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Enacting Poiesis: Centering Teaching Artists' Stories Across Educational Contexts

Shanita Bigelow
DePaul University

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DePaul University
College of Education

Enacting Poiesis: Centering Teaching Artists' Stories Across
Educational Contexts

A Dissertation in Education
with a Concentration in Educational Leadership

by

Shanita Bigelow

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the Degree of

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We approve the dissertation of Shanita Bigelow.

Amira Proweller, PhD

Amira Proweller
Associate Professor
DePaul University
Chair of Committee

October 25, 2021
Date

Francesca T. Royster

Francesca Royster
Professor
DePaul University

October 25th, 2021
Date

James Duignan

James Duignan
Associate Professor
DePaul University

10/25/2021
Date

Certification of Authorship

I certify that I am the sole author of this dissertation. Any assistance received in the preparation of this dissertation has been acknowledged and disclosed within it. Any sources utilized, including the use of data, ideas and words, those quoted directly or paraphrased, have been cited. I certify that I have prepared this dissertation according to program guidelines, as directed.

Author Signature ShatBy Date 10/24/2021

ABSTRACT

Access to art education is limited for many historically excluded students. Teaching artists are instrumental in providing opportunities for students to engage in art educational programming. In this qualitative, critical narrative inquiry, the professional identities, teaching philosophies and practices of three teaching artists are explored. Teaching artists carry multiple professional identities and utilize them to best navigate pedagogical potential within and across educational contexts, inside and outside schools. Through semi-structured interviews and document analysis, their distinct pedagogies were examined and analyzed. Their pedagogical approaches could serve as models for other teaching artists and educators, generally. Findings revealed that their teaching practices are student-centered, relational, and collaborative. The findings also suggest that these teaching artists view teaching as reciprocity and with humility—they are learning along with their students. Critical care, equity and social justice are at the forefront of their work. Situating their work within a critical pedagogical and arts-based educational research (ABER) paradigm provides a space for their work, their voices, and stories to take center stage. Through this inquiry, the beneficial properties of art education for student learning, well-being, and students' sense of belonging, are revealed as essential, particularly in this time of global crisis and national strife.

Keywords: art education, teaching artists, professional identity, critical pedagogy, narrative inquiry, arts-based educational research

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The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives. It is within this light that we form those ideas by which we pursue our magic and make it realized.

—Audre Lorde, “Poetry is not a Luxury”

CHAPTER ONE: “THE SPECTER OF A DIFFERENT RUNG”

Learning is fundamentally about transformation. It is coming into being and constantly altering that being; it is a subjective and often messy act. It is, in essence, letting go of a rung we have a firm grip on in order to fumble with the specter of a different rung.

- Patel, 2016, p. 76

The stories we tell ourselves and the stories we tell others really do matter.

- Mulvihill & Swaminathan, 2020, p. 171

Introduction

In this endeavor, I have begun to “fumble with the specter of a different rung” (Patel, 2016, p. 76). That rung rings in the soft chambers and harsh realities of the everyday. It rings in the voices of those at the forefront, on the precipice that is teaching and learning. It rings along the paths, the halls that fill and channel and shape urban art education. It rings in my mind and being. As a Black woman, as a poet and educator, it rings all too loudly in the present—this time of loss, grief, and calls for substantive transformation (social, political, communal, etc.).

For this dissertation research, I spoke with three teaching artists. I’ll often refer to them as artists rather than teaching artists because it feels more encompassing. I endeavored to listen and understand who they are as artists, as educators, as people. “Artist,” “educator” and “person” are not inherently distinct or separate identities, but interconnected, overlapping and, thus, shape each other. Their identities intersect and overlap. Their work does too. It is the layered work of teaching the arts, of being advocates for self and students, for community and for society’s well-being. At the heart of the work these teaching artists do, is a deep sense of responsibility, a rootedness in the possibilities inherent in connections made and sustained through learning.

