

A LOOK AT COMMUNITY-BASED ART EDUCATION THROUGH MULTIPLE  
LENSES: THE POTENTIALS OF EMPOWERMENT AND ADVOCACY  
THROUGH THE ARTS

BY

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DISSERTATION

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## Abstract

Through multiple case studies, this study investigates community-based art education through three different perspectives: a provider, a student, and two artists. My motivation was my experiences working as a visual arts coordinator, instructor, and curator at a non-profit community-based art education program. Borrowing from Friere (2010), hooks (1994), and Ladson-Billing's (1995) belief that a fundamental human right is access to engaging, dialogical and critical pedagogical experiences, I argue that access to meaningful and engaging art education is a democratic right. To provide an expansive ideation of community-based art education, I identify and describe various kinds of contemporary community-based art programs in their various sites, practices, audiences, orientations. I explore the potential these programs may provide in terms of opportunities for art learning to students who may not have such opportunities within schools and facilitating community building through programming and a place for community members to gather and engage in creative activities of mutual interest. Using social capital as a framework, I look at the potential these programs provide in terms of opportunities for students to not only develop artistic skills and practices, but to develop relationships that will help students navigate a professional life, and to envision a life trajectory where these skills may be applied. In order to understand the sustained or in-depth engagement, I examine these experiences through a sense of belonging (Rowe, 2005) and Winnicott (1971) and Ellsworth's (2005) concept of transformational experiences. Through protracting our conceptualization of art education and embracing the possibilities that exist outside of or in partnership with K-12 schools, access to meaningful art education experiences can create a path of life-long learning through engagement with the arts.

Keywords: art, art education, community, social capital, multicultural art education,  
social change, partnerships

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

I grew up in a working class neighborhood. It was friendly, people watched out for one another, but there were not many opportunities to engage in the arts outside of school without venturing into the city center. I was thrilled to get a teaching position at the Art Center<sup>1</sup> because it provided me with an opportunity to bring art, something I loved, to the community where I grew up. I became interested in teaching and creating access to art education through my personal experiences which lead to a belief that art can help people. I am dyslexic and while it was mild, I reached a point in HS where I was frustrated and didn't want to go to college. When I took an art class and I realized you could get a degree in art and you could teach art, I was once again bound for college. My interest in art gave me the courage and tenacity to stick with the classes and to tackle the readings. My master's degree thesis was an action research project on art and Dyslexia. Through my teaching at the art center, I further developed an interest in access to art education and the opportunities a meaningful and engaging art education experience might provide. Now as a doctoral student at the University of Illinois, my study is an investigation into issues of access, perceptions of meaningful art experiences, and the purpose of community-based art education and its role both within a community and within the field of art education.

Community-based art education (CBAE) is a broad term that covers many different art education sites and experiences. Community-based art education is diverse and multi-faceted in its approaches but includes art education experiences that occur outside of schools or involves partnerships between outside organizations, communities, and schools. The catalyst for this research is my own experiences as a CBAE provider, the issues that were important to me going

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<sup>1</sup> In keeping with IRB protocol, I use Art Center as a pseudonym for the community-based art organization where I worked.

into my position at a community art center, and the issues that emerged through my work at the art center.

My motivation, my mission, and my perspectives on community-based art education are informed by growing up in a working class neighborhood on the outskirts of a major metropolitan area in the Midwest. Neither of my parents graduated from college, but they had a strong interest in music so I was exposed to classical concerts and museums and other experiences outside of my immediate neighborhood. This was a very different experience from my peers who seemed to be focused on sports. I lived amongst small pockets of fairly homogenous, predominantly white, middle class populations but this area was primarily working class and racially mixed. My neighborhood was isolated from the rest of the city due to being located on the outskirts of the city, limited public transportation, and a reluctance to drive into the city because of traffic, congestion, and parking. Acknowledging the limited opportunities for developing or nurturing artistic interests, my focus in working at the art center was to provide access to art, both through classes and exhibitions, to my neighborhood.

My inquiry begins with “mystory” which Denzin (2010) defines as a narrative of what was experienced and felt by the inquirer to present a critique or call to social action. Denzin states, “The mystory begins with a moment in the past that has left an emotional mark on the person. That moment connects the person to others, to family, biography, social structure” (p. 58). My moment was when I began taking art classes in college and I felt like my skills were far behind my peers. Before college, I never felt like I had missed opportunities or that I was denied experiences to which others had access. My roommate had the opportunity to take AP art classes and she knew so much about art history and drawing, topics that I had never encountered. As a result, I felt like I had to work twice as hard in order to catch up. Students who had more

experience were also at an advantage for funding and were able to get a Talented Student Tuition Waiver--a scholarship the university offered--based on a portfolio of work. As my roommate and others talked about their high school art programs, I suddenly felt my social class in a way that I never had before.

In my own experiences, art allowed me to navigate class boundaries through a knowledge about art history. I have come to believe that the study and practice of art can open doors and provide access to career paths and create a desire for life-long learning through the arts. While schools that are over-burdened with struggling students and lack of funding may not see the benefits of keeping art in the schools (Rabkin, 2004), studies of community-based art programs suggest that the arts increase self-esteem (Adejumo, 2010; Buys and Miller, 2009), improve test scores or educational performance (Catterall & Waldorf, 1999; Parsad & Spiegelman, 2012), develop a sense of community (Bastos, 2002; Congdon, 2001), and empower students (Ginwright and Cammarota, 2007).

### **Purpose for Study**

With mounting evidence that arts education programs can improve test scores, improve the social environment of schools, and build self-esteem, it should follow that everyone has the right to benefit from arts education experiences. Central to my investigation into community-based art education is the belief that access to meaningful and engaging arts education experiences is a democratic right. However, in my experiences through the Art Center, I witnessed too many students without access to regular high quality arts education experiences. The purpose of this multiple case study inquiry is to understand the role CBAE has in creating access to arts education experiences, the responsibilities these programs have to the communities

they serve, and how these opportunities and experiences might contribute to a positive future trajectory for participants.

My interest in community-based art education began with my work as the visual arts coordinator at an art center on the outskirts of a major metropolitan area in the Midwest. In my position at the center, I was responsible for overseeing in-house visual arts classes for preschool through adults, assisting with our outreach art programs in both public and private schools, and organizing and curating our gallery exhibits in the four exhibition spaces in the building. The Art Center has been in existence for over 35 years, but recently moved into its own building and became a more noticeable and active part of the community. In this new venue the Art Center was able to expand its offerings which now include classes in visual art, music, dance, and theater. There are live music and theater performances on both the professional and local level, there are films, and the Art Center is a meeting place for many clubs and organizations.

As a community-based art education provider, the Art Center also provided outreach programming to the public schools. In my capacity as visual arts coordinator, I visited schools to initiate and supervise programming. I witnessed a wide range of access and opportunities that appeared to privilege some schools over others through huge discrepancies in the services that were provided from school to school. For example, one city school had a large spacious art room with plenty of supplies and display areas throughout the school prominently featuring the artwork of the students. In contrast, I visited another older city school that was an arts-based school with a choral instructor but there was no art teacher and no artwork displayed in the offices or in the hallways. When I was teaching children's classes in the art center, I had teachers who were parents of young children signing up their own children for classes at the center, and then the teacher/parent would ask me for help on how to include art in their school classrooms. I

perceived not only a lack of access to the arts, but a desire to bring art into the schools. It was disheartening to see such a deficit in the schools and disappointing that the art center couldn't do more to provide art programming to schools in need of and with a desire for art.

The Art Center and other community-based art education programs created access to art education for some students but I could not discern the role that community-based art education programs might have in creating democratic access to art education or grasp whether a quality art educational experience has potential to enhance the lives of students or participants. Studies like the U.S. Department of Education's report on the status of art education in public schools (Parsad, B., and Spiegelman, M., 2012) and Chapman's (2005) study on the status of art education in elementary schools show statistics but they do not give a clear picture of what the programs look like. What they do show is an equity gap where lower income schools are hit harder (Brenchly, 2012; Chapman, 2005; Parsad, B., and Spiegelman, M., 2012).

Providing programming that was relevant and desirable to the community was a major concern at the Art Center, because we needed to build an audience to maintain our financial stability. As an art educator I also wanted to provide contemporary and well informed art programming to educate the community about visual art. In order to provide meaningful art educational opportunities and to build an audience, it was important to take into consideration the needs and desires of the local community. We could not accomplish either goal without the willing participation of the audiences we hoped to serve.

In order to accomplish these dual goals, it seems essential to conduct ongoing assessment or evaluation of what is being offered at the center. Yet Davis (1998) describes the problematic nature of assessment in community centers due to lack of time and money. Working at a non-profit organization, I witnessed first-hand the lack of time, personnel, and resources for

systematic program evaluation. Our evaluations were often based on the success or popularity of a program rather than examining at the quality of the program or what the program or class was actually teaching. Staff was often stretched so thin that it was difficult to keep track of what was happening, where it was happening, and for how long. While formative assessment was utilized with in-house programs, in the form of staff self-evaluation and further quantifying which classes were successful through attendance and class sign-ups, it was nearly impossible to assess what was happening in our work in the schools. Feedback from principals and teachers often focused on addressing and fixing isolated issues or expressing gratefulness for the programs. While there was evidence that the Art Center was providing access to some art experiences both at the center and in the schools, it is difficult to determine if this experience was meaningful and engaging to the students.

My perspective is deeply embedded in the context of my community and the Art Center where I was employed, yet to understand my own experiences and answer lingering questions, I needed to look outward to other points of view that relate to my own. In addition to my investigation of my work at the Art Center, I investigated two other cases in an effort to gain additional perspectives and add to the understandings and reflections of my own experiences. These additional cases include a student participant in a CBAE program and two community-engaged artists who bring art to communities outside the traditional urban environment. These cases will bring different perspectives, experiences and nuances into the inquiry. I will examine each case individually to understand the specifics of each perspective and the situated knowledge within each case. Additionally, through these case studies I will investigate and discuss issues that are a part of the larger issue of access and community-based art education.

The particulars of personal reflection and personal experience are often overlooked when trying to understand community-based programs from an outside perspective. When describing the complexities of evaluating art center programs, Stake (1998) describes “responsive evaluation” as a reflective practice that looks at the issues of specific programs through the details of the values, participants, and contexts. Looking at a macro view of programs has its own value but there is meaning to be found that can only be elicited from within. Conquergood (2004) advocates for finding “finely nuanced meaning that is embodied, tacit, intoned, gestured, improvised, coexperienced, covert~ and all the more deeply meaningful because of its refusal to be spelled out” (p.370). Rather than trying to understand these experiences from the outside looking in, I plan to investigate, contextualize, and understand my own story. Through two additional case studies, I describe other experiences and programs through the fine details of their stories told through rich narrative and their own voices.

As previously mentioned, the role of community-based art education in creating access to meaningful high quality art and art education programming will be a primary area of focus in my dissertation. I hope to come to a more complete understanding of how democratic access to art education is both created or facilitated by community-based art education programs, and how artists engage with communities through such venues. Through understanding the issues and opportunities afforded in these community-based contexts, art educators can provide more meaningful programming and challenge ourselves to reach out to the artistic community and community-based art education programs to provide greater opportunities for students both within and beyond the school walls.

Access to meaningful art education experiences can create a path of life-long learning through and engagement with the arts. Community-based art education programs provide these

experiences both within and outside of the school environment. Providing access opens up many questions about audience, meaningful engagement, community, empowerment and what these artistic experiences provide. I argue that we need to expand our conceptualization about art education and embrace the possibilities that exist outside of or in partnership with K-12 schools through artists, community centers, museums, community colleges, or universities. Others have similarly called for this action to expand the field (Lackey, 2003; McFee, 1995), but there are still numerous opportunities out there that aren't being utilized by educators and educational institutions (Keyes, 2007; Rabkin 2010). It is my perception that the field of art education is extremely cautious about embracing community arts programming as an important part of the profession and a substantive component of our art teacher preparation programs.

In the rest of this chapter, I describe the three different lenses through which I investigate community-based art education practices and experiences. I then state my research questions, briefly describe the larger context of community-based art education, define key terms central to understanding the varied contexts, positions, and issues of community-based art education, and address the limitations of this study.

### **The Cases**

The purpose of this inquiry is to understand and describe community-based art education from three different perspectives: my experiences as a community-based art education provider, the experiences of a student who participated in community-based art education programming, and the perspectives of two community-engaged artists. My experiences provide a foundation for explorations into my investigations of the two additional perspectives.

## **Mystory: An Account of a Community-based Art Education Educator**

As previously mentioned, in this study, I bring my own experiences as an administrator, classroom teacher, and curator at the art center. My research will be driven by an investigation into growing up in a working class neighborhood, pursuing a career in the arts, and returning to my neighborhood to bring art experiences to my community. Reflective journaling, reviewing past documents, and interviewing those I interacted with at the Art Center will inform my inquiry.

Reflecting on my own experiences, I describe the unique opportunity to create and provide art programming for the community in which I grew up, a neighborhood that had previously had very limited access to art-related opportunities outside of taking a trip into the city. It was a position that was exhilarating and challenging, although fraught with many challenges. Despite difficulties, I found it extremely rewarding to know that I was contributing something important to my community. In order to provide meaningful art educational opportunities, it was important to me to take into consideration the needs and desires of the community. This led me to questioning who the art center was for, why people accessed the art center, and what the art center gave to the community?

As the Visual Arts Coordinator at the art center, I was responsible for overseeing in-house visual arts classes for preschool through adults, outreach art programs in both public and private schools, and gallery exhibits in the four exhibition places in the building. Located on the outskirts of a major metropolitan area, the art center served a mainly working class community that was isolated from the rest of the city. While growing up, my parents provided me with access to the arts through piano lessons, trips into the city for concerts, and visits to museums. That experience was unique and most of my friends didn't have the same experiences

that I did. At the Art Center, the opportunity to bring art into the community was a challenge since this was one of the only places local community members would experience professional art. This inspired me to want to create interesting and challenging programming that included a variety of styles of art and art making processes. Yet there was also the challenge of trying not to alienate our target audience. This became a difficult tight rope walk which often resulted in showing work that was contemporary and/or challenging and then following it with something that was more traditional, grounded in the experience of the community, or appealing to a larger audience.

My position was unique in that I not only coordinated the exhibition spaces, I also developed and provided art programming for children and adults. This again was challenging to discern what local community members were interested in learning and knowing, what kinds of experiences they were looking for themselves, and what classes they wanted for their children. Growing up in this neighborhood was an advantage because I knew my audience from an insider perspective. Providing art educational programming for a community was challenging, however, because there wasn't always the time, interest, or money to engage in planning and development that would provide meaningful experiences while continually responding to community needs and interests. Although art might not be a primary concern for everyone, I believed then and continue to believe now in the importance of art programming. Whether art is integrated with other subjects, art for arts' sake, a long term series of art lessons, or a make-and-take event, there is something in the experience that students take with them.

While the Art Center provided many different opportunities for art classes both on the premises and at other sites in the community, including schools, I became increasingly interested in how the Art Center provided access to the arts in the surrounding communities. As I became

more involved in the outreach programming and made site visits to discuss programming. When I visited schools to teach art classes, what began to stand out to me were significant inequities in the schools. What students did or didn't have access to had an impact on how they were able to navigate through schooling and through life. I am not a believer that art can change lives because of some illusory intrinsic value but I do think art has value for personal expression, developing social capital, and developing a critical understanding of the world and our individual positions and responses to the culture in which we live.

The art center's outreach program served a much wider audience than the in-house programming and included many public schools that did not have art teachers or art programs. These schools were often in poor neighborhoods on the south side of the city serving primarily African American or Latino populations. Through visiting these schools, I became increasingly interested in bringing art experiences to children who were living in underserved areas or were from marginalized<sup>2</sup> populations in an attempt to correct the inequities in what schools offered in terms of art education.

There were limits to what I could do because of restraints dictated by the non-profit organization that I worked for. These limitations included time and funding, as well as competing and multi-layered agendas of both the center and the communities/schools we served. Through a self-reflective analysis of my own practice and through interviews with staff and administrators, I hope to better understand the issues and complexities of providing meaningful

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<sup>2</sup> I use the terms underserved and marginalized to define communities that experience inequities and lack access to resources. These terms are used to emphasize that the inequities are a result of unequal opportunities and racism rather than the deficit model. Yosso (2005), advocates for looking at and developing community cultural wealth that already exists in communities with underserved and marginalized populations. While our work at the Art Center did not operate under the assumption that we could enrich lives through educating about Western Fine Art, I am not sure that we did enough to consider the populations we were working with and how they could or could not benefit from curriculum and programming decisions. I will problematize and analyze this further through my study of my experiences working at an art center in a large urban area.

and challenging programming, and what is needed to meet the expectations of both the wider community and the internal stakeholders of the organization.

My upbringing in this neighborhood and my experiences negotiating social class and opportunities for growth lead to my interests and investment in creating access to art education through my position at the community art center. This situated experience is valuable for a self-reflective practice that is similar to critical inquiry by questioning the interactions and influence of “culture” on the individual and the contexts of those interactions. Yet, my questions, inquiry, and reflections only offer one perspective. In an effort to provide a deeper understanding and address some questions, I am turning to experiences outside of my own. It is my hope that these additional points of view will add depth to my own inquiry, answer some of my questions, and lead to new questions and understandings.

### **Through the Eyes of a Student: A Case Study of a Student Participant in Community-based Arts Programming**

I chose a case study focusing on one student who participated in a community-based art education program located in a major metropolitan area in the Midwest to understand what a successful program looked like from the student perspective. One of my missions at the art center in which I worked was to try and provide rich art educational opportunities to local students that I felt I had missed out on. I tried offering several teen art classes including a portfolio development class, a visiting artist class, and a computer art class to provide teens with opportunities and knowledge that would help them pursue an education and possible career in the arts. I was often frustrated with low enrollment and an inability to retain students. We had received a grant from the Wallace Foundation to develop teen and young adult programming. While the theater department seemed to have a large population of students that participated in

classes, plays, and musicals, the art classes only experienced minimal success. I was unable to provide a successful program to educate and prepare teens with art experiences and cultural tools to succeed in their educational and career goals.

This student was selected through the art education department at the University of Illinois, after this student self-identified as having participated in a community-based art education program from 6th grade through high school. Through an examination of her experiences and stories, I bring forward understandings about what lead her to the decision to participate in this kind of programming, what in the programming engaged her in a long-term experience, and what the student found beneficial from participating in the program. This is a study of an individual's past experience, so observation of the student participating in this program was not possible. Data was primarily collected through interviews with the student and her mother, along with visiting her home, the neighborhood, and attending an art opening at the site of the art program. Document review of student work and written materials about the program including course offerings provided additional background information for analysis and helped me develop a more complete picture of this student's experiences.

While studies have been conducted to look at the importance of community-based art education for students, it is difficult to understand these experiences from the student perspective, and rarely do we get the opportunity to consider educational endeavors from a micro level. This is why I chose to study one student and to attempt to tell her story well. The student perspective is very significant to this study because typically we only speculate about what students gain from CBAE through data collected in surveys, observations, and program evaluations. I believe a case study specific to a singular student will provide a unique

understanding of why CBAE is desirable and will point toward the potential significance CBAE has to the individuals served.

There are many issues in community-based art education that have been studied including successful programming and student impact. There are fewer studies that look at the issues from the parent and student perspective that include why parents and students decide to participate in this type of program, whether it is for enrichment, recreation, or supplement to provide art experiences that are missing from the schools, or some other reason. Also lacking are studies that focus on what the experience provides from the students' perspective. I hope this study begins to create an understanding of these experiences from a participant's perspective.

Through a series of interviews with the student and her mother, I described the pedagogical relationship between the student, the program, and individual instructors working in this environment. I wanted to know if this student responded to the program and environment because of the art making opportunities, the relationship with the instructors, content that is meaningful and socially relevant, or a combination of all of these factors. While student experiences may vary, understanding the perspective of a student may help other community-based programs and K-12 teachers provide engaging and meaningful experiences that engage students and give them hope for enacting changes in their future.

### **Two Artists: Creating a Platform for Unconventional Art in Conventional Places**

The third case study will focus on The Poor Farm, which is an artist work space, exhibition space, and educational program in northern Wisconsin. The Poor Farm was developed by two artists, Michelle Grabner and Brad Killam. I chose to look at The Poor Farm and these two artists because they have taken measures to bring art into their communities and have created access to contemporary art practices for young aspiring artists and some interested

community members. This site was interesting in part because the Art Center was started by a few instructors from a major art institution located in the city who wanted to bring art into their own neighborhood and began teaching art classes to students in their neighborhood. There is a long history of community-engaged artists (Felshin, 1995; Kester, 2004); some of these artists may legitimately be called community-based artists. Community-based art educators and community-based artists are interested in bringing art to communities. There are contemporary artists who wish to engage the community as participants in the artistic process or as an audience for the expression of a thought or investigation taken on by the artists themselves. This may benefit the community in different ways through bringing community members together to share common interests or work together in an artistic collaboration (Kester, 2004). Other artists may engage the community calling attention to community or social justice issues (Meyer 1995). Community-based artist practices vary and benefit communities in different ways.

The Poor Farm was founded and is directed by two artists, Michelle Grabner and Brad Killam<sup>3</sup>. While the space and programming of the Poor Farm are in the beginning stages, my interest was in what is currently happening as part of art and art educational programming and the vision both artists have for the space and the surrounding community. My study of these two artists was conducted through site visits to The Poor Farm in Little Wolf, Wisconsin and The Suburban, which is a gallery space directed by both artists behind their home in Oak Park, IL. I conducted interviews with both artists to gain insight about their relationship to the communities they are trying to engage and how they envision the role of The Poor Farm in both the northern Wisconsin community in which it is situated and the artistic community that are invited to the space. I also reviewed both published and unpublished writings about Michelle Grabner and Brad Killam, writings that focus on their work through The Suburban and The Poor Farm.

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<sup>3</sup> IRB permission has been obtained to use real names in this case study at the request of the artists.

I first met Michelle Grabner through the University of Wisconsin-Madison where she was a professor in the art department. She drove in from Oak Park, IL to teach there. She talked about “The Suburban,” which was a small gallery space located behind her house in Oak Park. I visited the small building behind their house that looked like a cinderblock shed. I was surprised at the number of people who were there and their willingness to stand outside and wait for their turn to look at the work in the “gallery” space. I thought it was interesting that she and her husband Brad Killam, thought to take this tiny space and turn it into an art gallery as a way to bring art that was normally only available in the city, into their own community.

During one of my visits to the Suburban for an art show, Michelle told me about her new project with her husband Brad which they called, “The Poor Farm.” The name of The Poor Farm comes from the property’s history as part of the American poor farm system. The idea was to create an artists’ space in northern Wisconsin that would be a place to work for artists as well as an exhibition place. Their commitment to bringing art to an audience outside the traditional context is evident. While their primary goal is to create an exhibition space and provide a space for artists and writers to live and work for residencies, they are also interested in the possibilities a contemporary arts space can bring to a rural community through programming and partnerships with the local schools.

### **Research Questions**

This inquiry into community-based art education is told through the perspectives of three different participants who have been involved in community-based art education practices, exploring their individual stories to come to a greater understanding of the complexity of participation in art and art educational experiences outside a traditional K-12 school setting. Since this dissertation involved investigating my own role as community-based art education

provider, a case study of a student, and a second case study of two community engaged artists, my research questions are specific to each of the three perspectives.

(1) For my study as a community-based art education provider, I asked the following questions: What were the challenges I faced as a community-based art education coordinator in my attempt to create opportunities for access to art and why was this important? What is the significance of these opportunities? What insights did I gain about the responsibility of the provider to meet the needs of the the community it serves and how is this complicated by diverse and multi-faceted community composition?

(2) In my inquiry about the student perspective, I asked: Was this experience in a community-based art empowering and, if so, is it the program, individual instructor, or a combination of both that is the change agent? How did the instructor-student relationship provide experiences that were different from the K-12 school experience? What was the student take-away from these experiences?

(3) Looking at the participation of community-engaged artists, my inquiry was driven by the following questions: What leads artists to bring contemporary art practices into a remote community and what opportunities does this provide to the community and other participants? Can a space which shows contemporary art be political because of its location? Can the act of bringing art to a new space and a new potential audience be considered social action through questioning class and audience?

The combination of perspectives from these three vantage points (a provider, a student, and two artists) is a strategy to add meaning and gain a clearer understanding of my own participation and knowledge of community-based art programming. The analysis and discussion

of these situated perspectives will also add to the complexity and breadth of knowledge about community-based art education.

### **Significance of Study**

Community-based art education is a broad term that covers many different art-educational experiences. Community-based arts education may include arts education that happens in alternative spaces like community centers (Adejumo, 2010; Davis, 1994; Lackey, 2003) and museums (Dubinsky, 1999; Kim, 2001; Meszros, 1999; Zucker, 2001), art education that defines or reconnects communities (Bastos, 2002; Marche, 1998), art education experiences that address the environment and sustains our communities (Blandy, & Hoffman, 1993), or art education that focuses on social activism (Bailey & Desai, 2005; Gude, 2000). In many ways, community-based art education is defined by the interests and approaches of alternative or non-school sites and/or community-based art educators who are trying to engage the community in meaningful experiences.

Investigations of community-based art education programs can include how they function, the ways they are funded, by whom they are created and managed, and what audiences they are trying to capture. Studies of the benefits of community-based art education to children and participants are described as follows: opportunities to experience success (Adejumo 2010; Buys and Miller 2009; Davis 2010); facilitates self-motivated and inventive learning (Adejumo, 2010, Buys and Miller 2009); provides art instruction to students without access to art as part of the regular school day (Catterall & Waldorf, 1999; Seidel et al., 2009); create relationships or connections to a place or community (Bastos, 2002; Kellman, 1998; Marche, 1998); and allows for explorations and expressions of ethnic identity (Congdon, 2001; Richardson, 2001; White, 2001).

The benefits are not limited to the students but also benefit school teachers. Teachers may benefit by reaching out beyond their classrooms and into the community to collaborate with other teachers and community members, and break down the feeling of isolation that they sometimes feel from being the only art teacher in the school. Community-based art programs may also offer opportunities to create partnerships and build relationships between the schools, organizations and communities. Finally, community-based art education programs extend art education beyond K-12 schools. In times where education is being attacked and pressure is being put on schools to teach to the test, art is once again losing ground in the school (Delacruz, 2011), it is important to see art education as an expansive network that exists within and outside of the schools (Lackey, 2008). Yet, as Keyes observes, “utilization and exploration of these types of art education practices for all age levels are still largely untapped” (Keyes, 2007, p.100).

Yet, there is always a lingering question of why these experiences are important. It is difficult to measure or compare the value of a community-based art program because they are very diverse, there are no uniform standards by which they operate, and there is no grading or testing to see if participants are learning from these experiences. In order to understand and discuss some of these intangible outcomes, I chose to look at community-based art education with attention to the framework of social capital. Social capital can be defined as the social relationships that you can access to gain the resources needed for economic capital (Coleman, 1998). This framework provided a particular way of examining how and why community-based art education programs have the potential to build a sense of community, build the self-esteem of individuals, and invite ideation of future trajectories and opportunities in the arts.

There is a history of K-12 art teachers feeling threatened by community-based programs that work with schools (Chapman, 1992) because of budget cuts and fear of losing tenure track

positions (Chapman, 2005), so embracing community arts programming may continue to be problematic. Yet, there is a growing trend toward cooperation and engaging with community-based organizations as resources (Burnaford, Aprill, & Weiss, 2001). While art education programs are continually threatened by budget cuts, community-based programs not only exist to fill in the gaps, but also represent another aspect in the field of art education. Community-based programs are also threatened by unstable finances and loss of grant funding. When community-based settings and K-12 experiences are looked at as two parts of a whole, it gives a much larger structure of support for the arts.

As stated above, it is my perception that art teachers in the field of K-12 art education are cautious about embracing community arts programming, which may result in missed opportunities for creating meaningful programming that could benefit both students and K-12 art teachers. If we understand community-based art education as an important part of the art education profession, perhaps we can gain knowledge and share resources about practices and policies present in art education that occurs outside K-12 schools through artists, community centers, museums, community colleges, or universities.

### **Terms and Key Concepts**

#### **Community**

Community can be defined through a geographical location relating to a neighborhood, town, city or a “relational” definition concerned with human relationships not limited to a location (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Community is increasingly difficult to define since there are so many different forms of community and living in a technology-based age complicates the definition even more with on-line communities. Yet, when looking at community-based programming, certain limits can help create an understanding of the communities that providers

may encounter and need to consider when developing programming. Hicks (1994) describes the complexities of most individuals identifying with more than one community. While most public schools focus on creating a school community that brings many community identities into one community, community-based settings are often more individualized and may focus on communities brought together based on common interests, cultural or ethnic identities, or connections to a neighborhood or place. Understanding that community is fluid, diverse, and complex is important to understanding the functions of an issues engaged in by community-based programs.

### **Audience**

To engage an audience, providers must be able to provide stimulating content that reflects the needs and interests of the community. Whether it is an urban community that serves an under-represented population or a rural community that suffers from joblessness and poverty, there are issues that generate anxiety among people in different communities. Community based art education can provide individuals and groups with a voice to express their needs and enable a community to take steps towards change.

Art in rural areas is often understood to be local artisans and craft-based (Manifold, 2000). McFee (1995) believed that community-based art education functions to add to an existing culture as well as preserve cultural identity through communication and sharing of beliefs and values through art I question how an artists' space in a rural community can add to and challenge an existing culture. When we live in a contemporary society experienced through media, is it possible we make a mistake in our assumptions about what is relevant to the community? Could there be people who are interested in art that explores contemporary social issues? Or even art for art's sake? Do we make a mistake in our efforts to make art relatable that

we deny access to art that may seem provocative or elitist? If we provide access can we disarm the elitist notions of art?

Community-based art education is situated within both the context and audience; the experience is driven by the location of the art education experience and by who is participating. Information about the community and the organization that is providing the experience both have a profound impact on what drives the programming. Experiences may vary drastically not only in what subject or mediums are used, but also in the length of a program and the depth of engagement. Some experiences might be a one-time drop-in project and other experiences might be more focused on sustaining long term engagement. Community-based art education can also be considered place-based because it often functions to creating community connections (Bastos, 2002; Marche, 1998). Through community-based art education experiences participants can be reconnected with the history and heritage of their own community.

### **Democratic Access to Art**

Studies have shown that meaningful and engaging art education programs can improve test scores, improve the social environment of schools, and build self-esteem and should have a significant place in an overall quality education (Adejumo, 2010; Buys and Miller, 2009; Catterall & Waldorf, 1999; Ginwright and Cammarota, 2007; Parsad & Spiegelman, 2012). Central to my investigation into community-based art education practices, is the belief that access to meaningful and engaging art education experiences is a democratic right. Access to quality art education experiences supports the fundamental human right to engaging, dialogical and critical pedagogical experiences (Friere, 2010; hooks, 1994; and Ladson-Billings, 1995). Gude (2009) expressed this idea of art education as a democratic right, stating:

Quality art education introduces students to a wide-range of art - from practices situated in museums and concert halls, to those that are created and disseminated in community centers, urban streets, local copy shops, or the home computer and the worldwide web. Youth learn that it is their democratic right to have access through understanding to the full range of cultural practices. Youth learn that it is their democratic responsibility to be life-long makers of meaning through active participation in receiving, deconstructing, and reconstructing shared meaning. (p.10)

Access to the arts and art education is determined by schooling and educational opportunities as well as location and proximity to venues such as galleries, museums, art centers, and performance spaces like theaters and auditoriums. I became interested in the issue of access to the arts through my own position of providing community-based art programming. The art center provided art exhibits and programming to the community and through outreach programming, brought art into the schools where no full time art teachers were employed. The complexities of access became more apparent the more I visited schools and saw the disparities in what schools provided to their students and the populations of students served. What did it mean for a large art center with a primarily white staff and faculty to provide art education to diverse populations in the public schools? Whose agenda was being met through these experiences? While we were focused on getting art out in the schools, looking back, I wish we had more time to think about what art experiences we were providing, not only access to art education, but access to meaningful art education. While these questions were in direct response to my experiences at the Art Center and are not easy to answer, they are questions that lead to this inquiry into community-based art education and will be addressed through my study of the Art Center in chapter four.

The importance of access can be understood through looking at inequalities in educational opportunities related to educational funding. The question of school funding and equal educational opportunities is tied up in a complex history. There have been two approaches to looking at solving the inequities that exist in public education: desegregation and school finance reform. There is no question that inequalities exist in the public school system. Stoval (2006) argues that it is necessary to look at both race and class in order to ensure progress towards social justice in education. Stoval also states that the bias of the school systems is evident in the way in which resources are distributed. These inequities can be seen just by looking at who has access to art education programs.

According to Statistics presented by Chapman (2005):

In 1999-2000, 87% of public elementary schools offered some form of instruction in the visual arts (NCES, 2002, pp.6, 20-21). The Arts Education Partnership (AEP) database for 2003-2004 indicates that 48 states have content standards in the arts; but only 20 states clearly mandate arts education (AEP, 2003). (p.120)

Chapman (2005) also describes a mix of certified professionals and classroom teachers being responsible for arts education. Chapman reports that although integrated instruction is advocated by administrators, adequate time is not available for planning and collaboration. Chapman found that art education programs vary based on resources and communities. Low socio-economic status schools are less likely to have access to arts education and those programs that do exist are at increasing risk of being cut (Chapman, 2005; Parsad & Spiegelman, 2012).

### **Multicultural Education and Critical/Cultural Pedagogy**

The multicultural approach to art education allows for more equitable education and the teaching of social justice. Programs and curriculum that promote self-study and critical analysis

of cultural assumptions offer opportunities to engage in a dialogue about social justice through art (Delacruz, 1996). Although community-based art education does not ascribe to or advocate for a singular theory or approach, there are definite ties to multicultural education (Bastos, 2002; Marche, 1998). The focus away from the grand narrative and the interest in community history and culture, a connection to a place, and individual stories can be traced to the practices of multicultural education. Community-based art education can provide an opportunity for students to take a critical look at the way society undervalues the art and culture of the local and how one's connection to their heritage and community can get lost or forgotten (Bastos, 2002). Through alternate settings or community-based learning participants have the opportunity to reconnect to community (Bastos, 2002; Kellman, 1998; Marche, 1998), discover links to a hidden or forgotten cultural heritage (Congdon, 2001; Richardson, 2001), or break down stereotypes and racist ideologies (Gude, 2000). While this learning is not exclusive to community-based art education programs, these settings and the relationships with teachers students experience in these settings may be more conducive to exploring these issues.

According to Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr (2001), multi-cultural education came out of the civil rights movement and is dedicated to fighting racism and creating equal educational opportunities. Chalmers (1992) called for art education to be cognizant of the racist history of education and specifically art education. Tracing racism back to Europe and the self-perceived superiority of Western culture, Chalmers discusses how these racist views shape not only the greater societal biases but also very specifically influences thought in art and art education. Chalmers shares the view of other multicultural educators (Delacruz, 1995; Wasson, Stuhr, & Petrovich-waniki, 1990; Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001; Stuhr, 2003), that we need art educators to acknowledge that most cultures create art and cultural artifacts that are valued and

that the creation of art serves a function in those cultures. In order to provide meaningful educational opportunities to diverse populations we need to create curricula and art education programming that is culturally significant to the populations we serve and facilitate an atmosphere of mutual respect (Delacruz, 1996). Responsible and effective teaching in a pluralist society requires that teachers not only need to be aware of their own biases but also need to be aware of our vulnerability to “powerful and ingrained traditions in art education”(Chalmers, 1992, p. 142).

In order to understand the relationship between community-based art education and multicultural art education, it is important to look at curriculum as intellectual property (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Curriculum as intellectual property is understood as the educational opportunities available to students, and is manifested in the courses offered in direct correlation to the property values of the school. Art education is often not considered part of the core curriculum and therefore does not have to be offered at every school. In fact, very few elective courses are offered in low income schools. Often when funding is cut, the electives, including art, are the first to go. In this context, art education itself may be seen as intellectual property. Lackey (2003) article cited Bourdieu’s notion of art as educational and cultural capital. Bourdieu believed art to be about the production of cultural products which translated into capital whether real or symbolic. Looking at art education as cultural capital combined with Chalmer’s history of racism in art education, one might get the idea that art education is about maintaining the status quo and has no real function or purpose in schools that primarily service marginalized populations.

The inequities in school funding result in a lack of resources, qualified teachers, meaningful and engaging curriculum, technology and course offerings including the arts. There

are many schools that do not have art programs at all. I believe in art's role for understanding one another and the cultural differences that impact and influence our conception of the world around us. The multicultural approach to art education allows for more equitable education and the teaching of social justice. Art is an essential part of understanding the visual world for people of diverse cultures. If we deny art due to budget cuts we are denying marginalized populations access to an arts-based multicultural education that could lead to a more meaningful and engaging educational experience.

Programs that engage marginalized populations may provide programming to fill in a gap or may choose to engage students in a discourse on social justice issues. Community-based art education programs may choose to operate without a social agenda because of funders or board members who do not wish to engage in social issues because they feel it is too politicized or will detract from other programming they support. Yet others feel that working with marginalized populations isn't just about providing art experiences, but also believe that the content must be meaningful and socially relevant to the population. While community-based art education programs are relatively powerless to change oppressive societal power structures, addressing social issues through art educational experiences can give students a voice and create some agency for small changes in the present and hope for bigger changes in the future. As hooks (1997) suggests:

When we, as educators, allow our pedagogy to be radically changed by our recognition of a multicultural world, we can give students the education they desire and deserve. We can teach in ways that transform consciousness, creating a climate of free expression that is the essence of a truly liberatory liberal arts education. (p.44)

Through my analysis of these three cases, myself as a provider, the student experience, and the artists at the Poor Farm, I plan to explore the notion of “elitist art.” When reading about community-based projects there is often a focus on murals (Hutzel, 2007) or art that is functional and teaches a discipline of craftsmanship (Simpson, 2003). I have participated in discussions about art at the art center where I worked, and within the field of art education about the elitist nature of fine arts. My experiences with art and artists made me believe that it was the social constructs that made art elitist and not art itself. Conquergood (2004) looks at the artist connected to manual labor:

This configuration mirrors an entrenched social hierarchy of value based on the fundamental division between intellectual labor and manual labor. In the academy, the position of the artist/practitioner is comparable to people in the larger society who work with their hands, who make things, and who are valued less than the scholars and theorists, who work with their minds and are comparable to the more privileged professional-managerial class. (p.377)

I believe that educating students through a multicultural pedagogical practice is important but when students only learn about art that is social justice oriented, it can send a message that they can only participate in one kind of art. Providing opportunities for students to engage in all different kinds of art can be also be empowering and it is up to each individual to choose their level of participation and beliefs about art.

While social/political art is important and access to art and art education curriculum that is socially and culturally responsive is necessary, it is also empowering when students learn about all aspects of art, even art that is thought of as elitist. If we teach students only about art that reflects their culture or their minority group then we are also sending them the message that

this is the art that is “for them” and that the art in museums and galleries is for someone else. As a curator, I began to question if it was necessary to show political art or underserved artists in order to be political. I left my position as a curator and community-based art educator with lingering questions: Is bringing art to a new space and a potential new public political and can it be a form of social action?

### **Social Capital**

Social capital allows an investigation of the significance of the social relationships and support systems that exist in community-based art programs and provides a structure for understanding what participants experience and what is gained through these experiences. Social capital is a resource for people that can exist as reciprocal favors and trust, information, and the norms and sanctions of a community (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1998; DiFillippis, 2001). It is the social relationships that you can access to gain the resources needed for economic capital. Coleman (1988) defines social capital not as a single entity but a variety of entities that are embodied in the social relationships among people. Social capital is not an attribute of an individual; it is an attribute of the social relationships of an individual or a community. Social capital is a resource bound to the social relationships that an individual or group has access to. Social ties to a community may be demonstrated in organizations and community programs. These connections have the potential to provide access to upward mobility if the social ties have vertical access to power.

Social capital is inherently tied to power relations, and social networks with access are often closed networks to protect the interests of those who are benefitting from the social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; DiFilippis, 2001). DiFilippis (2001) clarifies that social relationships or networks can be very dense, but unable to generate desired resources because of a lack of access.

For example, high poverty areas may have high participation in church and community groups but they are unable to secure better employment because there is no one with connections to employers or politicians who might be able to open up employment opportunities. Marginalized and minority populations, inner city neighborhoods, poor rural areas may all have social networks and community organizations but what they lack is power and access to resources. This can be described as lateral social capital. Community-based programs may offer potentials for developing social capital and providing the potential to build relationships that lead to future access.

### **Lateral Social Capital**

Participants in community based settings often develop relationships with fellow participants that create a sense of community. These relationships are significant in these settings because students support one another. The social interactions and conversations about discovery, struggles, art, techniques, studio practice, aspirations, and goals become part of the educational experience. While there may not be power in these lateral relationships to make connections to professionals who can help with future goals, the social bonds between the students contributes to an atmosphere of dedication and commitment. Lateral social capital has the potential to enhance the experiences through peer relationships. Participants became part of a community that provided support, inspiration, and collaborative learning opportunities.

My use of social capital in this study was an attempt to understand what can be gained through participation in community-based arts education programs and uncovering what leads to sustained or in-depth engagement. While I thought I would find opportunities to develop vertical social capital, it became apparent during my study that lateral social capital was just as important and that the two work together to both build a foundation and provide future opportunities.

Additional concepts of a sense of belonging and transitional experiences emerged as a part of my inquiry into understanding the significance of lateral social capital and what is gained by participation in community-based art education programs.

### **Limitations**

CBAE is a vast field that covers any art educational experiences that falls outside of the traditional K-12 experience, which is not limited to but includes museums, community centers, community engaged artists, teaching artists, and artist guilds. This is just a small perspective that will hopefully illuminate some of the larger issues that community-based arts education experiences have in common. As Stake (1995) suggests, all qualitative inquiry is subjective. I have chosen these three perspectives because of personal involvement or personal relationships. Stake also suggests that “subjectivity is not seen as a failing needing to be eliminated but as an essential element of understanding” (p.45). I am aware of my personal views and biases and made every effort to describe each case through the words of the participants while utilizing triangulation and member checking for validation.

It was not my intent to explain outcomes or effects of community-based art education on its participants or its providers. Rather my intent was to create three different pictures of community-based art education that lead to understandings about the complexities of engagement and participation. Photographer Diane Arbus related,

I remember a long time ago when I first began to photograph I thought, there are an awful lot of people in the world and it is going to be terribly hard to photograph all of them, so if I photograph some kind of generalized human being, everybody will recognize it. It was my teacher Lisette Model, who finally made it clear to me that the more specific you are the more general it'll be. (Rice, 2006, p.96)

Looking at community-based art education through three different lenses will allow for an understanding of how art works in the community to provide access to the arts. Following the narrative tradition of contemporary qualitative research practices, my research is deeply based in telling personal stories and reflections. These narratives can often give insight into programming and how the programming is experienced through these individuals. It is difficult to measure benefits or to show with any certainty that art programming has a quantifiable impact upon individuals. Yet these stories offer what Flyvbjerg (2006) refers to as “context-dependent knowledge” (p.222), which is best suited for understanding and learning from specificities rather than generalizations. According to Stake (1995), providing a rich descriptive experience will allow the reader to participate in a vicarious experience and formulate their own “naturalistic generalizations” (p. 85) through relating what they read about to their own experiences and knowledge base.

