, the speaker is not punished for their words. Bruguera—who is Cuban—presents the physical elements of a soapbox without the negative consequences of politicized action under an oppressive government. Through such staged action the artist demonstrates how the pliability and occasional absurdity of art sometimes mitigates the threat of certain actions which otherwise are deemed alarming and insubordinate.

I think through these artists' conceptualisms to bend the traditions of teaching into a conceptual art form in and of itself. Conceptual art's disruption of expectations can lead to contemplation, discussion, emancipation, and transformed living. Experiencing conceptual art, one might ask “Why did the artist do that?” or “How is this art?” Conversely, a student experiencing teaching as conceptual art might ask, “Is this teaching?” or “Am I in school?”

Teaching as a pliable form

Questions triggered by disruptions of expectations are essential to teaching as conceptual art practice. Because it's art, I give considerable thought to the form of every pedagogical and curricular decision I make. With the initial thought that every student, in every class, in every semester is unique, I approach teaching with the same optimistic experimentalism that I do my conceptual art practice. For example, I skip introductions and logistics with my students on the first day of class, opting to make something together, a collaborative activity (usually a performance) that we refer back to throughout the semester in order to generate ideas, workshop our thinking, and evaluate our own work. At the end of the first class, I hand out what appears to be the syllabus asking the students to read it carefully and come prepared to discuss it next session. At home, students are surprised when what they assumed was a syllabus turns out instead to be a very long letter telling the story of the course: how it's conceptualized, what its history is, where the course fits in the context of the larger curriculum, and how I have been thinking about it in terms of those particular students at that particular time. In the letter I invite each student to collaborate with me in constructing the trajectory of the course. The letter is a plea—if you will—asking the students to substitute “going through the motions” of schooling with a more fully invested, personal quest to become truly educated. By promoting education over mere schooling, I want my students to recognize that education is a means by which the world is made legible, interpreted, and ultimately, opened to their contributions. This letter-as-syllabus has many movable parts, which requires us (my students and me) to constantly modify it. And we do. In fact, bringing students into the design of their curriculum can be unpredictable, taxing, and unwieldy for me as the official instructor, but course-trajectory-as-conceptual-art in the classroom enables every student to take responsibility for how their decisions and contributions affect their classmates and their professor.



Expertise emerges

Throughout the semester, pedagogical decisions are motivated by the design of the first day of class and the syllabus-letter. For example, I do not perform assessment for grading's sake. Rather, I have conversations with my students about their goals, their intentions, their accomplishments, and about my role in helping them achieve those things. I usually do not implement curriculum linearly; I believe in and pursue an emergent curriculum, what some call a “lived curriculum”, that arises from the needs, interests, and proposals of everyone in the classroom. This kind of curriculum is situated within the lived experiences of student and teacher, and through it we aim to disperse the responsibility of the teaching and the learning that happens when both are together. The emergent curriculum allows for everyone's expertise to be highlighted, while everyone's ignorance(s) are carefully attended to. I do not lecture authoritatively; instead I point, sometimes recounting stories from my twenty years of art and teaching experience—while positioning my story as just one of the voices that we could be listening to. The other voices that make up our curriculum are brought to the class by students, and include both the cannon and the margin.

When assigning readings, I ask students to look at the form of the text, to perform the reading aloud by reading slowly regardless of comprehension, and to collect, or re-write, the parts that make sense to them. This way of reading sometimes produces notes that the student does not understand. For instance, the student might have collected sentences for some reason other than comprehension; perhaps they liked the way the sentence sounded, or were intrigued by the way the words sat on the page. The point is for students to engage the text and trust that learning is cumulative, collaborative, non-linear, and takes place over a period of time that frequently surpasses the boundaries of a semester and the encounter with a single teacher. In my courses, homework assignments are meant to be non-prescriptive, sometimes causing me to modify my own expectations. And though some parameters are given, many of the outcomes are indeterminate.



Pliable Office

No element of my practice is left under-considered. My “office hours” are an artwork. My office space itself is THEJORGELUCEROSTUDYCOLLECTION. Once a week, the office opens to the general public for quiet study of my books, videos, and other ephemera, and can be used as an informal meeting space with or without me. I have also opened my office during lunch for a project titled Split-My-Lunch, where I’ve welcomed the school community, and especially students, to share a free one-on-one meal with me. These two projects have provided numerous opportunities for me to introduce students and colleagues to new scholars, artists, and authors and just to get to know the community where I work. On several occasions during Split-My-Lunch, I have also met students who were not my students. I have provided impromptu career and academic counseling, philosophical conversation, artistic critique, and frequently mere informal conversation. Most importantly, by opening the doors of my office through these everyday gestures of eating, talking, and studying, I am foregrounding the idea that school is life, not just a preparation for it.