My main research questions were: How do teaching artists perceive their professional identity? How does their professional identity inform their pedagogy and teaching practice? When I proposed this study, I was unaware of the depth of the problem. Yes, the lack of access

to arts education has a broad reach, but it goes much deeper; it impacts the lives of educators like Ali, Bea and Constance (pseudonyms); it impacts the lives of their students. It can be a means of countering the ills of division, the sorrows of loss and desperation. It is a means of celebrating the joys of creation and meaning making, of celebrating the complexity and profundity of life. These are my words, my thoughts after speaking with these artists. In their lives, their lived experiences, they have engaged in and rendered real what art can do personally, professionally, and collectively.

Why is this research inquiring into the beliefs, philosophies, identities, and teaching practices of teaching artists necessary? I think of synecdoche—a poetic device that allows a part to, in its own right, allude to or reveal the whole. Art education and the work of teaching artists may seem peripheral to issues of our American educational systems, but they are intricately connected and integral to reflecting and shaping schooling as well as learning that takes place outside of school walls (in community centers, community organizations, neighborhood associations, etc.). I also think of poiesis, which according to Mulvihill and Swaminathan (2020) “refers to meaning making emerging through artistic means and modes” (p. 21). These teaching artists move in, and this undertaking is a foray into meaning making that is influenced by and ingrained in arts-based practices. Creativity is a means of thinking, analyzing and synthesizing information, input from our social worlds, from our relations and interactions with those around us (Greene, 1995). This meaning making can take on many forms, but through conversations with these teaching artists, I’ve learned that meaning making is not always fluid, but always building—that is, it takes time and reflection.

Questions that arose throughout the research process were, “what can the arts do—in society, in a student’s life, in the life of a teaching artist, etc.?” and “what is beholden in

pedagogies that center the arts, creativity, culture and belonging?” This process, the interviews, the analyses and writing, were very much situated in responses to and an understanding of current crises—e.g., COVID-19 pandemic, racial/sociopolitical tension and protest. This time and, thus, this work is open to and fraught with the auspices of community belonging and healing, with loss and self-reflection.

Centering the voices of Ali, Bea and Constance, this dissertation seeks to buoy their experiences inside and outside of classrooms. It seeks to understand and share the possibilities inherent in their expertise and in their spirits as artists and educators. Leveraging their liminality and chosen identities, this is a foray into what happens when voices resonate across lives and perceived boundaries. All of this in a city with indispensable resources and operational othering; a city that is fragmented, absorbing, beautiful and full of possibility.

Research Problem and Purpose

Thinking about the arts, about art education, brings forth mixed emotions, a confused understanding of purpose and potential. The arts serve many purposes—personal, professional, educational, social. They have the potential to highlight social ills, to provide community and space where there perhaps isn’t one or where that community/space is fraught or divided somehow. It also brings forth notions of privilege and access (Kraehe, Acuff, & Travis, 2016). Who can participate in the arts? Who can leverage the will and social capital to become a professional artist? It is about more than skills, more than becoming a professional artist. That is the potential. The arts are more than technical skills, more than creative and visually appealing products. They bring forth, through their use, aspects of personhood and community that speak to larger questions about what it means to be human, what it means to heal, to find some respite from and solutions to the problems of the world (Greene, 1995).

This research delves into the lives and work of three teaching artists, Ali, Bea and Constance. Though our encounters were over Zoom, they were rich, full of human agency, want, understanding, and grace. I began this process thinking about the impact of art education, thinking about those who impact the field in myriad ways. I came to teaching artists for their tremendous efforts in the face of decreased funding or cancellation of programs altogether, in the face of social and political strife, in the face of being between so many things—between artist and educator, between educator and adjacent staff/faculty, between change agent and everyday human, between artist (personal) and artist (public/teaching) and so much more. That in-betweenness—liminal space or limbo (see Okello, 2019)—and what is borne from it is not the problem. It is a purpose. It is a means of leveraging experience across identities and contexts to provide for students of all ages opportunities to create, to learn and grow, to discover their own paths to success, to self-determination, to witnessing and acting in a world that might rather they become another cog in the wheel. And they do so in holistic and thoughtful ways.