While these contexts may appear to be very different on the surface, I believe through an exploration of each perspective, common issues emerged. Through these individual perspectives, I came to understandings of how access is both created and/or facilitated by programs and the opportunities that access provides. Through these understandings art educators can challenge themselves to create more meaningful programming and reach out to the artistic community and community-based art education opportunities to connect their students to arts experiences beyond the school walls.

## Chapter Two

### Literature Review

In this literature review, I review community-based art education literature and programming in its many forms to study how community-based art education, in different contexts, reach the community and provide relevant arts programming. To address issues of access and social justice, I specifically look at the issues involved in community-based art education programs that attempt to address multiculturalism and social justice through programming. To capture the breadth and reach of where community-based art education takes place, I look at community center and arts organizations, supplemental art education programs in the schools, and museum education programs. To address what is learned I look at programs that address community connections or expressions of ethnic identity, multicultural approaches, and agency and activism through community-engaged artists and community based activist art. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of how this inquiry might apply to current community-based art education programs and art programs in the K-12 schools.

### **Community-based Art Education**

Community-based art education is an evolving field of art education that can be defined both through its approach to connect students to their communities (Bastos, 2002; Marche, 1998) and through educational experiences that happen in alternative spaces like community centers or museums that are outside of or in partnership with K-12 schools (Adejumo, 2010; Davis, 1994; Dubinsky, 1999; Lackey, 2003; Kim, 2001; Meszros, 1999; Zucker, 2010). In addition, Congdon (1998) also includes university programs, correctional centers, governmental organizations, senior citizen facilities, and residential settings in defining community arts programs. While the definition of community-based arts education is very broad and can include many educational

practices that are happening both within schools and in alternative sites that are part of the community, in part, community-based art education is an investigation of the “relationship between the arts and communities” (Bastos, 2002, p.70).

Community-based art education can be considered a part of community-based programming and shares many of the same challenges and issues providing programs. Community-based programs are varied in the programs that are offered and populations that they serve, but can be described as educational programs, enrichment opportunities, and recreational activities that are offered by community centers and organizations. Community-based programs can address the needs and interests of children through adults. In what follows, I describe community-based art education through where it takes place, what is learned or experienced, and benefits of participation in community-based programming.

### **Places and Spaces of Community-based Art Education**

Community-based art education is not a theory driven construct of art education. It is a very broad field of experiences that happen in partnership with or outside of the traditional K-12 education program. Community-based art education is place-based in that the experience is driven by where the art education experience is taking place. Information about the community and the organization that is providing the experience both have a profound impact on what drives the programming. In many ways, community-based art education is defined by the interests and approaches of alternative or non-school sites and/or community-based art educators who are trying to engage the community in meaningful experiences.

### **Community Centers, Art Centers, and Arts Organizations**

Community-based art education looks different depending on the site, length of program, and the community. It is the relationship between the site, the organizer, and the community that

determines programming. Community centers and community art centers offer programming that ranges from drop in arts-based leisure activities to longer term arts enrichment programs for youth and adults. The classes are taught by practicing artists or art educators who bring in real world experiences to their students. In a study of community-based educators, Degge (1987) found that most of the instructors were practicing artists with degrees in art or art education. The art instruction can vary based on the instructor, the environment, the facilities, and the supplies.

Lackey's (2003) investigation of art education outside of schools that occurs through community centers is particularly interesting because it explores the role that art education takes in this different context. Lackey looked at an art program that was taking place at a community center whose primary function was providing a place for recreation. Lackey looked at the layered agendas that were taking place around a singular art experience. The community center was dominated by teenage boys playing games and the place that was chosen for the art lesson to take place was not chosen for its ideal environment but to attract the usual gamers to a new activity and to take back some for the space at the recreation center. The art activity also served the purpose for attracting people in from the community for a free activity that they might not have been able to afford. In this way, the art activities at the community center also gave students the opportunity to explore art and materials that they might not otherwise be exposed to. Because community centers are outside the compulsory environment of K-12 Education, they have to rely on enticement for voluntary participation. This has a direct impact on programming that they are likely to offer.

Although the arts center where I worked was not a recreational community center, but an art center with an arts education mission, enticement and layered agendas also had an impact on the programming that was offered. The classes catered to patrons who were looking for art

enrichment for themselves or their children. We offered classes in music, visual art, dance and theater. Most of the classes were for students in the PreK-5th or 6th grade. After the middle school age we had much lower participation. Adults were interested in some classes but the most popular classes for adults were exercise classes which had very little to do with art enrichment. The parents who signed up their children usually wanted them to have an opportunity to be creative and express themselves. Parents definitely had their own expectations about what students should be doing in the classes and were primarily focused on the finished product students were making, rather than the experimentation with materials or the experiences gained through creative thinking. For performance classes like music, theater, and dance, the parents were concerned with the final performances their children would participate in.

Many community-based programs run by non-profit organizations rely on grant funding to cover their programs and operational costs. Funding complicates what can be offered and to whom the services will be provided. Even successful programs are susceptible to a loss of funding. For example, Adejumo (2010) described the closing of a very successful program at a community center, in Columbus, Ohio, because of a loss of grant funding. He cited that this difficulty of funding is shared by many community based education facilities. Centers and organizations offering bits and pieces of programming to the schools cannot adequately supplement formal arts education in the schools or even begin to make up the discrepancies that exist in terms of educational opportunities and access to the arts from school to school.

Many community-based programs are offered through non-profit organizations and other small organizations so there is a heavy reliance on volunteers and part-time workers. This can be problematic when volunteers don't fully connect to or understand the larger program interests of the organization. In out of school time programs, there is also a conflict between what the

children want and what adults want to provide to students. For students, out-of-school programming may feel like an extension of school with dictated lessons, heavily restricted activities, and an atmosphere of control and even repression. After being at school all day some students may have a lot of energy they need to release which is sometimes in direct conflict with the provider's desire for a safe (controlled) learning environment (Halpern, 2002). Equally important, some students may have needs or expectations that are not compatible with what the provider is able to attend to in the out- of school program.

### **A Supplement to Art in the Schools**

Many community art centers also provide outreach programming to schools without art programs. There are many schools that offer little or no art instruction as part of the regular school day (Catterall & Waldorf, 1999; Seidel et al., 2009). The art center where I worked provided arts programming to both public and private schools in the city and surrounding suburbs without art programs. These programs ranged from one time workshops to longer term regularly scheduled art experiences for students. Some programs were scheduled during the school day while others were part of after-school programs. Lackey's (2003) look at the relationship between alternative sites and K-12 schools noted the tension that sometimes exists between the two. Lackey reflects back on Laura Chapman's argument against artists-in-the schools program that was funded through the NEA. While this may be an old argument, there is still an uncertainty that persists today regarding community-based art programs replacing full-time art teachers in the schools.

Chapman (1992) argued that the NEA program was attempting to de-school the arts and replace art education teachers with practicing artists. The NEA program was not exclusive to visual arts. It included art, music, theater and creative writing. While aspects of the program

were positive, there was a lack of voice given to K-12 art education professionals and changes were being implemented that undermined k-12 art education programs rather than creating a positive partnership that would complement art education practices that already existed within the schools. Davis (2010) also looked at the competitive relationship between schools and community centers regarding the fears of some art educators and schools about enrichment programs outside of the schools replacing programs inside the schools.

My experiences with outreach programming at the Art Center, both as a coordinator and an instructor, confirmed that while there was much need for arts programming in the schools there was resistance to bring these programs into the schools in any formal systematic way. Similar to Chapman's (1992) findings, when there was a lack of communication or when initiatives came from the administrators of the schools top down, programs were met with resistance from classroom teachers. While the arts center primarily served schools without art teachers, we did also offer varied educative enrichment experiences that could not be fulfilled within the K-12 schools. We offered ceramics field trips and exhibition opportunities to local schools with art programs but were looking for additional experiences for their students, although there were not many schools looking to add to the art programs they already had in place. Lackey (2003) concludes that the clear distinctions through k-12 art programs and alternative settings like community centers should both co-exist and inform one another, and that neither should be replaced by the other.

Many community-based programs, like those offered through the art center where I was employed, supply artists to schools providing access to a population who would otherwise have little or no access to the arts. The Chicago Arts Partnership in Education (CAPE) is another example of one such program. When CAPE was created, there were large deficiencies and

discrepancies in the Chicago Public Schools when it came to the arts (Burnaford, Aprill, & Weiss, 2001). Some schools had no art teachers and other schools were sharing an art specialist who was serving over 1400 students a week with limited resources, no classroom, and little to no planning time. CAPE wanted to offer something different than programs that brought arts experiences to the schools through one-time or brief artists in residency encounters that were not connected to the school curriculum or larger school experience. CAPE's idea was to create long term programs that provided art experiences that were more integrated into the existing curricula of the schools (Burnaford, Aprill, & Weiss, 2001). While this creates successful programming in the participating schools that CAPE is able to serve, the problem of inequity and lack of access to arts education still persists in many schools.

## **Museums**

Museums and galleries have also created community-based programs to engage the community. These programs also vary from one-time special exhibitions to longer term programming directed at bringing in and sustaining new audiences. Museums have had to respond to many cultural shifts in the last several years (Attenborough, 2002; Conwill & Roosa, 2003; Kim, 2001; Zucker, 2001). Recent calls to engage the community have resulted in the expansion of the role of museum educators and museum education. There have been many different responses and projects by museums and galleries to make these cultural spaces more accessible and inviting to the communities that surround them. While responses vary dependent on the size of the institution, the administrative support, and the communities that these institutions are a part of, each approach shows an attempt by museums and galleries to take responsibility for social and educational programs to engage their communities (Dubinsky, 1999).

Museum programs and the engagement of communities have varied in importance based on the mission of the museum. Zucker (2001) and Kim (2001) both look at the shifts in educational theories and administrative decisions that influence the mission of museum education in major institutions. Museum education can be directed through the institution but as Kim (2001) and Zucker (2001) describe, it is often driven by the vision of one person. Zucker looked at Anna Curtis Chandler who began her work at the Metropolitan Museum of art in the library department where she developed the idea for a story hour in 1917. Chandler's story hour attracted a large crowd and lead to the development of several educational programs for children and adults including programs designed for schools, professional development for teachers, lectures and tours, and eventually outreach through radio broadcasts and books. Kim writes about Victor D'Amico's museum education program at the Museum of Modern Art. D'Amico was inspired by progressive education and John Dewey and as a result, the programming he created was far more elaborate than previous programs.

Kim (2001) and Zucker (2001) both describe successful museum programs that focused on providing educational programming to visitors to create a more meaningful museum experience. The success of the programs brought in visitors from the community. Zucker (2001) describes the success of Chandler's stories in the first year drawing 8,700 visitors and the growth and development of her program that attracted 80, 000 visitors in her final year. Kim (2001) describes D'Amico's success in making the Museum of Modern Art more comfortable and accessible for a diverse age range, through the creation of a Young People's Gallery, a War Veteran's Art Center, and the Peoples Art Center. Through these exhibits, D'Amico also gave the community a voice within the museum walls. While communities generally value museums very few people feel like they have any influence or ownership in museums or in the

programming that they offer (Allen-Greil & MacArthur, 2010). When D'Amico left much of his work was undone but while he served at MOMA he won national and international recognition for his programs (Kim, 2001). While individuals were central to the success and popularity of these programs, these individuals also valued the importance of engaging a community.

Another way for a museum to engage a community is through a specific exhibit that might be in a museum, a gallery, or an art center. Blandy and Congdon (1988) discuss art and community through an exploration of community based aesthetics through an art exhibit of everyday objects at the Bowling Green State University School of Art Gallery. The exhibition was unique not only in its subject matter but that it was curated by the community itself, rather than being an outsiders interpretation of what is local art or what is assigned aesthetic value as a community. The exhibit that resulted was called "Boats, Bait and Fishing Paraphernalia: A local Folk Aesthetic" and featured objects that were part of the local fishing culture but were not seen as art. Boats, lures, rods, clothing, keepsakes, and snapshots were included in the exhibit. The exhibit was successful not only for the expression of a community but the attention and interest that the exhibition attracted. Because of dichotomy of the subject and the location of the exhibit interest was generated both by venues specific to the fishing industry, like Field and Stream magazine, as well as national news outlets that saw the partnership of the University gallery and the local fishing industry as a story of national interest. Many members of the local community visited a gallery for the first time and the audience of this exhibit represented a diverse community of local residents, fisherman, art students, and faculty.

Another example of targeting a new audience is described by Falk & Dierking's (2000) look at marketing an exhibit at the museum to a specific community that the museum is trying to engage. They give the example of the African Art exhibit that was marketed to the local African

American communities in an effort to increase their attendance of the museum for both the special exhibit and continuing after. Through the efforts the museum took to know the audience and where to advertise in their community through churches and other community groups, there was a huge increase in African American visitors during the exhibit. The museum used target marketing to churches and community centers that would appeal to African Americans and informed them that there was something at the museum for them. While the museum saw an overall increase in visitors during the exhibition, attendance after the exhibit concluded dropped back significantly. There are two problems revealed with this example, one is that the museum assumed that African Americans would naturally be interested in African Art, and the second is that this was a one-time exhibit not an ongoing shift in museum policy to try to be more inclusive in what is presented at the museum. Conwill and Roosa (2003) point out that true community involvement requires trust that takes time to develop through an ongoing, sustained dialogue and collaboration.

As noted above, while targeting an audience through a specific exhibition can bring in a new group of people while providing an enriching experience for a community, it often becomes a one-time experience. It is difficult to sustain a connection to the new audience over a long period of time. The primary interest of museums, galleries, and art centers is to build their audience base that they often rely on for funding. While educational and community-based programming has the potential to reach new audiences, it is also important to know the audience and be willing to incorporate their needs and interests into your overall mission. Sherwood (2009) observes, “New understandings of audiences based on segmentation research, and of their communication preferences and habits, are leading to new ideas about how arts institutions can reach the people they want to attract as attenders and potential donors” (p.4). There is

interest by providers to not only reach new audiences but to provide community-based programming that will meet the interests and needs of the community.

Engaging communities in meaningful experiences has the twofold outcome of educating the public about art and creating a community of support for the museum. Similar to Lackey's (2003) identification of the layered agendas of community centers, museum education programs provide an education in the arts for the benefit of individuals and communities but they also depend on education programs to draw in new visitors to help sustain their programs through funding that is generated through the patrons. Families can play a major role in increasing the audience of a museum and engaging the community. Programs are created specifically to attract families and children who will hopefully become life-long learners and patrons. For example, Meszaros (1999) describes a "Super Sunday" experience that occurs on the third Sunday of every month at the Vancouver Art Gallery. The event includes story-telling, performances, tours, and up to 10 hands-on activities. While this event is not exclusive to families there are many hands-on activities that are planned for children which may include writing projects, quick hands on art activities, or longer more involved activities.

Falk and Dierking (2000) believed that the social dimensions of learning were important for museums to consider and suggested more efforts should be taken to set up places of social and interactive learning for families. Many museums have a hands-on room with opportunities for families to sit and discuss things while learning together in an environment that is comfortable and much more like a space at home. Meszaros (1999) mentions an open studio as part of a hands-on people centered space to facilitate learning in a comfortable and welcoming environment. The open studio is a space with accessible hands on activities for all levels of skill and experience. The open studio is available during the regular gallery hours and provides a

social multi-sensory learning space. Meszros (1999) also discusses reading rooms and comment corners as a place to sit and read exhibition catalogues and to have time to absorb and share with others what they have seen and experienced through the exhibit. Through comment corners, places in the exhibit where visitors can leave messages taped to the wall, visitors were given an opportunity to speak back to the exhibit.

The Wallace Foundation took a look at participation building as part of the 2009 Wallace Foundation Grantee Conference (Sherwood, 2009). Sherwood's conference report confirmed that people who have educational experiences are more likely to attend performances and museum exhibits. Through providing more educational hands-on experiences as described above, museums, galleries, and other arts institutions may create renewed interest in the varied exhibitions, performances, and programming they provide.

## **Discussion**

Community-based art education can be considered place-based because it often functions to creating community connections (Bastos, 2002; Marche, 1998). Community-based art education experiences may vary drastically not only in where the learning takes place, but also in the length of a program and the depth of engagement. Some experiences might be a one-time drop in project and other experiences might be more focused on sustaining long term engagement. These places of learning provide access to arts education to their surrounding communities, targeted populations to serve or expand an audience, and schools that lack art instruction or provide after-school programming.

Programs like CAPE may succeed in serving underfunded and schools with marginalized populations but the this model is very expensive, time consuming, and limited by funding and willingness to follow a strict model. For schools that cannot afford a deep level of commitment

required of the teachers and the school for long term programs, there are shorter programs that can offer art experiences but there is often not the same level of engagement, there is rarely enough time to create a culturally responsive curriculum, and becomes very similar to a “drop-in” or “make and take” art experience that one might find in out of school settings. Lackey (2003) describes this type of short term experience through a young girl working with clay at an art center. There is noise and other activities going on that could easily detract from the art making experience, but while the experience wasn’t ideal, Lackey points out that the child may still take away a positive experience. This could be a first experience working with clay that inspires further investigations, or the benefits could simply be through having a positive interaction with an adult art instructor. It is possible that there is value in providing art making opportunities no matter how limited they may be.

Community programs and schools often work in partnership with one another but there is both a history of K-12 art teachers feeling threatened by community-based programs that work with schools (Chapman, 1992) and a growing trend toward cooperation and engaging with community-based organizations as resources (Burnaford, Aprill, & Weiss, 2001). While art education programs are continually threatened by budget cuts, community-based programs not only exist to fill in the gaps but also represent another aspect in the field of art education. Community-based programs are also threatened by finances and loss of funding but when community-based settings and K-12 experiences are looked at as two parts of a whole, it gives a much larger structure of support for the arts.

Museum education has taken a more important role while developing as a field and has a role in community-based art education (Congdon, 1998; Villeneuve & Sheppard, 2009). Museums may have a traditional role to define, collect, and preserve art but many museums have

found the need to take on a stronger educational identity in order to engage with and sustain an audience base that supports the museums and its programs. While there were dynamic programs that were driven by visionary individuals (Kim, 2001; Zucker, 2001), there is an increasing attempt by museums to engage and expand their communities (Dubinsky, 1999).

There is a growing body of literature that describes successful museum education programs and creates an understanding of the possibilities and best practices to design an effective museum education program. There are permanent programs and even structural negotiations of space within the museums specifically intended to educate and expand audiences. These programs often target a specific population, for example, Family Days or events. There are also examples of one time exhibits and events that target populations but don't sustain a long term engagement (Blandy & Congdon, 1988; Falk & Dierking, 2000). Conwill and Roosa (2003) argue that community involvement requires trust that is built over time. Sherwood sums up the importance of education programs in museum and gallery settings as an integral role in participation and audience building.

### **Learning Through Community-based Art Education**

In order to understand community-based art education in the context of different learning and instruction, Marche (1998) defined three different approaches: "Taking from, Learning about, and Acting upon" a community. Similarly, Villeneuve and Sheppard (2009) described community-based art education approaches as: community as place, community as learning group, social good of the community, and community heritage and traditions. Villeneuve and Sheppard's description of community as place and community as a learning group differentiate between where the learning takes place to define community or the group of learners that define community. Marche's "Taking from" approach is described as going out into the community and

finding objects to use in an art making experience, the community serves as source material. Marche's "Learning about" and Villeneuve and Sheppard's "Community traditions and heritage" approach is derived from multicultural education where students are asked to investigate their own communities and histories which require the definition of art to include local arts and crafts. Both Marche's "Acting upon" and Villeneuve and Sheppard's "Social good of the community" take more of an activist approach where students are looking at the community beyond the buildings and the people and including the environment or place in which a community resides and asks students to look at how they can care for that which sustains their community. Villeneuve and Sheppard pointed out that while these approaches can be focused on individually, there are often overlaps or incorporation of multiple approaches.

### **Creating Community Connections**

One of Marche's (1998) previously mentioned approaches to community-based art education was "Learning about" their community. Bastos (2002) also described community based art education as a way to revitalize their connections and identity within a community. The function of art within a community can be described as art being tied to a place, a narrative through relating to a space as an individual or a group (Kellman, 1998; Villeneuve and Sheppard, 2009). These authors cited the need to include both the art and the people of the community. In other words, art that comes from a place is connected to a place and can help define or create narrative about a place. Kellman (1998) asserts that through creating opportunities for students to explore where they live and their surroundings, whether it is self-guided or in the company of experts or artists, students are able to create their own narrative about their relationship to a place. When writing about the Pueblo people, Kellman describes a relationship between place and community, "place ties together individual lived experience and the content of Pueblo socio-

cultural life” (Kellman, 1998, p. 39). Experiences such as this may be an opportunity to develop a sense of community as they understand and share their narratives and their connection to a place thereby building their cultural capital through their connection to the community.

Community-based art education can benefit the community by bringing attention to a historical or community heritage that is significant to a community. Bastos (2002) looked at the connections between community and culture as expressed through local art that is a part of daily life. According to Bastos, through an exploration of the local, students gain a better understanding of the community which they are a part of. Looking at Leah Morgan’s classroom, Bastos identifies the importance of Morgan’s decision to include local artists and artisans into the classroom. Students also had input into the class and help to drive the curriculum towards local concerns. When a student was interested in Industrial Design, Morgan included chair design and was able to get grant money to incorporate a partnership with a local desk and chair company with her classroom community. Morgan was able to show students a different perspective of what goes into a business while exploring more expressive and creative chairs. Students were able to see a connection of art and functional objects and art as a part of their community. This enabled students to see a connection to art outside the classroom and the potential of art as a commodity.

Villeneuve and Sheppard (2009) also share a study of a community-inspired curriculum that helps students consider the image of their neighborhood and connect to the history of the place and the community. Rather than working with local artists, Sheppard asked students to investigate the image of their community “Frenchtown,” the history of flooding and community actions, the connection to French cultural influences, and learning about Impressionism along with the Emancipation Proclamation which took place at a similar moment in time. Outcomes

included students seeing this area differently and identifying with historical landmarks, and becoming more aware of community assets and resources.

Community-based art education also provides individual and community expressions and explorations of ethnic identity. Art becomes an expression of that cultural heritage and a way to self-identify with a community. Within these communities art is both tied to and expressive of history and tradition (Congdon, 2001). One example of this relationship is expressed by Richardson's (2001) look at the work of Elizbietas Ribokas. While continuing the tradition of creating Lithuanian sashes while in exile, her work began to take a political turn not through grand statements or large public works but in small expressions through gifts to dignitaries as a reminder of the plight of Lithuania during Soviet Occupation.

Sometimes expressions of cultural heritage find their way into a more public arena outside the originating community. White (2001) looked at the influence of Pedro J. Lemos influence on the field of art education through his own explorations of cultural identity and his position as editor of School Arts Magazine. Lemos established a sense of community through his own family history and cultural artistic practices, an affinity for Native American culture, and through the community of teachers that read and contributed to School Arts Magazine.

Community based art education can exist outside of the confines of an institution and may in fact exist within a familial or individual expression that spills over into the community.

### **Multicultural Approaches in Community-based Art Education**

Community-based art education responds to the needs of a particular community. This is achieved through knowing a communities individual needs and interests. The focus away from the grand narrative or a mega culture and toward interest in the individual stories, the focus on the heritage or history of a place, and community participation can be traced to the practices of

multicultural education (Bastos, 2002; Marche, 1998). As previously stated, some community-based programs and community-based art education programs also have the goal of social reconstruction. Bastos (2002), points out that this is a commonality of both multicultural education and community-based art education. The potential of community-based art education to reconstruct and revitalize the connections between students, schools, and community are central to this goal. Looking at the local art of the community and involving local community members into the various projects and processes included in community programming help to link students to their own cultural heritage that is intern linked to a particular place and a particular community. Teachers can guide students to see how the society at large undervalues the art and culture of the local, or how ones connection to their heritage and community can get lost or forgotten (Bastos, 2002).

In this view, the art world doesn't have to be limited to the established arts of Western culture; and many community-based programs are interested in exploring the art world and cultural heritage of a particular community. Bastos's (2002) reflections of Leah Morgan's classroom looking at a local chair manufacturer, or Blandy and Congdon's (1988) look at community aesthetics through fishing regalia are examples of community based art education breaking down barriers to conceptions about art and facilitating an inquiry and understanding of art in everyday lives. Reflecting on the definition of art and local artistic practices also calls for reflection on the hidden social agenda that still perpetuates and advocates for a distinction between high and low art. Even in community-based settings there are still problems of privilege that can exist in terms of who has access to the programs and services that are offered (Lackey, 2003).

The Spiral Workshop in Chicago also exemplifies this attempt to forge a strong connection between multicultural education and community-based art education. Gude (2000) describes a project exploring the relationship we all have with color and the values, and symbols that are associated with color. Through several projects, her students explored artistic uses of value and color as well as looking at popular culture references in movies and media that assign assumptions and meanings to color, and to light and dark values within colors. Students then explored these how cultural concepts of color find their ways into the classroom and community. Hicks (1994) describes at the importance of helping students who are not in the mainstream culture to negotiate between the expectations of their own community and the dominant society. Gude's (200) work achieves this negotiation through challenging White privilege and asking her students to take a critical look at what most people assume to be cultural norms. Under Gude's guidance students challenge these assumptions, and the culmination of these explorations results in the creation a group project within the school community. As Gude and Hicks demonstrate, art can help members of a particular community identify and understand cultural assumptions and break down stereotypes and racist ideologies and at the same time, serve as an expression of a community to educate about and celebrate cultural identities.

### **Agency and Activism**

Thus far, the discussion has been around places community-based art education occurs and the learning that is provided through community-based art educational experiences to a variety of audiences. Both Marche (1998) and Villeneuve and Sheppard (2009) discuss approaches to community-based art education that address the needs of the community. To engage an audience, providers must be able to provide stimulating content that reflects the needs and interests of the community. Whether it is an urban community that serves an under-

represented population or a rural community that suffers from joblessness and poverty, there are issues that people in communities are anxious about. Community based art education can provide individuals and groups with experiences and a voice to express their needs and enable a community to take steps towards change.

Issues such as the environment which sustains the community (Blandy and Hoffman, 1993; Neperud, 1995), community advocacy (Hutzel, 2007), and social and political change (Bailey & Desai, 2005; Gude, 2000) are social-activist themes that are explored through community-based art education. This is similar to community-based programs, as described by Ginwright and Cammarota (2007) that seek to facilitate a deeper engagement with the children and focus on leadership, self-advocacy, and social justice. They write, “Through organizational processes, young people experience critical civic praxis and thus comprehend the full, humanistic potential to create social change” (p.699). Beyond recreation, enrichment, or socialization, community-based programs can promote youth agency.

**Environment.** Art education experiences can, for example, create an opportunity for students to engage in dialogue about social and political issues surrounding ecological and environmental concerns. Blandy and Hoffman (1993) find that community based art education is ideal to explore issues of environment because of its well established link between art, student, and community. In order to expand the definition of community-based art education to include environmental concerns, Blandy and Hoffman call for a shift from an anthropocentric conception of community-based art education to an eco-theoretical orientation. This would expand the notion of community to also include the place and environment, in which a community resides, thrives on, is dependent on, and therefore needs to care for. Such a shift in definition of community puts an emphasis on the interdependence between the community and the

environment. In order to introduce students to this expanded view of community; Blandy and Hoffman suggest introducing students to art and artists that work with ecological themes and concerns. Experiencing art in this way will lead students to their own inquiry of community, environment, and sustainability.

The environment is a popular theme in art education but the environment is more than just a concern for nature, a more social political approach looks at the physical and natural environment which sustains and surrounds our daily lives. Neperud's (1995) research looks at the environments in which we live and interact. Neperud defines the environment as our surroundings in many different contexts. He believes that it is important for students to be able to be aware of their interactions with different environments whether it is the school, their room, their home, their town, or places they have been. Neperud believes that people plant gardens, decorate their homes and create graffiti and murals from a similar need to have an effect on one's environment. Since community-based art education occurs outside of the school environment, it is open to critical investigations into the impact these environments have on self-perception and self-expression.

**Social Change.** While there is evidence that community-based art education can provide an opportunity for a community to come together and voice their concerns, another question is whether or not it can provide opportunities for real social change. Hutzler (2007) described a community project to take back a public playground from drug dealers and gangs. Children from the neighborhood were participating in two community programs in a community that suffers from a high poverty and high crime rate. Through observing drawings of the participants, Hutzler determined that children wanted a safe and clean environment. Murals were created that reflected the interests of the children and the attention and press coverage from the activity created a

spotlight on the playground areas that was undesirable to the gangs and drug dealers. Rather than approaching the murals simply as beautification, Hutzler advocated for a process of listening to and understanding the goals of the participants and enabling the community to take action. The murals not only created a nicer environment but also represented a community's ability to take back what was theirs. This supports Ulbricht's (2005) view that, "Programs that educate or memorialize also empower. Community-based programs and projects have a continuum of purposes" (p. 10). Community-based art education in its many forms has the potential for community expression and social and political change.

Similarly, Bastos (2007) describes a partnership between the University of Cincinnati and a neighboring community to create community-based works of art to empower an underprivileged community through art. This program provides service learning opportunities for art education students who work directly with paid youth participants to both create small scale projects and conceptualize and execute larger projects. Rather than a one-time intervention, this program has continued for approximately 14 years and produced over 50 projects, some permanent and others that are temporary. This sustained partnership between the university and the community creates opportunities for university students, youth, community members, and collaborating organizations to have a voice in identifying community needs and selecting appropriate projects to execute.

**Activist Art and Artists.** Bailey & Desai (2005) consider community-based art education as a vehicle for looking at the world through multiple critical lenses, looking at how contemporary artists express ideas and concerns about power structures and social structures impact on individuals and the community. Contemporary artists engage the community in many ways both as participants in the artist's process or an audience for the expression of a thought or

investigation taken on by the artists themselves. Looking at the way artists investigate issues of identity, history, culture, or community allow students to engage in their own critical explorations. Although not all contemporary art is political or critical in nature there are many artists that do create work about social issues with many diverse approaches.

Looking at activist art and community-based artists can help lead community-based programs looking to facilitate social change. There is a long history of community based artists advocating for social change. Felshin (1995) explores artist's creative practices directed towards activism through the arts. Art in this sense is taken outside the traditional confines and brought into the public spaces of the community to encourage participation that will lead to social change. The line between the real world and the art world is blurred as artists employ the use of media and technology to deliver their message. This results in challenging the hierarchies of the art world as well as the hierarchies of social power that define and lead our culture.

Like multicultural education, Activist art has its origins back to the 1960's during a time of political activism and social upheaval. Activist art, political activism and multicultural education shared a common goal of giving a voice to the disenfranchised. In order to achieve the goal of reaching into the community and effecting social change, artists began working in groups and collaborating to deliver a message. The art doesn't stand alone as a singular piece but is a part of a process to engage a community in the idea of social change.

Activist art also changed the notion of what public art is (Pincus, 1995). Artists saw a potential to create socially conscious public work not in the confines of a traditional outdoor installation that could be seen and forgotten, but a more pervasive approach to bring their activist art message into the daily lives of the community through the media and multiple exposures to their message. In one project, for example, David Avalos, Louis Hock, Elizabeth Sisco brought

their message about immigration to the San Diego community through posters which were displayed on one hundred buses for one month. This turned out to be a very effective way to get a message out and engage the community because not only did the format create an opportunity for multiple exposures to the message but the popular media also became a deliverer of the message. This group of artists worked together on several projects to engage the community in a dialogue about several marginalized populations and to bring these stories to the forefront through billboards, benches, and posters.

Similarly, the artist group Gran Fury brought attention to the aids crisis by using media, posters, and installations to deliver their message (Meyer, 1995). The power of this approach was in the response to the work as much as the work itself. Vandalism to posters and responses to the vandalism brought the message into the popular news media. Gran Fury also employed familiar image to grab attention and get their message across. Leaving flyers that looked like money on one side and carried their message on the other on the streets of Wall Street was both a comment on greed and a way to get people to notice their message. Leaving “bloody” handprints on around the city and hanging posters of a bloody handprint with a message about the government and aids brought the message off of the walls and into the community.

Gran Fury group also succeeded in bringing world media attention to their message about Aids when they were invited to the Venice Biennale and decided to submit work that took a critical look at the Pope and the Catholic churches stance on aids. The group was able to bring attention to their message outside of the art world when there was controversy about whether it would be allowed into the country and displayed at the Biennale. While the group was very successful at getting their message across they disbanded from working as a group (Meyer, 1995).

## Discussion

There are similarities in the missions and goals of community based artists and community-based art education. Community-based art educators and community-based artists are interested in bringing social justice issues to the attention of the community. Whether it is through being able to identify with and honor one's own community history and cultural heritage or calling attention to a marginalized or unrecognized part of the community and culture. Culture, social status, and mobility are seemingly inextricably linked through the arts. Critical explorations of power and society can lead students and communities to new perspectives about their own identities as part of a larger culture. Providers of community-based art education, like K-12 educators, may be limited or shy away from art as social action because they have to answer to the communities they serve or grant providers which may be more conservative or disinterested in radical change. Yet Duncum (2011) writes,

In a climate where a sense of community is problematic and where environmental concerns have been ignored, making public art, whether it is in a rural or urban setting, is to stake out a claim, a physical declaration of both resistance and a forwarding of a different vision. (p. 353)

Community-based art education is more than art education that happens in a community setting rather than a school setting. Community-based art education programs can help participants create or respond to narratives about their community (Bastos, 2002; Kellman, 1999; Marche 1998) and develop knowledge about their community through local artists (Bastos, 2002) or an investigation of historical and cultural origins of the community (Villeneuve & Sheppard, 2009). Additionally, community-based art education experiences can also provide

opportunities to develop connections and expressions of ethnic cultural heritage and tradition (Congdon, 2001; Richardson, 2001; White, 2001).

Some art educators go beyond facilitating a sense of community or creating public artwork and challenge their students to address social issues more directly through their art projects. Art educators and teaching artists may look to activist art and artists such as Gran Fury. Bailey & Desai (2005) discuss projects by contemporary artists that offer a model and a site of investigation to form their own artistic inquiries into issues and concerns of the community. Artists, educators, and students can explore and create artwork that facilitates a critical discourse around issues of social justice, power, and political issues.

The environment is a popular theme in art education but the environment can also be a point of activist concern. Blandy and Hoffman (1993) ask students to think about the place and environment of their community while looking at artists that work ecological themes. Neperud (1995) looks at the environment as contexts in which we live and interact believing students need to be able to think critically about their interactions with schools, their room, their home, their town and the possible impact on self-perception and self-expression. Villeneuve and Sheppard (2009) also discussed the context of community and changing community-perceptions through investigations into community histories and participation.

As discussed, there are many issues that are relevant to community-based programs. In contrast to public schools, community-based programs are free to create their own programming responding to the particular needs of a community. There is also a freedom for instructors and providers to set their own policies and agendas that fit the environment and mission of the program. But, this freedom also allows for social and cultural bias of the instructor or provider to influence programming. While some providers may want to provide meaningful and stimulating

programs that encourage student agency to think about and respond to social justice issues, there is a risk of programs that may just be another form of social control, expecting to improve behavior and keep children out of trouble through providing another school-like structure.

### **Benefits of Community-based Art Education**

Stake (1998) discusses the development of community-based art education programming stating, “They have grown up largely to expand the arts community but increasingly assume responsibility for social improvement” (p. 16). Community-based programming can offer students opportunities for students to experience success. Programs may also aide students through offering real world experiences, developing problem solving skills, and building social relationships. Through community-based programs, students have the opportunity to develop social capital which may help participants to decode societal systems, critique institutional inequalities, and navigate mainstream institutions that may offer upward mobility (Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

### **Developmental Gains and Social Capital**

When describing the outcomes of community-based programming, Halpern (2002) mentions socialization, acculturation, training, and problem remediation as additional agendas that are central to some community-based programs, particularly after-school programs in low-income areas. After school programs and other community programs often exist to keep children safe and off the street while at the same time providing recreation and socialization. In addition to providing a safe haven and promoting youth agency, Hansen, Larsen, and Moneta (2006) were interested in children’s developmental gains resulting from participation in out of school time activities. Identity, emotional regulation, interpersonal development, initiative, team work, positive relationship, and social capital were the developmental gains they measured. While

different activities provided different development-enhancing experiences, the findings showed that the different organized activities exceed academic classes in all developmental areas.

Perhaps this is because unlike the standardized environment of schooling, the diversity of community-based programs and the voluntary nature of participation allows for programs to be responsive to the changing needs and circumstances of the participants and communities they serve.

Through community-based art education experiences, there are opportunities for participants to develop social capital. Social capital is provided to individuals or groups through meaningful art education experiences. There are many community-based programs that attempt to increase the social capital of their participants. Buys and Miller (2009) conducted a pilot study in Australia looking at the social capital that is enhanced in students through participation in a community based project. They looked at social capital in terms of *self-concept, helping others, meeting new people, feelings of belonging and obligation to finish the project, trusting the program leaders and other participants and feeling safe*. The participants were from socio-economically disadvantaged areas. Buys and Miller found that students enjoyed the experience and the ability to learn from the participants and teachers in a safe environment. They concluded that participation in community based art education programs do have the potential to have a positive impact on self-concept through meaningful and collaborative interactions with others.

### **Alternative Environments**

An important aspect of community-based programs is that they offer an alternative setting or experience from traditional schooling. A student who may struggle in school can sometimes flourish in these alternative settings. This may be due to a different relationship that is set up with the teachers. In these settings teachers are often in the role of a mentor or facilitator

rather than an authoritarian figure. Community-based programs can offer a safe place to explore different thoughts or identities which may be in direct conflict with who they are in the school setting. The structure and fluidity of an alternative environment can be a positive change from the rigid structures of a school environment (Adejumo, 2010; Davis, 2010).

Davis's (2010) research through Project Zero<sup>4</sup>, suggested that students who are unsuccessful in schools may find success in community centers. The reasons for this varied but included different student relationships to both the environment and the teachers. Adejumo (2010) also describes a different role between teacher and student where there is a partnership between the two. The teacher may still initiate learning but does not restrict innovative thinking and intuitive knowledge that may emerge through the participation of the students. He refers to this as a decentralized learning environment which allows for a greater connection to the community. Adejumo also observes that schools' structured curriculum creates walls between the school environment and the communities that the schools serve.

Neperud (1995) agrees with this perception of the school environment and states, "Kids shouldn't have to leave school to get into the real community. Academic studies and authentic community work need to be linked more significantly than is currently the case"(p. 231). Adejumo describes a way of working which creates more flexibility and allows teachers to respond to student interests, issues, and concerns. An example of this was given by Adejumo when he described a situation where students came in upset after someone they knew was killed. The instructors changed the schedule to allow students to respond in a personal and constructive way to the frustration they felt about their unsafe neighborhood. This mode of learning also facilitates self-motivated and inventive learning which is made meaningful through real life

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<sup>4</sup> Davis was a principal investigator into the effectiveness of community arts centers conducted by Project Co-Arts at Harvard's Project Zero.

applications. For example, Buys and Miller (2009) also looked at the way alternate learning environments can provide a beneficial learning environment for students who struggle in traditional schools. Buys and Miller argue that potential that art has to create an opportunity for real world meaning making can facilitate student independent and critical thinking. When students are engaged in meaningful activities where they can express their feelings and ideas about issues or social injustice they are able to explore their ideas about themselves or their communities in a safe and meaningful context.

Another advantage to no-school or alternate learning environment is that there is a greater opportunity to engage the outside community through performances, exhibitions, and special events that reflect both the program and the concerns of the communities (Adejumo, 2010). This allows for a merging of individual, collective, social and cultural experiences during an interaction and communication between participants in programming and the communities to which they also belong. These experiences have the ability to reach into the community through various activities and multiple audiences of the center rather than reaching primarily parents of children in public schools.

## **Discussion**

Community-based art education provides art experiences to youth but there are also benefits that participants experience from participation in community-based programs. Community-based art education programs create opportunities to develop social capital through relationships with faculty and staff, providing safe places to explore interests, and the community of participants. Students have the opportunity to see themselves as part of a larger community, gain support and motivation from instructors and participants, and develop a positive self-concept. These programs can also create possibilities for building and extending the notion of

community through partnerships. Building relationships with schools, organizations, and communities creates opportunities for organizations to extend their own networks and audiences. Community members benefit from knowledge of resources and organizations that are available to them. Students benefit from real world experiences and connections to the community that can provide a sense of belonging or aide in developing a future trajectory.

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### **Conclusion**

Community based art education is poised to meet the needs of the rapidly changing cultural and community identities through its connection and response to community needs and the fluidity of the approach which is driven by those who participate in it. Challenges continue to threaten art programs in schools and community based programs often step in to fill a need. Community centers (Davis, 1994; Adejumo, 2010; Lackey, 2003), museums (Dubinsky, 1999; Kim, 2001; Meszros ,1999; Zucker, 2010 ) and partnerships (Buys & Miller, 2009) provide students with access to the arts and extend the field of art education beyond the schools. Through these experiences, students are given a voice in which to enact positive social change (Adejumo,

2010; Gude, 2000) and identify with ethnic and cultural identities (Bastos, 2002; Congdon, 2001; Richardson, 2001; Stokrocki, 2001).

The benefits of community based art education are as expansive as the definitions and roles that community-based art education has within the field of art education. As Marche (1998) describes, participants in community based arts education and the community are able to preserve and reflect on the history and heritage of their community. Teachers, by reaching out to the community, are able to collaborate with other teachers and community members and break down the feeling of isolation that they sometimes feel from being the only art teacher in the school. There is a potential to create partnerships and building relationships between the schools, organizations and communities. This extends the field of art education beyond the k-12 schools and in times where art is once again losing ground in the schools because of funding cuts, it is important to see the field as an expansive network that exists within and outside of the schools (Lackey, 2008). Art practices that occur in different settings reflect art and art education that reflect the complexity and multiplicity of both practices. Davis (1994) encourages teachers and schools to overcome the tensions of competition and look for worthwhile educational experiences outside of the schools and taking advantages of the community resources available for teachers and students.

Looking at activist art and the concerns about the individual communities as well as the larger communities in which we all exist and participate, community based art education can act as a change agent to bring attention to concerns such as the environment and social justice. Yet as the internet and technology grow and permeate more diverse audiences and cultures, a new community is formed that will perhaps become a unifying or universal experience amongst the global community. According to McFee (1995), community based art education functions to add

to an existing culture as well as preserve cultural identity through communication and sharing of beliefs and values through art. This open multi-faceted approach allows community-based art education to have the ability to change and adapt to communities whether urban and rural, local and international and the environments which facilitate and sustain them, helping students understand and express their own multi-faceted identities and participation in multiple communities.

Programs that engage marginalized populations may provide programming to fill in a gap or may choose to engage students in a discourse on social justice issues. Community-based art education programs may choose to operate without a social agenda because of funders or board members who do not wish to engage in social issues because they feel it is too politicized or will detract from other programming they support. Yet others feel that working with marginalized populations isn't just about providing art experiences, but also believe that the content must be meaningful and socially relevant to the population. Community-based art education programs are positioned to challenge oppressive societal issues through art educational experiences by providing students a voice and opportunities for agency through creative community projects.