Plyful

The purposeful modification of traditional pedagogical forms—although playful—is one of the most serious things I do as a teacher, scholar, and artist. At this university (and previously, at the high school where I taught), I am a learner who depends on the expertise of my students and colleagues, and on their willingness to prioritize their own voices in bringing forth what they know as we pursue knowledge together. My teaching as conceptual art practice is an attempt to dismantle the hierarchies and myths of schooling by deemphasizing grades, institutional power, verticality, and tradition. These moves are made, not as an outright rebellion, but as a measured contemplation of the status quo in an attempt to return or awaken each student’s ownership of their intellectual development and their scholarly maturation, not just for school, but for everything.



Most of the experiments I enact through my pedagogy are initially jarring to my students, which is why I leave my actions open for scrutiny and conversation. This openness to criticism has led to countless fruitful and candid conversations with my students and colleagues, which consistently lead us to rethink our positions and approaches. Our thinking about what we do together in schools is made dynamic by our willingness to be transformed, and I am grateful that the schools where I have worked have been sensitive communities dedicated to this principle. The classroom conversations that emerge from what might appear to be radical pedagogy is vital for developing inquiry for both the students and myself because when students ask themselves “why” and “how,” whatever answers they arrive at are personal discoveries. Whether or not these discoveries are unique or original is irrelevant; what counts is that the students have found, manufactured, or synthesized their own learning, through their own exploration, grounded in their constantly evolving perspective of the world. I am happy to play a small part in their traversal through that experience.

Since I am now a teacher of future teachers, this method of playing with pedagogy as conceptual art has allowed me not only to deliver the content of my courses in a manner that resonates with my students, but also to present a formal model of teaching that radicalizes what my students think teaching should look like. That is, my method is simultaneously presented as the form of my teaching and as the content for my students to learn from. In order for the overlapping “form” and “content” of teaching to be experienced as both pedagogy and curriculum, the students and I must suspend what we think we know about school. My graduate students, my undergraduates, and I continue to grapple with the internal conflict between the comfort we have come to know as life-long-schoolers and our desire to have a genuine experience with professional development, personal renewal, and sincere community. I imagine that this internal conflict is similar to the sensation that audiences first had/have with Duchamp’s, Cage’s, Bruguera’s, and countless other conceptual art gestures. But I will also trust that the reverberations of these Conceptual artworks over time and their role in altering something as seemingly conservative as art itself can also be pursued through a teaching philosophy and practice that is unabashedly eager to stumble towards something yet to be discovered.

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Wabi-Sabi: A Glimpse

by Sheri R. Klein

I began my visual journal page the way I typically do,

with a sketchy composition, adding text, and a background wash of color—just when a bottle of aqua blue acrylic paint spilled on my table and all over the page. The paint obliterated my webbed diagram about the many things in life that I love. My page was ruined. But rather than try to wipe away the paint, turn to a new page, or rip out the page—in this unexpected moment, I embraced the unexpected and started to contemplate the spilled paint. Then I dabbed at the thicker areas with a sponge to even out the surface, concerned that the journal would otherwise not close.

With the spilled paint and sponging now obscuring most of what I had written, I decided in that moment to acknowledge the spill and the imperfection of my artistic process. I then added another layer of text that read, “I was listing things I love when some blue paint spilled.” This felt like the right response, and one that I was comfortable with. This was not my first time experiencing an unexpected occurrence on a drawing. Blobs of ink have often dripped from my fountain pen resulting in unexpected but interesting images. Paint has also served as a practical and aesthetic editing tool in my journals and paintings, for example, covering undesired text, or images. My decision to leave a trail of creative decision-making in the addition or removal of visual layers reflects my belief that creating is an imperfect process and that evidence of the artistic trail yield a far more complex and interesting outcome.

Wabi-sabi: A Definition

In the temporal spaces of teaching and learning, spills occur (metaphorically speaking) when new, and/or conflicting ideas, questions, or emotions suddenly intrude into classrooms and discussions, obscuring the original intent of a lesson plan or a conversation already in progress. In this way, artistic and pedagogical spaces afford opportunities to experience what is referred to as wabi-sabi. As the writer Leonard Koren explains in *Wabi-sabi for Artists, Designers, Poets, and Philosophers* (2008), wabi-sabi is rooted in Zen Buddhism and characterizes beauty through the qualities of impermanence, imperfection and incompleteness. In this sense, both teaching and art making are spaces where all of these qualities can be noticed and embraced.

In *Everyday Aesthetics* (2007), Yuriko Saito acknowledges that we are “profoundly affected by aesthetic concerns” (p. 53), whether “art centered” or “experience-centered” (p. 12). Artistic and pedagogical practices as well as daily experience can invite us into both art- and experienced-centered wabi-sabi aesthetic experiences, where we can take a closer look at images that are impermanent and fleeting—such as a half-eaten dessert, falling leaves, or birds in flight.