More generally, the problem of decreased funding, of precarious professional positions, and the social ills that plague so many (perhaps heightened now more than ever due to the COVID-19 pandemic) make the problems facing arts education also its purpose. It seems there's part of the world that requires of the arts, and art education, in particular, a legitimating stance—that is, that part of society calls for art and art education to prove themselves necessary, economically viable and personally proficient. Arts education is then tasked with catching up, with falling in line to give it the salience and universality desired. But art education is so much more than that.

Creativity, according to Lin et al. (2015) is an “economic imperative” and a “required skill for 21st-century learners” (p. 355), but it is not available to all; it is not readily integrated

into urban classrooms; funding for such integration and programming is lacking. The arts, integral to and enmeshed in our daily lives, whether via Instagram or Netflix, a mural or museum, has not garnered the same affinity, attention and traction in the education system, though the fight for its inclusion is decades in the making (Remer 2003; Seidel, 2013).

In addition to the need for “greater consideration,” the arts serve as “fertile ground for cultivating the creative capacities associated with new forms of urban economic vitality and, consequently, improving the life chances for young people historically underserved by city schools” (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016, p. 222). Think of current trends in entrepreneurship, the creative imperatives in calls for social action and change. The “life chances” Kraehe, Acuff and Travis (2016) wrote about are real and vital and should be cared for, supported through educational opportunities, which includes equitable access to arts programming.

It is not an accident of history that the arts are subject to scrutiny, to being overlooked or subordinated in the U.S. educational system. The arts, as skill development and a lens for critical thought and reflection, equip those engaged in them with the tools necessary to see, speak, respond, listen, learn and act with a sense of clarity, purpose and responsibility. This is evident in many examples of arts educational programming, of arts integration and through the work, words and actions of teaching artists (Pelletier Lewis & Humphries Mardirosian, 2016).

In Stovall’s (2006) article centered on the practices of four “poetry educators,” it becomes incumbent upon the reader to view and understand their work as necessary, revelatory and action-oriented: “Teaching social justice through poetry is a liberatory, conscious-raising, politicized process that challenges young people to develop understandings of their world and begin to engage the world as agents of change” (pp. 63-64). Stovall continued, “As many would find the aforementioned to be a loaded statement, it is used to highlight the importance of young

people's ability to develop relevant understandings of the world in which they live" (p. 64). In a world of an education system focused on high stakes testing and educator productivity (via surface-level evaluations and quantifiable observations), teaching, as a teaching artist, is counter—it is (counter)intuitive and counterhegemonic. Art education is not about quantifying performance or teaching testable skills; it is about creating the space(s) and community(ies) where learners may question/inquire, speak without judgement, where learners can test their critical thinking around personal and societal challenges, where learners can engage with emotion and practices centered on their well-being—that is, a holistic approach to learning that values them as people first, not data to be wielded as a weapon for or against them. For teaching artists, like those I spoke with, this concern for student well-being and their development in critical thought and reflection is paramount to student success—academic and otherwise.

Teaching artists, in their very being, enact poiesis; they live in and exist in the between, the liminal or hybrid spaces between what are perceived to be traditional educational models and “alternate view[s]” (Stovall, 2006, p. 64) of what education is, can be, and can do. As Desai and Koch (2012) wrote, “we need to envision our classrooms as fluid spaces that allow for the exploration of divergent views by experimenting with different methods of representation in and outside of schools” (p. 38). Teaching artists do this; they embody this fluidity, this divergent fluidity, and do so against the backdrop of precarious employment, decreasing funding, a system that functions on the premise of sameness, of what some might call a kind of political neutrality.

What I've learned in this process is that these teaching artists—Ali, Bea and Constance—teach and move through the world, their self-defined identities, with understanding the educational process is not and cannot be neutral. Listening to their stories, learning of their experiences, the challenges and successes, provided insight into what it means to be present, as

an educator, as you are—giving of self in a way that allows students to be in that learning space as they are, as they choose to be, without judgment. An acceptance of the reality, the subjective and often political nature of schooling, allows these artists to create spaces that are accepting, nurturing and critical—critical in the sense that inquiry and reflection are the norm, not the passive acceptance of proposed knowledge/educational materials/proscribed skillsets.