The community-based art education programs I have highlighted mirror many other community-based art education programs that are happening in big and small ways in various environments and educational settings. There are many tangible benefits to these programs including providing access to meaningful art education experiences, offering opportunities for success outside of the schools, building community through an exhibit, program, or documentation of a collective history, and enhancing social capital for students to allow for greater access to future opportunities both within and outside of the arts. There are less tangible benefits that are more difficult to see which may include better grades in school, a stronger sense

of belonging to a community, and a desire to continue to tackle social issues through the arts and other means. While some programs may have a community-wide impact, for example, Congdon and Blandy's look at (1988) "Boats, Bait and Fishing Paraphernalia: A local Folk Aesthetic", others programs may have a small impact on one student where a drop-in art activity lights a creative spark.

Understanding the potential of socially engaged community-based art education programs would further highlight the importance of providing community art experiences to varied audiences. It also has the potential to inform K-12 art teaching about the importance of providing meaningful, socially relevant, and challenging curriculum to prepare students to address the challenges of living in an increasingly globalized multicultural society of the 21st Century.

## Chapter Three

### Methodology

The main purpose of this study is to understand and identify characteristics of community-based art education programming through the lenses of a student, community-engaged artists, and a provider. Through the methodological practice of case study, while also borrowing from narrative inquiry, I reconstruct personal and social stories of each case and investigate the issues of access, culture, multiculturalism, and social empowerment. In the first case study, I examine my position at the Art Center as a provider of community-based art education. Second, I present understandings of a student experience and perspective of community-based art education practices and what experiences lead to a long term engagement in this type of setting. Third, I describe a study of a community oriented artists' space in Central Wisconsin to understand the purpose and mission of the space, the artists who created it, and the engagement with the greater community.

While I am initiating this study based on my own experiences as a community-based art education programmer, I chose two other case studies to investigate questions that developed through working at the Art Center. My primary interest is to identify and better understand how access is created in community-based art education settings and how access can lead to empowerment. For the purposes of this study, I am looking at access to meaningful art education experiences for participants from differing backgrounds. I define meaningful art education as opportunities and experiences with both art processes and conceptual thinking to facilitate students' ability to make art, create knowledge about art, discover where art can be found, and understand how art can empower, all, in part, through interactions with artists, teachers, and mentors in these community-based settings. I undertook this inquiry as a responsive naturalistic

research study which allowed new questions to emerge from the individual cases (Stake, 1995). Through this study I bring forth understandings of community-based art education experiences and practices through a reconstruction of personal stories that both confirm and challenge my own initial beliefs.

### **Study Design**

The purpose of this multiple case study investigation is to understand and describe community-based art education from three different perspectives: my experiences as a community-based art education provider, a student who participated in community-based art education programming, and two community engaged artists. Case study is about creating a thorough understanding of the subject of our research through looking at the context and activities of the case (Stake 1995). Case study is primarily a descriptive process that requires data collection to enable the researcher to provide the reader a picture of the case that is as complete and detailed as possible, paying careful attention to bring out the nuances of each case. I present three cases, each unique to the others and therefore required greater emphasis on specific means of data collection but the main sources of data collection were observations- recorded through field notes and reflections, interviews- in order to capture aspects of the case that were not observable and to present multiple perspectives or realities (Stake, 2006), and document analysis through written publications, photos, videos, or artwork.

In addition to traditional case study methodology, I chose to also utilize a narrative inquiry approach, which focuses on and privileges the voices and experiences of the subjects of the study. Chase (2005) writes, "From this perspective, any narrative is significant because it embodies- and gives us insight into-what is possible and intelligible within a specific social context" (p. 667). The goal is to come to understand the complexities and issues of each

individual experience, and to bring these experiences and understandings together into a dialogue in order to better understand the diversity and value of community-based art education.

Through the study of my experiences I also investigate how the community-based art education programs offered through the Art Center created opportunities for access to art. Through reflections and analysis of my past experiences as a provider, I examined the breadth of experiences offered to multiple communities and reflected on how we decided what was to be taught and represented, and if those decisions considered what is culturally relevant in contemporary culturally diverse communities. Understanding what responsibility the provider has to the communities it serves, how this is complicated by serving diverse and multi-faceted communities, and the manner in which social capital operates in these contexts lead my research.

Through the case study of a student's experiences and recollections, I explored the educational programming and opportunities that community-based settings provide, and what knowledge or skills students gain through the art-making experience. I wanted to understand if and how these experiences can be empowering for students, and how the program, individual instructor, and the environment might act as potential change agents. I also looked at the instructor-student relationship and how that relationship is different from the K-12 school experience, how the student valued the community-based art education experience and what the student identifies as the key factor(s) that lead to a sustained engagement in a program. I wanted to know if it is more about the art making, the social atmosphere created through a community of learners, the interaction with artists and mentors, or if it was the empowerment and the cultural knowledge and practical help with creating future goals that made these experiences particularly valuable and rewarding to this student.

Looking at the experiences and aspirations of community-engaged artists, through a third

case study, I bring forth understandings how and why two artists bring contemporary art practices into the communities where they reside and recreate. I investigated what the artists perceive as community benefits whether it is the artistic community that forms around these spaces or the communities in which they are physically located. I wanted to know if the artists plan or engage in art educational practices to engage the local communities. I wanted to understand the potential this artist space has to bring contemporary art to a new audience, along with some of the political and social implications of an artists' space located in a rural community. I looked at the goals and motivations of the artists, how the space functions as an artist retreat and educational space, how the community interacts with the space, and how the artists, visiting artists, and patrons of the space interact with the community.

I received IRB approval and consent from the student and the two community engaged artists to conduct interviews about their experiences regarding community-based art education. I have also received consent from both the community-engaged artists and the art center to conduct site visits, conduct research about the programs, and to use their real names. For the art center at which I worked, this consent also included the permission to interview willing employees. Consent for the study of each case was obtained prior to IRB approval. Interviews and data collection did not begin before IRB approval was granted. In addition, consent forms (Appendix A and B) for each interviewee were signed and collected prior to any official interviews.

### **Research Goals**

Beginning with initial questions about access to meaningful art education experiences, I examined the nature and roles of social capital within an educational, community, and social context as illuminated through each of the three cases in my study. Based on my analysis of

relevant studies of community-based art education (Adejumo, 2010; Lackey, 2003; Rademaker, 2007), afterschool programs (Buys & Miller, 2009; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007; Hansen, Larsen, & Moneta, 2006), and selected constructs in the discipline of sociology (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1998; DiFilippis, 2001), I wanted to investigate ideas about social capital as a way of understanding often overlooked potential benefits and outcomes of engagement with art and community-based art education. I also examined some personal, political, and cultural aspects of community-based programming, considered the audience, and examined notions of engagement from the perspective of multicultural education. In each case, I specifically looked at what is taught, how it is taught, who is teaching, and who is participating in these community arts programs in an effort to understand community-based practices.

Through the narrative of these three different perspectives, I focused on social capital and multicultural education as etic issues<sup>5</sup> that I am bringing into the dialogue of each case. As I began to collect data and began to analyze the varied experiences, ambitions, and missions within each case, I also looked for emic issues<sup>6</sup> where I found a sense of belonging and transitional places/experiences emerged across the cases. These themes that emerged from the three perspectives created an interesting and illuminating dialogue regarding varied level of engagement and the significance of social relationships within community-based arts. Looking at three perspectives was a strategy to add meaning and gain a clearer understanding of my own experiences, while adding to the complexity and breadth of knowledge that can be gained through these situated perspectives. While I came to understandings through a cross case

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<sup>5</sup> According to Stake (1995), etic issues are the researcher's issues that are developed before any direct experience with the case and are driven by previous research and/or literature from the field. These issues can help plan and structure the research but may need to be modified as the case unfolds.

<sup>6</sup> Emic issues emerge from within the case. They are identified by the researcher after they have taken time to understand the case. The researcher uncovers these issues through the research process but they are the issues of the actors (Stake, 1995).

analysis, it is through presenting these cumulative experiences and understandings with the addition of potential readers own perspectives that result in what Stake (1995) refers to as naturalistic generalizations<sup>7</sup>.

### **Rationale for Case, Participants, and Source Selection**

As previously stated, my research was driven by my own experiences as a community-based art educator and provider. It is through my own questioning and reflections that I selected two other perspectives to investigate, in hopes of understanding different experiences in community-based art education. The student participant in my study was a student from the art education undergraduate program at a major Midwestern university, who self-identified as having participated in a very well-known and successful community-based art education program in a large Midwestern city. The artists were selected as a result of my professional interactions with them at the art center where I worked. While my own experiences and questions have led me to these individuals, I hope my investigation and telling of their individual stories bring deeper understandings of varying experiences associated with community arts programs, and enhance knowledge about larger issues in community-based art education. These larger issues include access to meaningful art programming, social capital and relationships, critical or dialogical pedagogical practices, and community engagement.

### **Methods**

I am approaching my research as three individual case studies while borrowing from narrative inquiry. My research strategies include written reflections, observation, semi-structured and in-depth interviews, and document analysis to develop understandings of the unique qualities

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<sup>7</sup> Case study is about understanding the complexities and uniqueness of the case rather than about grand generalizations. Naturalistic generalizations are constructed by individuals through personal engagement and vicarious experience therefore naturalistic generalizations are embedded in the experiences and understandings of the reader (Stake, 1995).

of these three different perspectives. The cases are grounded in narrative inquiry, prioritizing the individual stories and voices of research participants. These narratives create opportunities for the reader to gain understandings about the case through thick description and vicarious experience (Denzin, 2010; Stake, 1995). These methodologies were interwoven within each case but some were more prominent as the unique qualities of each case presented different questions and opportunities for gathering data.

### **Case Study**

While studies exist that look at community-based art education in its many contexts, I am interested in looking at specific experiences within community-based art education to bring out the subtleties and specificities that make these experiences unique. I chose case study as an approach to look at three perspectives and experiences with community-based art education because case study allows the researcher to look closely at the specificities of the case and to bring out understandings. “Research is inquiry, deliberate study, a seeking to understand” (Stake, 2010, p. 13). To make the invisible more visible is one of the major goals of qualitative research (Denzin, 2010; Stake, 1995). Case study and qualitative inquiry are descriptive, narrative, and experiential and well suited to develop understandings about the specificities and complexities of individual experiences within specific contexts.

Case study is grounded in qualitative methodology and focuses on understanding rather than explanation as the purpose of inquiry (Stake, 1995). I chose my case studies based on my interest in developing a better understanding of my subjects’ engagement in community-based art education, and because of the potential within their narratives for me to explore issues of access, social capital, and empowerment. I openly acknowledge my role as researcher was very personal.

The researcher is historically and locally situated within the very process being studied. A gendered, historical self is brought to this process. This self, as a set of shifting identities, has its own history with the situated practices that define and shape the public issues and private troubles being studied. (Denzin, 2010, p.23)

As Flyvbjerg (2006) observes, “The advantage of the case study is that it can “close in” on real-life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice” (p. 235). To understand and express what is salient to each case, I looked at the context and activities of the case, while being careful to focus on what is happening within the boundaries of the case. With careful attention to the details and specificities of the actors and the contexts, I gathered and analyzed rich narrative data to discuss the etic issues of access, social capital, and empowerment. As Stake (1995) suggests, I tried “to remain open to the nuances of increasing complexity” (p.21). Therefore, I also allowed for emic issues, ideas and themes that were deemed important from within the cases, to emerge and I included a sense of belonging and transitional experiences in my discussion and analysis.

### **Narrative Inquiry**

Case study can be a narrative process which involves sharing stories through an interview or reflective process, are analyzed along with other supporting data, and re-told by the researcher. “Long understood as a systematic search for knowledge and understanding, research has always been a form of storytelling, that is, a way of sharing inquiries and discoveries in narrative form” (Delacruz, in press). Narrative inquiry is not simply storytelling, but a collaborative process between the researcher and actors of each narrative (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Chase (2005) describes narrative inquiry as “...an amalgam of interdisciplinary

analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods- all revolving around the interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them” (p. 651). This process involves creating a trusting environment and relationship where stories can be told and both the researcher’s and the subjects’ voices are heard and represented accurately and honestly in the re-telling (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Stories collected by the researcher through interviews or informal conversations are the raw data that are then organized, analyzed, and retold by the researcher (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002).

The experiences investigated here are both past and present. Chase (2005) refers to narrative as “retrospective meaning making” (p. 656). It is a way of bringing these experiences together and looking at the social contexts, connecting events, and examining the repercussions of these situated events. Ollenshaw and Creswell (2002), describe the “three dimensional space approach” to narrative inquiry which focuses on the personal and contextual experiences and interactions of the individuals. There are three aspects to this approach: Interaction, which looks at the personal stories and interactions with others; Continuity, which looks at both current and past experiences; and Situation, which looks at the context , physical place, or sequence of the story tellers places (Ollenshaw and Cresswell, 2002). In order to capture the aspect of *interaction*, I interviewed multiple participants associated with each case and ask the study participants to describe their interactions with others. The aspect of *continuity* was addressed by questioning study participants about past experiences and analyzing how these experiences inform and influence both the present and future aspirations. Through my own observations of the physical places events took place and asking study participants to recall and describe details about the physical contexts of their experiences, I included the aspect of *situation*. Rather than a

problem-based approach, I, as the researcher, focused on finding meanings and the social significance of the participants' stories.

### **Data Collection**

I collected data through semi-structured and in-depth interviews, observations and photographs, and student art work and document review. No identifying information was used without explicit permission granted from participants. Michelle Grabner and Brad Killam agreed to use their names and the names of their project spaces. While the data collection process for each participant is similar, depending on the richest sources available and the specificities of each case, there were variations in available data and in terms of what was the concentration of certain kinds of data. In what follows, I first describe the general data collecting methods and then I describe how data was collected within each case.

### **Interviews**

I conducted interviews as a primary source of data collection to capture insights and perspectives that were not observable. Rather than looking for common answers and assumptions, this study is about looking for the uniqueness of human experiences and actions in the context of community-based art education. "Interviews are part of the dialogic conversation that connects all of us to this larger Moral community. Interviews arise out of performance events. They transform information into shared experience" (Denzin, 2001, p.24). I went into each interview with a set of initial questions that were informed by my research questions but I also listened carefully to what the study participants were interested in sharing and what they felt was important to tell. It is this responsive technique and the collaboration with the research subjects that create interviews that are "performance events." Interviews helped construct

understandings and knowledge of the case through a series of perspectives, both the researchers, and actors.

In order to illicit in-depth recollections and content rich stories from interviewees, it is important to know how to ask the right questions. To conduct a productive interview that invites the interviewee to speak beyond generalities, the researcher must be prepared with a well thought out plan (Chase, 2006; Stake, 1995). A skillful interviewer is able to construct questions that invite responses that are personal and unique which give a perspective to the case that is unseen through observations. Chase (2006) describes the process of interview as inviting the interviewee to tell a story, rather than answer a series of structured questions. I approached the interview process through semi-structured interviews. Initial interview questions that were asked to interviewees had been approved by IRB (Appendix C and D), but I was also open to the unforeseen directions brought about through the stories told during the interview. At times, this resulted in further clarifying questions that emerged after reflecting on data collected through the initial interviews.

Interviews took place in mutually decided upon locations convenient to the interviewees, and were kept to 30-60 minutes in length. According to Stake (1995), it is essential that the interviewer is a good listener and allows time not only for the interview, but time to reflect on and write about the interview shortly after it takes place. In the interviews I used a combination of note taking and recording to provide a space for careful listening which allowed me to think and respond to what the interviewee was saying without being concerned that I may miss something they said. I also wrote reflective field notes that recorded my general impressions and thoughts immediately following the interview. Although I was initially asking participants similar questions during interviews, after reviewing interview notes and tapes, I found salient

issues and quotes from individual participants that lead to new lines of questioning. I scheduled and organized follow-up interviews around interpretive data and lingering questions to clarify issues and to further investigate issues and topics discovered in the initial interviews.

Data collected through interview audio recordings was personally transcribed and portions were selected to support the discussion of themes and issues in the cases. In the beginning only extraneous thoughts, false starts, and filler words were removed. Carlson (2010) states, "Partial transcripts should be considered so that participants can focus on their main contributions and not be distracted or embarrassed in seeing places they were off topic" (p. 1111). The selected transcriptions were sent through e-mail to the interviewees for member checking. Each interviewee had a chance to review the transcripts of data I used to describe the case for accuracy. The interviewees were also given the opportunity to read the case study chapter with their interview data to check that I presented their narratives accurately and to verify plausibility. This was particularly salient with the artists and The Poor Farm since I was using actual names.

Through an analysis and synthesis of interview data, I described each case from the perspectives of the actors. While the cases I have selected are centered on one or two key actors, other key players or participants were also interviewed to create a bigger picture and triangulate the data. As Stake (1995) describes, "Qualitative researchers take pride in discovery and portraying the multiple views of the case. The interview is the main road to multiple realities" (p. 64). Additional interviewees created a more detailed portrait of each case through additional perspectives.

## **Observations**

In an effort to understand the context, and to describe the case through a series of perspectives, both the researchers and actors, I included detailed descriptions from site observations in order to create a convincing picture of each case. Observations are important to be able to describe the context of the case and to describe what is observed happening within those contexts. As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe, “We know a thing through its representations” (p. 5). In order to understand and accurately portray a case, the researcher needs to not only observe the case but the context, where it is taking place, or the habitat (Stake, 1995). I took photographs at different sites in order to record and remind me about the spaces and contexts of each case. In my field notes, I wrote about the settings of interviews and described neighborhoods, buildings, facilities, and settings which was an important part of recalling and describing the context and creating a fuller picture of the cases.

As Stake (1995) writes, “The story often starts to take shape during the observation, sometimes does not emerge until write-ups of many observations are poured over” (p.62). While observations can be done in one sitting or over a series of sittings but observations are not data without field notes to describe initial impressions and what was observed in each sitting. After each interview and observation I left time immediately after observations to write down my thoughts and recollections, to record and document what I saw, and to reflect what I found significant through the observations. My reflections included looking back at my research questions and writing about what I observed that was significant to those questions.

## **Student Work and Document Review**

I reviewed documents as additional sources of data to create a more complete understanding of the case. Documents I examined were lesson plans, curriculum ideas, student

art work, photographs, records of events and exhibitions, class listings and schedules, websites, past e-mail correspondence and other records of activities or events that were not directly observed. The amount of available documents was overwhelming, especially when looking back over the seven years I spent at the Art Center, so I used my research questions to direct my inquiry into document collection and which documents would be valuable for analysis in each case.

### **The Cases**

**Mystory.** In my case study of the Art Center, I was primarily writing from memory. Through both description and critical self-reflection I identified significant events and influences that have shaped my experiences with community-based art education. While my own stories and experiences are primary to my research, I sought additional perspectives and stories through interviews of co-workers and e-mail correspondence. Chang (2008) writes, “Data from external sources- other individuals, visual artifacts, documents, and literature- provide additional perspectives and contextual information to help you investigate and examine your subjectivity” (p. 103). Interviews with previous co-workers helped to triangulate my personal experiences, created a richer description of key events or issues, and created a more diverse understanding about programming and issues at the Art Center.

I scheduled and conducted interviews with two past colleagues at the Art Center. I interviewed the Director of Development to gain a clearer understanding of the financial concerns of running an art center and I also interview the President of the Young Adult Board to hear her story behind the development, mission, and sustainability of the Young Adult Board at the Art Center. Through these interviews I planned to access knowledge about the history of interviewees experiences with the Art Center and their insights into successes, failures, and

changes the Art Center has gone through during that time. The interviews offered additional perspectives to my own reflections which added to the contextual information about the programming, day to day functioning, and complications involved in working for a non-profit art center.

My reflections focused on the Art Center and the surrounding neighborhood, which includes the area where I grew up. It was important to describe the settings and contexts of the Art Center to create a complete picture of the impediments to running a successful art program, specifically because of the location and audience. I re-visited the Art Center and the surrounding neighborhood several times while trying to capture an essence of the community through a description of what can be seen visually. Demographic information provided a clear and unbiased description of the population. I shared my own experiences and perceptions, both from growing up in this neighborhood, and working in the neighborhood, to create a complete picture of the community and surroundings in which the Art Center operates.

From my experiences at the Art Center, there is a large pool of data that I have saved consisting of past class schedules, records and photographs of gallery exhibits and special events, and minutes from meetings. Reviewing these materials was an important way to investigate and reflect on past events and experiences. I also kept an extensive collection of past e-mails which I accessed as sources of recollections. Referring to literature in art, art education, and sociology also informed the inquiry.

**Student.** The student case study presented challenges because it is a study of an individual's past experience, so observation of the student participating in her community art program was not possible. Data was primarily collected through interviews with the student and her mother, through visiting her home and neighborhood, and attending an art fair at the site of

the art program. During the home visit, document review of student work created in the community-art program and written materials about the program, including course offerings, also provide additional background information and helped me provide a more complete description of this student's experiences.

I scheduled several interviews with the student to allow for enough time for the student to describe her past experiences without having to sit through a tediously long interview session. Initial questions included: What was it that you and/or your parent(s) found appealing about the community-based program? Can you describe what you remember from your classes? How did you interact with the instructor? How did you interact with the other students? What would you say was the most important thing about your experience in a community-based art education setting? What were significant relationships you developed? What were the significant art experiences? I scheduled follow up interviews allowing the student time to continue to reflect on and recall past experiences. I also interviewed the student's mother to understand her perceptions of her daughter's experiences and her own motivations for signing her daughter up for these classes.

The student's past experiences doesn't allow for observations of the student participating in the setting. However, interviews were conducted in the student's home, and observations were noted in her home and surrounding neighborhood. Through attending an art fair, I visited the building which provided a visual context for the community-based art program that she described. I observed the professional atmosphere of the event, and the classrooms and surroundings where she took classes.

I asked the student for permission to take photos of art work she created in a community-based setting. I examined schedules of classes and descriptions of programs and other written

materials that the student saved. The website provided current information about classes, events, and the mission. The website also had written promotional materials about the programming including the history, mission, and demographic data which used to create a clearer picture of the over-all program. The purpose of looking at this data was to both create a more complete picture of the students past experiences and to get a feel for the atmosphere and environment of the community-based site.

**Artists.** The case study of the artists focused primarily on semi-structured interviews conducted at the artists' home about their experiences bringing art out of the traditional contexts of galleries and museums in the city and into the suburb in which they live and a rural area in central Wisconsin. I sought to understand their mission for the art spaces they have created at their home gallery in Oak Park, Illinois and the artists' space they developed in central Wisconsin, to discover what they are currently doing, and what they plan to implement in the near future. I examined books, publications, and articles that describe the gallery space, the artists' mission, and experiences of participants at the space in central Wisconsin. I also observed activities occurring in the spaces in both the home gallery and artists' space in Wisconsin. This primarily consisted of art openings at the home gallery and an art weekend event that is held annually in the artists' space in Wisconsin. After each interview and observation, I used detailed field notes to record data about participants, activities, and a description of the locations.

The artists were the only interviewees in this case study. While I am interested in their mission of these alternative art spaces, I was also interested in their autobiographical narratives and how their own experiences and interests have led them to their current practices. In this way, the line of questioning had some similarities to my own questioning shifting between the personal and the social context of the experiences. Initial questions included: What lead you to

develop these community art spaces? Specifically speaking about the Poor Farm, what types of programming do you offer? Do you try to target particular audiences with programming? What do you see as the major benefits of providing this type of programming? How do you meet the needs of the community through your programming? How do you interpret/measure the needs of the community? Do you feel this is an area in which you will grow and continue to invest time and effort into? Are there new areas that you would like to develop?

The artists had an established art space at their home in a suburb of Chicago and I had already made several informal visits to their home and gallery. Through conversations with them about their curatorial and educational work they brought to their suburban community, I learned about a new project they were developing to bring art to a rural community in central Wisconsin, where they have a cottage. This new project was the focus of my inquiry and I made two visits to record formal observations of events and participants at “The Great Poor Farm Experience,” an annual artist/student weekend event. Attending the weekend events allowed me to experience the place as an artist, art educator, and researcher while observing and participating in the programming and events that took place.

With this case study, there were several sources of written materials about the project at their suburban home as well as the new project at The Poor Farm. Reviewing these materials was a valuable source to gather information about the current mission, perspectives of participants that were published in blogs and visual arts publications, and past projects and experiences that lead to the current project. Since the interviews were limited in this case, document review was also a source of triangulation and affirmation of data collected through the interview and observation process.

## Data Analysis

As previously stated, case study and narrative inquiry employ similar data collecting methods through interviews, observations, and document review. The analysis of the data collected is also similar in the organization of data and the use of coding to break down the information into thematic and topical categories. Stake (1995) describes the analysis in case study as assigning meaning to the data collected through taking the data apart. “Analysis essentially means taking something apart. We take our impressions, our observations, apart” (p.71). Applying this to my research, data sets were collected, labeled, and organized specific to each individual case. Interview transcriptions, observations, and documents were coded. Coding involves labeling excerpts of data with codes for themes and issues to allow the researcher to see and identify patterns (Stake, 2005). I looked for cultural and issue based themes, coding for salient examples of education, culture, self-esteem, self-advocacy, community, empowerment, mentoring, and as well as other themes that emerge.

Adopting the interview coding and analysis methods suggested by Olson (2011), I transcribed each interview and read through the transcripts creating paragraphs based on shifts in the conversation. Beginning with circling words and sentences that seem important or significant to the research questions, I then added codes to identify the theme or issue that the data represents. I initially coded for examples of social and cultural capital, access, empowerment, and community. I also added memos about how I was thinking about the data and if there were topics or issues I would like to investigate further. As I probed deeper into each case, I looked for themes and issues to emerge and developed additional codes to help identify the issues and patterns specific to each case (Bogden & Biklen, 2003; Stake, 2005).

Data was collected and organized according to date collected and by the issues and themes I previously identified. I kept files, distinct for each case, as I started to analyze data. As categories emerged from observations, documents, and interview transcripts, I sorted the coded data to begin finding patterns. These patterns aided in making sense of the variety of data sets, to represent the individual cases, and to discover patterns common amongst the three cases (Bogden & Biklen, 2003; Stake, 2005). Since there are three distinct cases, data sets were analyzed within each individual case but also cross-analyzed in a final analysis, again looking for issues and themes that were common across the cases which may have relevance to an overall understanding of community-based art education. Additional themes that begin to emerge were mentoring, facilitating, support systems, feeling at home (which I interpreted as a sense of belonging), and transitional experiences (Ellsworth, 2005).

Through progressive focusing (Stake, 2005) and identifying the issues of each individual case, I created a dialogue that pulls from each of the experiences identifying emergent issues that were both common across the cases or contribute to a discourse about the unique qualities of each case. In the final analysis I looked over data again and coded for examples of how access is created through opportunity, content, community, and place. I also discussed what access provides through coding across the cases for social capital, a sense of belonging, and transitional experiences.

### **Attribution Error**

Observations of human behavior and performance are particularly susceptible to attribution error. Rather than look for the all factors contributing to a situation, performance or behavior gets assigned to the personal characteristics of the person being observed. “In other words, researchers are just as likely as lay people to attribute behaviors to personal qualities

rather than situational influences” (Kennedy, 2010, p.591). In order to prevent misinterpretations in both observed behaviors and interview data, I attempted to probe deeply into the context while trying to see the situation, event, or behavior, from multiple perspectives. This was carried out through scheduling additional interviews, probing deeper into lines of questioning, and sending clarifying questions through e-mail correspondence.

### **Triangulation**

To gain validity and trustworthiness of assertions within and across cases, triangulation was used. Triangulation is particularly important for data that is significant to the main issues of the case. “We assume the meaning of our observations is one thing, but additional observations give us grounds for revising our interpretation” (Stake, 1995, p. 110). Triangulation was conducted through multiple observations, revisiting lines of questioning, using more than one approach to data collection (for example, observations and interviews to confirm or add to what was observed), and member checking (asking interviewee to review transcriptions or write-ups of interviews). Seale (1999) states, “It is not hard, too, to conceive of triangulation exercises enhancing the quality of politically driven research projects, whose emancipatory or enlightening effect is enhanced by the elicitation of multiple perspectives on, or constructions of, a phenomenon” (p. 63). Triangulation reveals multiple constructed realities of an occurrence (Seale, 1999).

### **Interpretation and Assertions**

Describing the case and presenting the multiple narratives creates understandings that the reader can interpret and respond to, based on their own experiences. Flyvbjerg (2006) states, “The goal is not to make the case study be all things to all people. The goal is to allow the study to be different things to different people” (p.238). The observations,

interviews, and additional documents of the case were used to paint a picture that includes the complexities and uniqueness of each case. I consciously resisted writing a summary from the “omniscient narrator” and instead attempted to describe each narrative as it was told to me, letting the story unfold through the complex individual stories (Chase, 2001; Denzin, 2010; Flyvbjerg, 2006). This allowed for a more accurate portrayal and brought out the depth of the story so the reader can construct meaning for themselves.

Stake (1995) suggests including vignettes (descriptions of episodes) to tell the stories of the case. Sharing first-hand stories and recollections within my writing presented the information a compelling and honest way that allows the reader to “discover their own path and truth inside the case” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p.238). I also presented narratives as part of the analysis and findings to create a vicarious experience for readers so they can come to their own conclusions (Chase, 2005; Denzin, 2010; Stake, 1995). Chase (1995) describes the significance of narrative writing:

Thus many contemporary narrative researchers approach any narrative as an instance of the possible relationships between a narrator’s active construction of self, on the one hand, and the social, cultural, and historical circumstances that enable and constrain the narrative on the other...From this perspective, any narrative is significant because it embodies-and gives us insight into-what is possible and intelligible within a specific context. (pp.667)

The main focus of this study is to understand the particular circumstances and complexities of three individual cases but in the final chapter, I bring these three cases into a dialogue to contribute to current understanding about community-based art education. While the

experiences of each case may look very different, I believe there are many common issues and themes that emerged through the course of this research. While the findings may not be generalizable across all community-based art education experiences, the issues that emerged and are discussed add to the existing knowledge about community-based art education in its many forms. Yet as previously mentioned, there is plenty of opportunity for readers to bring in their own experiences and add their own ideas which may result in “naturalistic generalizations” (Stake, 1995). Stake writes, “Naturalistic generalizations are conclusions arrived at through personal engagement in life’s affairs or by vicarious experience so well constructed that the person feels as if it happened to themselves” (1995, p. 85).

I acknowledge I entered into this research with preconceived notions from my own experiences and with etic issues of access, social capital, and empowerment. I remained conscious of my own interests and bias and welcomed new and unforeseen issues that emerged from within each case. While respecting and describing the understandings of each individual case, the final analysis investigated the emic and etic issues that were identified. As Stake (1995) indicates, “Of course, the researcher is permitted, no, obligated, to indicate how the findings might be extrapolated, how they could be interpreted in various circumstances, and how they accommodate theoretical discourse” (p. 93). Through these final assertions, I brought these experiences, the issues, and theories across the cases into a dialogue with current understandings of community-based art education and the field of art education.

### **Ethical Issues**

Prior to collecting data, a research application was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at UIUC. Approval was granted on April 13, 2011. Included in the IRB application were interview questions I expected to ask to different informants (Appendix C & D). The

required Collaborative Institutional Training initiative - Human Subjects Research Education Module (April 12, 2010) was completed. Participants in these multiple case studies were invited to be voluntary participants in the research study and were made aware of potential risks and benefits related to participation. Benefits far outweigh the risks in this study. Before conducting interviews, they were given a copy of the IRB approved consent form (Appendix A and B), which was collected with signatures and an additional copy was theirs to keep. Participants were assured that their personal privacy, confidentiality and anonymity (when applicable) would be protected throughout the study and that they may withdrawal from the study at any time without adversely affecting them in any way.

There were no direct rewards or benefits in the form of financial gain or grades given to the participants that influenced the data or participant responses or rewards that would change the motivation of their participation. However, there may be professional benefits that were derived from the project. These potential benefits would primarily apply to the Art Center participants and the artists through providing an opportunity to reflect on their professional practices. Lincoln (1995) discuss that current standards in research demand that we not only think about what is being researched and for what purpose, but also the need to consider who has access to this research. Access to this research is a potential benefit. The participation in the research process and review of the written study may help broaden participants' understandings of current community-based art education practices and the potentials that exist within each respective case.

## Chapter Four

### Mystory: Finding My Voice as An Art Educator

My interest in community-based art education developed through working at an art center<sup>8</sup> on the outskirts of a major metropolitan neighborhood. I worked first as a teacher and quickly took on the responsibilities of the Visual Arts Coordinator and Gallery Curator. While I started out teaching a couple of art classes, my experiences and responsibilities quickly expanded. My work at the Art Center became an extension of me and my interests. I was bringing a piece of the art world that I loved into the neighborhood where I grew up. It was an opportunity to share with my community, something I was passionate about and loved. The Art Center became like a second home and my co-workers were like an extended family. As the Visual Arts Coordinator and Gallery Curator, I was allowed a certain amount of freedom to try new things, field test different programs and approaches, and create pathways to bring art to the community. My engagement, decisions, and participation were embedded in my own experiences. My work as a community-based art educator was influenced by my own development, my relationship to art, and my relationship to the community.

I started at the Art Center after moving back into town and hearing about the new building. I had recently started a family and I was interested in the flexibility that working at the Art Center offered. While flexibility was a motivator, my interest in community-based art education was based on my belief that art can help people. I struggled with reading because of mild dyslexia but my drive to learn more about art has always been a motivator in reading and writing. My interest in art gave me the courage and tenacity to stick with classes, to tackle readings, and to graduate from college. I returned to school for a master's degree and developed

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<sup>8</sup> In order to comply with university IRB requirements, I will refer to the specific art center I worked at as the Art Center.

an action research study of an arts integrated curriculum I created for a small school that specialized in Dyslexia and other learning differences. The significant role art has in my life is what drove my desire to share art with others. The Art Center offered an opportunity to bring art into my community, which was important to me. However, I did not foresee my eventual in-depth engagement and the significance of my role as a community art educator.

### **Re-Collections**

The primary source of data for this case is my own recollections of my experiences working at the Art Center for seven years. To support my recollections, I looked back at old Art Center e-mail correspondences, class and gallery schedules, and other artifacts that I have kept from my time at the Art Center. While my intent is to look critically at the functioning of the Art Center and my investment and role in providing arts education experiences to the community, my story is bound by my perceptions and my personal bias. In order to offer multiple perspectives, I interviewed two co-workers that had key roles in developing areas of programming that needed support. I spoke with the Director of Development, who I will refer to as Aileen, to get her perspective on the difficulties the Art Center encountered with funding and grants. I also interviewed the Director of the Young Adult Board, who I will refer to as Lynn, in hopes to understand the difficulties in pulling in particular demographics and creating programming for specific audiences.

### **The Art Center**

The Art Center is located in a primarily blue collar working-class neighborhood located near a major metropolitan city in the Midwest. Started by local residents who had graduated from a major art school in the city, the Art Center brought art out of the center of the city and into their own neighborhood. As a non-profit organization, the Art Center is run by an Executive Director

and a small staff, but it is also overseen by a Board of Directors. For many years, the Art Center functioned in a shared space that was rented from a local school. There were enormous limitations on programming because of space constraints and having to work around the schedule of the school. When an opportunity came to build their own building, the board decided to go forward and raise money. With grant money from the state and additional fundraising efforts, the Art Center began construction on a new space and moved into the new building in August of 2002. Unfortunately, the project went over budget with changes and modifications that were made to the original plans. This left the Art Center with a four million dollar debt on the building which put a burden on general operations and limitations on programming.

### **My Introduction to the Art Center**

I began working at the Art Center after the move to the new location. The first year was full of growing pains. Previously, the Art Center was run on an exceedingly small budget with an extremely small staff. After the move, it still ran with a calendar of classes that fit in with the schedule of the school from which they had previously been renting space. The Executive Director had the help of two other full time employees. To me, they seemed overwhelmed and unprepared for the new considerations the new building and a large overhead would bring. While the mission of the Art Center remained the same, there were some significant changes that needed to take place.

Of course, I did not see this at first. In the beginning, I was seeing this from a new part-time teacher's perspective. After the first few weeks, I started to see notes posted on file drawers saying, "Don't use my supplies." Sometimes the notes were longer and seemed angrier. I was confused both by the lack of community supplies and the lack of sharing or collaboration. I went to a faculty meeting where I learned I was one of the only new teaching artists on staff. All the

other teaching artists had been teaching with the Art Center in the old building. They complained that they could not lock up their supplies as they had been promised. They accused people of stealing supplies, and I learned that they often bought their own supplies and were reimbursed by the Art Center. This not only seemed to be inefficient to me, but it was also causing considerable morale problems.

The Art Center had an outreach program in place both at the old site and in the new building. Teaching artists were contacted to fill both long term and temporary teaching placements at the center. I began getting calls the night before some of the placements asking if I could substitute teach in some of these programs. When it came time to change the schedule, I was scheduled for classes without being asked if I wanted to continue teaching. There seemed to be a lack of organization and leadership within the visual arts program. I was frustrated and I thought about leaving. I was not being paid a lot of money, and it was no longer possible to go in and enjoy teaching while ignoring all of the organizational issues. The problems of the program and the organization were seeping into both my personal and classroom experiences.

### **Becoming Visual Arts Coordinator**

In order to address some of the issues I noticed, and hopefully create a more pleasant working atmosphere for myself, I decided to write a letter to the Executive Director with a list of concerns and some possible solutions. I was called in to meet with the Executive Director about my correspondence and he offered me the position of Visual Arts Coordinator. At the next faculty meeting, I was introduced as the new Visual Arts Coordinator. I received a caustic reception from other teaching artists and staff members at the center when I began to talk about changes I planned to implement. I felt like an outsider as the new teacher replacing the previous Visual Arts Coordinator who was fully embedded in the community of teaching artists as a

friend and colleague. One teacher walked up to me after the meeting and said, “Do you really think you can make things better here?” I replied, “Yes, I do.” The teacher then retorted, “Good luck with that, you are going to need it.” I was surprised by the negativity of the comment, but it coincided with the hostile tone of the notes that were being left in the classrooms.

After that faculty meeting, the already perceptible divisions and antagonism amongst some of the faculty and staff about supplies, storage, and classes became clearer. I did not want to get involved in old conflicts, so I implemented changes I thought would benefit the overall teaching environment. I told teaching artists they would no longer be allowed to buy their own supplies expecting to be reimbursed without permission from me. This was met with anger from some teaching artists but I explained that the Art Center’s money would go further to purchase larger quantities of supplies, available to all teaching artists. I insisted that the two main art rooms would be cleaned up, teacher personal supplies would be brought home, and Art Center supplies would be purchased in their place. This allowed for some of the old file drawers to be removed and provided more space in both classrooms.

The sessions at the Art Center usually lasted from ten to twelve weeks. This depended on whether they were children’s classes or adult classes. There were enormous chunks of time when no classes were offered because the Art Center had previously been tied to the school schedule. I met with the Executive Director to talk about changing the schedule, shortening the number of weeks to make the classes more uniform, and changing the schedule to add more sessions. We met for two hours, and he decided to keep things the same way. At this point, it was clear to me that things had worked a certain way at the old space, and while they had successfully made a physical move into the new space, there was resistance to making administrative and programming adjustments that better fit with the Art Center being in its own and much larger

space. Eventually we shifted the schedule to fit the operations of the new facility. In the meantime, I continued to work on the changes I could make, and I watched the enrollment trends on the classes and continued to identify areas that needed change.

### **Becoming Gallery Curator**

After working at the Art Center for a year, things within the visual arts department seemed to smooth over. The teaching artists had adjusted to community supplies, things were more organized, and new teaching artists were hired as the department began to grow with some additional classes that were offered. Then the Executive Director quit, and a new director was hired to replace him. I was only working part-time, and some of the work I did from home, so it took me awhile to meet the new director. When I met him we talked about what I did, my background and educational experience, and then he offered me the curatorial position for the Art Center. This had been previously handled by the outgoing Executive Director, but the incoming Executive Director did not have a background in the visual arts. It was another part-time position, and I accepted it with excitement.

It was a rough period when the new Executive Director came on board. There were many decisions that he made which were extremely unpopular. There was a café in the new building, and he fired most of the staff. This was because the café was losing the Art Center a significant amount of money. The new Executive Director also insisted that the lights in the building be kept off unless there was a class or it was evening. This energy efficient move was not well received, and many people claimed it made the Art Center look like it was closed. Despite the unpopular changes, it had been an engaging and challenging time to work at the Art Center. I was grateful for the experiences and the responsibilities. I felt like I was making a difference in a relatively short period of time, by helping with the Art Center's visual arts program transition and grow

into this new space. I was excited by the prospect of developing a visual arts program, both through the classes and gallery, but my idealism was consistently met with the reality of the financial burden of the Art Center.

### **Visual Arts Education Programming at the Art Center**

After the first year, I was responsible for two areas: visual arts education programming and the gallery programming. The educational programs at the Art Center consisted of both in-house classes and outreach programs. The in-house classes were offered to people in the neighborhood who were looking for art enrichment for themselves or their children. We offered classes in music, visual art, dance and theater. The intent of the visual arts programming was to provide opportunities for students both within the Art Center and in the schools with creative and artistic experiences that taught artistic techniques communities and creative thinking. In providing art educational opportunities to a diverse audience in multiple venues, I developed many questions about audience, meaningful engagement, community, empowerment and what these experiences provide.

The educational programming at the Art Center was for students ages 2 through adult. Most of the classes were for students in preschool through 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade. After the middle school age, we had much lower participation. Adults were interested in some classes, but the most popular classes for adults were exercise classes that had little to do with art enrichment. The parents who signed up their children usually wanted them to have an opportunity to be creative and express themselves but their focus was primarily on the product students were making. For performance classes like music, theater, and dance, the parents were primarily focused on the performances their children would participate in. In short the parents wanted to

see what they were paying for. Many of the parents who brought their children to the Art Center felt their children were gifted and wanted to provided that extra enrichment.

### **Class Offerings**

The Art Center's regular schedule of classes included classes for children and adults in drawing, painting, jewelry, ceramics, digital photography, computer graphics and Web design. We offered specialized classes when we had teaching artists and students interested in stained glass, fabric painting, knitting, and furniture painting. We occasionally offered workshops in calligraphy or papermaking since these were classes that did not fit into the 10 week schedule. Classes varied from one to three hours, depending on the age of the student and the type of class. Teaching artists for these classes were usually local artists that lived in the community. Some of the teaching artists were certified to teach art in the schools, but this was not a requirement. All teaching artists worked part time as independent contractors. Some classes were sustained over longer periods of time and others seemed to draw interest for only a short period of time. During my time at the Art Center there were major areas of growth through developing digital arts classes, a ceramics studio, a preschool program, summer classes, and teacher workshops.

### **Digital Photography and the Arts**

The financial and infrastructure limitations of a struggling art center had a direct impact on the classes we were able to offer. Classes had to be able to generate revenue for the Art Center. If classes were struggling or losing participation they were removed from the schedule by the Executive Director. For example, traditional photography was initially a part of the Art Center but the photography lab took up a large space, and the classes were only offered two or three times a week, and the rest of the time the room was not in use. This turned out to be too costly, and the Photo Lab was removed by the Executive Director and the Board. The lab was

turned into a multi-purpose room. The Art Center continued to offer digital photography, but the computer lab did not have the technology hardware or software to facilitate this with any depth. Eventually, with the help of a substantial grant, a new computer lab was developed allowing for more classes in the digital arts.