Wabi-sabi in Art Practice

Historically, the wabi-sabi aesthetic is observable in fabrics or objects that become worn with age, such as the patina on bronze sculptures. This aesthetic of age is important to wabi-sabi, which Koren (2008) describes as “tarnished, fragmented, and/or in disrepair” (p. 11). In Western art, wabi-sabi might be visible in the surfaces of paintings that are heavily layered or cracked by wax, pigment, or varnish. For example, the aged surfaces of George Morrison’s or Louise Nevelson’s wooden assemblages might suggest wabi-sabi. Through manipulation of materials and techniques, artists can mimic the wear and tear of time by making objects look old, such as distressed wood.

Contemporary examples of art journaling embrace wabi-sabi. In her book *Wreck this Journal* (2012) Keri Smith, a Canadian conceptual artist and illustrator, provides prompts that encourage a wabi-sabi aesthetic through experimentation with making mistakes and embracing imperfection. Another journal artist, Sabrina Ward Harrison, in her book *Spilling Over: The Art of Becoming Yourself* (2012) embraces techniques that include visible spills, crossing out of text, overlapping paint, words, textures and photos, and a beautiful kind of messiness that leaves a trail of imperfection.



Above: Author's journal page.

Opposite: Pencil shavings. Both images courtesy of the author.

Serena Barton, a mixed media artist, uses encaustic to build up imperfect and aged surfaces that consciously employ a wabi-sabi aesthetic. She uses photography to capture the details of imperfection and impermanence in the “handmade...[and in] the humble and the worn” (Barton, 2013, p. 7), and her photos often serve as inspiration for her encaustic works. The act of stopping to take a photo to capture a wabi-sabi aesthetic might seem contradictory, that is, making something that is seemingly impermanent, permanent.

But photography does capture fleeting moments in time, and the act of taking a photograph is an opportunity to look closer. Photographs of peeling paint on walls or natural decay can inspire a wabi-sabi artistic creation (Barton, 2013; Koren, 2008). Similarly, collage can evoke the wabi-sabi aesthetic through the layering or juxtaposing contradictory surfaces such as the transparent and opaque, the old and new, or the rough and the smooth.



Sabrina W. Harrison (2000). From *Spilling Over: The Art of Becoming Yourself*. New York: Villard. Image used with permission.

A return to spilling

The spilling over of paint into my journal invited me to pause and reflect on the emergence of imperfection that had arrived on my page. This led me to read about wabi-sabi and to seek out examples in art and visual culture. This ultimately led me to a greater understanding of and appreciation for how wabi-sabi might more fully spill over into my artistic, pedagogical, and life practices. That is, in the context of a contemporary life dictated by a distancing from nature and a focus on perfection, the experience of wabi-sabi can contribute to what educator Maxine Greene (2001) described as wide-awakness, or the ability to “notice what is there to be noticed (p. 6), to expand our “capacity to hear and to see and to attend” (p. 9).

This can mean paying attention to the sky or the snow melting on the boughs, smelling fresh cut grass, listening to a woodpecker or street musicians, stopping to admire a cracked sidewalk or peeling paint, and acknowledging what philosopher Steve Odin calls “the beauty of perishability, ephemerality and fragility” that is all around us. (Odin, 2016, p. 262). Attention to wabi-sabi is ultimately a call to pause, notice, and listen to what is happening in the aesthetic spaces of our lived experience. And, in the process of pausing, a poetic action or reaction might feel necessary—allowing for a spilling over into another art form.

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(coda)

Listing things I love,
aqua blue paint
spilled over.
Stopping,
I listened.

NEXT TRENDS

Expanded Materiality: Surprise and Serendipity in Art Education

Trends 2019 invites essays and artworks that explore the way materiality matters in art education and in and through art. At the root of this call are questions about how artists and art teachers attend to the tools and materials that anchor their practices, and how producers and receivers of art pay attention to the material world.

For instance, art teacher Nancy Beal has written that materials are as much the teacher as she is. And Mary Hafeli, an art teacher educator, has argued that children “invent ways of working expressively with materials to make artworks” — just as artists do.

Working with and being guided by materials resonates with artists across disciplines. The painter Elizabeth Murray said, “I just take my cues from putting the color down and seeing how it works.” The poet Wesley McNair said that the poem tells you when it’s done. And the woodcarver David Esterly wrote: “In the usual way of thinking, you have ideas, and then you learn technical skill so you can express them. In reality it’s often the reverse: skill gives you ideas.”

In these statements we hear artists and art teachers at the threshold of surprise and the loss of control, where innovation is closer to serendipity than to purposeful design, and where coming face to face with material agency is a normal part of practice. That is, in our vibrant material world, artistic production often emerges from the liveliness of things. How does this call-and-response dynamic inform or expand art learning? How do art teachers design surprise into lesson plans and facilitate it in their students’ artmaking?

Trends 2019 welcomes submissions that explore and expand the materiality of teaching and learning. We also welcome research manuscripts that analyze the learning potentials of material practices.

See taea.org for more details. Original manuscripts must be received by January 15, 2019. Email questions to taeatrends@gmail.com.



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