These artists teach with an openness and a thoroughness/rigor that could help to (re)shape and transform teaching practices and learning spaces writ large. That may be a grandiose statement, but the purpose of speaking with and learning from these teaching artists, was to glean from their experiences and expertise insights into what is possible, not just on the perceived periphery, but at the center of learning in an urban environment, in a city that mirrors the inequities of the past and present and holds the possibilities of a more just future. All of this at a time of great devastation and loss, when transformation feels like the only way forward.

Approaching Identity and Loss

I find myself wondering, what is being lost in the absence of arts in education? In the absence of frequent and widely accessible opportunities for students to participate in it? What othering is projected onto teaching artists? What other othering goes into this desire to teach arts and still know there will be loss(es)? How do we hold and thus talk about our identities? And identity is something, though not always explicit, much like the nature of narrative or story, that situates and shapes lives and relationships/connections within and across space and time: “Rather than a fixed, essentialist identity that a person carries from one situation to the next, individual identities are now seen as differentially performed from one social context to the next” (Collins, 2019, p. 37). Who we are and how we show up is very much a direct response to and an indication of the multifaceted means by which we come to know ourselves, name our identities.

They are also shaped and named externally. The arts as a tool for poiesis, for making meaning within and across contexts, within various identities, is an act that harbors/holds thought, reflection and an embodied sense of being or belonging. What do we do with such artistic acts during a time like this?

The Changing Landscape of Qualitative Inquiry

This is a moment of much upheaval and change, a time of loss and discordant dialogue. It is a time of transformation. These changes, this upheaval is real and traumatic. It impacts lives around the world. It is personally impactful. Undergoing this process of interviewing, of reading myriad literatures and theories, of questioning and enacting various methodologies and methods has also demonstrated the changes, the upheavals alight in qualitative research. These losses, this grasping for and making of meaning during a pandemic, where people are facing unemployment, state-sanctioned violence and political turmoil, exists in this work, in these words. It is a time of creation. Denzin and Giardina (2016) wrote about the transformations in qualitative inquiry, the call for criticality and the inclusion of affect:

In these new spaces, theory turns back on itself, re-reading itself through the biographical, the historical, and the ideological. A re-born critical theory is imagined. Strategies and tactics of resistance against racism, sexism, homophobia, and a global geopolitical system out of control are called for. The affective turn resists the war machine, the corporate commodification of science and knowledge—untangling and re-doing nested relations of power, bodies, life, death and desire. (p. 7)

There's something about doing this research in this moment that calls for an understanding of loss, of self in a space of grief. Change abounds in the ways in which I interact with others, especially as a qualitative researcher. To grieve is to recognize (Harris & Holman Jones, 2019). We are in need of recognition as researchers, as educators, as a field of inquiry. It seems that in this time of deep distress, in speaking with these teaching artists, I gathered or learned more

concretely that, “the only real forces at work between you as you come to terms with grief are circumstances and grace” (Harris & Holman Jones, 2019, p. 28).

This inquiry was a means of coming to terms with the ever-changing landscape of qualitative research and the always-shifting climate of urban education. It was also a means of understanding what grace, in the midst of turmoil, can look and feel like. These teaching artists shared the wonder and joy of teaching as well as the challenges inherent in it: social challenges, political challenges, economic challenges, interpersonal challenges just to name a few. These challenges impact them, they impact their students and the perceived outcomes of their work. There are losses inherent in those challenges. In this time of Zoom meetings and remote learning, of essentialized work and workers, of so much loss (loved ones, jobs, time and connection), there is an imperative to sit in the loss, to reflect on its historical underpinnings and to respond with care, with thoughtful words and critical approaches to teaching and learning. This is true for the field of qualitative research, for me as a qualitative researcher, and for teaching artists like Ali, Bea, and Constance, who may fall into or out of some of the losses mentioned (for instance, the conditions of essential work and remote learning).