### **Ceramics**

The financial struggles did not always limit new growth if there was a potential to develop a new area that would be financially sustainable. Ceramics became an area of potential development. When I learned that there was not a ceramics studio in the new building, I saw this as a major oversight. In my experience, ceramics is frequently one of the most desired visual arts disciplines by both children and adults. I have known several people who have said, “I have always wanted to learn how to throw pottery on the wheel.” Even young students, if asked, will often indicate they want to work with clay. The new building did have a kitchen and a café which lost money and were removed after the first year. The Art Center received a broken donated kiln and I found a teacher who thought he could fix it, so we started a ceramics program where the kitchen and café used to be. The ceramics classes were very successful and the program grew. Eventually, the Art Center invested in some wheels and a new kiln to offer a full range of classes for children and adults. The ceramics studio also turned out to be a powerful draw for some local schools to take their students to the Art Center for field trips.

### **Art-based Preschool Program**

As the Visual Arts Coordinator, I had the freedom to try new things, as long as it was self-sustaining by covering its costs. New classes were expected to break even by bringing in enough money to cover the teacher and the supplies. When my son began to reach preschool age, I was frustrated with the limited preschool options. I saw my niece bring home worksheets, and I

did not want that for my son. While teaching a family art class, I realized there were other parents who shared a desire for an arts rich preschool experience. The Art Center allowed me to create and field test a half day morning preschool program. It was not certified, but since attendance in early childhood education is not required by the state, many parents chose the Art Center preschool as an alternative program while others chose to enroll their children as an addition to their regular preschool program. The flexibility of my position once again proved to be an asset by allowing me to provide the preschool education I wanted for son while keeping him with me. It became a very successful program which we continued into the summer offering both morning and afternoon sessions. The summer preschool program flourished since there were not many other summer preschool programs.

### **Summer Classes**

The summer programs became an immense area of growth. When we previously rented space we were limited by what we could offer, even in the summers. When we moved to the new building we continued to offer classes in a similar format to the rest of the year. After the first summer, we began to add a larger variety of classes at different times of the day and slowly began to create summer art camps. Some art camps involved multiple areas of the arts and others focused on individual disciplines. The summer programs were tremendously successful and brought in a lot of new students. We had an exceptionally large violin program which helped launch the idea of offering interdisciplinary arts camps. This allowed students who were involved with the Art Center in one area to try out different art experiences. We hoped that students would continue with these explorations throughout the year by signing up for additional classes. It was also hoped that new students would try out an art class in the summer and then continue through the year.

## **Teacher Workshops**

The Art Center also held teacher workshops and was an approved provider to award Continuing Professional Development Units (CPDU)<sup>9</sup> to teachers who took classes or participated in workshops. The teacher workshops would sometimes cover a broad range of artistic experience with teachers attending classes on how to integrate visual art, drama, dance, and music into their curriculums. At other times, they were more specialized to include only one or a couple areas of the arts. At times we had groups of 100 teachers from a school district coming through at one time and rotating through a series of workshops. We also had smaller groups coming in from a single school or school district. We offered many adult classes in the regular schedule of classes that teachers could sign up for and earn CPDU credits.

## **Outreach Programming**

A large part of the educational programming at the Art Center was the outreach program working with the local schools. These programs were usually put into place by school principals in order to offer students an art experience even if there were no art teachers in the schools. These projects varied in length depending on what the school wanted and their budget. Sometimes this involved providing a part-time art teacher that was in the schools every week and functioned similarly to a K-12 art teacher. Some programs were a one-time art experience or once a week for a specific grade. We also worked with schools who offered after school art programs, specific after school group projects resulting in a permanent art installation at the school, or hands-on field trip experiences. Most of the programs were extremely limited by budget which put restrictions on the number of experiences offered, the supplies that the students could work with, and groups of students that received programming.

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<sup>9</sup> Continuing professional development units are required by the state for continued teacher certification. There are many ways to earn credits but the Art Center was approved to offer workshops, classes, or similar training that addressed educational concerns.

The Outreach Program at the Art Center was funded by schools with budgets for special programming. Grant money specified for outreach programming was available, but it usually only covered the cost of supplies and the teaching artists. The budget, even with the grant money, was usually exceptionally tight. The programs at these schools were usually well received, but there were exceptions. Teachers and the students were generally enthusiastic about the opportunity to have a visiting artist who would talk to them about art and teach them techniques to create their own art. However, if there was not good communication at the school, we were occasionally met with resistance to the outreach programs. These complications could start in the funding and coordinating process, but sometimes they were not evident until we had teaching artists in the schools. When I spoke with the Director of Development at the Art Center, she also discussed some of the complications with the outreach program.

The Art Center is one of the largest providers of outreach in the greater metropolitan area. Grant funding was more attainable for outreach, but the funding is only for programming and not for the salaries of the people who put the programs together. They are so much work that it ends up costing the Art Center more than it was worth. (Aileen<sup>10</sup> interview, September 8, 2012)

### **Providing Art in the Schools**

There were public schools in the area that did not have art teachers. Schools would contact the Art Center and ask for an art teacher or an art program. The programs varied based on the schools needs and funding. We had teaching artists that worked close to full time by working at multiple schools, but most of the placements were shorter. Usually, the teaching artist would create their own curriculum and bring in supplies ordered through the Art Center. Some

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<sup>10</sup> In order to comply with university IRB requirements, I am using a pseudonym.

schools provided planning time for the teaching artist and the classroom teachers to meet and discuss what was happening in the classrooms and what the school was looking for. More often than not, this time was not provided by the school because of the budget and scheduling. The teaching artist would provide a curriculum based on their own interests or area of expertise.

Private Catholic schools were abundant in this neighborhood. These private schools usually did not have an art teacher and while the Art Center offered classes to many of the Catholic schools, one stood out in particular. This school bought pre-packaged art programs that the classroom teachers could use. Although these pre-packaged programs came with detailed lesson plans and visuals for the teacher to reference, most of the classroom teachers were resistant or unwilling to teach any art in their classrooms. The programming was terribly limited, and the students only created two art projects a year. Projects were chosen by a parent group and often had nothing to do with the curriculum of the classroom. The parent group working with the support of the principal asked the Art Center for art specialists to provide the art instruction in the schools. However, the teachers were resistant to giving up their class time for the arts specialist. They often stayed in the rooms disciplining students and waiting for the art instruction to conclude.

The Art Center also became involved with other local schools that did not have art teachers. In a nearby suburban school district an art program was entirely designed and managed by a parent group. The parents would volunteer to teach the lessons on a regular basis during the school year. At the end of the year they created vast displays throughout the school building exhibiting all of the work the students had done. They made an effort to integrate the art experiences with some of the other subjects the students were learning about in each grade. The Art Center became involved when the school had an art day at the end of the year and invited in

practicing artists to create art projects with the students. The parent group contacted the Art Center for artists to bring hands-on projects to the students for this event. Unfortunately, the parent group wanted the whole school to participate in several hands-on art making experiences presented by four different artists in the cafeteria over the course of three days. Teaching artists only had a group of students for 15 minutes and then they moved on to a new project. Problems with this format were many, but primarily there was not enough time to give students a meaningful experience.

Problems in providing art in the schools arose many times when there was not ample communication, planning, and commitment to the programming all levels. For art in the schools programs, principals would contact the Art Center and make the arrangements, and the classroom teacher would be told that a program was coming. Problems resulted in situations like this because the teachers would then complain about the art programming and then the Art Center would be asked to make adjustments. Sometimes the problem was that the teachers did not want an interruption in their classroom, and no matter what adjustments the Art Center made we were still met with complaints. We tried to encourage principals to allow teachers to have input on what they wanted from a visiting art program, but the budgets, scheduling, and workloads of the teachers often prevented much collaboration with the Art Center.

### **Enriching Existing School Art Programs**

We also worked with local schools that did have a full time art teacher. There were local schools and teachers who were interested in providing a different art experience for their students. Since many of the schools with art programs had limits to their facilities, equipment, and supplies, they would bring students to the Art Center to do specific projects like papermaking or ceramics. There were several schools that were within walking distance, and it

was these schools that usually took advantage of this extra programming offered at the Art Center. One local school with a well-funded art program asked to do a student art show at the Art Center. They did not access the specialized teaching artists or the facilities beyond the Art Center's exhibition space for a celebration, but they gave their students the experience of exhibiting work in a professional context and a place to bring parents and community members to celebrate the arts program at the school.

### **After School Programs**

There were several local schools that were interested in bringing in arts enrichment to their afterschool programs. Some schools would ask for specific classes while other schools were more open ended, wanting general arts experiences brought in on a specific day of the week. One of the biggest problems we encountered with these programs was student behavior management and clear expectations for the students and teaching artists to work with in the after school setting. The after-school programs were often held in a large room like a gym or cafeteria and the students would run around and drop in when they wanted. At times it was extremely difficult for the teaching artists to negotiate how to balance student energy with school expectations. In other schools there were designated classrooms for the after school programs and only students who chose to participate were put in the programs. This self-selection process resulted in less time being spent trying to navigate student behavior issues by the teaching artists. In the after school programs it usually took clear communication with the school administrators, reciprocal communication with the teaching artists, and finding the right match for the school. However, if there was no support for the teaching artist at the school, the program would occasionally be discontinued by the Outreach Coordinator at the Art Center.

## **Libraries**

Part of the Art Center's outreach programming also took place at local Libraries. We offered workshops related to the libraries' monthly programming. This was a difficult relationship to maintain because the city libraries had a central coordinator but individual libraries often had their own ideas about what should be included in the workshops. Sometimes the art projects consisted of an open-ended drop-in project but often the art workshops would go with a theme or a book that the library was promoting. These projects varied in the age range that the libraries were trying to serve. We did after-school workshops for school age children and evening workshops for adults at various local libraries. The difficulties with these projects included poor communication with the library representatives, lack of supplies and budgets, and the fact that these were isolated projects. On a few occasions, we tried a longer term project with repeat visits, but we had a hard time getting participants to come back for subsequent workshops. Since the library workshops were offered by the library for free or an extremely low fee, there was no real incentive to come back except for the experience. Sometimes a fee can deter participation, but with adult classes in the suburban libraries, it seemed that paying a fee for a series of workshops can be an incentive to return.

## **Big Read**

The Art Center also participated in National Endowment for the Arts "Big Read Program."<sup>11</sup> The Art Center received grant money to create programming around a month-long reading project intended to get lapsed readers (both student and adult) back into the habit of reading. This was a project at the Art Center where we also tried to partner with local libraries to varying success. The programming at the Art Center included book clubs, discussion groups, an art exhibit that went with the theme of the book and a family day that was a time to come in and

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.neabigread.org/>

learn more about the program and participate in hands on projects that went with the theme of the book. We sometimes created traveling exhibits made up of reproductions of art work that went with the theme of the book. These reproductions traveled around to create exhibits at local libraries. Sometimes these exhibits were art based and sometimes they were more informational panels about themes or issues in the texts. The “Big Read Program” was a way for the Art Center to interact with the community in a different context and was intended to bring in a new audience through the activities around the program.

The outreach programs at the Art Center had the dual purpose of providing arts programming to the community as well as raising awareness about the Art Center. The Art Center actively sought grant money in order to be able to provide occasional programs at low or no cost to families. One example of this was family workshop days that were sponsored by the Target Corporation. This funding allowed the Art Center to purchase supplies and recruit teaching artists and volunteers to bring free arts experiences to families. This would sometimes be accompanied by a movie or other event and projects would be designed to coincide with a theme. Families would be invited to move freely from station to station creating small craft projects. Themes were sometimes multicultural, but the majority of the projects were craft projects. The attendance varied but when it was accompanied by a movie or another event, the attendance was usually quite large. The main purpose of these events was to entertain and entice the public to come back and sign up for classes or attend other future events at the Art Center.

### **Evaluation**

The programming at the Art Center covered a wide range of disciplines, involved several coordinators and approximately sixty-five teaching artists between the in-house and outreach programming. What I perceived as a major strength of the Art Center was the ability to create a

variety of quality programming on a shoe string budget. However, the time and effort that went into the debt management were so demanding, there was little time for any kind of evaluation or reflection on programming as an organization. The evaluation of the in-house classes was based on informal feedback from parents or students and on the number of returning students. If an Art Center teacher developed a following and had significant numbers of students sign-up for their classes, it was assumed they were an effective teacher. The outreach programs were more difficult to evaluate. There was informal correspondence between the school and the Art Center's Outreach Coordinator. I usually only received information about outreach feedback if there was a complaint. I also relied on the teaching artists' feedback. If they identified problems at the school like resistance from teachers, it could mean the program was not a good fit, there was a lack of support or buy-in at the school, or the teaching artist was not an effective teacher in that environment. When problems were identified through the site personnel or the teaching artist, there was usually an inquiry to understand both sides of what was happening at the school or program in question.

Evaluation at the Art Center was more intuitive, relying more on an ongoing informal assessment, rather than based on facts, surveys, or data. The main data that was looked at was the numbers of students enrolled in the classes and the amount of money that was brought in for programming. While it was a non-profit organization, the Art Center still needed to cover its operation costs. While I would have liked to drop in on classes both at the Art Center and in the outreach programs, there was a lack of money, time, personnel, and resources for evaluation. Even extremely basic evaluation of teacher performance was difficult to assess and left to the success or popularity of a class. Determining the quality of the program, the engagement of the

students, or what the program or class was teaching the students was non-existent at the Art Center.

### **Gallery Programming**

As Gallery Curator at the Art Center, I selected, coordinated and hung art shows in the main gallery and other spaces in the building. My goal was to create an exhibition program that served an educational function as well as a venue for the public to see and interact with art exhibitions. The visitors that frequented the Art Center came for many reasons, whether it was to bring their children for an art class or to attend a performance or concert. Most visitors did not come with the sole purpose of visiting the gallery exhibits. Yet, patrons who would not necessarily seek out art experience would spend time looking at the art work during intermissions or while waiting for their children. I realized this was sometimes the only professional visual art experience some patrons would encounter. I created a challenging exhibition program that included some highly conceptual and contemporary art but balanced it with many shows that fit a broader definition of art. Exhibitions included tattoo art, realism, printmaking, drawing, local artists, photography, papermaking, watercolor, and included professional solo and group exhibitions, local artists, and student work. My goal was to create a vibrant exhibition program that challenged but did not alienate the local audience.

As an educator, I had a dual mission of creating gallery programming that educated patrons through the diversity of exhibitions as well as workshops and artist talks. One mission of the gallery was to challenge common perceptions of art and to expand the audience's knowledge about art practices. Some common perceptions included but were not limited to: art is only painting and drawing, art is boring and does not offer anything to relate to, art is only for artists and wealthy people, art is only made by trained artists. I worked with a Gallery Committee that

consisted of local artists and other professionals from the community to create a calendar of exhibitions. When selecting shows we tried to create a balance of conceptual art and realism, a balance of different mediums and processes, and a balance between professional artists, “outsider” artists, local artists, and students. The intent of the gallery program was to show a wide range of art which would educate the public over a period of time to the great variety of art ideas, styles, media, processes and approaches to art making.

### **Gallery Committee**

The Gallery Committee was created to offer advice and support for the exhibitions. An Art Center board member helped form the committee with some neighborhood volunteers who were interested in art and the gallery. The Gallery Committee met for approximately one hour once a month to plan for shows, openings, and programming. In the beginning, the Gallery Committee seemed to be interested in helping with particular shows but did not have a vested interest in the gallery program as a whole. There were many things that committee members did not follow through on, like soliciting sponsorship, or helping out at opening receptions. Eventually, many of the gallery volunteers began to lose interest. The board member on the committee encouraged me to recruit people I thought would be interested in supporting the gallery. I began to recruit artists I met through shows at the Art Center and the Gallery Committee shifted to consisting primarily of neighborhood artists who also held teaching positions at area colleges. The artists had a greater interest in a sustained relationship with the gallery and as a result, they were more invested in supporting the gallery and taking on projects like building walls, painting the gallery walls, or installing new lighting.

## **Engaging the Community**

As with the rest of the programs offered at the Art Center, I was challenged to use the galleries to bring in new audiences. There was not significant revenue from selling work on display, so bringing in new audiences was thought to contribute to the maintenance of steady revenue to cover the operational costs of the Art Center. Some of the exhibits were solo exhibitions of city-based artists that had low attendance at the receptions and during the month the exhibit was on display. Group exhibits had more success, but the crowds were still relatively small depending on the number of artists and the number of invited guests.

I was aware that I was showing work in a working class community with community members that valued art classes for their children but did not perceive their own relationship to art as an adult. In addition to showing work that I was interested in which included recent MFA graduates and contemporary conceptual artists, I wanted to show work that was from the community, art that was more relatable to their everyday life, and art that pushed the boundaries of what art could be. I had been to an art exhibit of work by city police officers a couple years earlier and I was intrigued by the number of police officers who created art and the content of their work. Some seemed to use it as an escape while others seemed to process the imagery of their daily lives through recreations of violent imagery. Since the neighborhood around the Art Center had many police officers and fire fighters, we sponsored a police and firefighter exhibition. We also had a board member who was an artist and a fire fighter. We put out a call for submissions and exhibited work from interested artists who were also fire fighters and police officers in the metropolitan area and the surrounding suburbs. Some of the work submitted had police and firefighter themes other work was traditional landscapes or portraits. It provided the artists with an opportunity to exhibit and share their art work with the community. The reception

was well attended and many visitors expressed surprise that police officers and fire fighters were also artists. This exhibit gave the community an opportunity to broaden their conception of what an artist is.

Another exhibit intended to appeal to a wider audience was a tattoo art exhibition. It was at a time (2006) when tattoo reality television shows were popular. The tattoo show reflected popular culture, appealed to the blue collar neighborhood we resided in, and brought in an entirely different group of artists. The result was a large exhibit with tattoo artists from several states in the Midwest. The turn-out for the opening was enormous. People continued to make trips to the Art Center to see the exhibit after hearing about it through word of mouth and through an article that was in a popular local publication highlighting things to do in the area. It is not clear how many visitors to the exhibit would return for other events, but the exhibit was considered a success both as an event that expanded the notion of what is considered art and in bringing in a new audience.

Several of the board members at the Art Center were also involved with a small historical society in the neighborhood. The historical society had its own space in a building near the Art Center and served to maintain a historical record of the local community and surrounding areas. This relationship allowed us to partner with them on a few occasions. One of these partnerships was a Hat Exhibition that was at the Art Center and the historical society simultaneously. The exhibit at the Art Center focused on more contemporary artistic hats while the historical society's exhibit featured historical hats that were lent by local community members. This exhibit brought in new audience members through the partnership of the historical society, as well as the milliners who participated in the exhibit. The hat exhibit presented the regular patrons of the Art Center another approach to art making and the creative process.

## Gallery Partnerships

The regular schedule was balanced out between solo and group exhibits of well established artists and local artists who were just starting out. Because these audiences were often small, we began to come up with annual exhibits that would include several artists. This increased the audience that would attend the exhibit and opening reception. The first exhibit of this kind was a printmaking exhibit that was a partnership between a local printmaking studio and the Art Center. When I first approached the printmaking studio we made preliminary plans for a cross town exhibit that would be taking simultaneously in two very different parts of the city. After complications with available exhibition space, we decided to collaborate and jury the exhibit together, but the entire exhibit would be held at the Art Center. By partnering with the printmaking studio, we were able to benefit from their mailing list to reach potential artists as well as their expertise in jurying the exhibit. The exhibit resulted in a large survey of printmaking styles and processes that brought in a new group of artists and their acquaintances. The patrons of the Art Center were introduced to the medium of printmaking and given an opportunity to see the breadth of possibilities that were possible with this artistic process.

We also had partnered with the city during a festival to highlight contribution of artists with disabilities and works that increase visibility of the disability experience. When we agreed to host exhibitions for this event, we were contacted by three very different groups of artists. The first group was from a graduate program at a major art institution in the city. This group of artists did not have disabilities but worked with issues with and ideas about disability in many different ways. The exhibit was technology based incorporating sound, video, projections, and robotics as major components in the art making and presentation. The art work invited visitors to touch or move elements that would change images or create sounds. This was a very different show than

the neighborhood was used to seeing both because of the technology based art and the interactive nature of the exhibit. The second group was from an organization that is an artists' community for adults with cognitive disabilities. The artists from this group also had their own band which played at the opening reception. The third group was a couple artists from another organization which gave adults with mental illness a place to come together and participate at in a studio/art-making space. One of these artists had exhibited in a professional gallery that specialized in outsider art. The gallery director produced a film that was also screened during this exhibition.

There was a city-wide artist recognition month that created a publication with featured exhibits to highlight the arts in the city. For two years, the Art Center's exhibits were highlighted as a feature exhibit in the publication that was printed and distributed by the city. Each year had a different theme and asked area galleries to feature local or city-based artists. We were fortunate to be able to put together shows that coincided with the themes that featured interesting work from city artists. Participating in these city sponsored events led to city-wide recognition and some fantastic free publicity. The Art Center's involvement and participation also led to greater interest from newspapers and local magazines who wrote stories about the exhibits we were showing.

### **Student Work**

When I began at the Art Center we had a local school art exhibit. It was usually held in May, and local art teachers participated on a voluntary basis. After the first year, the participation dropped significantly. When I talked to the teachers who had participated in the past, some had retired and were not replaced, and others just said they did not have the time at the end of the year. I decided to try something new by moving the exhibit to December and making it an art card competition open to both school and individual participation. The exhibit had a theme

around celebrating the arts and was an opportunity to create original artwork about the importance of the arts. We selected five winners each year and used their images to create a pack of “art cards,” which were sold at the Art Center. Winners were also offered a free class at the Art Center. This offered the dual purpose of creating an opportunity for students to show their artwork in a professional environment and as an outreach program to get parents and students interested in the Art Center and the programs it offered. The exhibit was tremendously successful with both school participation and individual entries.

### **Art Education and the Gallery**

The exhibits were available to the public during the same hours that the building was open. While we tried to have information available to the public to help viewers navigate the exhibits, because of funding and the limit the director put on time I could invest in the gallery, written didactic information about artists and exhibits was often limited to whatever the artist provided. This varied quite a bit depending on how much the artist wanted to share and their personal beliefs on whether written text should accompany their work. When showing more conceptual work, I asked the artist to write an artist statement to offer an explanation of the work in the show. Some artists preferred to leave their work to speak for itself in the gallery setting. Still, other artists created work that had a social agenda or were about community engagement and asked if they could offer talks or workshops in relation to their exhibit. Participation for workshops was usually limited because of the challenges of getting information out to the community when it was not a part of the regular schedule of class offerings at the Art Center. However, the gallery and exhibits were frequently utilized by the in-house teaching artists as part of their teaching.

## **Funding**

While there are numerous issues that can be discussed with community-based art education programs, one of the main issues at the Art Center was funding because of a multi-million dollar debt that resulted in a continuing struggle to stay operable. The Art Center was a non-profit organization, but it needed to bring in enough new revenue to sustain itself and cover the massive overhead that was created by interest payments alone on the debt incurred from the new building. Funding was a constant issue influencing decision making while limiting the function and role of the Art Center. Funding sources included grants, board members, financial donations from area businesses and community member support.

### **Grants**

Grant funding was an essential piece of the Art Center. While the Art Center generated revenue through classes and performances, much of the programming was dependent on grant money. The large overhead from the building debt was a constant challenge to address. When I spoke with the Director of Development, she identified two key issues with funding the Art Center: one was the location, and the other was the financial aspect of the Art Center and its board members.

The location of the Art Center was far from the city center, and while it is surrounded by poorer areas, the neighborhood the Art Center sat in was a predominantly white working class neighborhood. One of the main city funding agencies has a map with all the places that are funded and the Art Center is in a desert. There is really almost no grant funding. You would think they would want to fund it more but they don't. The demographics of the location were also problematic. If foundations want to fund diversity, we weren't

diverse enough. Some foundations only fund certain neighborhoods. They couldn't quite figure out where we fit. (Aileen interview, September 8, 2012)

The Art Center was able to cover expenses in its general operations. The classes and programs brought in enough revenue to support themselves. Grant money funded additional programs. Yet the debt was a constant problem and a deterrent from getting additional funding to relieve some of the stranglehold the debt had on the programming and functioning of the Art Center.

The financials were also a deterrent for funding. The Art Center had a large overhead of debt from building the new center. You are not going to finance something that looks like it is on the brink of going under. Some foundations are smart and know how to read a spread sheet, some do not, so it scared them. They usually didn't call and ask about the debt so we couldn't say, "We are operationally solvent but we have this other piece." The Art Center lost grants because of the debt. An organization that funded us for the last four years would not continue funding without a clean audit. Most grants are for specific programming, and everyone wants the general operations grant because there are no strings attached. Trying to get your programming to fit what the foundation is looking for can be like fitting a square peg in a round whole. (Aileen interview, September 8, 2012)

### **The Board**

There was a Board of Directors that oversaw the overall functioning of the Art Center. The board hired the Executive Director and worked closely with him to ensure the Art Center was meeting the expectations of the board, the community, and the financial institutions that were providing loans and other financial support. The board was made up of community

members that were usually recruited by existing board members. The board looked for members who were financially solvent and had experiences in management or other areas that would contribute to the general operations of the Art Center. With the demographics of the neighborhood, it was difficult to get board members with enough money or professional connections to adequately help the Art Center. The Director of Development explained this:

If your board has one or two people in upper management that can leverage their vendors or banks that they work with, or if they have peers in funding corporations it can provide leverage. There are people in the neighborhood that are wealthy and comfortable, but there are not enough people with enough wealth or connections that help leverage funding opportunities. It frustrates the board because they see that a foundation like, Kraft, who gives to nutrition and food banks, may also give to art programming, but there is no one on the board that was willing or able to make the calls to secure that type of funding. Philanthropically there is no pull; no one who can call these companies with connections. The board didn't participate in fundraising. Every place I have worked has had board members that help out with fundraising except the Art Center. (Aileen interview, September 8, 2012)

### **Individual Giving**

When raising money for the new building, the Art Center asked for individual donations from the community to supplement the funds that were made available through a state grant. According to the Director of Development, they raised slightly over 1 million dollars before the new building was completed. The Art Center tried to maintain a base of community support through memberships. The memberships were bought primarily by community members who

participated in classes or other events on a regular basis. The Art Center membership numbers never came close to the number of community members who offered that initial financial support through donations to the building project. There was initial support to build a new art center, but it did not mean that the community members who offered initial donations were going to be active patrons of the Art Center. Aileen explained the need for individual support.

If all the people, who gave ten or twenty dollars once, could do it every year, it could have been big. The Art Center tried monthly contributions. We created a campaign to get 500 people to give \$500, for five years. It was a very hard sell. We got up to 150 contributors, but that was it. Even to get fifty people to do that for the Art Center was big. Unfortunately, they would finish their five years and then not come back. Community members with kids do classes, but they only see the classes, the movies, and concerts they are personally interested in. They didn't see all the other work that we do. If people gave a little extra money to the Art Center, it could help with all of that. We didn't cross promote or showcase what we did to the neighborhood. We tried but we didn't have the money. We did a little with social media, but more could have been done. We didn't have the staff with the time or the know-how. People live in big houses that are expensive to maintain and look very comfortable, but they also have a lot of debt, and expenses and they can pay for art classes, auctions, etc. There are not the financial resources to go beyond that. They enjoy their participation in the Art Center, but they don't see the greater good it does supplementing the arts in the public school system. (Aileen interview, September 8, 2012)

## **Other Fundraising Opportunities**

There were a variety of fundraising events, both large and small, to help supplement the grants and revenue of the Art Center's programming. The largest fundraiser was an annual auction that was put together by the Auxiliary Committee. According to the Director of Development, the auction brought in about \$100,000 a year. Aileen described this event.

People who go usually attend every year, but it has been getting less populated. The last auction raised enough money, but the audience started diminishing. The auction needs to reinvigorate every four or five years. The board should attend, but they were never there 100 percent. They should also have to sell a certain number of tickets. To get on the Board, members had to contribute \$1500, which is pretty low. There were members on the board and the Auxiliary Committee that worked really hard on the auction. There was usually around 100-110,000 dollars brought in, but the last couple years it was down to 85 –90, 000 dollars. They used to do a big Gala, but it was scaled back in recent years. There is a live auction and a silent auction. The live auction is very cool, but some of the silent auction items are not high quality. Tickets are \$50, which is not expensive, so people spend their money at the auction. This past year the food was bad and when people are spending the money, and they remember the food as being bad, they may be less likely to return. (Aileen interview, September 8, 2012)

There were additional smaller fundraising events like a golf outing and a summer music festival. The summer is always a hard time financially, so the music festival/fundraiser was intended to provide some much needed additional revenue. The golf outing may seem out of place at an Art Center, but it was an attempt to reach a wider audience. Aileen explained this:

The golf outing was not a lot of work, but it was expensive with the green fees. It made \$25, 000 and had potential to go bigger. It attracts a different audience. It was an effort to try to shake things up. You have to bring people in constantly, get sponsorships with more programs, and find different ways to attract new audiences. (Aileen interview, September 8, 2012)

Without sufficient funding, there was a lack of structural support to maintain the building, support and develop programming, and market the Art Center's offerings. Instead, the Art Center relied on finding teaching artists who were dedicated to their craft and brought their expertise into the Art Center. With a lack of time and ability to pay coordinators for meeting time, there was not much collaboration and coordination across the disciplines. Each area either thrived or struggled based on who was leading the programs and their investment in both their specialization and in building a program to share that specialization with the community. The lack of structure meant specialization coordinators, faculty, and students were on their own to navigate without a strong support system. While there was freedom to build and work on each respective area, without structural support from the Art Center, when coordinators left, the programs often suffered.

### **Funding the Gallery**

The main challenge of the Gallery, as with the rest of the Art Center, was funding. The only visible revenue of the gallery was when artwork sold. We took an unusually small commission, to encourage artists to keep their prices low, and hopefully increasing the potential for sales. Unlike traditional galleries there was not a clientele list so sales were infrequent. This provided more freedom in the work that could be shown, but it was also challenging to maintain

administrative support for the gallery. The cost of the gallery space was relatively low. The cost of running the space was mainly my time to select, prepare, and hang work. The gallery space was consistently challenged to show how it contributed to the financial well-being of the Art Center, due to the financial strain on the building. The gallery was a pivotal piece for general grants from the city and state. The Director of Development explained this.

With our general grants, the gallery is an important piece. They ask for and look at what is going on, and the gallery makes us look well rounded and elevates us. The art gallery makes us go beyond park district programming. There was a balance between local artists and regional artists. Some funders look for one or the other, so it is important to have both. (Aileen interview, September 8, 2012)

There were also specific grants that we would apply for, specific to exhibits, to create educational programs, or in partnership with artists. These grants seemed to be challenging to get. Aileen explained:

We are not a traditional gallery space only, and there is not a lot of funding out there just for the arts. There is more funding for individual artists. The artists are not always used to that kind of programming. A gallery or art center might get money to bring in an exhibit, but it usually needs to have a lot of components to it. Certain foundations look for a certain image, and you usually don't get specific feedback. It can all be very political and who you know, we like to think it is not, but it can be. (Aileen interview, September 8, 2012)

Another aspect of the gallery that was often an overlooked contribution to the Art Center was the publicity the exhibits provided to the Art Center. As I mentioned previously, several of the exhibits were in partnership with the city or other organizations. This increased the Art Center's visibility. There were exhibits that were highlighted in the city and local papers and magazines. There could have been more done to increase the visibility of the gallery exhibits through educational programs, promotional printed materials, and marketing but there was not enough money to pay someone to do that kind of work. The Director of Development confirmed this.

The marketing for the gallery was non-existent, so that is also problematic in both attracting exhibits and creating and promoting programming. There was no money to put towards a staff member to create programming with the exhibits. It gave us credibility, but it had more potential than was utilized. Some artists are connected to very deep pockets. With more marketing, the spotlight could have been on it more often. (Aileen interview, September 8, 2012)

### **Teen and Young Adult Programming**

One of my personal missions at the Art Center was to try and provide opportunities to local teens, to help them develop a sense of what the arts had to offer as a career, as recreation or hobby, and for college. I tried offering several teen art classes including a portfolio development class, a visiting artist class, and a computer art class to provide teens with a range of opportunities to help students envision, develop, and pursue their own future trajectory in the arts. The theater department seemed to have a large population of teen students that participated in classes, plays, and musicals. The rehearsal and performance schedule seemed to facilitate a

community atmosphere. The visual arts did not have a culminating event that facilitated a sense of a larger community outside of the individual classes. It was difficult to attract teen students and I was often frustrated with low enrollment and an inability to keep students interested in visual art class offerings. I tried to package classes in different ways, but it was difficult to know what might attract students. I tried changing the format, the class title, and the times for classes, and yet the Art Center never seemed to attract a sustained group of teen students who were interested in the visual arts.

With a \$230,000 grant from a major foundation that funded programs in the city, the Art Center set out to boost teen and young adult participation in the arts. It had a considerable impact on the Art Center, specifically in the visual arts programming because we were able to rebuild our computer lab and expand class offerings to include digital technologies. I believed we could have success attracting teens and young adults through a digital arts program, offering classes in digital photography, computer animation, and web design. We had a computer lab but the computers were donated and they were not able to handle the software needed for visual design. I spoke with the Director of Development about the programs the grant made possible and Aileen shared how she interpreted the Art Center's use of that funding as a success.

We met with other organizations who also received money from this grant program. We got the least amount. So many organizations changed focus half way through. They saw it was throw away money. It was to try something and if it did not work, ok. We were careful with how we spent the money. We created a teen and Young Adult Board, put in a new computer lab, and created programming for teens and young adults. The Teen Board fell apart after the leadership left, but we had more teen programming than we had before the grant. The Young Adult Board came up with the digital art competition and a

young artist exhibition. We opened up the doors for artists in that age group coming in. We had the smallest grant that had the biggest impact. (Aileen interview, September 8, 2012)

The grant was to develop teen and young adult programming and could have been used in any of the programs at the Art Center. All the coordinators submitted proposals for the grant money. The Art Center used a portion of the grant to create a teen and a Young Adult Board, but the rest of the money went towards the visual arts to re-develop the computer lab and develop digital arts classes. The computer lab did expand our class offerings for teens. While cartooning had been offered at the Art Center for a long time, the new computer lab extended that experience into computer designed comics and the beginnings of computer animation. Still, the teen classes were still participated in as individual classes. Teens who did take the new digital art classes didn't become part of a community of peers with a shared interest. After the class was over the students did not continue to work together in additional classes.

### **The Young Adult Board**

The Young Adult Board was formed through a grant with the express purpose of bringing in teenagers and young adults. There was remarkably little young adult programming at the Art Center. With both teens and young adults, it can be challenging to create programming at an executive level that will appeal to a young adult demographic. The idea behind starting a Young Adult Board was to create programming from within the specific age demographic. With the grant, both a Teen Board (ages 13- 18) and Young Adult Board (ages 21-35) were started. The Teen Board focused more on theater since their leader was also the theater coordinator. When there was a change in staff and the theater coordinator left her position, the Teen Board

dissolved. The Young Adult Board was more successful. It was formed and led by the Art Center's team of graphic designers, who were paid staff members and also active young adults in the surrounding community. I spoke with the Young Adult Board president, who I will refer to as Lynn, about the beginning of the Young Adult Board.

I was asked by the Executive Director and the Director of Development to start and run a Young Adult Board. The organization had received a grant to increase young adult programming and felt a board was the perfect fit. I did not feel comfortable with the responsibilities of running the board because I did not like public speaking and I was shy. I asked my co-worker to be the vice president because he was outgoing and seemed to know everyone in the neighborhood. We had to find additional people to be on the board and make a committee. I had to write a mission statement; the vice president of the Art Center board helped me write it. There were five of us to start with. We started in the fall with a Halloween party. We screened a movie and made decorations. There was a costume contest. The turnout was ok. We did not have much time to plan and advertise so for the short notice we were happy with the crowd. In January, I came up with a list of things we could do which included: fall festival, beer tasting (which were eventually combined to an October-fest celebration), and a digital photo contest. (Lynn interview, October 7, 2012)

In the beginning, the Young Adult Board had to define the purpose or mission the board would focus on. While programming could include classes, a series of talks, or special events, the Young Adult Board focused on events to bring young people into the Art Center. Lynn defined the Young Adult Board and its mission:

The Young Adult Board is for ages 21-35. I am 29 and I think I am the oldest person on the board. The main purpose was just to bring in new people. The young adult age was the dead zone. I am not sure if we actually did bring them in many times except for the occasional event. At the largest, we grew to about eight Young Adult Board members. For those who got involved it was a good networking opportunity and the events were a fun neighborhood thing to do. (Lynn interview, October 7, 2012)

### **Young Adult Board Events**

Lynn asked me as the Gallery Curator if the Young Adult Board could sponsor an art exhibition. In the past, the gallery had made several attempts to bring in younger artists through college art shows and local artist exhibits organized by young artists in the community. While each attempt resulted in some degree of success, when we made an attempt to repeat the exhibit the following year, interest seemed to have faded. I was interested to see what would happen if the Young Adult Board put together an exhibition. We worked together to get the show underway. We discussed how to put out a call for artists, and I helped hang the work for the exhibit. The result was a digital art competition which was tremendously successful and continues to be an annual event. With the board's efforts, each subsequent year brought in new artists and audiences. The exhibits serve the dual purpose of creating a venue for young emerging artists to exhibit their work with their peers and a social event for young adults in the community. Lynn described the work that went into making these exhibits events.

The first digital image contest was such a success we did an emerging artists competition. About 30 artists submitted work. Each person had 1-5 pieces in the show. A local pizza place donated pizzas for the reception. There was a cash bar and a DJ. We gave away 5 or

so prizes, some being cash. We had about 200 in attendance. All the artists and attendants were very happy. So many artists asked at the reception what the next competition was we decided to do the competitions annually. The emerging artists' competition was in the winter, and the digital image contest was in the summer. (Lynn interview, October 7, 2012)

In addition to the art exhibits, the Young Adult Board created other events that they felt would appeal to their age demographic. They decided to try a wine tasting. Lynn described the event.

The first Wine tasting brought in about 150 people so we had another one a few months later and 2 more the following 2 summers. The summer after that we had about 600 people. The Executive Director turned it into a wine and beer tasting. It was great and had a ton of people. For each tasting we had sponsors, and sometimes vendors or sometimes we served our own wine. (Lynn interview, October 7, 2012)

The Young Adult Board was given a lot of freedom and support from the Art Center to create these events, but they did meet with some resistance and difficulties. Trying to negotiate their vision and interests with the overall mission of the Art Center and the administration was sometimes problematic. Lynn had approached me for additional support when the Young Adult Board was trying to put together a music venue. There was fear on the administrative side that the event might draw the wrong crowd or lead to problems with damages to the property so they were never able to get permission to develop a music venue. Lynn discussed the board's interest in putting together a Punk music show.

The whole point was to get more programming for this age group. There could be more flow and programming for all ages. We wanted to do a Punk show, it was just too much work and too much resistance. We thought we could get shows there on a regular basis. It would have brought in a whole huge group. There are a lot of creative people. I had some other people on the board who were into it, we could do a series and do punk once a month or once a week, bring them out of the bars and into the Art Center and have cheap beer that appeals to young people. (Lynn interview, October 7, 2012)

The administration was not the only influence on the Young Adult Board and their programming at the Art Center. The Auxiliary Committee wanted the Young Adult Board's involvement in the annual fundraising auction. Lynn was frustrated that the Auxiliary Committee did not understand why the event was not appealing to young adults. Lynn described why the event was not a good fit for the Young Adult Board.

The ticket was \$50 or \$40 for board members. You got food, but you had to pay for your drinks, you have to bid on stuff, there is not that kind of extra money at that age, there are apartments, car payments, student loans. They do not have anything that the young age groups are interested in. It was not feasible. When you are 21, you want to hang out with other 21 year olds. (Lynn interview, October 7, 2012)

### **Sustaining the Young Adult Board**

The success of the early events was a result of the Young Adult Board being given the freedom to create events that met their interests. They knew there would be an audience for their events because they called on all of their friends to attend. The grant money allowed the

administration to support the Young Adult Board without concern for the financial aspect of the events. When the grant money ran out, the administration took a larger role in some of the events. Now that an investment was required, the administration wanted to oversee the financial aspects of programming the Young Adult Board was creating. When I met with Lynn, her own interest in the Young Adult Board was fading because the administration was limiting the Young Adult Board's involvement in events they had developed.

We had wanted to do something with music for a while and were finally being given permission for a Music fest. We all met to talk about ideas and bands, but we did not get any say in it. The administration took it over. All last year they used our ideas, but we just flyer'd the neighborhood and didn't get any say. We became a street team. Anything that brought in money the administration wanted more control. When board members don't feel like they have a say, they lose interest. Keeping board members is difficult, sometimes people get married and have babies, sometimes they join, and we never hear from them again, sometimes people have crazy ideas and come in and do something and then get busy, whatever their reason for joining, resume builder, music fest, an event they want to help with, they will come in for a time and then leave. I kept it going because I worked there and thought of things we could do. Unless you have a purpose people don't like to give up their time. (Lynn interview, October 7, 2012)

### **Challenges of the Young Adult Board**

There were many challenges to keep an active adult board in place. Having someone who was invested in the success of the Young Adult Board seemed to have been crucial to the survival of the board. Since Lynn was on staff, she was aware of what was already going on in

the center, and she would see opportunities that an outside board member might not see. Lynn was also able to work on the Young Adult Board as part of her work hours. The rest of the board was volunteering. Lynn put in more time than she was paid for, but there was an overlap for her. It was difficult to keep the rest of the Young Adult Board interested and invested over a long period of time. The board shrunk to about four active members and other members dropped in and out depending on their time and interests. The Young Adult Board brought in a young audience for these events, but it never succeeded in creating monthly programming that would bring in a crowd of young adults on a regular basis. Lynn was well aware of the challenges and where the Young Adult Board could have been more successful.

Things like gallery exhibits, were successful and brought in people, but they did not bring in money. The music people come and go because there are also bars and other venues. The exhibits, our two art competitions, are where I see the most people. We have thought about building on that and doing a “best of emerging artist competition” or doing a young artist series. There isn’t enough man power and there isn’t enough people with skills. You have ideas, but there isn’t always people on the board that have the time or knowledge to get it done. We need more people and we need more people running it, there are probably people who are more qualified, could add more positions, treasurer, etcetera. Right now we just have a president and vice president. We need a full committee and someone in charge of marketing. We could sell out every music fest if we had someone to do our marketing. (Lynn interview, October 7, 2012)

The Young Adult Board did provide a place for young people to meet and to invest time in their interests. The gallery exhibits offered many artists their first formal exhibition

opportunity. The active board members gained experience in event planning and met people in the community. I asked Lynn if she would have been on the board if she did not work at the Art Center and the way she paused, it seemed like it was a difficult question to answer. Lynn acknowledged that she was so shy when she started as the board president, it was difficult to imagine taking that initiative without working at the Art Center. However, the position had transformed her through the opportunities and responsibilities. “I learned how to be a leader, and I learned more about the business end. I will keep in touch with a lot of these people,” (Lynn interview, October 7, 2012).