Approaching This Dissertation

What is being lost in these conversations about arts education, about liberatory and communal teaching practices? What/where are the holes? Is there a memorialization of loss, of recognition (think protests over the deaths of Black lives)? Is that what art is? Is that what the creative process is? An attempt toward recognition (of a loss)? A kind of grappling with loss or the search for language, the visuals, the sounds, the self to make it all make us, you, the world make sense?

Each of the teaching artists I spoke with, spoke about how gaining more of themselves through the arts required some kind of loss, whether previous notions or understandings of self, whether family or time and stability. Is there loss in reclamation? Is it possible to move from loss toward reconciliation and recovery, toward a future, a society that values life, creativity and quests for liberatory practices? It's all interconnected.

When I think of the loss of Black lives, of minoritized lives, of youth, of communities historically excluded from the staples of power, the loss of funding for educational programs, the loss of employment opportunities, the loss of homes due to rising property taxes, the loss of land to environmental degradation, how do I grieve? How do I mourn? What do I build, create, seek inside and out? Do I seek it there? Where else do I seek it and why? What role do the arts play in this search for recognition? In the wake of so much trauma and loss, what do the arts do? As a poet and educator, I turn to that song or poem or movie or book, I do. Because I want to fill those losses—not necessarily feel them. Do the arts allow us to do both? This inquiry is driven by these questions and more. It is driven by a passion for and call to understand, with a new depth and clarity, what the arts do in educational spaces and how.

Research Questions

At the outset of this endeavor, I sought to gain a better understanding of the lives, philosophies, teaching practices and artistic endeavors of teaching artists. What came from those initial inclinations was so much more. I began this process with the following central research questions: How do teaching artists perceive their professional identity? How does their professional identity inform their pedagogy and teaching practice as teaching artists?

Sub-questions include:

1. How do teaching artists understand their positionality as artists?

2. How do teaching artists perceive the role that other status markers might play in their pedagogy and teaching practice?
3. How do teaching artists perceive the place of arts education in social advocacy and change?

Overview of Research Design

This qualitative inquiry utilizes narrative inquiry. Over the course of three months (October – December 2020), I contacted, through network sampling or direct reach-out (through publicly available information), several teaching artists. And over the course of those three months, I was able to connect with and speak with three: Ali, Bea and Constance. I spoke with each teaching artist for more than an hour. Two of the teaching artists provided additional documents: one provided teaching and artist statements and another provided a pedagogical map/timeline. All were asked if they'd be able to provide these materials.

Seeking to respond to these questions and the ideas they engage (identity and pedagogy), the interviews were semi-structured. Each artist was asked a similar set of questions. This aided in analysis within and across transcripts. It aided in the analysis of their collective insights and experiences and helped to crystallize (Kuby, 2014) the similarities and differences—the traces or resonances—within and across each. The transcripts and accompanying documents were manually coded. A codebook was created and information from the interviews was organized/sorted into its respective code(s).

My approach, while streamlined was not entirely straightforward or linear. From transcribing and taking notes to reading and re-reading and taking notes and asking for the perspective of a critical friend (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), this process was more iterative. I utilized an abductive approach (Collins, 2019; Tavory & Timmermans, 2014) to analyzing the information and my interpretations. I let the information presented lead the way.

It felt like the creative process. It began with an inkling, an idea, which led to reading and some writing. The interviews and documents added another layer of clarity and complexity. It was/is an ever-evolving and iterative means of developing a project. As a poet, it felt familiar and scary. From start to finish, reflection and returns were necessary for growing clarity, in terms of interpretation and conceptualization. That is how stories are made, how narratives are formed and form us (Kim, 2016). Seeking to explore the inflections or echoes of what was said within and across interview information and the documents collected, it all served as a means of delving deeper into that well, of processing and interpreting it in a way that felt purposeful, thoughtful and respectful of these artists' time, words and work.

Narrative inquiry, in this case surrounded by or enmeshed within a critical conceptual frame, provided the space(s) for those interviewed to share their stories, their experiences and, in the process, reflect on and add to their existing lexicon(s) and approach(es) to sharing about themselves, who they are and what they do (Kim, 2016). Much of my movement with and through this process has been shaped by the impetus of narrative and the call for a more intentional and purpose-driven approach. O'Connor's (2019/2020) work utilizing the frame/metaphor of the wide-angle view became a rationale for my chosen frames as well as the theories/concepts that arose in this research process. O'Connor (2019/2020) asked, "How do we begin to capture this multidimensionality and especially its temporal spread via the methods and analytical foci we employ?" (p. 476). What are my methods, what are my analytical foci? How am I moving within and through them? How am I defining and re-defining them within the context of this research? More specifically, am I engaged in all of the concepts O'Connor so graciously lists as necessary for capturing or encapsulating that "multidimensionality and...its temporal spread." Those concepts include: "Macro-historical forces, multi-level study, [the]

study [of] identity, beliefs and behaviors of those historically excluded from the research, and privilege[ing] the voice and perspective of those most subject to distortion” (p. 476). Taking these concepts into account, this work seeks to understand if /how teaching artists are subject to distortion. It also seeks to understand if/how art education is subject to distortion. In gaining an understanding of these teaching artists’ perspectives and practices, I wondered how they attempt a similar wide-angle view with their students. While not explicitly stated as such, these teaching artists are engaged in work, in pedagogy that moves across and between boundaries, that seeks a wider perspective, one that understands and is critical of the power dynamics at play in education systems and in society.

Rationale and Significance

This is an attempt, though brief and bounded, to explore “new ways of seeing, documenting and representing” the life worlds of three teaching artists and art education (Mulvihill & Swaminathan, 2020, p. 7). This inquiry is constrained by time, place, and circumstance.

This study is situated in a city, and while the three teaching artists come from or represent various parts of the city, the space of the city (physical and social) contextualizes their work, their experiences in education and their identities (professional and not). These may be seen as limitations, but they underscore the significance of the research. I am not suggesting a standardization of their teaching practices. I am calling for acknowledgement and awareness of their work and its impact. That impact, often local in scope, can and perhaps has a greater reach, through their efforts, past travel and, perhaps, through this dissertation.

I have, in this endeavor, decided to dive into the stories and experiences of these three teaching artists. With the interviews, documents submitted by two of the teaching artists (artist

statement, teaching statement, and pedagogical map/timeline), and my interpretations, I have developed a series of portraits (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005; Travis, 2020). Listening to, seeking out voices that are not heard enough has the potential to highlight both what is missing (critical and thoughtful pedagogies) and what is, unfortunately, all too familiar (inequity and a lack of access).

Ali, Bea, and Constance shed light on what it's like to be a teaching artist in all its myriad and fruitful ways; they shed light on the impact of thoughtful and rigorous arts educational opportunities, on relationship-building and placing students at the center of learning. This is not a recipe for teacher training/education, but it can provide some ingredients for more holistic and thoughtful approaches to teaching. It can also lend evidence to what it means to engage in and explore educator identity. What is revealed through educator reflection could be fertile ground for the development of more meaningful and impactful teaching training and professional development.

This is also a means of demonstrating how these teaching artists have and are responding to and across contexts (formal and informal educational spaces, various age groups, etc.). It demonstrates their attitudes about and care for students' well-being in times and spaces wrought with challenges - trauma, loss, disaggregated difference—that is, difference perceived as a barrier rather than a means of connection and potential for growth. This work, in its narrowness, like a well, is a resoundingly deep look into what it means to be, to learn, teach and create in a specific place, across time and various iterations of the self (i.e., past and present identities). We are all one person, but we encompass or embody multitudes. As O'Connor (2019/2020) wrote:

[O]n the one hand individuals articulate their own sense making about who they are and with whom they belong via a range of performances...On the other hand, individuals experience *opportunity* or *constraint* as a consequence of how others not only make sense of their performances but about their bodies in performance. (p. 472)

These artists are doing this and teaching this, both for self-recognition and for pedagogical reach. My interpretations of their words, spoken and written, is an attempt to make sense of and provide meaning regarding their experiences. What is presented here is both an opportunity and a constraint, neither have to restrict the other. My hope is that this work will provide new ways of seeing art education, new ways of approaching teaching and learning, and new ways of writing about all of the above.