### **Discussion**

When I was working at the Art Center, I was a participant, an educator, an artist, and an administrator at the same time. Through my investment in the Art Center, I gained experience, self-confidence, self-awareness, and developed a community of peers that reflected my interests. Through the partnerships, programming, committees, and boards, I developed a more realistic perspective about the functioning of art within a community. The Art Center was plagued by organizational and financial difficulties but the talented and dedicated people teachers and staff made the programs work. There were staff and teaching artists who went above and beyond to create programming and classes to the students of the Art Center. Artists brought in new interests, new ideas, and new energy. One of the most rewarding things about my job was meeting new people through the Art Center community. The relationships with staff, teaching artists, students, artists, and patrons contributed to a strong sense of belonging.

The Art Center gave me both a voice and a cause. I became more aware of arts role in communities and society as a whole. I began to see art education as a democratic right. I adjusted my own teaching, I adjusted and developed art center programming, and I adjusted

course offerings based on experiences and observations. This was a complicated task because the Art Center served a diverse audience base and there was little structural support. I have chosen to discuss the critical issues of the Art Center's programming and functioning through how the Art Center created access to the arts. I begin by sharing a story of access that inspired me to think more deeply about the role of the Art Center in creating access and the curriculum and pedagogical practices that provide a more democratic art educational experience. While access was created through a variety of programming and disciplines, my discussion will focus on access to visual arts education created through the Art Center's outreach, classes, and the gallery.

### **A Story of Access**

Through working at the Art Center and teaching in the outreach programs, I began to think more comprehensively about who exactly had access to art education in my community. The contrast between schools I observed that were within walking distance to the Art Center when compared to the schools I observed that were deeper in the city (and farther from the Art Center) was drastic. There was one school in particular that always stood out in my memories. It was a school on the east side of the city, which I will refer to as East Side Elementary. I had difficulty finding an Art Center instructor for the outreach program at that school because the location was far and in a low income area known for a higher crime rate. The school was tremendously enthusiastic about setting up an art program. There was good communication between the administration, the teachers, and the Art Center.

The Art Center provided a weekly art teacher for 3 and 4<sup>th</sup> grade. School personnel met with the Art Center's Outreach Director and wanted to meet with the instructor before he started. They were not asking for or allowing time for a fully integrated art curriculum, but they were looking for art lessons that would complement the curriculum. I knew it would be difficult to

find a teacher because most of the teaching artists lived near the Art Center. They were used to teaching placements that were convenient and close to home. I found a teacher who seemed to fit in exceptionally well and he began teaching at the end of November. His enthusiasm showed through the lesson plans he developed and his timely request for supplies. I encouraged him to write his own curriculum based on his artistic practices and what he thought the teachers and the schools were looking for, based on their meetings.

At first, his lessons and curriculum reflected traditional methods of art making and focused on the figure and portraits. After a few weeks of getting to know the school and students better, he then sent me an e-mail with new plans for a mural project. Along with the plans, he indicated several reasons he was planning to implement this new project. He hoped the mural would change the scale students were working on, give them a break from working in the classroom environment, incorporate teamwork and leadership building, and increase learning of reading and geometry, not just teaching drawing fundamentals. I was excited to see the change in focus and his willingness to make adjustments based on his experiences with the students. Then with only a week notice, he quit for a full time job. I was fortunate to have received a resume from another artist who was available to begin teaching in his place. Unfortunately, she did not implement the mural project. Instead, she chose a fairly traditional curriculum consisting of observational drawing and painting.

I had not fully contemplated the curriculum or pedagogy of our outreach programs until I had the opportunity to substitute for the teaching artist at East Side Elementary one day. I had never visited the school. I had been to meetings at the Art Center and hired the teaching artists, but the Outreach Director at the Art Center had been the one to visit the school and make the contractual arrangements. I was surprised how fast I got to the school, I had planned for forty-

five minutes but it only took around twenty-five minutes to get there. My perception had been that the school was much further from the Art Center. When I was looking for a parking space, I could see the students arriving. It was predominantly a Latino and African American population. The East Side Elementary school building was extremely old, but it seemed to be in good shape. I love old buildings and immediately noticed all of the old wood in the construction of the doors and window frames. When I checked into the office, I was given a key to a supply closet and the room numbers of the classes I would see. There were four classrooms. The school was highly structured with rules that were strictly enforced. The hallways were fairly quiet when I was making my way upstairs. When I walked in the classrooms, the students were exceptionally attentive. I had grown used to teaching at the Art Center and having a far more relaxed environment. It was a significant contrast.

At the final classroom, the class was taught in Spanish. I introduced myself, and the lesson and the classroom teacher translated for me. I thought the students were well behaved. I remember being startled as she began to yell at a student. I do not recall what he had done if he was talking, or doing something else. I remember thinking that these kids were so good and I could not imagine what would have caused that severe reaction. It was such a drastic contrast to the relaxed atmosphere I had grown accustomed to at the Art Center. As I drove home, I thought about the school and the students. I now had a different perspective after having spent a day teaching at the school. I hired two African American teaching artists but their curriculum reflected their own post-secondary schooling in the dominant Western Art practices. I thought about the shift in the curriculum that the first teaching artist had planned to implement as a response to the restrictive classroom environments that I observed. I wondered how the school, the teachers, and the students would have responded to a more physical, dynamic, playful, and

responsive art curriculum. It was a question that did not just apply to this school, but many of the outreach schools of the Art Center.

### **Outreach and the Art Center Community**

While I developed an interest in the Art Center's role in creating access to art education, I felt ill-equipped to understand the needs and desires of the diverse and divergent communities we served. While the in-house classes reflected a familiar neighborhood and demographic, the outreach program had a much further reach into communities that I was unfamiliar with. As an outsider, I did not understand what would/could be empowering, what would give agency to students to determine and articulate what art interested them and what their relationship with art might look like. In an effort to make up for my lack of knowledge, I tried to hire teaching artists from within the communities we were serving, left curriculum open to allow for responsive teaching, and encouraged teachers to share their artistic practices and expertise. The story of access represents the conflict that many teaching artists had to navigate. Through my observations and conversations with outreach teachers, it became clear that although teaching artists had the impulse to teach from a creative and artistic perspective, they also felt pressure from the schools and classrooms to conform to and maintain the school routine and culture.

In the story of access, one teaching artist wanted to disrupt the restrictive classroom environment but he did not see that change through. The new teaching artist taught art lessons that fit in with the restrictive environment and a curriculum that reflected the dominant White European conception of art and artistic practices. When describing Freire's educational theory, Ballengee-Morris writes, "The act of knowing is based on a dialogue between the community teacher and the students. The subject to be explored is determined by the community needs" (2008, p. 61). The outreach program was an opportunity to create access through bringing art

into the schools, but also an opportunity to create access to a responsive, critical, and dialogic pedagogy. While some teaching artists made attempts to teach from a creative and responsive place, it was sometimes a difficult task if the school administrators or teachers had their own conceptions of what art teaching and art curriculum should be. There was often an additional challenge of a low budget which made time and coordination between teachers and the teaching artists extremely limited. Without this time, it was difficult to tailor the artistic experiences to the audiences we aimed to serve. Too often, this resulted in providing an art experience without consideration for meaningful content or teaching practices.

While the curriculum could be problematic at times and the programs were often short term, the outreach programming did provide access to art educational experiences. Allowing artists in the schools and showing students that there are opportunities outside of schools offers multiple visions of what art looks like in daily lives. Teaching artists represented a living working artist from the community. Through the teaching artists, the Art Center was able to give students exposure to some artists and creative processes, but most of the time, the exposure was limited and isolated. Access to a more meaningful or layered experience was still denied to many populations we were attempting to serve and was deficient when compared to what other schools were able to offer. Local schools in the immediate area had more access the Art Center for field trips to see exhibits or make work in the ceramics studio. However, the schools further out were limited by what we could bring to their building.

Another difficulty with the outreach program was the lack of visibility of the outreach programs as a major part of the Art Center's educational programming. The Art Center was doing important work in the schools, but there was not a formal institutionalized strategy for sharing what was happening in the outreach program with the rest of the Art Center community

and patrons. A teacher from an outreach school showed work from her students, and I tried to extend this opportunity to all teaching artists working in outreach programs. The teaching artists were paid hourly for their teaching time and the administration did not pay teaching artists for the additional time for planning or to exhibit the work from their teaching. This made it difficult for Art Center patrons to see the extent of the work being done by the Art Center and to gain additional support for outreach programming.

### **In-House Classes**

The classes at the Art Center were one of the primary ways of providing access to the arts. The classes were taught by local artists and educators. The teaching artists had a lot of autonomy to develop curricula based on a combination of their own artistic practice and student interests. The classes were small in size ranging from four to fifteen students. With the smaller class size, teaching artists often developed relationships with their students and the families. The Art Center provided a place to work in a professional atmosphere and to develop a community of local artists. Returning students often developed a sense of belonging when surrounded by familiar students and lead by the same instructor. Parents also got to know one another and friendships developed from participation in the classes. The teaching artists who were invested in the Art Center as a personal and professional resource usually had more successful classes and stayed for a longer period of time but some teaching artists only stayed for a session or two.

The in-house teaching artists were often local artists who were interested in sharing art with their community. The more successful teaching artists listened to their students and responded by making adjustments in what they were teaching or the way they were teaching. The Art Center offered art classes for leisure, enrichment, and entertainment. Many of the teaching artists built a following by developing relationships with their students and/or the parents. While

this was a part-time contractual position, many teaching artists financially depended on their classes at the Art Center. Teaching artists were able to propose new classes as well as continue with what they were currently teaching. Listening to feedback from students often gave teaching artists new ideas for classes.

The Art Center also offered adult classes which provided adults with a space to develop their own interests and to meet others with similar interests. There were several adult classes that became their own communities. These classes were led by artists with significant expertise and skill in a particular discipline. One example of this was an oil painting class that had the same students returning session after session. The students were older adults, many of them retired, who were interested in learning to paint realistically. They brought in images, and the instructor helped the students to mix colors, draw, and apply paint to get the look the students wanted to achieve. These adult students returned session after session because they had developed a rich social network and supportive community around their interest in oil painting and because they trusted the instructor's advice. They complimented one another and advised one another on their work, planned shows together, and created a friendly and supportive environment to develop their interests.

## **Gallery**

The Gallery Committee was interested in sustaining a gallery program that brought in new art work that inspired them as artists. Since the artists lived in the local community, they also had an understanding of the surrounding neighborhood and had an invested interest in bringing out the art and artists of the community. The gallery provided a place for local artists and those interested in visual art to meet. I met several people who thanked me for bringing compelling art into the neighborhood because they knew there must be people who had similar

interests, but they never knew where to find them. The gallery program and the Gallery Committee facilitated the development of a community of artists that were invested in the Art Center. It was important for artists to meet one another and work together on projects. The artists involved in the Art Center had their own connections to the larger art world apparatus, and they were able to share contacts and opportunities. The Art Center created a local community of support that included social gatherings and studio visits.

While the Gallery Committee and I had an interest in art based on our university education that was embedded in conceptual and contemporary art practices, there was also an education mission the Gallery Committee advocated. The purpose of the gallery was to show a wide range of art, showing what is familiar and unfamiliar. One time exhibits can bring in new audiences and assist in community members reconceive what they already do as art such as Blandy and Congdon's (1988) look at community aesthetics through fishing regalia and the customized cars described by Keys & Ballengee-Morris (2001). Outside of the context of a larger gallery program, the police and fire fighter exhibit and tattoo exhibit may have been one time re-conceptualizations of art or one time opportunities to bring in new communities. However, the variety of programming in the Art Center gallery spaces created access points while continuing to show a wide range of art that built up to a very broad ideation of art and artistic practices. There are galleries that specialize in university driven conceptual or contemporary art, galleries that specialize in outsider art, and art that is more familiar and experienced as part of everyday life, like photography, cartooning, knitting and tattoo art. The Art Center offered a venue that included all of these art experiences in one place. Over time patrons experienced a breath of artistic practices and a broad definition of what is considered art.

The Art Center was clearly an asset to the community. The programming offered access and opportunities for quality arts education, arts enrichment, and arts entertainment to a variety of audiences. The Art Center neighborhood was a working class community located on the outskirts of the city, isolated from much of the traditional arts based programming cities have to offer which complicated the task to provide arts programming that met the needs of the community. While individual coordinators and teaching artists could make vast differences in the programming of their specialization by being responsive to the community or communities they were served, the financial debt limited the organizational support that needed to sustain programming and participation over a large period of time.

Although my position was plagued by too many responsibilities for the amount of time my positions as visual arts coordinator, teacher, and curator were allotted, it was extremely difficult to leave. Despite all the work and stress that came with the job, in a way, leaving meant I was saying goodbye to a piece of me. I created visual arts programs and a gallery program that reflected my personal artistic interests as well as community interests in the neighborhood where I grew up. The work was an act of passion; it was an act of creation; it was an act of giving. I also received, because in the act of my work as an educator, coordinator, and curator, I was transformed by the time and the place. My views about education, art, and community were challenged and formed at the Art Center. The experience of teaching, relating, creating, organizing, socializing, coordinating, programming, struggling, curating, negotiating, building, reflecting, greeting, presenting, watching, enjoying, and participating made me a different person through those experiences.

When I reflect on myself as an educator, I look at where I felt I could have done better and what I wished the Art Center could have done better. Through these reflections, I have found

a voice that is clearer and wiser than the voice I had at the Art Center. Before the Art Center, I thought of myself as an artist and an art teacher, but they were two separate things that I compartmentalized and participated in differently. The Art Center brought these identities together and added curator and arts administrator, and into the mix. The boundaries between these identities became porous and overlapped, and knowledge and experience blended and spilled over into each other. The relationships I developed with students, families, artists, and co-workers connected me to the community and made me more acutely aware of community interests, needs, and resources. The Art Center provided me with a learning opportunity in the significance and difficulties in community-based art education that influenced a desire to study, understand and continue to work with communities.

## Chapter Five

### Through the Eyes of a Student: A Case Study of a Student Participant in Community-based Arts Programming

I remember the first time I ever went to Artspace, I went with my mother and my aunt, my aunt was the one who told my mother about it, and my mother knew that I was into art, so she took me there. We had to wait in line for registration since 7:00 in the morning and registration started at 9:00 in the morning, so we waited in line for two hours. And so that was kind of an exciting process for me because what I really enjoyed doing outside of school was artwork. I was in an after school art program through my teacher at school and really enjoyed that, so I wanted to continue with more art experience. The two hour waiting period was totally easy for me and my family.

(Adelina Interview, April 15, 2011)

When Adelina<sup>12</sup> first shared this recollection with me, I thought about her as a young girl at the beginning of a journey, not knowing exactly what she was searching for, not sure how to get it, but knowing she wanted something more. During one of our initial interviews, I looked at Adelina sitting before me about to graduate from a major university with two degrees, and I couldn't help but admire her energy and tenacity to overcome obstacles. Here, I attempt to tell her story about her experiences in a community-based art education program, how that experience helped her to navigate college, and helped her to become an artist and art educator like the ones who inspired her. Through her story, I hope to understand what the program did to

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<sup>12</sup> Adelina is a pseudo-name for the student of this case study.

facilitate an art educational experience sustained over a long period and what opportunities and experiences the program offered students like Adelina, in addition to an art making experience.

Adelina's experiences at art Artspace<sup>13</sup> began when she was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, continued through high school, and continued as an alumni through college. After my own experiences of working in community-based art education for seven years, what was so compelling about Adelina's experience was her dedication and participation in programming from 6<sup>th</sup> grade through high school and beyond. In my experiences as a community arts program provider, adolescents were the most difficult audience to engage long term. Through this case study, I investigated Adelina's participation in Artspace, what she found valuable and what opportunities and experiences the program provided. Adelina's story illustrates the roles of instructors, fellow students, the environment and the program in this community-based program, and how it informed her future trajectory and current teaching practice.

Questions initially guiding my inquiry included the following; (a) What lead Adelina and her mother to find and enroll in a community-based art education program, what expectations did they have going in and how were those expectations met or how did they change through the experience? (b) What experiences did this community-based setting provide Adelina that lead to a sustained or long-term engagement, was it the program, individual instructors, fellow students, the environment, or a combination of these factors that provided a meaningful engagement, and how did these experiences form and inform Adelina's future trajectory as a student, artist, and art educator?

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<sup>13</sup> Artspace is a pseudo-name for the community-based art program the student participated in.

### **Data Collection**

The interviews with Adelina and her mother were my primary method of collecting data for this case. Adelina shared past experiences that I was unable to observe first hand. In order to create an account of her experiences we met on several occasions to talk. We also looked at her artwork, photographs, and notebooks from her time at Artspace. While her Artspace educational experiences were in the past, Adelina maintained a relationship with the program through their alumni group. I attended an art fair that she participated in and in which she showed her work and sold some notecards. I was able to see and experience the professionalism of the space, the place, and the program first hand. In addition to conducting the interviews and attending the art fair, I was also able to obtain information through the significant documentation of the program on Artspace's website and an online publication they had created through a grant. This was extremely valuable in being able to triangulate and support the experiences shared by Adelina.

The main focus of the interviews was to discuss Adelina's experiences at Artspace. I asked her about specific classes and details about the teachers, the students, and the artwork she made. I asked her to recall interactions with teachers, students, or staff that stood out in her memory or may have influenced her to take a class or try something new. As we looked through documents and programs that she had saved, documents containing descriptions of the classes she took, she talked about the memories and experiences she recalled in connection to the documents. Through prints, negatives, and a holiday card, we looked at and discussed some of her artwork that she created at Artspace. Talking in her home with her and her mother, I learned about her family and their family history and how previous experiences factored into her participation in classes and programs through Artspace.

### **Introduction to the Case**

I met Adelina during the first semester of my PhD program at the university in which we were both enrolled. I was a teaching assistant in an undergraduate early field practicum course in the art education program. I did not work with her directly in this course, but I had the opportunity to observe her working on lesson ideas and I saw her students work. At the end of the semester, we coordinated an art show for the student participants in the art program which provided the early field experience. The instructor of this course also wanted to include art work from the student teachers. I volunteered to coordinate the student teachers' work, labels, and information for the show. The student teachers' participation in showing their own work was voluntary. Adelina was particularly enthusiastic about showing her work and asked several questions about displaying her work. Her energy and professionalism showed a greater depth of engagement and consideration than many of her peers. She showed an investment in her own artistic practice that was not common to other art education students I had encountered in the program.

When I met Adelina, I was unaware that she had a long-term experience within a community-based art education program. My dissertation advisor informed me that Adelina had attended a highly successful and well-known art program in a major metropolitan area in the Midwest, which I will refer to as Artspace. I had previous knowledge of this program through instructors and colleagues at the art center where I worked. These instructors had been students in the program at Artspace and had always talked favorably about their experiences, including an alumni program and exhibiting their work at Artspace both as students and alumni.

I approached Adelina and asked if she would be interested in talking to me about her experiences and becoming a subject in my dissertation study. After she agreed, we scheduled

several interviews while she was still at the university, and we continued to meet after she graduated and began teaching. We met at Adelina's home, I attended an art opening at Artspace, and we met for lunch in a café in the neighborhood where she grew up. At her home, I had the opportunity to speak with her mother which added an additional perspective to Adelina's recollections of her experience. As indicated on their website, Artspace has a mission to provide a meaningful and professional art education program to underserved youth. Adelina is Latina, comes from a single parent home, and is a first generation college student. Her mom did not graduate from high school, and her older sister did not go to college. Her sister got her GED. She did have cousins who went to college, but Adelina was the first to graduate with a four-year college degree.

It was the home interview that gave me insight about the context for Adelina's experiences. In the initial interviews, Adelina mentioned several times that Artspace was like a second home. It was necessary for me to understand the context of her home, where she lived while attending the program at Artspace, her neighborhood, and the location of Artspace. I drove to conduct an interview with Adelina and her mother in their apartment, which is extremely close to a popular tourist area of the city and a long time gallery area where I had also spent a lot of time after graduating with my BFA in painting. Although the area is highly congested with traffic, buildings, restaurants, and stores, when I arrived within a couple blocks of Adelina's apartment building, the streets began to look more residential. I parked my car on a street a few blocks away, an area that had paid parking similar to meters, but I paid at a central location and left the receipt on my dashboard. It was not difficult to find a space, but the parking time limit was two hours. I then walked two blocks to Adelina's apartment.

Adelina, her sister, and her mother live in a large apartment complex. There is a large church on the corner and train tracks that run between the church and the parking lot for the apartments. When I walked in the main entrance, I had to dial up her number to gain entrance to the building. The inside of the apartment complex was remarkably clean and open with an expansive center atrium area on either side of the elevator. The layout reminded me more of a hotel than an apartment building. I took the elevator to the third floor. Adelina met me in the hallway. I did not see a lot of other residents in the building. It was exceptionally quiet. We walked down to the end of the hall and entered her apartment. The apartment was perceptibly clean and uncluttered. There was a small table, a couple chairs, a television, a bookcase and some music CD's. There was not a lot of furniture, just what they needed.

### **Experiencing Art Space**

When I met Adelina's mother she seemed a little nervous, but she was welcoming and offered to share some lunch with me. I had just eaten, so I agreed to a glass of water. The three of us sat at a table and we began to talk about how and why Adelina got involved at Artspace. I asked how her mother felt Adelina benefited from that participation. Her mother seemed to enjoy sharing many memories and recollections about Adelina and her intensity when it came to wanting to do things, like playing the piano or drawing. Adelina's mother talked about how she watched both of her children and could see what they were interested in. In a story she shared about Adelina and her drawings, she described how Adelina would tear up the paper if it did not look right. It was the intensity her mother observed in her daughter and what she heard about the program from her sister that initiated her to sign Adelina up for art classes at Artspace.

Adelina's mother was a busy single parent. While she was happy to find a place her daughter could develop her interests, she did not always feel she had the time to bring Adelina to

these experiences. The classes at Artspace were free, but they were available on a first come, first serve basis. As previously mentioned, this resulted in a long wait, with a line that went around the block, in order to sign up. Adelina's mother recognized that these classes were valuable enough to invest that time in waiting in line. She spoke about what a significant experience it was, how happy Adelina was, and how she would come home and want to share what she learned. Adelina's mother told me, when she saw how much Adelina enjoyed the classes she found the energy in herself to continue bringing her to these experiences.

I watched her growing, she wants to draw something, and she gets very angry and rips the paper. If you really want to do something, piano and guitar or anything, you have to be very patient and try and try and try. I try to explain to her that no one ever does something without making a lot of mistakes first, she understands better that she has to work at those things, it is the only way you know you are interested and you want it, if you go through those things and you still want it you know you really want it. [Through Artspace,] she started with drawing and she really liked it and she seemed less nervous and less angry. I looked for more and more stuff, there was a lot of peace, and she wants to discover more and more and more. (Mother Interview, June 29, 2011).

The beginning experiences gave Adelina a foundation in the arts and taught her some practical skills that her mother felt her daughter needed. Rather than jumping into a recreational or fun art experience, Adelina recalls that she began with learning about the formal qualities of art. Adelina described her first classes as traditional where she learned basic skills:

The first couple of classes I ever took at Artspace had to with more traditional forms of art making like life drawing and I also took a mixed media class there. My introduction to

drawing was, actually I remember Barnes, I think he was the one who was teaching me some of those life drawing skills and he always emphasized the more traditional formal ways of creating a drawing which was great because learning some of those more traditional skill sets was what pushed me to further want to pursue the arts. (Adelina Interview, April 15, 2011)

I spoke with Adelina and her mother about how they made the decision to sign up for additional classes. They both expressed that Adelina enjoyed the art classes. Her mother described watching Adelina and seeing that art was important to her. The experience was not just having fun. Adelina also talked about the difficulties she experienced.

When I came home, they would always ask, “How did it go, how was Artspace, what did you learn?” My Mom would ask me to show her my sketchbook. But I remember actually, my sister jokes about this, I used to come home and throw my sketchbook across the living room floor and say, “I can't draw, I can't do this, I'm not an artist!” I would just throw fits and cry my eyeballs out. I think that's kind of a struggle with any artist. We don't publicly talk about how you throw fits in your room and cry about things. I think everybody goes through that. At the beginning, when I first started going to Artspace, I was really challenged in my skills just because I've never really been a traditional artist but I really do enjoy learning how to find more applicable ways of using art or using more skill sets to better communicate what I am trying to do with my artwork. Of course it is frustrating, I am much better at photography. I am much better at remembering things about photography than I am with drawing. I was being challenged to put it into practice. I remember Barnes used to always say, “Practice, practice,

practice!” Any time we were in class he said, “Practice, practice, don't stop, keep going.” I am not going to sit here and be like oh my experience was lovely and I was hooked from the beginning. I was so angry in the beginning because I had a yearning to be able to be good at anything I did. I guess I was always very competitive with myself in the sense that I want to be able to do things and do them well. That really pushed me as an artist to really challenge myself and to pick up the sketchbook from the floor and to try it again and to keep practicing. (Adelina Interview, April 15, 2011)

### **Environment**

Over the course of our interviews, Adelina emphasized the professional environment of Artspace. I was able to experience this myself when I visited Artspace for an art fair. The building was fairly mundane from the outside. Apart from two banners on a light post and a mural, the building looked like an ordinary industrial brown brick building. When I walked into Artspace, I was immediately captivated by the large open space. It did not look or feel like an art center; it looked like a professional gallery space. Located just blocks from a popular gallery district, this space could blend in as a professional gallery. I was here to see Adelina in a student, faculty, and Alumni art fair. It also functioned as an open house/fundraiser. My discussions with Adelina had started many months prior to this event, but now I could see first-hand the environment where her experiences took place.

Inside Artspace, in the main gallery area, there was art on all of the walls with some tables and a stairway going up to the second floor. There were some signs directing to offices and classrooms. The art on the walls was professional looking. The students, alumni, and teaching artists' artworks were displayed together. There were no separate walls for students or

artists. The only distinction between the work of an artist or student was the label, which indicated if the art was created by a student, an Artspace alum, or a teaching artist. Some of the work by the teaching artists was larger in scale, but all of the work was given equal consideration.

In Artspace, there were several different classroom/art studios with large studio tables with four or six at each table. There were drawing horses in other rooms. Most rooms had a wall to pin up work for a mid-way critique, and immense windows with natural light coming through, one of the windows facing the train tracks. There was a digital lab, mixed media studio, painting and drawing studio, sculpture area, the main floor gallery area, a meeting area for the college program, and in the basement there was a darkroom and photo studio space. There was a whole wall of still life supplies so students could pick out their own still life materials. The main entrance had artwork hanging on the walls; the upstairs usually had alumni artwork on the walls. This provided an environment where students were immersed in artwork, from alumni, professional artists, and the student work in the studio spaces during classes. As indicated on their website, “Facilities that are handsome and adequate for their purposes, and equipment that works and allows for maximal performance, have beneficial effects on students’ attitudes and achievement”.

The rooms and the facilities were pivotal to the experience. It was essential that the rooms and the facilities created an intimacy through providing a comfortable and professional environment conducive to the growth and development of the students. Adelina recalled her impressions of the space.

One of the rooms that stands out for me has really big windows and you can see the city, and you can see the train tracks, usually at the end of every summer session we had pizza

parties with the board. As a young person that was all part of understanding it was more than an after school program. Artspace really isn't that big, but through what it stands for and what they do, you get to really see what you want to do. And that room felt like real life, I felt like I was at home in that room. I looked out the window and saw the city and I could feel at home. (Adelina Interview, June 29, 2011)

There were spaces that students could meet and talk or research artists and artwork. There was lounge space with couches on both the first and second floor and a library space on the second floor. The library was modest, but it was a comfortable space with a large number of art books. There were places to sit and look at the resources. The library was an open and informal space where students could come and go as they pleased and use the resources as they saw fit.

Adelina described the library stating:

There was a little library space with a computer a large table and what I consider to be a really nice library, a lot of books that you can just pull out and read about artists, like you could read about Van Gogh if you wanted to or you could read about Vermeer if you wanted, like there were just a lot of books you could pull off the shelf and look at and put back, I kind of really liked trusting the students that they're not going to damage the books, trusting the students that they are not going to steal the books, that kind of also makes the students want to respect the space, is that there is so much trust in there, that it is kind of like a sacred thing that you don't want to break. (Adelina Interview, April 15, 2011)

Adelina mentioned the significance of being trusted to look at and use the books responsibly without causing damage or stealing the books. It was essential to her experience that these resources were available, and as a student she was trusted with using them as she needed. According to Adelina, the professional resources were above and beyond what she experienced at her elementary school, her high school, and even some of the resources at the university.

### **Fellow Students**

At Artspace, Adelina had the opportunity to work with fellow students that shared an interest in art. According to the Artspace website, students come from all over the city and suburbs. Adelina mentioned a large population of students came from the immediate area, including a low-income housing area close by that brought in a large African American population. Overall, Adelina's perception was that the population was remarkably diverse with mixed representation. She felt the diversity at Artspace happened naturally compared to the controlled diversity at her high school. Her high school only accepted certain numbers from different racial groups to keep the diversity of the school at the desired level. The Artspace website showed the diversity of the population was 42% Latino/a, 23% African American, 16% Caucasian, 9% Asian, and 10% mixed/other (Artspace website). Adelina met other students that were self-motivated and shared an interest in art and the programming that Artspace offered. As Adelina's experience continued, she engaged in additional programming and opportunities that allowed her to create close bonds and friendships.

### **Teaching Artists**

Adelina recalled significant memories about several of the instructors she worked with. When she talked about the classes she took, she mentioned that she never thought of her instructors as teachers; instead she always thought about them as artists. Artspace called the

instructors teaching artists, placing an emphasis on their dual roles. The teaching artists shared information about art, materials, and processes through their own work and the work of others. The role of the teaching artists was less formal than the traditional role of a teacher. The teaching artists introduced traditional and experimental ways of creating, but there was an emphasis on students practicing and developing at their own pace. As they encountered problems or questions, they asked the teaching artist. The teaching artists wanted students to be self-driven. They taught students to look for resources on their own, but they were there to help guide and direct inquiry.

I remember specifically a teaching artist who does a lot of really great outreach with students in that community. She always talked about herself as an artist, but she was really good at teaching and communicating ideas and how to better students in communicating their own ideas. She would always start off every lesson with some kind of power point of other artists with different mediums who convey ideas and how they convey ideas and how they use different materials to convey ideas. And then she would talk about her own practice, and how she really relates her messages and the kind of work that she does and where she was at in her life. It was just so honest, and there wasn't anything elitist or superficial about the way that she taught, it was just very honest. So I think that was a really good balance and I didn't just see it with her I saw it with other teachers there who really just wanted to share their passion for the arts and I think that is what made a difference for me and that's why I want to do the same thing. (Adelina Interview, April 15, 2011)

## Classes

Classes at Artspace were free and available on a first come basis. Students had to register quickly because capacities were limited and the popular classes would fill up fast. The capacity was different for each class. Studio classes were usually 10 -18 students. The specialized classes were smaller. There was a college and career class that was 10 -12 students, and there were seminars that were a one day class with 4- 6 people. Specialized workshops like college and career would run for a week with a morning session and an afternoon session. There were also job internships where students would go to Artspace in the mornings, have lunch, and then go to their internship site. Artspace offered a variety of experiences available for different levels of engagement.

Adelina recalled two beginning classes that focused on basic skills, a drawing and painting class and a principals of design class. In these classes, Adelina was taught to draw what you see and not what you know, how to create and use preliminary sketches, still-life, life drawing, self-portraits, painting, color theory. All the supplies needed for each class were provided for the students, and students were also given materials to continue working at home.

The first drawing class I remember getting a sketchbook for free, owning a sketchbook was such a privilege for me. They had raffles and would give away art supplies like portfolios or drawing boards, they were really good about materials, never pressured students to not try things to save money, but encouraged them to try different supplies and different papers different kinds of art. (Adelina Interview, April 15, 2011)

The structure of the class time varied and depended on the teacher and type of class. In general, there was an introduction to what students were going to be doing, or a recap of what

they had been doing, and then students would have an open studio time. Classes were usually about three hours although some of them were more than three hours, especially during the summer time.

That's the way it functioned most of the time and I think that is why I really enjoyed Artspace. Because we would learn about what other artists were doing and then we would have the opportunity to engage with the materials. But it would just be like a play free for all, it would be oh we have previous knowledge of this and now we are going to apply it. And it was never necessarily open studio time at all it was usually a recap of what we were learning or a new introduction to what we had previously heard about. And that really pushed me as an artist- to really think about how I was engaging with the materials as opposed to what can I do now and getting stumped constantly. There was always a way for you to get help from somebody else. (Adelina Interview, April 15, 2011)

When I asked Adelina about how she chose her classes she mentioned that she would look for classes that fit her schedule, her interests, and based on the instructor. She also mentioned seeing different classes going on simultaneously. Adelina stated, "So if you were in the hallway you might see another class and think, oh, what is that class doing?" (Adelina Interview, April 15, 2011)

Along with learning fundamentals of art, Adelina spoke very enthusiastically about the experimental processes to which she was introduced.

We laid out a really big piece of paper and the teacher told us to pick up a broom or a mop and think of it as a big brush. We were told someone would pose and we were going to do figure drawing. I was thinking, how am I going to draw with a mop? But that was

the first time I really got to understand that there was a motion to everything we do and that motion makes a line and that line makes meaning, and that meaning takes on something else. I still remember that because I would want to do that project with my students and have them think outside of the box. It was ground breaking for me, the extremes of fundamental foundations and classes that were really experimental. (Adelina Interview, April 15, 2011)

Adelina mentioned that as she entered high school there were art making opportunities in school and she could have dropped the classes at Artspace. By then she was so attached to the program, the people, and opportunities, her experiences just intensified. As her participation peaked, she tried to register for as many classes as she could take. The open studio format and her summer break create a time where she could spend almost limitless time in the darkroom. Adelina said she was there all the time in the summer because she did not want to do anything else. She began to see herself as an artist and not just a student in an art class. As she developed her perception of herself as an artist, she also began an in-depth focus on photography as a favored artistic medium.

### **Photography**

Adelina's experiences with photography began at Artspace when she was in high school. She took a wide range of photography classes that included a street photography class, digital photography, a 4x5 photography class, and she was given the opportunity to use a Hasselblad, which is an extremely expensive camera. The opportunities to explore photography at Artspace were much more advanced than what was available at her high school. This was due in part to the darkroom facilities and the camera equipment the teaching artists brought in and allowed the

students to use. Adelina mentioned the significance of being trusted with such expensive equipment. As Adelina continued to take more advanced classes she was able to use some sophisticated and expensive equipment that was brought in by individual instructors. She took a 4 x 5 photography class. Adelina shared what it was like to be able to use different photography equipment.

We got this big camera and it was something kind of magical. Understanding how our eye sees and how our brain puts it all together. I wondered how they could feel ok letting someone use such an expensive piece of equipment, but the teacher for that was nice and we had to share one camera. We planned out our photos, the film is expensive it takes a lot to process and develop. (Adelina Interview, June 29, 2011)

Adelina was immersed in darkroom photography at Artspace. She mentioned how time disappeared with photography saying, “I could spend hours in the darkroom and hours in the digital lab” (Adelina Interview, May 11, 2011). It was selling her first piece at an Artspace art fairs that influenced her decision to focus so much of her attention on photography.

The first thing I ever sold at an art fair was a photograph. And somebody from Artspace came up to me and said you know you were just talking to an art collector he wants your piece. I thought “Oh my goodness I just sold my first piece to an art collector this is such a big deal and ever since then I was well maybe I am supposed to go into photography.” (Adelina Interview, May 11, 2011)

While she was able to take art classes at her high school, Artspace gave her the opportunity and resources to work in photography. During high school, Adelina took an AP

(Advanced Placement) art class where she was able to choose the medium she was going to work in and after trying a few other things, she chose photography. She received a Golden Apple Scholars Award<sup>14</sup> for her photography portfolio. Adelina's photographs were images of puddles reflecting the city. She talked about going out and taking pictures whenever it rained. She took the AP art class at her high school, but she took the photography classes at Artspace and used a camera from Artspace.

### **Beyond the Art: Additional Support and Programming**

The experiences that Adelina had at Artspace went beyond a student taking art classes. The classes were part of a much larger program or system that offered a variety of opportunities and services to the participants in the program. The emphasis on self-motivation was a factor through-out the program. Classes were free but you had to attend the classes to stay a student at Artspace. Students who stayed in the program over longer periods of time and showed increased interest and engagement were asked to participate in additional aspects of the program. Adelina's in-depth engagement lead to her involvement in the student board, career development, and college preparation programs.

### **Student Board**

Artspace staff were attentive to students needs and interests. Adelina indicated that they tried to understand students as individuals and wanted to know what they are looking for through classes and programming. This supported the belief that (as stated on their website), "Students should have regular, expected access to program designers and administrators on an informal basis to enable unselfconscious, natural feedback and interaction". The Student Board was a way to give students advocacy in the program and to give Artspace feedback they needed. After a

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<sup>14</sup> The Golden Apple Scholars Award is given to high school seniors and college sophomores who show promise and drive as future educators in high-need schools.

sustained and involved experience at Artspace, Adelina was encouraged to join the Student Board by an administrator. The Student Board was selected through an application process. The members had an influence on classes and Artspace programs through administering end of class surveys and presenting programming suggestions. The Student Board addressed student concerns, helped plan events, exposed students to the art world through events like art shows both at Artspace and other venues in the city, created advertising and postcards for shows, and helped with public relations.

Artspace meetings were run by a staff member, Maria, who was primarily involved with the upper level students through the Student Board and college preparation programs. All the students were at the same level. Rather than officers or official responsibilities, students would volunteer for duties and opportunities. Maria had an agenda for each meeting, so it was always a constructive use of time. The meetings were fun to go to because of the people involved, and there was food provided, usually pizza. Meetings were once a month or bi-weekly and student had responsibilities outside of the meetings.

Adelina's involvement with the Student Board included organizing fundraisers for Artspace. She helped curate a fundraising show for a trip to Boston to visit colleges. She helped out with art fair sales, sold raffle tickets, and recruited students to walk around and talk about their experiences. Adelina spoke about how this level of engagement made her feel a part of this community.

And since I was so heavily involved I ended up joining the Student Board for I think three years or so. And the reason I did that was because I wanted to give back and Artspace heavily relied on student feedback and student input. Which I thought was really great and again just kind of emphasizes that idea of community. They really did

care about the students. It wasn't about this organization that provided materials for students it was a community and place where students could grow and really learn from the teaching artists and really learn from each other. (Adelina Interview, April 15, 2011)

### **Career Development Program**

The career program at Artspace gave Adelina hands-on experience. Two experiences that she recalled were early teaching experience at a children's museum and creating design materials to encourage families to visit the zoo. Adelina kept a notebook with all of her notes, ideas, and planning for the education project that she participated in at the children's museum. She was able to flip through the pages and recall the experience. She described the work that went into transforming the space and creating lessons, as well as the reward she felt in providing a fun and engaging art experience to children.

The lessons were for ages 0-4, but a lot of kids that were different ages came. It was successful because it attracted a wide age range of interest. We had a Lazy-Susan with spray bottles and students could see colors mixed together. Besides doing a lesson plan, we had to take everything down that had to do with science and recreated a room with hand-made puzzle pieces. (Adelina Interview, April 15, 2011)

Adelina also spoke about a zoo project she participated in with some other Artspace students and the pride that she felt when the zoo had actually used some of their ideas. Through these career development program, Adelina experienced real world applications for her interest in art and creating art work.

## College Preparation

The college preparation program at Artspace included opportunities to visit colleges both near and far, like the previously mentioned Boston trip. Students were given practical help in filling out applications for colleges and applying for financial aid and grants. Artspace offered practical workshops on time management and money management when students moved on to college. They explained what it meant to have a major or a minor in college. This helped low-income students get information about things which they may not have previous experience or knowledge. Adelina said, “As a first generation college student, I was grateful for this information, it was almost like a gift to me, and more realistic than information from the colleges” (Adelina Interview, April 15, 2011).

The college preparation opportunities were also crucial to Adelina’s mother. She knew Adelina always wanted to go to college and she was particularly appreciative for the help that her daughter received in navigating the application process.

I think it was very good help. I was very happy and thankful and Adelina was very happy. She had someone on her side and showing her how to grow and how to get things, taking her to see what else is outside. That was a big, big help. Life was easier for her, helped her communicate to me about those things. They took her to Boston and they treated her good. She got a lot of help, and it was like a second hand and they help her to keep going and keep trying. I am very pleased with Artspace, very happy. They were always trying to help and they make shows to show their art. They were very good shows and I went a few times and even invited some people. They helped her a lot. I wasn’t the only one encouraging her and telling her to keep going. It was good for both of us and we really needed it. And now she is out of college and it is time to practice what she learned

and now she is more peaceful about her art because she knows what to do. (Mother Interview, June 29, 2011)

## **Mentorship**

Adelina's experiences were all heavily influenced by and supported by a key Artspace staff person, Maria. This was the first time that Adelina experienced having a mentor. Maria was primarily involved with college and career planning and the student board. This was a formative relationship in Adelina's experiences at Artspace but also continued to influence her in forming her future plans and career goals.

I knew I was smart and understood that I could go to school but Maria was a very personal resource. I thought I would never be able to afford it (college). When I got my acceptance letters my family was happy but the financing (bills) overwhelming. Tension was high because I was so nervous. My mom was willing to get two jobs to put me through school, she wanted to support me, and was trying to figure out how to make it happen. When I got financial aide at the university, it was very emotional. I got a full ride for the first year, and ended up with a full ride all four years. Maria and I were both crying in the office when I got my financial aid. While the workshops about applying to the universities were helpful, I always felt more comfortable talking about finances with Maria. It felt more natural to go to her. My sister helped and my family helped, but Maria was my go to gal. (Adelina Interview, May 11, 2011)

Maria was Adelina's first role model for mentoring and created an understanding of what a mentor was through the student board and Maria's own mentorship of students. Adelina talked

about her desire to be a mentor and to give back what she received. The student board was not formally a mentorship program, but they did help other students navigate through Artspace. This modeling of what it meant to be a mentor had a lasting impact on Adelina. After her experiences at Artspace, Adelina joined a university mentor program. While she was at college, an Artspace college mentor program started. Adelina was asked to participate and she went to a training seminar where she saw many of her old friends. She was given a book with guidelines and expectations, and she was assigned to a mentee who was an Artspace alum going to the same university. She was paired up with someone who shared an interest in photography and art education, and Adelina influenced her mentee to pursue a dual degree.

### **Alumni Group**

Adelina is also part of the Artspace alumni group. The alumni group participated in events to help support Artspace programming. She wanted to be in greater contact with Artspace, and participate in alumni shows, but her involvement was limited while she was away at college because of the distance between the university and the city. As previously mentioned, Adelina participated in an art fair and invited me to attend.

Adelina was at the event with her sister. She enjoyed bringing her sister to art events since her sister was not an artist. She was interested in what her sister likes and how her sister was not afraid to form her own opinion about what attracted her to some work and not others. At the art fair, I had the opportunity to talk to Adelina about how she felt being back at Artspace as she was about to finish her degree from the university. Adelina spoke effusively about how meaningful it was to be back at Artspace. She was just finishing her student teaching and she felt a conflict about what she should do next. Adelina mentioned the possibilities of grad school, Art Corps, and other opportunities she was beginning to explore. She kept going back to expressing

conflict over how much she wanted to be able to devote herself to “cultural service” in any capacity, her desire to be an artist, and a desire to stay home and give back in a way that allowed her to stay close to her family.

As I spoke to Adelina at the art fair, we were standing in the professional environment of Artspace that we had discussed so many times before. She mentioned it was at an art fair like this one, that she discovered that art was more than just a hobby for her and something she wanted to do as a career when she sold a photograph as a student. Talking to Adelina in this space was an opportunity to observe the facilities of Artspace, to understand what contributed the professional environment, and to get a clearer understanding of her envisioning a future as an artist. Moreover, there was poignancy to this discussion in the place responsible for her formative development as she had finished a degree in photography and was currently in the process of completing her student teaching and art education degree. I could see that her experiences at Artspace were still compelling to her. She was getting tears in her eyes. I could hear the emotion in her voice as she talked about participating in the art fair, being back home in the city, and figuring out her future aspirations. When she mentioned opportunities that would lead her away from home, she said it was more important for her to give back to her community and to provide others with experiences that she had. She once again referred to Artspace as her second home.

Students love how they are treated, how they are taught, how much choice they have, and how all this makes them feel part of a supportive community. [The] method — built on tenets of personal choice and responsibility; diversity of students, staff, faculty, and media; and rigorous, high-level instruction that models authentic practice — helps students to separate respectfully and lovingly from families. It teaches them how they fit into a larger, “real-life” context. (Artspace website).

The experience of Artspace was continuing to influence Adelina and how she saw herself in her professional life.

### **Discussion**

During my time with Adelina, there were several things that started to stand out from her experiences. She talked about people, events, and past reflections that were significant to her experiences. I have identified three issues that emerged from Adelina's recollections: community, mentoring, and professionalism. These areas are overlapping but also have distinct characteristics that created an engaging and empowering experience for Adelina.

The community at Artspace was developed through the students, the teachers and staff. Students felt listened to, the teaching artists encouraged individual growth, and the staff was supportive and responsive to student needs. The smaller classes and intensive experiences created an environment that was conducive to forming supportive relationships. The faculty and staff often had a mentoring relationship with students. Significant to Adelina's experience was the influence of Maria, as a staff person and a mentor, was highly personal but also influenced Adelina's desire to give back herself as a mentor to others. Adelina said, "I would definitely say it was the people who encouraged me and always wanted me to stay involved in different ways" (Adelina interview, April 15, 2011). The professional level of the program was also vital to the overall experience. The teaching artists, the environment, and the use of sophisticated equipment and supplies contributed to the students seeing themselves as artists.

In addition to discussing Adelina's experiences through community, mentoring, and professionalism, within each area, I will discuss how aspects of social capital factored into these experiences. As previously mentioned, social capital comes from the social relationships that one develops in order to gain resources for economic capital. Social capital requires and derives from

reciprocal relationships, favors and trust, and provides to individuals information, access, and greater understandings about the norms and sanctions of a particular community (Coleman, 1988). The experience of participating at Artspace contributed to Adelina's development of social capital that helped form a future trajectory for her engagement and career in the arts.

### **Community**

During our conversation at her apartment, Adelina showed me a photograph of her sitting on a curb just outside of Artspace surrounded by a few other students. This was a place where she could develop and express her creativity, be immersed in a community of students that shared her commitment to art-making, and the time and space to work and enjoy time with her peers. Adelina mentioned several times the feeling that Artspace was her second home. She identified the feeling of community she felt with the students, teaching artists, and staff, which made it feel like a place where she could be herself. This community provided the support she needed to develop her skills and knowledge about art.

I just had so much encouragement from so many people there, not just from adults but from the teaching artists that came in there from mentors that I had from other Artspace students who just as passionate as I was. And finding that kind of community was really incredible for me as I was growing and learning very quickly that my mind was geared for art. And so, it was definitely the community aspect that kept bringing me back. And it was kind of like a home to me. (Adelina Interview, April 15, 2011)

The community atmosphere contributed to Adelina's dedication and her commitment to the program. It influenced her desire to give back to Artspace and community-based art

education programs in general. Being part of this community allowed her to build her own social capital through the relationships that she developed with staff, artists, and peers.

The peer group at Artspace provided support and motivation while Adelina was participating in programming at Art Space and those relationships continued to offered support as Adelina moved on to college. When we spoke, Adelina shared stories about the friends that she made at Artspace, the time they spent hanging out at Artspace, and the significance of being with friends who shared her interests and her dedication. She also mentioned the importance of remaining in contact with her friends from Artspace which helped her navigate the difficulties of moving away from home, being in a new place (especially a large University), and pursuing a college degree. The peer group she developed at Artspace shared her ambitions and continued to be a resource to her as she moved on to college. This is a form of lateral social capital (Portes, 1998), meaning that Adelina found support and a sense of belonging that helped propel her forward, but these relationships were on her same level and no one in her peer group had the power to help her achieve upward mobility.

The artist teachers and staff at Artspace were also a valuable form of social capital for Adelina. They not only provided Adelina with opportunities and skills but they were valuable links to a professional world that she might not have access to, outside of Artspace. These relationships were influential in showing a possible path Adelina could take in her own professional development and provided information she would need to create access to professional development opportunities through galleries, museums, and college. Teaching artists shared their own work and in doing so shared their own path to being a professional artist and teacher.

Artspace itself became an opportunity for Adelina's development of social capital. Many of the funders and contributors to the program had significant ties in the community. The support of the program was not limited to monetary support. Funders and supporters also attended art fairs and fundraisers where students and their artwork were also present. This is significant because many times fundraising events focus on entertaining the funders and they never meet the students involved in the program. Instead, students may only be represented through a presentation or a small display. At Artspace, the students were the focus. It was through an art fair that Adelina sold her first piece, and it was to an art collector. The social capital, in this case, is Adelina's perceived upward mobility through seeing her work in a professional space, and the selling her work to an art collector. This allowed Adelina to see herself as an artist and opened up the possibilities that this outside interest in her creative work could continue. There is also social capital gained through the investment of the funders and supporters of the program. If they see the students and their work through events like the art fair, funders and supporters are more likely to help out the students through their connections and providing additional support. This happened for Adelina when a gallery owner purchased her photograph and invited her to visit and attend programming at the gallery.

### **Mentoring**

As previously mentioned, there was one person who had a critical influence on Adelina. Maria, a staff member at Artspace, became Adelina's mentor through the college program, career program, and the student board. Adelina also eventually became a mentor herself, through Artspace and through the university, inspired by a desire to help others. This relationship was also a significant factor to her feeling that Artspace was a second home. Adelina said, "I didn't feel I could discuss personal things with Artspace, it was Maria" (Adelina interview, April 15,

2011). This mentoring relationship was pivotal in Adelina's development. It also encouraged her to seek out mentoring relationships with others to help her to navigate through the university experience. Maria left her position shortly before Adelina graduate and went on to college. Adelina talked about the shift that took place and a mentor at the university through a scholarship program. She emphasized that while Maria's position was filled by another person, that Maria was not replaced as her mentor. Maria was still in her life and Adelina stayed in contact with her.

The teaching artists were integral as providers of art knowledge, but they were also mentors and role models for the students. The Artspace teaching artists influenced Adelina to think of herself as an artist first and a teacher second. Adelina discussed the relationship she had with teachers at Artspace compared to the teachers in her schools. While she expressed respect and admiration for all of her teachers, she found the less formal relationships at Artspace to be more supportive. A less formal relationship created opportunities for students to learn from the teaching artists but also encouraged students to work on their own. The student/teaching artist relationship encouraged self-motivated learning. Adelina felt that she received valuable information about how to develop her own skills, but she also learned from teachers sharing their own work and discussing their own artistic practices. This more informal relationship had a mentoring quality to it through showing students possibilities for career paths through their own example. This modeling helped students to develop their own skills while also showing a possible path to pursue a professional career of their own.

These mentoring relationships contributed to the social capital Adelina was building through her experiences at Artspace. The teaching artists were indispensable to her artistic development and they had real world connections they could share with students. While Adelina chose her classes and had the opportunity to take classes with instructors she admired or

connected with, frequently the teaching artist changed with each class. It was the sustained relationship with Maria that nurtured Adelina through professional development and helped her find a path to college. Adelina spoke about the importance of having the support of Maria and being able to access information about college from a safe and personal source.

### **Professional Atmosphere**

The professional atmosphere of the program was vital to the overall experience for Adelina. She was able to see herself as a professional and to see the potential future trajectory for possible careers in the arts. Adelina began to feel like an artist when she was in this professional looking space, surrounded by professional art and artists, using professional quality equipment and supplies, and when she sold her first photograph. Adelina's identity as an artist was reinforced when the artwork of Adelina and her fellow student artists were prominently featured alongside the professional artwork of their teaching artists at the art fair fundraiser. This provided opportunities for Adelina and her peers to participate in a professional exhibition and to see their work on the same wall as professional artists. Through the funders and the social ties of the professional artists, students also gained access to social capital that would keep them on a professional trajectory and provide social support to go to college and find a career, whether it was in art or another field.

Adelina had mentioned early on the significance of receiving her first sketchbook. The access to professional supplies and the encouragement she received to use the supplies was a formative experience. This was especially significant when artists would bring in their own equipment and allow students to use it. This was not only provided students with professional opportunities, but it also created reciprocal trust between the teaching artists and students. Trust was paramount in building influential social relationships and social capital for the students.

Students not only felt good about being trusted, but they are also more likely to reciprocate and trust the teaching artists. These reciprocal trusting relationships created a positive atmosphere, contributed to a sense of community, and made it more likely that the students would feel comfortable accessing the teaching artists as a resource.

The teaching artists, the staff, and the funders all contributed to the professional atmosphere of the program, but they also provided students with access to social capital through professional ties. Adelina mentioned the significance of not just selling her work but selling her work to an art collector. The funders and social ties of the staff, faculty, and Artspace itself contributed to the social capital of the students in the program. Adelina not only sold work, but as a result of that sale she had a new professional social tie. Subsequent professional conversations and attending gallery exhibits contributed to Adelina's knowledge about the professional environment of the art world. Adelina received a scholarship from another gallery which helped her purchase her own camera. That scholarship also created a relationship that included an opportunity to bring in a portfolio of work and receive professional feedback.

### **Final Reflections on Adelina**

While student experiences may vary, Adelina's case illustrates the significance of art education experiences being part of a larger program that provided support beyond art making experiences. The program, relationships within the program, instructor teaching practices, fellow students, and the environment work together in creating an opportunity for meaningful and sustained engagement in genuine artistic practices while also building practical life skills. I identified and discussed community, mentorship and professionalism as three main factors in Adelina's experience. These factors worked together to provide Adelina with a sense of belonging to ArtSpace and the community within the program. Having a supportive environment

just blocks away from her own home was significant to Adelina and proximity was essential to her access. Adelina had a strong sense of belonging to her family, her home, and her community, which included Artspace as a community.

### **Social Action**

As much as possible, I have tried to tell Adelina's story through her own voice. I did not want to directly ask Adelina about the mission of Artspace to provide art programming to underserved youth or what that meant to her. It was not until one of our last formal conversations that Adelina candidly discussed the social implications of Artspace. She was talking about being low income, the significance of access to supplies, and the help of college applications, college visits, and financial aid. Adelina discussed her experiences at Artspace and her perception of the social framework. I will close with Adelina's own words.

I didn't even know I was underserved until someone told me, I didn't know that being a woman and a minority and not having the same income puts you in a slot of what the society thinks what you're not going to be able to do. In grade school I understood I didn't have two parents when most other students did, but attending Artspace was the first time I heard the term "underserved youth." I have always thought that people want to victimize you to try to put you down because you are already in this space that people want you to be. Then, in a college educational policy studies course, I was learning the statistics of drop-out rates and every single statistic told me I wasn't going to make it, from being a woman, from being Latina, from being a minority, from a low income house, from not having a father. I don't see myself as a victim, I see myself as a person who has had many blessings and many opportunities and many people that I have admired and looked up to. I never fully acknowledged that status. Some people think of

me as underprivileged or not having what I need, but my mom always tried to give me everything I needed. Artspace was an extra helping hand in many ways but it was more of the personal relationships. Especially Maria, a person like her that made it feel like a home, I didn't trust Artspace with my personal life but there were people like Maria and a few other people my own age that I trusted to talk about how college could be a possibility for me. Artspace is social justice, helping underserved youth, building a community. Now I am interested in paying it forward. I experienced the impact it had on me. I didn't have the proper resources and Artspace helped me see that was why I was having such a hard time. Knowing there is a program to give students resources and a program that gives without asking makes me want to do the same thing. I go to the university because I want to learn what it is to be an artist and an impactful art educator, and I want to start my own non-profit arts community. To do that you need to be grounded. (Adelina interview, June 29, 2011)

## Chapter Six

### Two Artists: Creating a Platform for Unconventional Art in Conventional Places

I had known Michelle Grabner and Brad Killam for about seven years, and in that time I attended many art openings at The Suburban, an art gallery located at their home in Oak Park, Illinois. I was getting ready to move and begin work on my dissertation, but I made another trip to The Suburban to see some art. As I was getting ready to leave, Grabner started to tell me about their new project “The Poor Farm.” Grabner and Killam had already brought art and the art world into their home and backyard located in the nontraditional space of the suburbs. The Poor Farm is located in Manawa, Wisconsin. This small town in central Wisconsin is close to the place where Grabner grew up. They have a cabin where Grabner and Killam had traditionally gone to get away with their family. Now they were extending an invitation to share this space with artists, students, and all of those who may take an interest in looking at art in unconventional spaces. When I heard about “the Poor Farm” I was instantly intrigued by this idea, and I kept in touch with Grabner and Killam and through conversations and visits to the Poor Farm, I watched this idea and this space develop. This place is not an example of traditional community-based art education, but it is both an art space and an educational space.

### **Introduction to the Case**

Artists Michelle Grabner and Brad Killam are married and along with raising their family in Oak Park, a suburb of Chicago, they have also brought art out of the city into more conventional settings of family life. Michelle Grabner is Professor and Chair in the Painting and Drawing Department and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Brad Killam is an Associate Professor of Fine Arts at College of DuPage. Together they co-direct their alternative gallery space in a small building located in their backyard. It is a small unassuming cinderblock building

which could have been used for a tool shed, but not much else. Instead, Grabner and Killam converted it into a gallery and began showing work in their suburban “avant-garde art gallery” (Grabner and Killam, p. 11, 2009) in 1999. It has since expanded with an additional building on the same property. It is run entirely out of their household budget. After a decade of showing more than one hundred artists Grabner and Killam embarked on a new experiment. When the opportunity presented itself Grabner and Killam purchased the former Waupaca County Poor Farm, located in Little Wolf, Wisconsin and began to convert it into an exhibition space.

The Poor Farm sits across the road from Grabner and Killam’s cottage, which is not far from where Grabner grew up. The landscape is as familiar to her as the urban environment in which she lives and works. She has extended family nearby. Killam is from the suburbs of Chicago, but he is equally at home in the relaxed atmosphere of this rural Wisconsin environment. This was a retreat, a place to relax with the family until they once again invited the art world into their personal/private place.

It takes a certain amount of dedication to find The Poor Farm since it is several hours away from any major city. I drove to the Poor Farm twice, and I got lost twice. I was prepared: a GPS, a map, the address but the roads are not always clearly labeled and construction adds to the confusion. Trying to find the exit and making sure you are on the correct road is challenging, especially since once you are off the highway, all the roads seem to look the same. The second summer, I am sure I made the same mistake and got off the highway too late. Turning around and making the loop to find the correct exit seemed particularly familiar to me. The first summer my friend and I stopped and asked for directions, once we decided we were utterly lost. We stopped at a house where we saw some people standing outside and asked, “Do you know where The Poor Farm is?” One person responded, “This here is a poor farm, would you like to hang out

with us?” It was said in good humor, but the irony was not lost on us. They gave us perfect directions to get to The Poor Farm.

As Michelle Grabner described it, “The Poor Farm is off center, or off-off center” (Michelle Grabner interview, October 8, 2012). It is about four or five hours from Chicago and Minneapolis and about two hours from Milwaukee. Once you get there, you can camp on the grounds, stay at a nearby campground, or look for a room at a local bed and breakfast. It is not a place that most people can drop in and look around for a short visit and then go on to do something else. The Poor Farm is surrounded by farmland and sits down the road from a river. The building looks like an old institutional building, reminiscent of a school building. Across the road, there is a large field with cows that you can hear and smell quite clearly.

### **Data Collection**

“The Great Poor Farm Experiment” is a three day art opening for the year-long exhibits at the Poor Farm which occurs annually around the first weekend in August. The summer is spent preparing for this weekend. Participating artists and volunteers may use the space as a residence while preparing for the opening weekend. People can make arrangements to visit the Poor Farm from spring through the fall, but “The Great Poor Farm Experiment” is the main event, where close to one hundred people converge on this relatively small space. I attended the Poor Farm Weekend twice to see the space and experience the place and surrounding events myself. It was necessary to be able to use the names of the artists in this study both because of the specificity of whom they are in relation to these spaces, and to refer to the written documentation surrounding the spaces that Grabner and Killam have created. I limited my interviews to the artists because I am interested in why the artists brought art to this space, examining how the space functions, and what educational opportunities the space provides.

I talked to Grabner and Killam at the Poor Farm, but the primary interview data collection was taken through two interviews in their suburban home. I had been to The Suburban several times for art shows, and I had been inside their home a few times before. It is not extravagant in any way. The back door off the side of the house is used as the primary entrance. There is a small room for coats and shoes; then you walk into the small kitchen. The dining room and living room take up most of the first floor. The furnishings are understated and there are carefully selected works of art on the walls. It is an older home with wood floors and wood framing around the doors and windows.

I met with Grabner and Killam separately to ask them about The Poor Farm, the mission, and their relationship to the project. When I interviewed Michelle, we had to adjust the time because a group of students from the Art Institute were coming to her house to hear her give a talk and to see The Suburban Gallery. When I walked in Grabner was still talking with the students. There were donuts and coffee on the table and students were sitting in chairs and on the floor. The students went to look at the gallery spaces in the back yard and Grabner needed to go outside and answer questions and finish up. She gave me a few things to look at and read in her absence. When she returned we began to talk, but after a short while there was another person at the door ready to go on a scheduled shopping trip with Michelle and her daughter. Grabner explained our late start and made adjustments to her schedule so we could finish our discussion.

I met with Killam about a month later. I walked in and was greeted with coffee cake and an offer of something to drink. It was much quieter, just Brad, Michelle, and their daughter were at home. While Brad and I sat at the table and began to talk, Michelle stopped in to say hello and ask if I needed to talk to her too. She was getting ready to leave for New York so she started to vacuum and clean up around the house. Their generosity is often noted by anyone who has had

an opportunity to spend time with them. They are both incredibly busy with family, careers, and projects, but they were willing to invite me into their home to talk with me. Not only are they generous with their time but, every time I am there I am offered food, beverages, and publications from The Poor Farm Press. This generosity is fundamental to their projects at both The Suburban and The Poor Farm.

### **The Poor Farm**

The Poor Farm is really an extension of The Suburban, Grabner and Killam's backyard suburban art gallery. Like The Suburban, The Poor Farm, functions as an artist run exhibition space and brings the art world out of the traditional urban environment into a rural environment. With their interest in keeping art and artists close, it seems a natural extension that Grabner and Killam would eventually bring art and artists up to Wisconsin.

The Poor Farm is a large structure and with living quarters in the back, it provides more opportunities to re-envision what this space is about. Both Grabner and Killam think of the Poor Farm as primarily an exhibition space. They refer to it as a Kunsthalle.<sup>15</sup> Killam described the Poor Farms mission:

At the core, the Poor Farm is about presenting, what we would consider or hope is really incredible art work. It would take all day to describe what we feel is really incredible art, but it centers around contemporary art. It is about experimenting with exhibitions, as well. That is the core of everything we do and is nearly the sole mission, what is attached to that is, what might become a broad range of programs, outreach, texts and publishing, an extension of university education. (Brad Killam interview, December 8, 2012)

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<sup>15</sup> A Kunsthalle is a German term for a facility that mounts art exhibitions roughly equivalent to an art gallery but with a more specific meaning. A Kunsthalle is often operated as a non-profit organization, unlike traditional gallery space.

The Poor Farm gets its name from a history that is unfamiliar to most people. It was part of the American Poor Farm System. Poor farms were established in England and Wales as a workhouse to house, incarcerate, discipline, and reform the poor. There were thousands of poor farms across the United States during the mid to late nineteenth century (Morris, 2012). The Waupaca County Poor Farm was established in 1876 (<http://poorfarmexperiment.org>). The building still has the institutional looking facade and some of the interior walls show a history of wall coverings. There is a jail cell in the basement, with the metal bars still present. A graveyard, with plainly marked graves of some past residents, is within walking distance of the main building. Grabner talked about the dual identities of the space:

With the local community, even though the local community is suspicious of contemporary art, the fact that they value part of their history and the Poor Farm is a part of their history that they can be more patient with us, on a very slow timeframe. They may not get it and may push at it, but one summer they may show up, and the next time they may bring an auntie who is from out of town and walk them through and talk about it. They may be there and walking through the space for very different reasons, but we all know that just through the compression of something else going on, this may be the closest they get to visual art or contemporary art. Even if they are not there to look at art, it is in the space, and it somehow makes an impact. I like that we can offer two very different kinds of content. I think the history is really interesting. I think it is kind of great, you know who is the artist and who is the farmer up the street not just by what they are wearing but how they interface in the whole experience. (Michelle Grabner interview, October 8, 2012)

The Poor Farm is a complex and complicated space because of the history of the building, the community in which it is placed, the participants who come from many different places, and the simultaneous open but limited space for these intersections and interactions. There are artists, students, art professionals, and locals who converge and intermix in this place. The building is an icon to a dim and stagnant history but the place has been transformed into a dynamic art space that takes on a new life with each year long exhibit and the energy, history, and dialogue that each patron brings.

### **A Destination Place**

When I go to a gallery, I drop in, look around and leave without much of a time commitment. There might be a short commute, parking, and walking but galleries are usually located in an area close by one another with restaurants, bars, and other businesses. I can walk through a gallery exhibit and be outside and ready to move on in a very short period of time. A museum is larger, so it takes a greater time commitment, but the work is by many different artists and leads to brief fleeting moments spent with each piece. The Poor Farm is different because of the location and distance from most urban areas. It requires making a commitment to be there for a certain period of time.

I like the incongruity of it being way off center in a rural location and the idea of contemporary art kind of making its way there. It is a destination place, no public transportation, one really has to make an effort to go there. (Michelle Grabner interview, October 8, 2012)

There are limited things to do in the area. There is a variety of art work to view at the Poor Farm but it is confined to a handful of artists. When I first walked through the building, I

gazed quickly at first, anxious to see what else is there, but then I had time to go back through the building and exhibits many times. I went back to look carefully and to spend time examining the works of art that are there.

When I drove to the Poor Farm, the travel time to and from became part of the experience. I was with a friend I do not see terribly often, so we talked about personal things, but we also talked about art, art-making, exhibitions, and our professional lives. When we drove home, we talked about the weekend, the art work, the people, and experiences at the Poor Farm. Michelle talked about the travel time constructing a space for dialogue.

It is the most interesting viewing experience because of the drive to get there. It takes four hours and during the course of the drive you are with other people. You car pool with people you are familiar with but it is in this compressed time. You see the show, during the drive home it becomes forced discourse to some degree, talking about the show, the space, being located off center or off-off center. Also, when the drive is four hours or so, participants really engage in the exhibit and spend time. (Michelle Grabner interview, October 8, 2012)

The exhibits at the Poor Farm are up for a year. The summers are spent preparing for the next show and then there is an opening weekend the first weekend in August. This is when the greatest number of people converge on the space at one time, but it is not the only time that people attend the shows at the Poor Farm. I asked Killam about making the trip to The Poor Farm.

There is a wide variety of visitors. Some people come when they can and they spend a couple nights on the grounds and they look at the exhibitions multiple times during the

day, talk to other visitors, talk to staff, a far level of concentration in conversations around art work and the art world, people in the know bring their fishing poles, find a trout stream in the area or bring their bikes, there is a lot of rural regional outdoor opportunities to take advantage of. They make it a weekend vacation, look at some art, and engage in activities. It is four hours away by car from Chicago and Minneapolis. If you are in Milwaukee, you can make it a day trip. (Brad Killam interview, December 8, 2012)

### **The Great Poor Farm Experiment 2012**

Once in Waupaca County and on the right road, it is hard to miss The Poor Farm. There are a line of cars along the side of the road, a patch of trees, and then little pops of color from the multitude of tents that pepper the ground. The Free School students are camped out together in a large patch of grass to the left of the main building. The grounds are plenty large enough to host a large number of tents, but it is a matter of finding a spot that is flat enough without tree roots to poke into your back while you sleep. When we arrived, we were tired and cramped from being in the car. We walked up to the Poor Farm building where we were greeted by Michelle, and almost immediately offered food. Brad was cooking brats on the grill and a bit later, their seven year old daughter served ice cream.

After stretching our legs, grabbing a snack, and finding a suitable plot to call home for the weekend, we scrambled to set up our tent before the sun went down. We had a small two person tent, our sleeping bags, pillows, and a cooler with food and drinks. We left our clothes in the car because you never know if it is going to rain. After setting up camp, it is tempting to sit and relax, but there is a large building full of artwork that you just drove four hours to see. There

was a schedule available on the website<sup>16</sup>, which I printed out. It was not needed, but it helped to know what was planned, what was there, and background information about the exhibits. At the end of the evening, which was usually around 10:00pm, Killam would close the Poor Farm for the night, turning off the lights, and locking the doors.

The first year I went to the Poor Farm the first floor was a large open space with a staircase in the middle. I was captivated by the lines on the floor that indicated where walls may have been at one time. I looked at the walls with almost as much interest as the art. There were scraps of wall paper and multiple layers of the construction of the wall visible in some places. I was taken in by the history of the building. My mind wandered as I imagined what life might have been like here. As I walked along the old wood floor, there were visible lines where walls were once constructed, dividing up the now large open space into smaller rooms.

When I arrived for my second Poor Farm experience, I was astonished to see such a transformation. On the outside, the building and surrounding property looked the same. Inside the Poor Farm, new walls had been constructed to create two video screening rooms. The transformation was to accommodate the work of the late Gretchen Bender, a video artist known for her work from the 1980's. There was a wall of TV's in each of the first floor screening rooms. One video ran continuously in one room and the other room had specific screening times. The second floor has small rooms, about the size of a typical bedroom. In some of these spaces, there were projections onto large screens or video on a single television set. Some rooms had places to sit down to watch the video. One room had a table and chairs with a television monitor with several copies of a catalogue of research that contained old articles that talked about Gretchen Benders work.

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<sup>16</sup> <http://poorfarmexperiment.org/>

This was the first time The Poor Farm had shown a deceased artist. The Gretchen Bender exhibition was organized and constructed with the help of artist Phillip Vanderhyden and a group of interns. Vanderhyden and the interns, from the Milwaukee College of Art and Design, worked together to build the screening rooms and install the televisions (Michelle Grabner interview, October 8, 2012). There were other works of art done by living artists that were being shown in the basement and on the grounds. These works included sculptures, a movie screening outside, a sculpture garden, a video, and the unveiling of a permanent sculptural installation by artist, Paul Drueke (<http://poorfarmexperiment.org>). The sculpture resembles a historical landmark sign, with a large plaque held up by two posts, but the plaque is blank. It sits to the left of the driveway at the front of the Poor Farm property. The viewer is left to decide why it is blank and invokes the history of the building and the people who lived there as well as the current function of the space.

It is difficult to put into words exactly what it feels like to be there. I walked into the building many times to see the art work. There were so many videos. The videos were created in the 1980's and were at least in part about information overload. They were over 20 years old but they still had poignancy in our current time. The information overload was in the individual videos as well as the number of videos that were showing.

The rooms upstairs are small. When you walk out of one room and into the next, you sometimes get an opportunity to glance out the window. The tents, the trees, the grass, and the cows are a resting point. When you walk out the door, you aren't whisked back into your hectic life, there is time. There is time to think about the videos, there is time to think about the jarring contrast of the videos being shown on the interior and the open uncluttered space on the exterior,

there is time for conversations. You have time to process. The learning environment is open and patrons choose their participation.

### **A Trek Into Town**

In the mornings, things were usually pretty quiet. The days seemed to start slow as participants gradually emerged from their tents. Killam would come over and unlock the doors. During the video installation, he had to be present to turn on the videos in the smaller rooms that ran continuously. There were also scheduled video screenings of a video called, "Total Recall." Most of the main activities were scheduled later in the day. While there were several participants who chose to camp, along with the "Free School" students, there were people who drove in for the day, just on Saturday.

On both of my trips, my travel companion and I went into Manawa to get some breakfast, use the bathrooms, and access the internet. Although we both enjoyed camping, it was gratifying to find a nearby space to get away from all of the people, to be able to splash some water on your face, and enjoy a satisfying breakfast. The diner was clean and the staff seemed friendly. We usually spent over an hour there, eating, talking, and checking in through the internet. While we were there, it was sometimes remarkably quiet with only one other customer, but we also observed times where there would be families coming in for lunch. I perceived a mutual curiosity as I looked over my shoulder to see who was sitting at the tables. Although we did not stand out in how we looked or what we were wearing, the cell phones and computers lying on the table gave us away as outsiders.

Manawa as a town seemed to be suffering economically. There were several stores in the main strip that were closed. There was a hardware store that was going out of business the first year I was there. Other than the closure of the hardware store, things were unchanged from the

previous year. The center of town, or the business area, is just a couple blocks long. There are not many stores or restaurants. There is a bar/restaurant, a small diner, a coffee shop, two re-sale shops, and a country store. The country store does not sell local crafts. It carries the manufactured country crafts, candles, potpourri, and dried floral arrangements.

In the re-sale stores, there were DVD's, dishes, jewelry, books, and some additional items one might find at a garage sale. There were a few art objects, landscape prints that were faded but framed cost between fifteen and thirty dollars. There was an owl print, and there was a back lit landscape painting that was meant to be plugged in so the whole image would light up from behind.

### **The Fortune of Standing in the Doorway During a Rainstorm**

Saturday is a day filled with a variety of activities and many people choose to participate in The Poor Farm weekend on Saturday. There are people coming and going, looking at the artwork, walking around the property, and it is difficult to know who is there, where they traveled from, and why they are there. While sitting on the porch and reflecting about the activities and my surroundings, I met some women who had traveled to The Poor Farm from a Wisconsin University. They took a day trip to The Poor Farm to see some art and learn more about what was happening at this alternative art space.

As an afternoon storm blew in, I stepped inside the doorway to get out of the rain. It can be easy to stay within groups of people I know when I am in unfamiliar territory. Often at art openings I might have conversations with a few people, but they are usually short because there is a limited amount of time. I have been to art openings where someone is talking to me, but also looking over my shoulder to see if there is an opportunity to talk to someone more influential. The atmosphere at The Poor Farm is not entirely immune to the social positioning of the art

world, but it is more relaxed. The atmosphere, the landscape, and the protracted time span lead to prolonged conversations. The dialogue around the exhibits can be as significant as the exhibits themselves. Killam describes the atmosphere being conducive to significant conversations:

When you go to a Kunsthalle and spend 4-6 hours there, compared to an hour, maybe two, in a museum in the city, there is a greater time commitment to the experience, and I think we deliver, the orbiting conversations, have had a profound impact on people, I hear that was the best weekend we ever had, what a great art experience, so many great conversations. (Brad Killam interview, December 9, 2012)

Standing in the doorway during the rainstorm, I had the opportunity to meet people who came to The Poor Farm for different reasons, and different lengths of stay. Each person had their own story which was told through their relationship to the place, their responses to the exhibits, their background, and their relationship to Grabner and Killam. I entered into these conversations as a participant in this remote alternative art space. As I talked to people about what they do for a living and how they found themselves at this place, I thought about my own interest in coming to The Poor Farm. The work, while it is profoundly interesting, was secondary to being in that place and allowing myself the space and time to look at art and be surrounded by others who shared my interests. The conversations are an indispensable part of this unique viewing experience.

After the rain had passed through, a group from Chicago came. Both my traveling companion and I each knew one of the people in the group. We walked with them back to the graveyard. The Poor Farm graveyard is close by. It is behind the building, but you have to walk through a field and some corn crops to get there. The ground was wet and muddy from the

afternoon showers. The long wet grass whipped my ankles and I felt mosquitoes feasting on my wet skin. The cemetery is non-descript and in a discrete location. There is no gate or fence around the cemetery, no large grave stones. The grave markers are all the same: plain white rectangles in the ground with names and dates.

The loose structure of the Poor Farm provides opportunities to self-navigate a space, the art, and fellow participants. The structure of the weekend is exceedingly relaxed. Participants can wander in and out of exhibits. The screenings of some of the videos ran on a schedule, but the screenings repeated, so moments where everyone converged in one space at one time were rare. Late in the afternoon on Saturday, there was a dedication of the Paul Drueke sculpture. This was a moment where everyone gathered together. A large tarp was over the sculpture until it was formally unveiled. The artist was there and he spoke about creating this piece for The Poor Farm. There was a publication that he handed out. It had two different people writing about his work. One of the writers did a reading of what he had written for the publication. It was a unique opportunity to see the mass of people assembled all in one place sharing an experience as a whole group.

The Poor Farm also allows for artists to bring in different experiences and practices that would not fit into the traditional exhibition structure. An example of this was a DJ from New York that had worked with Gretchen Bender who attended The Poor Farm Weekend and performed on Saturday night. Those who were still around were asked to join him in one of the screening rooms. There were bleachers along the back wall of the room filled with close to 40 people including artists, students, and the farmer from across the street. People were sitting on the floor too. The DJ spoke briefly and played his mix of techno style music and electronic sound. Everyone paid careful attention to the music with little movement, except the farmer, who

appeared to be dancing in his seat. There was a mesmerizing effect that was magnified by the loud music pulsating through a small closed dark space. As we emerged into the night air, there was relief from the hot and airless room.

## **Night**

At night it is dark, the sky is full of stars, and the moon seems almost like a looming participant or a part of the installation. It is difficult to see very far in the dark since street lights are limited and far apart, but you can still smell and hear the cows across the road. There is a fire pit where people gather. Some participants bring guitars and play music. The Poor Farm seems like the middle of nowhere to me, having grown up near a major city; yet there is not a vast wilderness, and little chance of getting lost in the woods. In an effort to enjoy the night air and engage with the moon looming over head, I took a walk down to the river. It is a short walk down the road. We passed a couple houses on the right and a farm on the left near the edge of the river. This is the farm with the cow pastures that are directly across from the Poor Farm building. As I got near the water, I could hear the rumbling of the currents flowing over the rocks. The road crossed the river, so I walked across and looked down over the edge of the road to see the shimmering currents flowing over the rocks below.

## **The River**

The river is a vital part of the Poor Farm experience. The first year I attended, I participated in the annual float down the river. The river float is organized by Richard Galling and John Riepenhoff, who invite participants to design and create their floatation devices (<http://poorfarmexperiment.org>). There is a judging of floats before the launch, and an award ceremony after the float has ended. A majority of the float designers were students from the “Free School,” but artists, participants young and old, Grabner and Killam and their family

participated in the float down the river. The river has a way of diminishing the social hierarchies as your float develops a mind of its own with the currents and bends in the river. You end up crashing into new people and starting conversations. Grabner spoke about the river float:

Groups of people sticking together, it goes away on the river float. It is interesting, people either go or don't go on the river float because you are at the mercy of your float and who you encounter. There are people who won't do it, not because they are afraid of water, but because they can't risk those types of colliding. When I look at photographs I get excited about it because it does have an idealistic and easy way, and it is more democratic. (Michelle Grabner interview, October 8, 2012)

### **The Environment**

The river is just part of the environment that make this more than an art viewing experience. "Indirectly the character of the rural environment influences the Poor Farm," (Brad Killam interview, December 9, 2012). The surroundings, the walks, the fresh air, and the river create a very different context. The context of experiencing art in this environment can be jarring. This was especially true in 2012, for the Gretchen Bender exhibit. The downstairs was separated into two black theaters with screenings reflecting information overload through mediated experiences. Walking out of the building and into a rural landscape with the cows across the road creates an immense contrast. Far away from an urban environment and away from safety nets, you can be more interpretive. The experience of looking blends into the experience of being in nature, and being in this more relaxed environment.

## **Community**

When talking to Grabner and Killam, it is clear that there are no delusions that art can be put in a community and that alone can change perceptions or entice people to appreciate contemporary art. They are aware that there will be pushback from the locals, but there is also a hope of tolerance and patience. There are two very different communities that intersect in this place. There is the local community that is primarily interested in coming to see the Poor Farm for its historical significance. During the summer months, they encounter influxes of unfamiliar people who may look different. The space itself primarily functions for participants who come from other places. Grabner is from this area. She seems equally at home in both communities since her family represents the local community and the artistic community reflects her professional life.

### **Local Community**

The area around the Poor Farm is a fairly impoverished area. There are few opportunities to engage with art in the area. Appleton is nearby with the Appleton Art Center, but there is almost no exposure to contemporary art or contemporary art practices. Grabner grew up in this general area. She is very familiar with the place and the people. Grabner and Killam had a cottage and studio across the street from the Poor Farm, so they both have a familiarity and a history with the area. They did not bring art to this space in order to convert its small town residents into appreciators of contemporary art. In an interview by Regan Golden, Grabner stated, “But like everything we do, we keep artists and art close” (Golden, 2012). Grabner’s family still lives nearby. While they find Grabner and Killam’s work at The Poor Farm interesting, according to Grabner, they also do not want to know too much. Grabner’s family are makers, but their interests are outside the contemporary art scene.

My dad is a painter, my brother is a painter, and grandfather is a classic crafter, making things, imagining art, and craft-like things were always within reach. There is something about the contemporary art world, that even though you feel comfortable painting landscapes and gourds, you are not interested in the contemporary art world, you do it for very different reasons. (Michelle Grabner interview, October 8, 2012)

Grabner and Killam understand that they are custodians for a space that has a compelling history. What brings local people in to the Poor Farm itself is the history of the Poor Farm. They are willing to invite anyone who is interested in seeing the space because of their relationship to that history. If they happen to ask about the art work, they are also happy to explain what is there and what is coming up.

**Benefits.** The Poor Farm may be a place that most local people do not directly or actively engage with, but there are incidental benefits to the community. These benefits are primarily economic.

There are enough local people who say how nice the building looks, we have cleaned up what used to be a junk yard. A lot of people who visit Poor Farm patronize the local establishment, bars, stores. Certainly it helps at a very small scale. The local B&B people, we run into and they are usually very interested in what is coming up. ( Brad Killam interview, December 9, 2012)

Along with the economic benefits, local people exposed to an unfamiliar, largely urban population, through the local establishments they access while they are there. This may not be a

measurable benefit, but Grabner mentioned exposure may be a significant benefit because of the shifting populations.

New London used to be very homogenous but it is shifting, larger Hispanic populations and there is also Mung populations. I think difference is good, it is initially pushed at, but the idea of different people coming in from different places and different representations coming into a homogenous area is a truer representation of the world, cultural breath.

(Michelle Grabner interview, October 8, 2012)

**Push Back.** While I was at the Poor Farm, I would see cars speeding by and hear them honking. I never saw it as hostile, I honestly thought it was people saying hello. Hundreds of artists camped out on the lawn of a historical building is a curiosity worth driving by. When someone else mentioned it was hostile, I wondered if local people objected to all of the people suddenly dropping into town. When I asked Grabner about this, she said she did feel a push back at times.

Sometimes it is funny to read the honking. Sometimes it is to say hello and sometimes it is honking and throwing a can. It is a relatively poor area. You go to the local establishments, at the Manawa steakhouse, these guys were being served and heard talk about the people being “Goth” and then heard someone saying “but they were really nice.” There is something about just not being exposed, and resistance to the unknown. But it is always economic, they may not like what the people look like but if they are going to patronize the restaurants, some places still have a push back. (Michelle Grabner interview, October 8, 2012)

This is a weekend place for Grabner and Killam. There is no groundskeeper keeping an eye on the space while they are gone. When they drive up from Chicago, they are often unsure about what they will find. The Poor Farm is located right off of a main road. There is a sculpture garden on the corner of the property, right near the street. There is a risk in bringing something new and unfamiliar into a place.

There is a lot work that is out in the open and it hasn't been vandalized, the sculpture garden. There has been vandalism, but every time we pull up after a week or two I am prepared for something to have happened, but most of the time it is not. (Michelle Grabner interview, October 8, 2012)

### **Community of Artists**

The space and time at the Poor Farm creates a temporary artist community through sharing a confined space and participating in a dialogue about a shared interest. Each participant chooses how they will participate and their own level of engagement. Even on the periphery, the warmth of Grabner and Killam, the free food they prepare and share, and the communal environment create a sense of belonging. There are people who just come in for the day on Saturday, but they also blend into the community through interacting with the art and the participants who invested their time in the full weekend experience.

The most obvious form of community happens through the Free School participants. The students arrive on Thursday and set up tents. They have a schedule and faculty that coordinate their experience. When young artists feel that they are part of this fabric they care about and are more invested in the artwork and the experience. The students stick close together, but they are interested in talking to people who are in attendance and finding out why they are there. They

have their own community within the larger weekend artistic community. One of the things that struck me was watching students bond while living without their safety nets. The students may not be used to camping and nature but they were good sports about it. With a lack of technology, internet, and consistent cell phone service, they become more invested in one another and the environment.

Grabner and Killam are inviting the public into their private spaces. Whether it is the Suburban, as a guest at their home, or the Poor Farm, as a guest at their weekend retreat, they welcome the public into these semi-private spaces.

It is interesting, I was just at a space called Acre. People have to pay money to go there. I can't pay people. I can maybe give them a beer, but I don't want to charge people. I don't want to run on the back of artists, I don't know if that is what they are responding to. The other thing is both good and bad, the compression of different cliques and groups. It can get really uncomfortable if people stay in their little tribes, particularly if you get a bunch of groups coming up from the same city with sparring and positioning, it feels uncomfortable, I feel really spread and run back to the cottage. (Michelle Grabner interview, October 8, 2012)

The Poor Farm is not a utopia entirely free from all of the social constructs of culture and the art world. There is still evidence of social hierarchy and cliques, but the environment seems to soften the edges and allows for more porous social boundaries. There are plenty of opportunities to reach out and find a compelling exchange with new people. Some stay in their social groups; some people come to network and try to meet everyone.

There are events that bring everyone together into a larger community: the cook-out on Friday, the artist talks or performances, art dedications and art installations. It is a combination of the openness of Killam and Grabner, the environment, and the dialogue around shared interests that contribute to this sense of community. Zachary Cahill wrote, in his *Artforum* review, about camaraderie and community at the Poor Farm.

The work that best epitomizes the ethos of the Poor Farm may be Guillaume Leblon's *Down, South, 2011*. Into the ground around the premises of the gallery, Leblon cast concrete cubes that, once removed from their earthen molds, were left encrusted with thick deposits of soil. Witnessing these hulking works being ushered into the first-floor exhibition hall and aligned precisely by the artist and a number of helping hands on the morning of the opening, one sensed what is at stake in seeing our environs differently: To see dry dirt is to realize that there is no relationality without the aesthetic, and no art without its community. (Cahill, 2011)

### **Education**

The Poor Farm serves as an educational space, but it is mostly about adult learning, college students, life time learners, artists and teachers who are also learners. Grabner and Killam are both teachers as well as artists. Their connections bring in people who are primarily from higher education, college students, and people who are making a choice to engage in a particular kind of art and art practice. There are different layers of education: informal tours of locals and visitors inquiring about the history of the place, individual groups who make trips to see the exhibits, higher education school groups who schedule visits, the Free School, and the research publications of exhibits.