Researcher Positionality

“We got to be in this work. We’ve got to be in these spaces. We got to disrupt these spaces... We have to. It’s our—It’s our duty to our ancestors, to our babies coming up. Now. To create space for them to do this... To dismantle it. To make something new. It’s so important... I just take this... so serious because this is our lives, our survival. The least we want to do is be educated. The least.” (Ali, 2020)

The least, he said is that we want to be educated. What does that mean to a doctoral candidate, interviewing artists for her dissertation? What does it mean? Ali, a teaching artist, an educator, a creator, an interdisciplinary artist, among so many other things, said this and it made me pause. It made me pause several times for various reasons. What is this all about? This research, this degree? These interviews and literature reviews and data collection and analysis? Yes, it is a degree requirement, but it is so much more. It’s about opportunity. It’s about change. Ali and the other artists I interviewed spoke so thoughtfully about their work, about themselves and the spaces in which they live, work, where they show up and how.

This is about our lives and stories, about our families, about youth, our communities and the desire to see the world anew, to make it again, to do the work of assembling its variegated parts into something we want to call home, into a place that cares for all its inhabitants, into a sphere of communal courage and conversation, where change requires little more than that—self-reflection and conversation, a mutual, truly mutual, desire for change.

How do we shape that change? For me, as a Black woman from the southeast, living in the Midwest, this change is both enthralling and terrifying. The mutuality I seek may not come, at least not from everyone. The art, creativity, reflection, and community I seek lives in this world in ways, despite myself, I can't fully understand. This is a means of working toward understanding. I am an educator. I am a poet. I am learning too. I will always be learning. This is a foray into the possibilities inherent in acknowledging the want and need to learn, to create time and spaces for dialogue and creativity and showcase both.

And all at once, I feel such a fullness and a sense of loss. The COVID-19 pandemic came up several times in each interview. Funding for arts programs, or the lack thereof, also came up. The unnecessary and seemingly ceaseless loss of Black life came up. All of this is not a departure from or a tangent to the arts; it is the arts, how art holds us, our humanity; it is what art does and can do—tell the story of us in this moment and beyond.

Who am I in all of this? I'm many things and too often feel as though those pieces of me are not as important or as valuable as the titles (current and future) may demonstrate. I am, as stated earlier, an educator and a poet. I am a daughter and a sister, a Black woman, a graduate student. I am a former art student. I am an advocate for the arts and art education. I am an advocate for the voices and work of these artists (Ali, Bea and Constance) as well as those and that of so many others who have taken it upon themselves to teach, to continue learning in the process, and to create. That is no small feat, especially given the nature of the current moment. As Taylor (2016) so astutely wrote, "Justice is not a natural part of the lifecycle of the United States, nor is it a product of evolution; it is always the outcome of struggle" (p.5). This moment in our collective history has deep-seated and entangled roots; it has overwhelming and perplexing contradictions. It is not normal, but then, what is/has ever been. I feel that Taylor's

statement addresses whatever norm there may be; one of injustice and one of struggle. As the saying goes, “the struggle is real.” And it is real for most. What I’ve gained through this process is an understanding of the power of story to move—a person, their context and actions, their well-being; story has the power to articulate and circulate within and beyond the struggle, to give space and meaning to the fight for justice, to give it voice(s) and memory, to embody its call, to create in its name. These artists embody and create. They shared with me the personal and the prolific. I am honored. And I think of my own story, stories I heard when growing up, stories I hear all too often played out on the morning news. I think of all these stories and wonder how some become more salient than others, how some ring loud and others are silenced or undervalued.