## **The Free School**

Imagine a classroom with no walls. Imagine a curriculum of lived experiences. There are readings, but no tests, only thoughtful conversations. There are lectures, but from living artists who share the way they think, the way they work, the way they relate to the art world and society as a whole. There is space, there is art work, there are spacious skies, there are mentors, there are cohorts, there is a river, there is a fire, there is openness, but there is a platform on which to stand.

The Free School is organized by an outside educator from St. Paul/ Minneapolis Area. It is a no cost full immersion weekend. Students who sign-up for summer school, they come, they camp, they service the poor farm through cleaning up or helping with an exhibition, two or three seminars a day, from the organizer, or other professors from the tri-state area who volunteer their time. It is really a full immersion situation.

Unfortunately, they don't get credit anywhere. (Brad Killam interview, December 9, 2012)

I was not a student of The Free School but I went to the Poor Farm to learn. I observed the opportunities and the students while we were all there. Each year, since 2009, approximately 20 -25 students come to The Free School at The Poor Farm. There is no internet, and cell phone service is spotty. There are no beds and no shower, and there are portable toilets. It is a place that takes you away from your safety nets and opens you up to different experiences. It is about art and artists, but the place and the surrounding environment have a profound impact on the overall experience. It is an immersive experience as part of a weekend learning community.

It is interesting, in terms of communities and fostering community and in terms of the summer school, the safety net is not only being in an environment and seeing other people handle it if you are not use to it, but the summer school has four faculty. You have to have these touch points, a professorial mode. The interns from MCAD slugged it out. We couldn't have done Gretchen Bender show without them. They worked hard and learned a lot. Having a relationship to some authority figure is helpful to students to know how to navigate. Even though there is no curriculum the authority figures are there to help them navigate. (Michelle Grabner interview, October 8, 2012)

### **Professional Development**

There is no formal professional development at The Poor Farm, but when I think about why I went to The Poor Farm and why I want to go back, it is out of a desire to learn, and to further develop as an artist and an art educator. This happens from being in the space and interacting with the artists, the students, Grabner and Killam, and the art work. There are easier ways to see art. When there is a commitment to take the time to come to a space like this, it is probably for reasons beyond just seeing an art show.

There are many conversations that revolve around the exhibitions, around being in this place, about careers and artistic practices. Artists talk about their work formally, as Paul Druecke did, during the dedication of his sculpture. There are also opportunities for informal conversations because of the amount of time that is dedicated to being in this space. When I walked up to ask Paul Druecke a question, I did not expect a pleasant and casual conversation about art and art education. The dialogue, the environment, and the works of art create a unique

learning opportunity. Learning is not limited to the students and participants. Grabner spoke about it as well.

Not only do I learn so much, and keeps the reality of the art world quite real, and changing all of the time, and affords one to map not through the internet but real life experience, but also deals with protracting conventions, protracting the art world as well.

(Michelle Grabner interview, October 8, 2012)

### **Higher Education**

According to the website, Grabner and Killam see the role of the Poor Farm as a facilitator. Grabner also described their approach as creating a platform. They have created a structure that they invite other people to bring in new ideas and build upon the foundation of this rural exhibition space. They invite professors to bring their students into the space and to learn from the exhibits and the environment. They are also working on creating a symposium for the Spring of 2013. While Grabner and Killam are both educators and, they are interested in what other people bring to the space.

It is setting the possibility for something to happen, setting up good exhibitions for other people to build a curriculum around. We are not interested in developing that curriculum. We are not in the position where we are an institution that can have an educational program that is already attached to it. I really like that with the limitations of the Poor Farm, the idea that most people who come up are usually either students, or faculty, or somehow related to higher education for 99.9% of the interface. It is an extension of that, I often think of it as an extension of my own teaching. (Michelle Grabner interview, October 8, 2012)

## **Networking**

Networking is a byproduct of being in a space with people who are involved in the art world in different levels and capacities. This is an opportunity for students of The Free School and other participants who come to The Poor Farm to develop to new relationships that contribute to their social capital. Through the formal interactions that are provided by the Free School, or the informal opportunities for dialogue, people meet others in the art world and some of that may help develop connections for future career paths and opportunities.

For interns that come up, or for the summer school, where if they find themselves in New Zealand they can look up Simon Ingram, that's a reality within our world, and that happens too in a place like the Poor Farm or even the Suburban. (Michelle Grabner interview, October 8, 2012)

## **Outreach**

As I mentioned earlier, when I walked into Grabner's house for the interview, there were a group of students from the School of the Art Institute there to hear Grabner talk and to see The Suburban art gallery located behind her house. As I entered the room, Michelle was telling the group that The Poor Farm does not do any type of outreach programming. Once she returned for our interview, we talked about what The Poor Farm is and isn't about. Grabner stated, "When I think about the Poor farm, we are not interested in doing outreach, we do a lot of things but that is not one of the things we are interested in doing" (Michelle Grabner interview, October 8, 2012). There were several reasons for this. The logistics of coordinating an outreach program would be time consuming, there are infrastructure issues that would be prohibitive to bring groups of school age students to The Poor Farm, and the purpose of outreach, as a form of

enticement, isn't an area where Grabner and Killam currently place value. In addition to those limitations, Grabner described her reservations about pursuing an outreach program.

I think that it has to do with misperceptions, a kind of resentment, I see in proper institutions, whether it is the Whitney Museum of Art or the Milwaukee Art Museum, what they do in their art programs, they are crafted around their exhibitions, and they create this educational program to get resources, there are resources that can be spent on education that can't go towards exhibitions and they create programming and I think it is done fairly poorly, at the Warhol exhibit kids go make Warholesque things. (Michelle Grabner interview, October 8, 2012)

While Grabner and Killam are not interested in creating a formal outreach program, they are interested in supporting artists who incorporate forms of outreach into their artistic practice. This outreach is initiated by the artists and Grabner and Killam are there to make introductions, provide information, and other types of support to facilitate the artist's concept and artistic practice.

The same thing goes for the Suburban, on occasion artists will come here and want to work with our neighbors or work with the Dominics across the street and I will support them. That is not built in to how we see it, it really is looking at artist practices and if their practice is at all related to outreach we are there for them but that doesn't mean we turn away people and don't educate. I feel like I am always teaching no matter where I am, I am always talking about something. (Michelle Grabner interview, October 8, 2012)

## **Informal Tours**

Both Grabner and Killam mention their willingness to give tours. The multiple contexts of the Poor Farm are interesting because locations, formal settings, and institutional buildings sometimes keep people away from looking at art. The space's two simultaneous contexts can break down some of the perceived barrier and hierarchies that are embedded into the architecture and context of a formal place. Grabner spoke about the contrast between formal spaces and the rural landscape.

I still feel the authority of walking into an art museum because there are guards and all these signifiers of authority and official culture and my heart gets a little anxious and I can't wait to get to the art but I have to go through all these steps to get to my own viewing experience. And it gets more profound now with architects, which are interesting spaces-but again signifying high culture. Or the non-context, the traditional white gallery, and that goes back to rural landscape, there is nothing more basic. (Michelle Grabner interview, October 8, 2012)

If someone is interested, Grabner and Killam will walk them through the space and give them a history, or talk to them about the artwork. Grabner mentioned that it is often the institution of the American Poor Farm system that she ends up explaining to art world people more than the local community asking about art. The Poor Farm is a real remnant of a social system that is part of our collective history. The contemporary art, the artists, and the students bring together an interesting dialogue. Grabner and Killam are ready and willing to deliver the content dependent upon what the audience is interested in knowing.

## Research

The most active role The Poor Farm has in educational programming is the research and publications revolving around the exhibits. There is an advantage to having year-long exhibits and working in a collaborative environment. “We can be expansive, we can do research through the year of the exhibition, an institution does the research ahead of time, and presents it, at the Poor Farm we can continue our research and continue to present and represent” (Michelle Grabner interview, October 8, 2012).

Grabner and Killam self-publish research and documentation of the exhibits and events of both the Suburban and the Poor Farm through Poor Farm Press. These aren't publications they sell for a profit. They give them out to people who are interested in their projects. It is a way to share what they do, what they have learned, and what they have experienced with a much wider audience. Michelle Grabner spoke about the research aspect of what they do in an interview published in the *Brooklyn Rail*.

I take great pride in the fact that a scrappy kunsthalle in northeastern Wisconsin is developing historical content as well as supporting experimental projects and exhibitions by contemporary artists. In 2010, the Poor Farm was dedicated to the art historian Moira Rothe. The Project took the contour of a frestschrift<sup>17</sup> that included contributions by Annika Marie, Janet Kaplan, Chuck Mobley, and David Horvitz, Linda Nochlin, Suzanne Lacy, Dinh Q. Lê, Slobodan Paich, and many others who have been impacted by this extraordinary scholar and educator. (Grabner with Schwabsky, 2012)

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<sup>17</sup> A frestschrift is a book of collected essays, poems, or other writings and artworks to honor and pay tribute to a respected person.

Grabner was referring to the first Poor Farm Experiment with contributions and reflections that were turned into a publication titled, “All Over The Map.” She gave me a copy of this publication during our interview. They are also working on a publication for the Gretchen Bender exhibit. “The Gretchen Bender show is going to travel to the New Museum and The Tate Modern,” (Michelle Grabner interview, October 8, 2012). Grabner and Killam have collected a large amount of supporting material and research for the exhibit. During the opening weekend, this information was available in one of the viewing rooms at a table with chairs. This allowed people who were interested to investigate and learn about the history and context of Gretchen Benders work.

### **Benefits and Pitfalls of the Space**

When I am with Grabner and Killam in these spaces I can see that they enjoy what they are doing and the experiences these spaces bring. Yet, they are not without their problems. The Poor Farm is not a public space. Killam explained this stating, “We operate privately as a non-profit organization and our goal is to be a public non-profit organization. We do have some plans for a broader educational program but it takes physical environment infrastructure to get there” (Brad Killam interview, December 9, 2012). It is a slow, difficult, and expensive process to restore an old building that has been neglected for years. Grabner described the difficulty in getting funding for infrastructure.

We did get the Warhol grant but it is for programming, but we need to get money for a roof and heating system, those are the bricks and mortar things that just aren't sexy for grants. We are working with an architect and thinking about the social constructs, cliques and communities and breaking those down and what is necessary in terms of a seminar space, a studio space, without chipping away at the big impressive frame the Poor Farm

has. It is slow. I don't mind it having its own time frame and it being seasonal. (Michelle Grabner interview, October 8, 2012)

The other downside of inviting people into a semi-private space is that Grabner and Killam feel a certain amount of responsibility to their guests. The people who attend the Poor Farm during the year and during the opening weekend usually know Grabner and Killam through another context. This responsibility can be exhausting. Michelle stated, "It can get so pitched on a social level that I get tired," (Michelle Grabner interview, October 8, 2012).

The Poor Farm is located four hours away from where Grabner and Killam live and work. They don't have a caretaker so they are responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the building and the exhibits. The exhibits are up all year round but during the winter it goes into hibernation since there is no heat in the building. Groups can make arrangements with Grabner and Killam to visit the Poor Farm when it is in season. Since there is no caretaker they have to go more often than they would like.

The benefits of the space keep Grabner and Killam interested in developing their ideas and interests and seeing what can happen. Grabner shared her visions for the future of the Poor Farm.

The good side is that over five years we have been able to hone in who we are. Killam's vision looks very much like a kunsthale which is an exhibition space for really interesting art. I like that too. I am resistant to a formal residency program. I am more interested in the building in the back being a dormitory and people can use it as they need, developing research and having symposiums. I like the great poor farm experiment, I think it has a lot of value. To be brave and continue to host that, and to have a studio where people can

actually make things. I see it as a multi-faceted space. Right now the Poor Farm has the seeds to all of that, dedicated exhibition of work by an artist who died in 2004, original research being done, a smart installation, other projects orbiting around it that are truly experimental. (Michelle Grabner interview, October 8, 2012)

## **Discussion**

While the Poor Farm is not a formal educational place and Grabner and Killam would not refer to it as a community-based art education experience, it does create a setting for non-traditional educational experiences to happen. There are three factors: facilitator/platformist, community, and professionalism atmosphere that contributed to the educational aspects of the Poor Farm. These areas overlap and work together, but I will examine each area separately and describe how aspects of social capital factors into these experiences. In this context, social capital comes from the social relationships of Grabner and Killam that has allowed them to develop these non-traditional exhibition spaces which is also passed on to the participants who come to these spaces. This social capital provides individuals information about artists, access to a wide variety of artistic practices, and greater understandings about art world. The role of the Poor Farm as a facilitator or platformist, the sense of community, and the professional atmosphere contribute to transformational experiences that can refresh and breathe new life into an artist's career, or develop a future vision and path for a student or developing artist.

### **Facilitator/Platformist**

Grabner and Killam had an idea for a space, and whether it is The Suburban or The Poor Farm, they are interested in what other people bring to these spaces. Grabner referred to herself and Killam as platformists. A platform serves as a base which gets built upon. Grabner and

Killam created platforms through the Suburban and The Poor Farm where they invite artists and others to build upon. The Suburban's exhibitions are referred to as projects and The Poor Farm weekend is called "The Great Poor Farm Experiment." There is a playfulness and openness in the collaborative way that Grabner and Killam run both of these spaces.

When one is a platformist, it is a tricky scenario, it is altruistic in one sense because you are giving to others, providing a space to others, but at the same time you cling to the success and it can be a very parasitic position where you are gaining a reputation on the backs of others, but fundamentally I learn a lot. If it's a good idea, why not try it? As the Suburban falls in and out of favor, as the art world changes, the value of the Suburban changes, so we have to be willing to learn, and be willing to un-do it too. (Michelle Grabner interview, October 8, 2012)

Grabner and Killam create these spaces with the purpose of keeping art near to them. In the act of bringing art to these places, they also bring in new people and new ideas. This is how the Free School came about. Killam said, "It is important that the Poor Farm has an educational aspect, I am glad that we had the proposal. If he hadn't come forward I think we would still be trying to figure things out" (Brad Killam interview, December 9, 2012). The idea of a platformist is similar to the facilitator model in education which focuses on independent learning which is supported and encouraged by the facilitator (Grasha, 1994). Participants at The Poor Farm, whether they are students, artists, or community members, learn through the art work, the space, and one another. Both The Poor Farm itself and the educational opportunities through The Poor Farm change through what people bring with them, both formally and informally.

### **Community: Keeping Art and Artists Close**

While The Poor Farm is a collaborative space and serves as a facilitator or platform for ideas coming from many people, the overall mission, purpose, and function of the Poor Farm reflect who Grabner and Killam are as people, educators, curators, and artists. In many ways, these spaces become a way to open up their world, their relationships, their creative practices, and their ways of knowing to the public. The artists and art work that Grabner and Killam bring to the Suburban and the Poor Farm is discovered through their professional and social circles. Their open invitation into their worlds at their home and in Wisconsin, create porous boundaries between public and private. They invite participants to partake in these lived artistic experiences that would otherwise only be experienced by themselves and the artists and professionals they interact with. Grabner articulated what can be gained from experiencing art from within, rather than through a book, a museum, or the internet.

I become a better teacher, a better critic, and even a better artist, when I know what other people are doing, how they think about how they are in the world. So when artists are close, whether it is here to do a project at the Suburban or spend the summer doing work at the Poor Farm, it is not a matter of bringing in artists who make work like me or think the same way that Brad and I think about art making, and it is not a matter of bringing the differences in. It is a variety of practices and one learns from having them in a different proximity than just going to an institution and looking at their product. One is actually interfacing with them. One sees how they think, one sees their process, the materials they use, how they talk about it, what they talk about when we are having drinks in the evening, their world view and what they think about the contemporary art world and how that's moving, what's valuable and what's not. To have these conversations one really

learns quickly about the breadth of the contemporary art apparatus and other peoples practices. One can then shape their own thinking in relationship to that. It is not about ‘that was a good show’ or ‘that was not a good show,’ ‘that’s a good artist,’ ‘that is not a good artist,’ it really is how other people are able to structure lives, and what is interesting and what is critical and so forth. (Michelle Grabner interview, October 8, 2012)

I had an opportunity to meet artist Christopher Sperandio while we were floating down the river in 2011. The Poor Farm facilitates experiences for artists that flow into how they interact with participants during opening weekend. The environment and the context of The Poor Farm: the air, the cows, the river all contribute to letting down the well-practiced boundaries of our usual everyday existence. Although it is a short span of time, a few weeks in the summer for exhibiting artists, and a weekend for summer school and opening weekend participants, this space and place create an environment that leads to transformative experiences. The experience can reposition the idea of self, artist, student, or educator. Artist, Christopher Sperandio wrote about his experiences at the Poor Farm.

There was an almost alchemical compatibility of the artists that I shared living conditions with...As artists arrived, we got to know each other. We cooked together in the Poor Farm’s communal kitchen, took turns bathing in an old claw-footed bathtub with a too slow drain and shared a toilet that flushes with hot water. The days had a rhythm. We worked hard but we also played dominoes while cursing each other’s mothers in creative ways. I made art but I also caught fish and went tubing on the Little Wolf River. (Sperandio, p. 14, 2011)

As my friend and I floated down the river, we bumped into Sperandio. He asked who we were and why we were there. He talked about his summer and creating an art work inspired by looking at the clouds. These moments of informal dialogue are part of what makes this experience so rewarding. The place and the experiences inspired Sperandino as an artist and in his relationships with others who shared his experience. His willingness to share this with me as we floated down the river inspired me to think about how the environment influences us both as artists and as people. When we returned to The Poor Farm, I went back upstairs to see his painting again. The painting had new life. I could not separate the work from the words of the artist floating down the river.

Grabner and Killam have been in the art world as artists, educators, and curators for many years. Through their professional lives they have developed relationships with many artists and educators. This social capital enables them to create these spaces and to get people interested in showing their work in these non-traditional spaces. It is the personal relationships that create a desire and dedication to working with Grabner and Killam on their projects. They benefit from years of experience and knowing a wide range of artists and arts professionals. This access and social capital not only allows them to do this work but it is passed on to the participants who are motivated to engage in Grabner and Killam's projects at the Poor Farm and Suburban.

### **Professional Atmosphere**

The Poor Farm is a relaxed, rural, slow paced environment with recreational opportunities that include fishing, tubing, biking, and more. For many years it was a recreational place for Grabner and Killam, to relax, be close to Grabners family, and to get away from their professional lives in the Chicago area. The Poor Farm maintains the slowness and recreational

opportunities but it is now combined with a professional atmosphere and network of artists and art professionals. The summer school participants learn about the program from their home university programs. Artists and other participants learn about The Poor Farm through contact with the Suburban, other artists, or through Killam and Grabner themselves. Although there is not a formally structured education program in place, The Poor Farm provides an opportunity for learning through art, artists, lived experiences, dialogue, and research. The Poor Farm opens up opportunities for meeting people, learning about what they do, and how they navigate and balance their creative practice with their professional careers. This helps young artists and students to construct a vision for the future. Through networking and building relationships, participants develop contacts that may be helpful in gaining the education, experience and opportunities to achieve their goals.

There is just enough structure to provide a foundation to explore in many different directions. The students have touch points including the faculty, mentors, art and artists. Participants can choose their level of engagement by the amount of time that is spent at the Poor Farm, participation in activities, and openness to meeting new people and engaging in a dialogue. There is obviously going to be a much different experience for someone who comes for a day, looks around, talks to a few people, and drives home than someone who spends the weekend, lives out of a tent, talks to students and artists, and takes the time to float down the river.

The environment, the place, and the people create an atmosphere and a potential space that is open to play and learning and leaning through play. Psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott wrote:

I have tried to draw attention to the importance both in theory and in practice of a third area, that of play, which expands into creative living and the whole cultural life of man. This third area has been contrasted with inner or psychic reality and the actual world in which the individual lives, which can be objectively perceived. (1971, p. 102)

Ellsworth (2005), examined the ideas of Winnicott within the context of pedagogy. She looked at the potential for this third area, or transitional spaces, to create transformational experiences. Ellsworth wrote:

Transitional space allows us to use the environment to get lost in oneself, to make a spontaneous gesture, to get interested in something new to surprise oneself, to organize bits of experience into a temporarily connected sense of self and then to allow those bits to “un-integrate” so they can be surprised by themselves and reconfigured in new ways. (p. 61)

It is difficult to say what creates a transitional space. How an individual chooses to participate in the space seems as important as the space itself. Being part of this transplanted and open artistic community lead me to a transformational experience. I was open to new experiences and I no longer felt a need to define myself as an artist, an educator, or a researcher. I learned from the lived experience, the dialogue, and the shared social spaces. While I was there, I felt like I was part of something bigger. While amongst a sea of strangers in a strange place, I felt a sense of belonging through being immersed in the experience while surrounded by like-minded individuals. In the end, I felt changed and empowered to be a better teacher, a better artist, and a better researcher.

**Final Reflection**

As I mentioned, this space is not a traditional community-based art educational space but it is a space where art and education come together. This space and this place provide an opportunity to learn about the contemporary art world from the interactions and dialogues of practicing artists, curators, arts professionals, and students. Michelle Grabner describes the potential of this space to, “protract the art world.” Perhaps it also protracts the conceptions of what an educational space looks like, or how an educational space is structured. Through their desire to keep art and artists close, Grabner and Killam break down boundaries of the traditional contemporary art world apparatus. Examining this space and the educational moments and opportunities it offers broadens conceptions of community-based art education.

## Chapter 7 Cross-Case Analysis and Implications for Art Education

The cases I chose to investigate included a wide range of experiences and opportunities for exploring and engaging in arts educational experiences outside of, in addition to, or in partnership with K-12 schooling. These cases varied in the degree to which they engaged a community or communities, the overall mission of the space, and the audiences the spaces and programs served. Their commonalities included a commitment to creating access to contemporary art and art educational experiences for their target audience(s). These are serious educational spaces that allow students and participants to learn through both formal and informal educational experiences. Within these contexts, community-based art education provided opportunities for young students, adults, teachers, and artists to sustain and/or develop practices as thinkers, creators, researchers, and teachers.

Through a cross-case analysis, I focused on who these art programs served and what participants gained through access to alternative or community-based art education settings, opportunities, and experiences. Primary to my investigation is a consideration of the role community-based art education has in creating access to art education opportunities as a democratic right. Drawing upon the work of Blandy (2011), Gude (2009), Giroux (2004), and Vanada (2010), I assert that access to meaningful art education is a democratic right and necessary for a democratic society. Meaningful art education provides opportunities and experiences through which students can engage in social dialogue through making, seeing, and experiencing art. Art education, that includes the development of visual literacy through the investigation of visual forms, leads to new understandings about art and contemporary society. In what follows, I will look at how access is created through experiences represented in each of the cases in the following way: through social capital theory, a sense of belonging, and transitional

places. In each of these cases, I will analyze what these experiences provide the participants; and finally I will discuss how these art educational experiences apply to the broader field of art education.

### **Democratic Access**

When I began looking at the role of community-based art education in providing democratic access to art education, I was primarily looking at the uneven access to art education opportunities in the schools. While public schooling should ideally be democratic places of learning, studies show the art educational opportunities are very different with a correlation between lack of art education and low socio-economic schools (Chapman, 2005). I was interested in investigating the role community-based art education has in creating access where there is none. As I began to investigate these programs further, I began to consider pedagogical practices, content, relationships, and places of learning.

Borrowing from Dewey (1998), Friere (2010), hooks (1994), and Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) beliefs that a fundamental human right is access to engaging, dialogical and critical pedagogical experiences, I argue that access to meaningful and engaging art education is a democratic right. Dewey (1998), Friere (2010), hooks (1994) discuss the need for students to engage with teachers in conversations with opportunities for critical thinking. While they do not specifically point to art education, I propose that the arts offer a more open environment where teachers may feel a willingness to explore different pedagogical practices and allow their students to look at and respond to both creative and social issues through looking at and creating works of art. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) describe curriculum as intellectual property and while art education is not specifically mentioned, it can be argued that art contributes to the quality of curriculum and may have significance in teaching students to accept and affirm their

cultural identity (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Without access to art education, students do not have the opportunity to become what Gude (2009) described as “life-long makers of meaning” (p.10).

Through these case studies, I describe the role of community-based art education in providing opportunities and access. This discussion focuses on how access is facilitated by community-based art education programs and the potential benefits to individuals and communities. Access to these artistic experiences opens up many questions about audience, meaningful engagement, community, and empowerment. In each case access is created through opportunity, content, community, and place.

### **Opportunity**

Community-based art education provides opportunities for students to engage in art education experiences through supplementing k-12 art programs in schools, providing art experiences in addition to traditional art education experienced in school, bringing art experiences to non-traditional audiences, and offering free arts programming. The cases exemplified a wide range of engagement opportunities. Within the experiences described in the previous chapters, there are opportunities to experience art in a one time or drop-in program, short-term intensive experiences within a community of artists, art programs within school time, after school programs, recreational art making activities, classes to learn specific skills and techniques, and sustained engagement through a series of classes.

Providing access to meaningful art educational experiences does not merely depend on providing opportunities to experience art, but also on how the experiences are presented through instructors or teaching artists. Within each of these cases, I described teaching practices that were based in mentorship and modeling. The community-based art education experiences that occur outside of the constructs or confines of the school culture may also contribute to students

experiences through alternative pedagogical practices and a more open environment. Teaching artists as mentors present an alternate pedagogical role and embody ideas of a democratic and critical pedagogue. Friere (2010) describes critical pedagogy through a different teacher/student learning model:

For the dialogical, problem posing teacher-student, the program content of education is neither a gift nor an imposition- bits of information to be deposited in the students- but rather the organized, systematized, and developed “re-presentation” to individuals of the things about which they want to know more. (P.93)

Experiences in the community-based settings aren't inherently significant or transformative, but there are opportunities for meaningful engagement through both programming and pedagogical practices.

**Programming at the Art Center.** When I worked at the Art Center, I questioned whether a workshop, a “make and take” project, or teaching one art lesson twice a year in a school was creating access. The Art Center provided access to art education experiences through classes offered at the center, and outreach programs at schools and libraries, but the experiences were sometimes very limited by time, and other opportunities provided a more extended experience. While the one day experience may not be considered a significant experience, it is an introduction and may lead to a student seeking out more experiences. As the Art Center was located in the city, it was also in a very residential neighborhood, thus access was also created by location. The students who lived closer to the Art Center were more likely to participate in events at the center and to have school programs augmented by the Art Center. The main audience of the Art Center was white working class families who lived in the immediate

neighborhood. Through the outreach program, the demographics changed to serving a majority of African American and Latino populations. While the Art Center had a clear mission which included outreach to bring arts education to the schools, the multiple audiences and sites of these experiences complicated the funding, implementation, and assessment of the programs.

Creating access to art education is not just blindly sending a teaching artist into a school, although this sometimes happened at the Art Center. A school would call and ask for a teaching artist on short notice and I would find someone who was available. Usually these experiences were short, a one lesson project. While these short-term experiences may have some value in giving students an opportunity to create something and break up the monotony of their school day, in retrospect, it did not create access to meaningful art education experiences. I define meaningful art education experiences based upon the different pedagogical practices and a sustained and responsive curriculum.

**Pedagogy at the Art Center.** In the case of the Art Center, I described an outreach instructor that began working with a school and developed a curriculum that was based in traditional approaches to teaching portraiture. After working with the students and spending time in the school environment, he wanted to change his approach. As I mentioned in the description of the case, he e-mailed and said he wanted to change his curriculum to change the scale students were working on, give them a break from working in the classroom environment, incorporate teamwork, and leadership building, and increase learning of reading and geometry, and not just teach drawing fundamentals. His teaching experience exemplifies a struggle to identify as teacher and a shift in how he saw his role. A teaching artist doesn't necessarily have a different pedagogical stance than the traditional teaching model but engaging in a creative practice with students may be conducive to developing a more democratic and critical pedagogical stance.

**Programming at Artspace.** Artspace had a very well defined mission to provide access to art education experiences for under-served populations (primarily Latino and African American) through free art classes on location. The benefit of a program with a well-defined scope is that time, energy, and finances are directed toward a singular overall goal. This allows for fine-tuning of what is offered, flexibility in the program to adapt to the interests and needs of students, and accountability to donors. The programming provided opportunities for students to participate in the arts through art making and art exhibits, to see a future trajectory in the arts through teaching artists and mentors, and to prepare for their future through internships and college preparation. While the program was free and open to the public, Adelina and her mother both mentioned investing over two hours standing in line in order to sign-up for classes. While Adelina mentioned the proximity to her home as a contributing factor to her sustained engagement, Artspace did have participants from all over the city. Access was created for participants who were able or willing to invest the time to sign-up, lived in close proximity or had access to transportation, and were able to invest the time to attend regularly.

**Pedagogy experienced at Artspace.** In the student case study, Adelina described her experiences through telling stories about the different teaching artists that she identified with. The courses offered at Artspace were determined by the teaching artists. Adelina stated, “I really admire my art teachers, but it was a different structure at Artspace; it was a little bit warmer than it was in the schools” (Adelina interview, April 15, 2011). While Adelina described activities, like drawing with a mop, rather than creating predetermined projects, she described classes that began with an introduction or a review and then time to engage with the materials and concepts. The teaching artists shared their interests with the students through the courses they taught and

sometimes brought in their own equipment. This created a feeling of mutual trust between the teaching artists and the students.

Through a presentation of ideas and concepts, students learned a skill set to work with and in a trusting environment they were encouraged to explore and develop their ideas. Adelina was able to choose classes based on who she wanted to work with, what materials she was interested in working with, and what fit with her schedule. Her engagement with Artspace was primarily determined by her own interests and drive.

**Programming at The Poor Farm.** The Poor Farm is well known through publications, the website, and their e-mail list; but participation is primarily based on invitations through professors for students or Michelle and Brad for artists and other participants. While there were exceptions, the population was made up of primarily white artists and students who were already connected to higher education. The educational opportunities were not limited to the curriculum that was designed for the student group. The weekend provided many opportunities to engage with art, artists and art world professionals in a continual dialog. Access for the students meant not only the curriculum and the artwork, but access to professional artists that shared their thoughts about art both formally through group talks and informally through individual conversations. The opportunity to learn was very self-directed. It was short-term but it could also be a very intense learning opportunity. The Poor Farm weekend mainly created access to an artist community that was very different from the geographical community where the Poor Farm was located. Community access to the history of the Poor Farm was created through maintenance of the physical building structure and through historical investigations and narratives of the artists and writers involved.

**Pedagogy at The Poor Farm.** An alternate model of the teacher is also shared and expressed by Dewey:

When education is based upon experience and educative experience is seen to be a social process, the situation changes radically. The teacher loses the position of external boss or dictator but takes on that of leader of group activities. (1998, p.59)

Michelle Grabner's approach to teaching within the context of the Poor Farm exemplifies a pedagogical model based on modeling, dialogue, and experience. She invited her students to learn along with her. She talked about creating a platform by bringing in art, artists, and experiences, but the learning and engagement of the students happened through the dialogue, both formal and informal, during the Poor Farm weekend. Students were able to directly engage with artists and learn how they construct their lives around art and how they think about and approach their work as artists.

**Reflection.** While community-based settings provide opportunities for students to experience and engage with arts and opportunities to engage with adults and instructors in a different way, not all instructors in community-based settings approach teaching through a more critical and dialogical stance, and there may be many k-12 art teachers who do. Community-based settings are usually more informal than school settings. This allows for divergent thinking, teaching, and creating, however, the role of teacher is sometimes engrained in individuals through their own school experiences. Teaching artists may approach teaching through their art practice, model their teaching based upon previous studio-based instruction at the college level, or fall back on how they were taught as k-12 student. In each of the three cases I observed examples of different teaching practices and mentoring relationships. Through these practices, there is a potential and openness that allows for a critical and dialogical art education experience.

## **Responsive Curricular Content**

While learning through experiencing art in the alternate settings of community-based art education can lead to more democratic and critical approaches to teaching, these are not the only reasons access to art education experiences are important. Community based art education experiences include outreach programs that supplement a lack of art in the curriculum through a visiting artist program during the regular school day or as an after-school program. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) look at curriculum as intellectual property. There appears to be a direct correlation between the material and intellectual property in educational environments. This is evident in the courses offered in direct correlation to the property values of the school. Very few elective courses are offered in low income schools, thus limiting student access to cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Art education is not part of the core curriculum and therefore does not have to be offered at every school. Art education itself may be seen as intellectual property. Community-based programs create access to art education to students that do not have art in their school curriculum but the content and quality of the content varies depending on the program.

**Art Center.** In my own role as a community-based art educator and provider, I facilitated access to art education through developing education programs both at the Art Center and through outreach programs, developing gallery exhibits that offered a wide variety of art disciplines and artistic practices, and my own teaching practices. In order to effectively create programming, it was important to observe and listen to students, parents, and the community to determine what art experiences they desired and finding new experiences the patrons and community might respond to. It was essential to be responsive to provide art experiences that were meaningful and engaging. As to be expected in a diverse environment, this process had

many miss-steps and was complicated by the divergent interests and multiple communities we served.

Developing curriculum and programming that is responsive is challenging. Knowing your audience makes it easier but it is complicated by multiple factors including considerations of race and class. Critical positionality is essential when negotiating the shared spaces of community based art education. For instance, when we were working with schools with predominantly Latino and African American populations, I was very aware of both myself and the art center coming from a position of whiteness. From this position, I didn't want to provide programming that represented or reinforced the western canon of art, however that is often what schools requested. In this instance, as in many others, It was important for me to listen to what individual schools wanted, while concurrently observing the community and the environment, as school administrators and personnel may be unaware of opportunities and experiences that would be engaging and meaningful to the students and the school. This synthetic approach was and is very time consuming, and at the Art Center, it was difficult to get that time because of last minute requests or limited funding within the project. As a result, content and curriculum were primarily developed by the teaching artists. This was hit or miss depending on whether the teaching artist was a good match with the school. The longer sustained experiences allowed for the teaching artists to develop a relationship with the school, the faculty, and the students which resulted in richer content and a more engaged experience.

Classes at the Art Center were also sometimes developed based on teaching artists' interests or techniques. The teaching artists from the art center were diverse in experiences, backgrounds, and interests including comic book artists, painters, and photographers that were either formally or informally trained. Each teaching artist has a story that they pass on to their

students which may inspire students to experience something new or open their minds to different ways of thinking. In addition to the inherent diversity offered through the experiences of the teaching artists, there was also a progression of classes that I developed to provide introductory or exploratory art classes to a variety of age levels. This allowed students opportunities to continue taking art classes according to their age level and their interests. As there was no set curriculum in the classes that were offered, only guiding criteria, the teaching artists were encourage to respond to student interests while sharing the knowledge and skills that were central to their own art making practices.

**Artspace.** In the student case study, content was provided by the teaching artists through exercises, studio practices, and sharing their stories of becoming and being an artist. Adelina mentioned a teacher that shared her own experiences as an artist working in the city and her community as part of her teaching practice. Adelina said, “She would talk about her own practice, and how she relates her messages and the kind of work she does and where she was at in her life.” Learning about how her teacher balanced her life, work, and art made the idea of being an artist more tangible. Adelina continued, “It was just so honest, and there wasn’t anything elitist or superficial about the way she taught, it was just very honest.” This is an example of honesty and the significance of being able to relate to and trust the instructor. Adelina finished her recollection by stating, “I think that is what made a difference for me and that is why I want to do the same thing.” The stories the teaching artist shared represented a counter narrative to the notion of art as elitist and out of reach. Through this relationship, Adelina was able to see herself both as an artist and a teacher.

**The Poor Farm.** The educational experiences at The Poor Farm were both constructed through an open-ended curriculum for the student participants in the “Free School” and self-

directed for other participants who were primarily artists and art professionals. The curriculum was based on readings and arranged artist talks to augment the work on view. Both students and participants alike learned from interacting with one another and interacting with the work at The Poor Farm. The draw to The Poor Farm may have been to participate in the Free School, to see the work that was being shown, or to have a relaxing artist weekend interacting with other artists, but a major draw to The Poor Farm was both Grabner and Killam. Grabner, while an art world insider, represents a female artist who is able to balance life, family, teaching, curating, and a very successful art career. The work that Grabner and Killam do together presents an alternate way of participating in the art world they love while maintaining a lifestyle that sustains their family and not just art careers. They present compelling content through inviting people to spend time with them and engaging in conversations about their lives and work.

**Reflection.** One significant finding was that art was similarly defined across the three cases. The focus was on contemporary living artists. While each of these cases varied on many levels, art and the content of what was being taught was defined through the teaching artists' life, work, and experiences they shared with their students. Regardless of whether it was the artists on exhibit at The Poor Farm, Artspace or the Art Center or the teaching artists in the programs, the contemporary artists often represented counter narratives to the Western Canon of art that is predominant in schools and art institutions. In part, art and artists exist to respond to our world and to help the viewer understand and see things in different ways. Through creating, experiencing, and reflecting, art is a way of engaging with and understanding the world we live in. Access to art education allows participants to engage with the world through art and see their ability to both question and understand their relationship to society as a whole.

## Community

The programs discussed in each case serve a primary community or multiple communities. There is a responsibility that the community-based art education provider has to the community it serves but this is complicated by diverse and multi-faceted communities. Community can be a group of people that are linked through a location/neighborhood, a cultural identity, a common interest, a common pursuit, and perhaps even a common experience. The Art Center primarily served the neighborhood community where it was located which was primarily white working class families, but this was complicated by the segregated surrounding communities that included predominantly African American and Latinos populations and the diverse communities in the outreach programs. Artspace served mainly underserved youth from the immediate area, but did attract students from further away. The Poor Farm created a temporary transplanted primarily well educated, white, and predominantly urban artist community in an area far away from museums and galleries that show contemporary art. However, The Poor Farm is in a rural space and a historical building with a history tied to the local community as well as the history of Poor Farms in the United States, which Grabner and Killam acknowledge and respect. This results in a complexity in the engagement and responsibility to these two seemingly divergent communities.

**Art Center.** I described the Art Center's main audience as the local community because it was created by community members to create a place to provide arts education experiences to the local community. At the Art Center, participants could sign-up for classes in visual art, theater, dance, and music for a moderate fee. Community members selected individual classes based on their interests and what experiences they want for their children. Students and families who signed up for multiple classes not only looked forward to the art-making experiences, but

participating with friends. While there were participants with serious interest in the arts, a majority of the participants looked at art classes as a form of enrichment and recreation. The art center provided a place for community members to meet others who shared their interest in the arts. The Art Center also provided art shows, concerts, performances, and family events. Participants were encouraged to become members of the Art Center, creating a community of support.

The Art Center participated in the community by providing programming at the center, at schools, and libraries. As the Art Center grew, there was no longer a singular community, but multiple communities that the programming served. The location of the Art Center changed in population with growing African American and Latino populations. While there was definitely diversity represented in the classes offered, a majority of the in-house programming (including films, stage shows, exhibitions, and other performances) was geared primarily towards white audiences. This may have been a factor of the influence of the Board of Directors in that the board at the Art Center was all White and primarily middle class, with the exception of one member. Although there were programs, exhibitions, and classes that appealed to a more diverse audience, diversity programming and building a diverse community was not a primary mission of the Art Center. In contrast with the in-house programs, the schools that were served through the outreach program primarily consisted of minority populations in the city.

The Art Center both thrived and suffered because of the diverse audiences and multiple missions stemming from the varied programs that were offered. It thrived because it created a large visible gathering place for local community members to meet, participate in arts programming, and to share their interests with others. With diverse programming, there was freedom to try new things and rebuild programs because the programs carried one another. The

Art Center suffered from the multiple missions and audiences because it was difficult to secure funding and gain support when it was unclear who the support was for or where the support was most needed. The Art Center was a private non-profit organization, so it also heavily relied on community support from community members and businesses. Aileen mentioned that she found that community members had just enough to put their kids in classes but not see it as their responsibility to support the Art Center's mission to provide programming in the schools. The local funding efforts tended to appeal to the local programming and grant funding tended to appeal to the diversity, but grant money was lost because the Art Center was not diverse enough.

**Artspace.** Artspace served the community through providing visual art education programming to the urban community where it is located. The mission was to provide art education opportunities to under-served youth and students from the immediate urban community and surrounding communities were invited to participate. Artspace also created its own community and this was a major aspect of the learning experiences that were described by Adelina. Artspace was not just a place to come and take art classes. There were places to “hang out” with other students. Participants were able to meet other students that shared their interests and commitment to creating art. The student board and college programs brought groups of students together to work towards a common goal. Adelina mentioned several times that Artspace was like a second home, “I always used to tell people Artspace was my second home. I was there all the time, I loved being there, I loved volunteering there. It really was like a second home, everybody there was like family to me.” For Adelina, it was a community of staff, teaching artists, mentors, and students that together created a safe place to explore interests and ideas.

**The Poor Farm.** The Poor Farm is not a site of community-based art education as it is traditionally defined but it did provide art educational opportunities to a specific community, fitting Villeneuve and Sheppard's (2009) concept of community as a learning group. At the Poor Farm there were two seemingly disparate communities, those of the well-educated urban artists community and the local rural community. I primarily focused on the learning opportunities for the community of artists both for understanding different ways of learning. The community of artists was composed of a transplanted community of students, artists, and arts professionals. The local community was composed of the residents and business owners who lived in the immediate vicinity. It can be argued that Grabner and Killam belonged to both communities, since this is near Grabner's hometown and this community was where Grabner and Killam had their summer home. While there were some benefits to the local rural community where the Poor Farm is located, the primary function of the Poor Farm was the community of established artists and art students that converged on the space for The Great Poor Farm Experiment weekend. There is no formal outreach with the local community, but Killam indicated there is interest in developing programming when The Poor Farm can function year round. It is slow growth so the project can be sustained as an extension of Grabner and Killam's summer home. The local community can't help but notice the presence of a large number of artists in their community for a weekend each summer or the changes at The Poor Farm. It is yet to be seen whether the present activities will have an impact on the local community.

The artists' community was constructed through being at The Poor Farm for a weekend experience with a group of people who had similar interests and thoughts. For many of the participants it was a temporary community, for others, coming here was an extension of a longer relationship with Grabner and Killam. The bonding between participants was expedited, in part,

because participants were taken out of their familiar urban environments and spending a designated time camping and being in the natural environment. Being part of this community played a significant role in the learning experiences of The Poor Farm and the degree of engagement determined what was learned and gained through participation. While there were ample opportunities to learn from observations and intense conversations, participants benefited from bumping into one another, meeting new people, brief conversations while floating down the river, and many other opportunities for more casual or playful interactions.

**Reflection.** Community plays a big role in participation in CBAE settings both in developing relevant programming and in participation. Learning is not just a function of an individual, learning also involves being open to and responding to others. Both Artspace and The Poor Farm benefited from having clearly defined missions and a clear understanding of communities they serve. This allows more time to be responsive to community needs and creates stronger bonds amongst the participants. The Art Center served multiple communities and that complicated how both time and money were spent in the creation of programming. With the divergent communities, the bonds were not as strong and the Art Center did not develop a group of students in the visual arts who were dedicated to the program or the learning communities developed in individual classes. It was not necessarily sustained engagement over time or beyond a singular participation that created successful communities at Artspace and The Poor Farm, it was the clear purpose and the in-depth engagement that allowed for responsive programming and participants to feel part of a larger community.

### **Place**

The physical space and environment of the Art Center and Artspace buildings contributed to creating access to engaging art education experiences by creating a space for an open-ended

engagement with the arts through viewing and making work in a professional environment. The environments added to the experience through the architecture, the dedicated spaces to art making, and professional exhibits that made the experience feel unique and different from what was available in the schools. Kennedy (cited in Ellworth, 2005) poses that place and time can provide a context of open-ended learning opportunities “with bodies [of learners] in a web of inter-relational flows in material ways” (p. 24). The places involved in these case studies created opportunities for learning through structured classes, self-directed learning through engaging with art and other resources, and informal learning through interactions with others. The buildings provided participants with an atmosphere that was professional, inspiring, and comfortable. These spaces provided a place to come and be with other people who shared common interests and make connections with people who could share, inspire, and support future goals.

**Art Center.** For over twenty-five years, the Art Center rented space from a school for programming. It was significant to have this large dedicated space to the arts and arts education in the neighborhood. From the outside, it was newly constructed two-story building which stood out among the older single story buildings in the area. It was modern looking on both the inside and outside. It stood out in the neighborhood and improved the look of the intersection where it was located. When entering the building, the reception area was a large open space and there were dedicated rooms to classes, exhibits, and performances. The space felt consequential. It looked and felt like an art building one might find in the downtown area of the city, but instead it was on the outskirts of the city, within a couple miles from where I grew up. It was a place to gather with friends for entertainment, it was a place to take classes and learn something new, and it was a place to find artists and art enthusiasts who lived in the neighborhood.

**Artspace.** Adelina spoke so favorably of the Artspace building and facilities, I became determined to see the space for myself. When I finally arrived at Artspace, it didn't particularly stand out from the street, but when you walked inside there was a large open gallery space which felt both momentous and inviting. I was able to walk through and see the library, the classrooms, the offices, and meeting places that Adelina had described as part of her experience. The place was significant because it was a professional space dedicated to making art work. It was well maintained, resources were available to students in the form of books, art supplies, and equipment. The Artspace environment also provided a place for both formal and informal engagement, for both "hanging out" as informal sharing and facilitated dialogue. It was a place to come to make art, be in a professional space, and hang out with people who shared similar interests and a similar level of dedication.

**The Poor Farm.** The Poor Farm offered an alternative place than a traditional urban art environment. The primary participants in this experience were students and arts professionals from cities. The place, the natural environment, and the isolation were significant to the experience. Many of the participants were camping, there was communal food available, and the activities were a mix of art viewing and recreational activities including walking and tubing down the river. The remote location allowed for a different viewing experience, art wasn't viewed once for a blocked out time, as when attending an art opening or visiting a museum or gallery. The exhibits were there to engage with throughout the weekend experience. When outside the main building the fresh air, the sounds and smells of the farm across the street, and open space allowed for time to digest the work. In a different context, some of the divisions of artist, viewer, and student seemed to dissipate, especially for those who stayed for the weekend and camped.

The Poor Farm's past history was a continual underpinning to the contemporary uses and interactions with the space. When you walked through the building, you could see evidence of the history in the floors and on the walls. There were areas where you could see several layers of wall paper. On the floors you could see lines and markings that indicated that the space had been divided into much smaller rooms. While I was there looking at the art, I couldn't help but think about the stories of the people that had once stayed there. The large, stone, institutional looking building was inseparable from the past. Yet, it was also easy to see how it could have become an increasingly forgotten past. While the mission of The Poor Farm was not directed at the geographical community, the renewal of the physical place, brought forward the history. For the artistic community, the history of the place might be an interesting dichotomy when looking at contemporary art, but for the residents surrounding The Poor Farm, there is a history of the physical place in which they live and a possibility for a personal/familial connection to someone who had The Poor Farm in its original incarnation.

**Reflection.** In each of the cases, the place became central to the experience. Artspace and The Poor Farm were tied to one place and that place provided a context for the experiences of the participants. The Art Center was complicated by the multiple venues for programming. The newness of the building and dedicated art space added to the experience of taking art classes, but programming offered in the schools didn't have the benefit of the space to support the experience. It was up to the teaching artist to bring the professional environment to their students. The Art Center, Artspace, and The Poor Farm provided context and possibilities that participants could access through the places in which they were located.

### **What Access Provides to Which Participants**

Through arts engagement opportunities, participants in each of the three cases were provided access to art education opportunities which contributed to social capital through being part of a community, working with teaching artists, and gaining professional opportunities and support. Each case demonstrates opportunities for participants to develop social capital through relationships with mentors and participants. The relationships and social bonds that are experienced through community-based programming also facilitate a sense of belonging (Rowe, 2005) through a social support system. This sense of belonging factors into long-term participation and devotedness to the program. The sense of belonging provides a platform of invulnerability which allows participants the freedom to try new things and openness to new ways of thinking. In this way, these programs may also function as transitional spaces (Ellsworth, 2005) and offer transitional experiences to participants through open and dynamic learning environments. The benefits from these alternative art education experiences varies based on the individual, the experience, and the duration of engagement, but these venues offer opportunities to develop social capital, a sense of belonging, and transitional experiences.

### **Social Capital**

Using social capital as a theoretical framework, I looked at the potential these programs provide in terms of opportunities for students to not only develop artistic skills and practices, but to develop relationships that will help students navigate a professional life, and to envision a life trajectory where these skills may be applied. I looked at Buys and Miller's (2009) study where they identified social capital in terms of self-concept, helping others, meeting new people, feelings of belonging and obligation to finish the project, trusting the program leaders and other participants and feeling safe. Using these identifiers, I looked for and coded for similar examples of social capital in each of the three cases, focusing on relationships, both in terms of being part

of a community and building relationships with leaders, mentors, and role models. Initially I went into this study looking for examples of social capital that provided resources for upward mobility. I looked for relationships and social connections that had the potential to provide access to upward mobility through social ties with access to power and knowledge needed to develop a positive future trajectory (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1998; DiFilippis, 2001; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). What became more salient through my investigation is the significance of supportive relationships that are not related to power and is described as lateral social capital (DiFilippis, 2011). As a result, I reconsidered the relationships present in each case to investigate opportunities and differentiated between vertical social capital (relationships that may provide opportunities for upward mobility) and lateral social capital (relationships that may provide enjoyment and support).

**Vertical social capital.** Vertical social capital connected participants with artists and arts professionals who could help navigate future opportunities including college, art shows, and job or internship opportunities. Through the relationships with mentors, teaching artists, staff members, artists, and supporters, each of these cases offered opportunities to build vertical social capital. While examples of opportunities to develop vertical social capital were observable in each case, it was more difficult to point to observable examples of students or participants who benefited from social capital in these programs, with the exception of Adelina at Artspace. Adelina's experiences at Artspace gave her opportunities to learn about art techniques and art careers from artists. Adelina began to see herself as an artist when she sold work to a gallery owner. Through exhibits, internships, and the student board Adelina was given opportunities to develop social skills and social connections she would need to develop an art career. She had a

mentor that guided her through her experiences in Artspace and helped her navigate college applications and scholarships to help Adelina continue her education and career path.

The Art Center offered opportunities for participants to make connections with artists and art world professionals. I can speak from my experiences that there was a desire to connect students to professional opportunities and to help students develop a successful path to follow their interests but it is difficult to cite a specific example of a student that was clearly empowered through social capital at the Art Center. Yet the Art Center was a professional environment and through teaching artists and exhibiting artists, students were able to see art as a possible career trajectory. Through the exhibits, teaching opportunities, and gallery committee, artists in the community became more visible through their participation at the Art Center. Students were able to see and interact with professional artists living in their community.

The Poor Farm offered opportunities to connect with artists and art professionals through the weekend long art opening, the Free School, and recreational activities, yet over the two years where I participated in the weekend events, I cannot point to a definitive example where vertical social capital helped an individual. Grabner spoke about the opportunities for young artists to meet and connect with artists at the Poor Farm and reach out to them in future contexts. In the summer of 2012, student interns worked on the Gretchen Bender exhibit along with Philip Vanderhyden, one of Grabner's former students from University of Wisconsin. Part of this exhibit was included in the 2014 Whitney Biennial (<http://whitney.org/Exhibitions/2014Biennial>). Grabner is a very successful artist, critic, and curator and is very generous with her time and both physical and social resources. She sees herself as an educator who wants to provide opportunities for success to her students.

**Lateral social capital.** Upon reading DiFilippis description of social capital and the differentiation of lateral and vertical social capital, it seemed that community-based arts education provided opportunities for empowerment through the development of vertical social capital. Through the process of interviewing, observing, and reflecting I began to see the significance of the role of lateral social capital in social, emotional, and creative development and support. The Art Center, Artspace, and The Poor Farm all presented opportunities to develop lateral social capital through the relationships that were developed through participation in programming. These relationships are an example of lateral social capital because they create encouragement and conviviality that add to the overall experience but aren't relationships that lead to new opportunities or show future trajectories. In order to understand the significance of these relationships that might be referred to as lateral social capital, I discuss each case through the opportunities to develop a sense of belonging and transitional experiences.

### **Sense of Belonging**

When I interviewed Adelina for the first time, she spoke about Artspace as a second home. I spoke with her three additional times, and each time, she mentioned feeling at home when she was at Artspace. I began to think about the significance of what Adelina meant when she talked about Artspace as a second home. While I could explain her ties to a community through social capital, it seemed that it was not enough to elucidate what she was expressing by alluding to "home." Initially, within each of these cases I analyzed how these experiences contributed to social capital. However, I found it necessary to go back and re-examine these experiences looking for opportunities to develop a sense of belonging through community, relationships and support. I examined the significance of support and relationships through a sense of belonging (Hagerty, Williams, Coyne, & Early, 1996; Rowe, 2005) in order to

understand the sustained or in-depth engagement and setting future goals. A sense of belonging is experienced through a system of social support that provides a feeling of security and acceptance. This sense of belonging may contribute to a positive self-image, self-efficacy, positive social relationships and understanding of others through feeling accepted and valued by peers and instructors (Hagerty, et al., 1996). Sense of belonging is significant because it creates a positive and safe environment in which participants are free to explore, grow, reach out, and come to a better understanding of themselves in relation to others.

A sense of belonging, like social capital, can be empowering when individuals are challenged to see the implications of belonging to multiple sites and communities. Students need to be challenged to consider differential belonging in order to understand who they are in relation to others. Rowe (2005) defines differential belonging:

And yet, the point of “differential belonging” is to call attention to the multiple paths we may travel in our own circles of belonging and to consider the implications for each on the other. It is not to be bound by the regulatory practices of any particular group nor the need to remain consistent or “pure,” but rather to take a risk and move in the direction of multiple others. (p. 36)

When students understand how people are included or excluded from groups or participation it opens up the possibility to be empowered by the security in their own sense of belonging and move towards understanding and participating in multiple or differential modes of belonging. This understanding of differential belonging may facilitate a shift away from individuality and towards a longing to understand, to be with, be a part of, and connect across communities.

**Art Center.** While there were supportive communities within the art center, there was not an overall support system in place for the teachers or the students. The teachers were asked to

develop their own following. The sense of belonging was with the class, the instructor, and the fellow students. This worked well for some teachers but without another touch point outside of the class, the students often did not try other classes. When taking music lessons, like violin, one teacher might be desirable. The teacher would work with the student over time and work with their skill level. The theater program also had a strong core of participation that eventually formed a teen board. There were performances that required long-term dedication but the leader and main instructor of the program also had energy and enthusiasm that pulled in students and made them feel like an integral part of the program.

In art classes, art teachers might have a following and students might sign up for the same class each session, but eventually a student will want to try something new. Without a support system or touch point, the student may not know what to take next and decide not to continue with art classes. The structure and support of individual instructors created a sense of belonging for participants. Art Center had difficulty facilitating a sense of belonging that transferred and flowed from the diverse offerings. As the visual arts coordinator, I tried to create programming that parents could navigate according to age level. I taught a parent child class and a preschool class for several years and I hired another teacher to teach an art class for kindergarten through second grade and she taught at the same time and next door. This allowed parents to access age appropriate classes for siblings and they could see what to take next. I was able to provide the support needed when I was teaching and programming classes because I could see the need and I was there to answer questions and advise. When I was not available, parents and students were left to figure out what to take on their own or relied on the front desk staff that did not have first-hand knowledge of the instructors or the classes.

Participation and belonging to or at the Art Center was also complicated by the multiple communities it served. The Art Center was situated in a neighborhood that was predominantly white but surrounded by diverse communities which included a large African American population and a Latino population. From my observations, the sense of belonging was predominantly felt by the majority white population from the area. There was participation and at times meaningful engagement of minority populations but the Art Center had a problematic relationship with diversity. Individual teachers could not create an atmosphere of openness and acceptance. The sense of belonging did not flow into the outreach schools. Most of the outreach students never saw the Art Center itself. The teaching artist may have been a significant figure in the students' educational experience, but that relationship did not extend outside of the school walls. The parents of most of the outreach students were disconnected from the Art Center. The school administration had the relationship with the Art Center.

Through an analysis of my experiences, interviews, and observations of the programs and activities at the Art Center, a sense of belonging played a major role in sustaining deep or long term engagement. There was enough support to create a sense of belonging to some participants and the Art Center did create a safe place that offered acceptance and opportunities for exploration through the arts. This was observed through students who repeated classes at younger ages, adults who took and repeated oil painting and ceramics classes, and was evident through my observations of participants in the teen theater program. When support was there, parents and students had a stronger sense of belonging. They spoke about how meaningful their experiences were and they wanted to take advantage of other offerings at the Art Center. This was their art school, this was their community center, this was their art gallery, and this was their concert venue. However, the experiences at the Art Center did not go beyond the boundaries of

the individual instructors, classes, or programs. These were not empowering experiences and there were not many opportunities to develop a sense of differentiated belonging. There were participants that took a class or two and did not feel the support necessary to create a sense of belonging to the class or even fellow students. When there was no support, when parents asked questions that couldn't be answered, then the Art Center could be a place where people felt excluded.

**Artspace.** Adelina spoke frequently about the encouragement she received from people in the program, not just her instructors, but the staff and fellow students as well. She stated, "I just had so much encouragement from so many people there, from the teaching artists that came in there, from mentors that I had, from other students who just as passionate as I was" (Adelina Interview, April 15, 2011). What Adelina experienced was a deep sense of belonging that was formed through trusting relationships over time. Adelina felt a sense of belonging through having a place to go that supported her interests with supplies, facilities, and staff. She became part of a community through participating alongside students who shared her enthusiasm for making artwork and learning from practicing artists.

Adelina's experiences shifted from participation in classes to a deeper investment through the board, the college program, and the career program. As her experiences deepened, her personal investment deepened, and her relationships deepened. The teaching artists were able to give her experiences with art making and represented art making and being a teaching artist as a possible career path. It was really the whole community of Artspace that created a sense of belonging for Adelina and helped her make sense of what her own future trajectory might be. She spoke about her mentor that sponsored the board but also helped Adelina navigate college applications and financial aid. Adelina felt like an integral member of Artspace because she was

given opportunities to contribute through the student board. She was given support, and she was given resources both in terms of making art and navigating a future trajectory and college education. This sense of belonging transferred to her mother when she trusted Artspace to bring Adelina on trips to visit colleges.

Adelina articulated a differentiated sense of belonging when she spoke about her experiences at Artspace, her experiences at college, her experiences as a photographer, her experiences as a teacher, and how she was thinking through her plans for the future. When I spoke to Adelina, she talked about Artspace being a second home that gave her the courage to pursue a degree in art and move away from home to go to college. Adelina stated that while she was primarily interested in photography, she wanted to give back what she received through Artspace so she decided to double major in photography and art education. When she talked about the future, Adelina was conflicted about pursuing graduate school in photography, teaching, going away to another university, or staying close to home. Artspace gave her a foundation that allowed her to see herself in a position of belonging to many different groups; Adelina is Artspace, she is a university student, she is an artist, she is a teacher, she is a daughter, she is a sister. Artspace empowered Adelina to see herself in relation to others, to make informed decisions about who she wants to be, and decide the path she wants to take.

**The Poor Farm.** The sense of belonging that was facilitated at The Poor Farm was not as tangible because it was a short term experience but there were structural elements and support that created a sense of belonging to that temporary community that had a potential to carry over to a sense of belonging to a larger art community/art world. Grabner recognized the need to have touch points for young students who are participating in programming.

It is interesting, in terms of communities and fostering community and in terms of the summer school, the safety net is not only being in an environment and seeing other people handle it if you are not use to it, but the summer school has four faculty...Even though there is no curriculum, the authority figures are there to help them navigate.

(Michelle Grabner interview, October 8, 2012)

Grabner identified being in the environment with a group of people and the faculty touch points that contributed to the feeling of being part of a community. I would also add that the schedule of both The Poor Farm programming and the natural schedule of sunrise, sun down, and the noise of one another waking and moving through the day created a feeling of community and contributed to a sense of belonging.

The environment was a huge factor in the experiences at The Poor Farm because most of the participants were used to urban environments and camping out in nature was not familiar. The environment contributed to a sense of belonging both through the interactions that developed from being in a somewhat isolated and unfamiliar place and the responding to the natural schedule of the day that was dictated by the sunrise and sunset. There was no internet, no television, and limited phone service so participants spent more time interacting with one another. In the morning, the sounds of nature and the sounds of other participants waking, talking, and walking could easily be heard through the tents. Once building was locked up for the night, there was usually a campfire and while some people stayed up late, there were gathering places, like a campfire, that brought people together in conversations. Participants relied on one another to navigate the unfamiliar surroundings which quickly contributed to a sense of community and belonging.

The structure that was provided from both the faculty and the programming of The Poor Farm also contributed to a sense of belonging. As Grabner described, the faculty were there to help students navigate the environment, the opportunities, and the experiences that The Poor Farm had to offer. The programming, which included artist talks, movie screenings, and performances, created a structure to the open-ended learning opportunities. The structure provided an example of what navigating an art career might look like through interactions the teaching artists, the visiting artists, the exhibiting artists, and other arts professionals that shared their work, their experiences, and art making processes. While the structure provided support that may contribute to a feeling of security in a strange environment, it also created a sense of belonging to that experience which could transfer to a student sense of belonging to a community of artists. Participating alongside artists in a dynamic and supportive environment provides the opportunity to identify as an artist and to see concrete examples of making a life as an artist.

**Reflection.** The participation varied within the context of each case, but within each of these three cases, there was as a sense of belonging to a place or a group. The structure of the program, the staff and additional touch points created a sense of belonging and in-depth engagement, whether it was a short term or long term experience. I did not attempt to assess the sense of belonging for the participants or how this may have transferred to new experiences. I do not know if the students experienced differentiated belonging and if these experiences gave the participants more courage to embrace who they are in relation to others. However, with Adelina and student participants at The Poor Farm, this sense of belonging did prepare them for future opportunities in the arts. The sense of belonging to a community of artists may have contributed to their own identity as an artist. Adelina stated that through the classes and opportunities at Artspace she identified herself as an artist and felt that she had the right to pursue art in college.

The sense of belonging also contributed to her desire to become an art teacher because she wanted to give others similar opportunities that were so important to her own development.

### **Transitional Spaces**

I was surprised that the curricular content, in a traditional sense of developing a curriculum and lesson planning with clear goals and learning outcomes, didn't have a more significant role in student engagement. Through a cross examination of the cases and looking at opportunity, content, community, and place I found that community-based art education experiences within these places of learning had the potential to function as transitional spaces leading to transformational experiences for some of the participants who were deeply engaged. Ellsworth (2005) looked at DW. Winnicott's idea of transitional space and wrote, "He believed that to have a sense of aliveness a person needs a capacity to access the world around her and then to use it creatively and responsibly rather than simply to comply with it" (p.59). The context of these experiences provide learning environments that are conducive to dialogical pedagogical experiences.

Opportunities for transitional experiences are provided when participants are invited to engage in short term or long term in-depth experiences, exercise choice, and experience personal growth through an open and dynamic learning environment. Ellsworth (2005) describes this further stating,

Transitional space allows us to use the environment to get lost in oneself, to make a spontaneous gesture, to get interested in something new, to surprise oneself, to organize bits of experience into a temporarily connected sense of self and then allow those bits to "unintegrated" so they can be surprised by themselves and reconfigured in new ways. (p. 61)

**Art Center.** Art Center was a large building dedicated to the arts and arts enrichment opportunities. Artists that worked at the Art Center often had professional jobs as performers and artists. Participants had a catalogue of classes to choose from three times a year along with other short-term or workshop opportunities. There was room for exploration and cross-disciplinary experiences. If a student came in for a dance lesson, they might also discover an art class they wanted to take. Classes were set-up so students could build skills and have an in-depth experience in one area, or they could explore different areas and disciplines. Not everyone who walked into the Art Center had a transitional or transformative experience, but the potential was there. The greatest impediments were the cost for classes and a lack of a director of education that could answer questions and encourage students to explore the many opportunities the Art Center had to offer.

Through my reflections and interviews and investigations into the ArtCenter, I could not help but to reflect on my own experiences while working there. For me, the Art Center was a transitional space where I personally experienced surprise, growth, and change through the many experiences I had while working there. I started as an art teacher and quickly took on new roles and responsibilities. At times the new responsibilities seemed to come faster than I could process what I was doing and who I was becoming. There were many times when I felt lost or overwhelmed by the varied tasks assigned to my position. Since I always felt short on time, my roles were constantly influencing and informing one another. I thought about curating as I taught and teaching as I curated. I developed relationships with artists that informed my teaching, my art making, and creating exhibitions. I was consistently inspired by my students and the professional artists I worked with. I was a different artist, educator, and person than I was when I

started. Through these transitional experiences, I gained confidence in my abilities to teach, create art, curate exhibits, lead a group of teaching artists, and making program decisions.

**Artspace.** For Adelina, Artspace was a safe place to explore and experiment with different art processes. She was given both freedom to make choices and try new things and support to provide her the security and determination to take the risks necessary to change how she saw herself. Adelina was provided with art materials to use in Artspace and at home. She was given the opportunity to choose her own classes according to her interests. Adelina began taking art classes as a student, learned to practice as an artist, experienced showing artwork as an artist, and received guidance to find internships and scholarships which allowed Adelina to get a college degree and further her career both as an artist and art educator. What Adelina described through her experiences at Artspace is an example of what Ellsworth (2005) described as an environment of interrelation.

An environment of interrelation holds the potential to become a transitional space when it provides opportunities for us to both act in the world and to be acted upon by it-while at the same time offering us the flexible stability we need to risk allowing ourselves to be changed by the interaction. (p. 32)

Artspace provided Adelina with the flexible support she needed in order to be open to the changes and opportunities that she was able to access through the classes, relationships, and additional programming.

**The Poor Farm.** The Poor Farm experience is a weekend arts experience where artists, arts professionals, and art students come together to engage with art in a relaxed environment where dialogue and experience are central to learning. Rachman (cited in Ellsworth, 2005) describes pedagogues that “show and release the possibilities of life” (p. 27). The Poor Farm

experience takes on this pedagogical stance and shows the possibilities of living a life engaged with art and art making. There were readings that summer school students could access, there were talks by faculty, but there was not really a set curriculum. Students and participants alike, learned through looking, through conversations, and being in the space and environment of The Poor Farm. There was a blend of strangeness experienced through the history of the building and the rural surroundings and the familiarity of art and artists that facilitated openness to difference and change. The Poor Farm offered the potential for transitional experiences through self-directed learning in a dynamic and dialogical environment.

While Artspace and The Poor Farm offered environments of flexible stability, this may not have been as prevalent or central to the experiences at the Art Center. Yet, in each case study, there were learning environments that are designed to facilitate transitions. Students and other participants benefit from a place and space to explore, to rethink who they are, and to develop of what they might become. This might be described as a state of becoming, or as Ellsworth (2005) described, the state where we are no longer who we were but not yet who we hope to become:

We are in transition. We are traversing the boundaries between self and other and reconfiguring those boundaries and the meanings we give them. We are entertaining strangeness and playing in difference. We are crossing that important internal boundary that is the line between the person we have been but no longer are and the person we would like to become. (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 61-62)

### **Interpretation**

Access to art education provides students with critical thinking skills and the opportunity to participate and make informed decisions about their depth of engagement and where to find

opportunities for additional art experiences. Not all community-based programs are invested in the concept of social action or social reconstruction, however, access to art education can provide a platform or opportunities where social action or change may take place. Through the process of defining the nature of quality art education there can often be an emphasis on what is taught to the exclusion of how it is taught. Community-based art education provides opportunities to learn from practicing artists. This includes not only the opportunity to make art but also, includes allowing students to see future professional trajectories through experiences, artists, mentors, and internships.

The Art Center did not have a social action agenda leading its mission but it did offer diverse programs to diverse audiences and created access points to a wide range of arts education experiences. The outreach program brought arts experiences to the schools and the Art Center provided arts experiences that were primarily fee driven but there were also free programs including family programming and art exhibits. For participants who came to the Art Center there were classes in drawing, painting, digital photo, cartooning, computers, theater, dance, piano, strings, voice, drums, and more. The artwork that was on display included contemporary artist, local artists, outsider artists, tattoo artists, comic book artists, digital art, video, artists with disabilities, and student artwork. Programs were created to accommodate community needs, like a family support group for autism that came to the art center to watch films and make artwork together. The Art Center did not maintain long term programming for the diversity that was represented in the surrounding community but at times there was something for everyone.

Adelina identified social action central to her experiences at Artspace through the structure of the program, not through a multicultural or social action curriculum. Yet Adelina also described a different relationship with the teaching artists than she had experienced at her

school. She talked about learning through the teaching artists sharing their work and their influences. Adelina described learning how artists construct their careers combining making work, teaching, and working in their communities. The curricular content may not have the intent to inform students through multicultural art education but the diversity of the instructors sharing their work did provide multicultural and local content. The educational experiences challenged Euro-centricity based on the teaching artists from a variety of backgrounds sharing their lives and their work.

The Poor Farm provided a space that allowed artists and students to learn alongside one another over a sustained period of time allowing for a variety of experiences and possible interactions with the art, the people, and the space. This not only allowed for self-directed learning but for unexpected interactions and moments of learning that happened spontaneously. The art and the artists provided content but how individuals interacted and learned from the content varied based on choice, personal and group interactions, as well as the investment and level of engagement of the participants. Places like the Poor Farm offer opportunities for classroom teachers to engage with art and artists to refresh themselves as artists and to bring new ideas or ways of learning back to the classroom. It is a place that teachers can direct students when they have a strong interest in pursuing art as a career. It is also a place that is open for collaboration and while there is not currently programming that would qualify as community-based programming, there is interest among Grabner and Killam to support others ideas.

A key difference between these spaces is that the Poor Farm is not yet a site of community-based art education and it may never branch out in that direction. It is an interesting site because it does provide educational opportunities to what Villeneuve and Sheppard (2009) describe as “community as learning group.” Since it does not serve the larger community, it is

not a democratic place of learning, but it is a place that represents the choice to come together and form a community around shared interests. Without earlier democratic access to arts education, potential participants don't have the opportunity to make informed choices to seek opportunities The Poor Farm has to offer. Some might still call The Poor Farm elitist, because of the predominantly well-educated white audience tied into higher education in the arts. Yet we can learn from this space through the democratic ways of learning based on dialog and choice and the challenges to the norms of a male dominated art world through Grabner as female artist. Grabner built a successful career as an artist, educator, critic, and curator while raising a family in the Midwest and challenging the art world to bend to her terms. The Poor Farm also challenged the traditional urban spaces for art and created access to a contemporary art world and artistic practices by bringing art and artists to a small community in Wisconsin.

### **Personal Reflection**

Through investigating the three cases, it became clear that the support system and relationships are essential, as much as the content. At the Art Center, a recurring question that administrators and program coordinators struggles with was how to sustain long term experiences, retain students, and bring in new participants. During my time at the Art Center, I was primarily concerned about the content and focused on implementing changes through curricular and programming content that would improve both our in-house and outreach programs over time. I rarely considered the relationships and support system of the art center itself. Through examining these cases, I learned the importance of a support system for participants, teaching artists and staff when creating long-term, meaningful, and engaging programming.

At Artspace, the students were the focus and they felt at home because they had places to hang out, places to take classes, places to talk to administrators, and places to show their work. It was a place created for them, where they were trusted with materials, and held to expectations through participation. With the Art Center serving multiple audiences, this would have been difficult to achieve but creating a place for teens and a support or contact person would have been a starting point to create a more supportive environment for teen programming. The opportunities to create art, create social bonds, and benefit from the experiences and connections of arts professionals may be present in programming without a strong support system, like the art center, but the deeper sense of belonging, transitional experiences, and social action can be better facilitated with a clearer purpose and a support system in place. This is what leads to the long-term participation and longevity of the program that I was seeking.

Artspace and The Poor Farm also created opportunities for students and teaching artists to collaborate and learn from one another. Artspace had teaching artists and the students show their work together at the art fair. This not only allowed funders to see the programs they were supporting but it also allowed the students to see their work on the same level as the teaching artists. The environment of The Poor Farm also created a space that put artists and students on the same level. Through camping, floating down the river, and sharing meals together the interactions between artist and student were about what was happening in the space at that moment. Student participants may still look up to and admire the artists but there was not a formal teacher to student relationship.

While The Art Center and Artspace both offered programming to create art educational opportunities for marginalized or low socio-economic students, the Art Center was not able to provide the degree of stability and long term programming offered by Artspace. The Art Center's

diverse programming and diverse audiences created divided interests amongst the board and key decision makers at the Art Center. Without a unified position to provide art education to marginalized or underserved populations, the programming offered arts education experiences that varied from short-term to long term but the quality of the programming varied. The Art Center lacked an investment in the social mission of providing arts education to low-socio-economic populations.

### **Implications for Art Education**

We need to do more as field to support the art educational experience outside of the schools. As a community-based art educator, I have received personal comments regarding a fear that teaching artists and community-based art education programs threaten, rather than strengthen the certified k-12 art education teaching profession. My own experiences have indicated the opposite perception. When schools are provided with meaningful and engaging art education experiences, they often want more. Through the art center, we worked with schools that started with teaching artists and eventually hired a full-time certified teacher. The art center provided a place and a space for certified art teachers to gain new experiences for themselves and their students. Art educators need to embrace the possibilities and opportunities these programs have to offer.

Rather than treating pedagogy as a commodity, progressive educators need to engage their teaching as a theoretical resource that is both shaped by and responds to the very problems that arise in the in-between space/places/contexts that connect classrooms with the experiences of everyday life. (Giroux, 2004, p. 37)

What these spaces and programs offer is connections to living working artists and art work that exists outside both the classroom and museum contexts. This is significant because an artist sharing their own work is more relatable, not just because it is presented as something that is current, but because it is connected to the person who made it. The students can see the work, and hear the artist talk about their work, and interact with work based on their own background and experiences. Students can see an artist as a person with a story and in turn, an artist becomes less exotic, idealistic, and out of reach. Teachers can bring in artists to be an expert in a process they are less familiar with, but they can also bring in an artist as an example of a career or possible future trajectory.

### **Professional Development**

In the art education field, it is necessary to break down the assumptions that the teacher is an expert and has to know everything. It is not possible to be an expert in all things, especially considering the increasingly diverse contemporary artistic practices. Many undergraduates enter the field with minimal experience in many different media or they have an in-depth experience in one media and very little experience in other art forms. Art educators should not be afraid to reach out and access opportunities to engage with local artists and to direct our students towards community-based arts experiences that may add to, not replace, existing art education programs and experiences. One person in an isolated art room can share what they know but there is access to more diverse opportunities when a teacher facilitates learning through collective of individuals who each bring their own interests, strengths, and unique talents. A teacher can access expertise outside of their own primary interests through inviting visiting artists, sending their students to community-based programs, or taking classes and learning new processes or approaches to bring back to their students.

### **Professional Networking**

Community-based programs can offer art teachers a place to develop a professional network of artists and art teachers. Art teachers are often in schools as the only art teacher and this can be isolating. Depending on the school district, there may be a community of art teachers that develop through professional development days and district meetings. At the Art Center there were many opportunities for art teachers to participate in programs and exhibitions which also offered opportunities to make connections. There were student art exhibitions and open calls for several art exhibitions that art teachers could enter themselves. The art center also offered professional development workshops. While Artspace was focused on developing opportunities for students, an art teacher might meet teaching artists through attending an exhibition or an open house. The Poor Farm also offered opportunities to meet artists and art professionals through the social interactions. These cases show a variety of opportunities for developing a professional network to support an art teacher in both their artist development/practice and in their pedagogical practices.

### **Alternative Pedagogical Practices**

Developing a professional network of art teachers, artists, and art teachers; allowing artists in the schools; and showing students opportunities outside of schools opens up the art classroom to alternative pedagogical practices. Providing access to art experiences outside of the school walls offers multiple visions of what art looks like in daily lives and multiple visions of how students can engage with art in the future. Community-based art education offers life-long learning opportunities for teachers and students to engage in together. These experiences can create an active learning opportunity for teachers to develop and nurture their own artistic and creative pursuits.

Within the cases presented here, there were multiple examples of teaching artists interacting with students as facilitators, mentors, or platformists, all of which can be considered alternative pedagogical practices. Through my work at the Art Center, I came across many teaching artists who positioned themselves as facilitators or mentors, but I also encountered more traditional teaching methods. The teaching artists at Artspace and The Poor Farm consistently followed an alternative pedagogy model. The alternative approaches come from a position the teacher with a defined artistic practice and wanting to share their experiences as well as their conceptual and technical expertise with others.

What art education specialists can learn from these places, spaces, and programs is how to provide participants with opportunities, not just art projects, to help them envision a future. There is a potential for transformational experiences in these spaces and places. Art educators need to pay attention to what is happening in these environments to continue developing new teaching practices and to take advantage of the resources that are out there for both teachers and students. Understanding what happens in community-based settings can help k-12 art instructors to guide their students towards new opportunities and in-depth art experiences that are available outside of school time. Art teachers can look to these alternative spaces and programs for help in engaging students as creators and makers in the world.

### **For Further Discussion and Research**

There have been previous calls to extend the field of art education, to consider art education as a network and include art education experiences that happen out of the traditional k-12 schooling (Blandy, 2011; Keyes, 2007; Lackey, 2003; McFee, 1995). Yet we still have a field that, in my perception, is cautious about embracing teaching artists and community-based art education as part of the field. When art educators close themselves off from the outside in an

effort to protect their jobs, they create a limited view of what art is and what art has to offer. There is a need for more collaboration between community-based art education practitioners and academia to share research and disseminate information to enable teachers to take advantage of resources and to help their students navigate the opportunities that are available. Extending the field and creating a collaborative professional network can benefit teacher and students alike and create a sense of belonging beyond the art room into professional, recreational, and cultural art practices. Differential belonging allows for movement across different modes of being and belonging and allows for students and teachers to participate across different art and art educational opportunities.

Collaborative experiences can create learning opportunities for the teachers, create social ties to the art world and their community, and create professional ties. Students benefit from seeing artists as living working participants in their community, they can see the role of art in a contemporary and authentic context, and they can experience working with an artist in their community. Whether or not students continue to make art when they are no longer in school, through an arts rich learning environment, they are better able to critically assess and navigate the visual world we live in and make informed choices about their future participation in the arts.

Community-based art education offers a wide range of experiences and opportunities for students, teachers, and community members to engage with the arts. The cases presented here, indicate that there is a breadth of experiences available to provide democratic access to art education both within and outside of schools. There is a potential for partnerships between certified art education teachers, teaching artists, and community centers to bring art and authentic art making practices to their communities. These cases offer just a glimpse, three stories out of thousands, of community-based programs that provide access to art education. Community-based

art education has a substantial role in providing arts education experiences, yet, there is still much to learn about how certified art educators can work with community-based arts practitioners to extend and strengthen the network of art education.

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## **Appendix A Informed Consent**

Exploring Community-Based Art Education Sites  
and the Communities They Serve  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

### **Description and Purpose of the Research**

Jennifer O'Connor is conducting research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Art Education.

This research consists mainly of ethnographic/case study field work, which involves observations and interviews, as well as interpretation and analysis of information gleaned from these activities. The general purpose of ethnographic research is to learn how members of a community (for example, students in a club or employees in a dining hall) make sense of their own community and its relationships with other people, communities, and institutions. This study will be looking specifically at community-based art education sites and their relationships to the communities they serve.

### **Voluntary Nature of Participation**

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you wish to withdraw at any time you may do so by contacting the researcher. Participants must be at least 18 years old to participate.

### **Confidentiality**

In this study, every effort will be made not to reveal personally identifiable information in publications based on this research. To accomplish this, no records will be created or retained that could link you to personally identifiable descriptions, paraphrases, or quotations. Your actions or things you say may be presented without specific reference to you, reference only by pseudonym, or combined anonymously with the actions and words of other participants. While photos and recordings are considered individually identifiable, investigators will only use images and recordings in presentations and publication with permission from the participants.

### **Risks and Benefits**

Your participation in this project should not involve risks beyond those of ordinary life. You will not be paid for your participation in this research project, nor is it expected that your participation will bring you any benefits, tangible or otherwise.

### **Explanation of Procedures**

Your participation in this project will involve short 30 – 60 minute interviews about your experiences working or participating in a community-based art education setting. The investigator will take notes on your experiences that you choose to share. You will have an

opportunity to review the investigators notes to clarify that everything you say is recorded accurately.

### Contact Information

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about this research project, please contact the Responsible Project Investigator (RPI) or Project Investigator (PI):

Elizabeth Delacruz, Art Education, 217-333-0855 or [edelacru@illinois.edu](mailto:edelacru@illinois.edu) (RPI)

Jennifer O'Connor, Art Education, 708-299-2072 or [bergmar1@illinois.edu](mailto:bergmar1@illinois.edu) (PI)

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board as Suite 203, 528 East Green Street, Champaign, IL 61820, 217-333-2670 (You may call collect if you identify yourself as a research subject) or via email at [irb@uiuc.edu](mailto:irb@uiuc.edu).

### Consent Statement

I have read and understand the forgoing description of this research project, including information about the risks and benefits of my voluntary participation.

I give my permission for this interview to be audiotaped \_\_\_\_\_ (Please check to grant consent)

I give my permission for my artwork to be photographed and disseminated through publication or conference presentations(if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_ (Please check to grant consent)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

*There are two copies of this form. Please sign both. Return one to the researcher and keep one for your records.*

## **Appendix B**

### **Informed Consent (Student)**

Exploring Community-Based Art Education Sites  
and the Communities They Serve  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

#### **Description and Purpose of the Research**

Jennifer O'Connor is conducting research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Art Education.

This research consists mainly of ethnographic/case study field work, which involves observations and interviews, as well as interpretation and analysis of information gleaned from these activities. The general purpose of ethnographic research is to learn how members of a community (for example, students in a club or employees in a dining hall) make sense of their own community and its relationships with other people, communities, and institutions. This study will be looking specifically at community-based art education sites and their relationships to the communities they serve.

#### **Voluntary Nature of Participation**

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you wish to withdraw at any time you may do so by contacting the researcher. Participants must be at least 18 years old to participate.

#### **Confidentiality**

In this study, every effort will be made not to reveal personally identifiable information in publications based on this research. To accomplish this, no records will be created or retained that could link you to personally identifiable descriptions, paraphrases, or quotations. Your actions or things you say may be presented without specific reference to you, reference only by pseudonym, or combined anonymously with the actions and words of other participants. While photos and recordings are considered individually identifiable, investigators will only use images and recordings in presentations and publication with permission from the participants.

#### **Risks and Benefits**

Your participation in this project should not involve risks beyond those of ordinary life. You will not be paid for your participation in this research project, nor is it expected that your participation will bring you any benefits, tangible or otherwise. **Your participation is completely voluntary and will not effect your grades or your program in any way.**

#### **Explanation of Procedures**

Your participation in this project will involve short 30 – 60 minute interviews about your experiences working or participating in a community-based art education setting. The

investigator will take notes on your experiences that you choose to share. You will have an opportunity to review the investigators notes to clarify that everything you say is recorded accurately.

### Contact Information

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about this research project, please contact the Responsible Project Investigator (RPI) or Project Investigator (PI):

Elizabeth Delacruz, Art Education, 217-333-0855 or [edelacru@illinois.edu](mailto:edelacru@illinois.edu) (RPI)  
Jennifer O'Connor, Art Education, 708-299-2072 or [bergmar1@illinois.edu](mailto:bergmar1@illinois.edu) (PI)

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board as Suite 203, 528 East Green Street, Champaign, Il 61820, 217-333-2670 (You may call collect if you identify yourself as a research subject) or via email at [irb@uiuc.edu](mailto:irb@uiuc.edu).

### Consent Statement

I have read and understand the forgoing description of this research project, including information about the risks and benefits of my voluntary participation.

I give my permission for this interview to be audiotaped \_\_\_\_\_ (Please check to grant consent)

I give my permission for my artwork to be photographed and disseminated through publication or conference presentations (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_ (Please check to grant consent)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

*There are two copies of this form. Please sign both. Return one to the researcher and keep one for your records.*

**Appendix C**  
**Interview Questions for Former Participants**

Exploring Community-Based Art Education Sites  
and the Communities They Serve

1. What prompted you to find an art class in a community-based setting? Who initiated the dialogue you or your mother? Did you have art in your school?
2. What was it that you and/or your parent(s) found appealing about the community-based program? How did you find the program? What initially attracted you? Was it a class they offered? Was it the location? Something about the program?
3. Describe what you remember from the first class. What role did the teacher have? How many students were in the class? How did the teacher and students interact with one another? How did you interact with the other students? Do you remember what art projects you made? Did you save any of them? Was there something about that first class that lead you to stay in the program and continue taking classes? Was it the experience? Was it the love of art?
4. What would you say was the most important thing about your experience in a community-based art education setting? Was it the relationships with teachers? Interactions with other students? The art experiences? Were there other important skills that you gained?
5. Do you still maintain contact with other classmates/participants, teachers, or the community-based program itself?

## **Appendix D**

### **Interview Questions for Administrators and Staff**

#### Exploring Community-Based Art Education Sites and the Communities They Serve

1. Community-based art education is art programming that typically occurs outside of the standard K-12 curriculum. Community-based art programs may provide opportunities for art learning to students who may not have such opportunities within schools; and may facilitate community building by providing programming and a place for community members to gather and engage in creative activities of mutual interest. How does your organization participate in community-based art education? What types of programming do you offer? What is your role in your organizations efforts to provide community based art education?
2. How do you meet the needs of the community through your programming? How do you interpret/measure the needs of the community? How does the community influence programming? Do you try to target particular audiences with programming?
3. How does Community-based art education programming fulfill the mission of your organization? How does your organization benefit from providing community-based programming? Why do you believe community-based art education is important?
4. What are some of the pitfalls you have experienced as a provider of community-based art education? Have there been bad experiences? Is there things you run into that keep you from creating the type of programming you would like to provide?
5. What do you see as the major benefits of providing this type of programming? Do you have a particular success story that keeps you going?
6. How do you see your future relationship with community-based art education? Do you feel this is an area in which you will grow and continue to invest time and effort into or do you see your organization pulling back on some of the programming? Are there areas of your community-based art education programming that are growing more than others? Are there new areas that you would like to develop?