As a reader and writer, as a poet, I come to narrative from story. I come to words from memory and experience, from observation and contemplation. This endeavor is one that has moved me. Thinking of the openness with which these artists shared their stories makes me wonder of what is possible when we are heard, listened to. I am listening. I have something to say too. These artists are listening and speaking and creating and teaching; they are moving. I can only imagine what it must be like to be a student of theirs. I suppose I was for a little over an hour. I am not going to do this under the false premise of objectivity. It does not exist. I cannot withhold what I think and feel, the movement(s) is possible because of these artists and so many others. I am choosing to call them artists. I am choosing to be open to the possibilities engendered in their responses to interview questions. I am biased. I am, but I am also thoughtful and willing to listen. I’m open to the possibility of being wrong, of learning something new, of not having any answers at all. I am engaged in this work because I believe it matters. When talking to Ali, he affirmed this work and I, again, paused because that affirmation is not always

in me. I sometimes think, is this important enough? Will this add value? Will this truly uphold and bolster the voices of these artists? What will it/can it actually do? I hope that it reaches those who are interested in arts education, in arts as a means of learning with and from, of forwarding traditions of changemaking and of radical counters to the “norm.”

Ben Okri (1997, as cited in Clandinin, 2013) wrote, “If we change the stories we live by,/Quite possibly we change our lives.” That gentle push was a means, I say, to interrogate my story, not necessarily to change it—I didn’t always believe I had a story. Okri’s lines ring true. What if we could somehow believe in our own power to change our stories? That our stories and the stories of others matter? That that change wouldn’t be singular or solitary, that it would have implications for the collective? What art has taught me, what it has given me, is agency in a world that would rather my silence be stuck in me, that would rather I simply agree and/or conform. In response to Okri’s lines, Clandinin (2013) wrote, “Okri’s last two lines...suggest the possibilities that are created by attending to the relational, by thinking narratively about how relationships unfold in inquiry” (p. 22). This work is about the stories that change lives, that acknowledge and accept the storied lives of others.

Overview of the Dissertation

Immediately following this overview, Chapter Two provides a review of literature and discussion of the conceptual framework. Intent on listening and responding to the words and work of the teaching artists I spoke with, the review of literature and conceptual framework seek to contextualize literature and concepts central to grounding the work/words of these three teaching artists. Rooted in narrative inquiry and surrounded by concepts that speak to who these teaching artists are, what they’ve experienced, and what they do, the literature review and conceptual framework, ground their stories. They provide necessary background information

about the realities facing urban art education and synthesize theories that serve as illuminating frames for these teaching artists' work. Seeking to enrich my own understanding of the value of their stories, I ground them in concepts/theories that reach back to the interviews and echo their critical and student-centered approaches to teaching and learning.

Chapter Three focuses on the methodology. This qualitative, narrative inquiry took many roads, some more direct than others. The methodology seeks to explain my process and the outcomes posited through taking those roads. A deep dive into the findings follows in Chapter Four. The findings highlight each of the artists I spoke with. Each artist and the city will have a section, a narrative portrait (Travis, 2020), one that does not define but provides a glimpse of each. A discussion of the findings follows in Chapter Five, that serves as a means of synthesizing and understanding how, collectively, these artists, the city and the social and political contexts surrounding them relate. Chapter Six serves as a conclusion to the study, wherein the purpose, the significance and the reach of this inquiry are shared and reaffirmed. It is where Ali, Bea, Constance and I meet once again.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This dissertation focuses on the stories and voices of teaching artists. This review of literature seeks to situate those stories, their voices. In light of the myriad metaphors utilized in the literature (see Collins, 2019) included here, and in the theories utilized to situate this work, I am also situating this work in a metaphorical landscape. While it is not the whole of a place, it is more of an image, a snapshot of a place where land and sky meet, where what is on the ground is reflected in and resonates with what is above. Each section follows this metaphor: there's what one may see or understand "on the ground," "at the horizon" and "in the sky."

What happens on the ground is the concrete work of defining, of situating the work in literature revolving around art education and arts integration. It is where we can find our footing. "At the horizon" takes on the task of providing insight into what it means to be, to take on the identity of a teaching artist—that ever-evolving and multitudinous identity that also sits at the nexus of teacher, artist, and complex personhood (Gordon, 2008). "In the sky" attempts to provide a backdrop for the ways in which teaching artist identities take shape and take root in educational spaces.

An essential aspect of understanding, of piecing together the snapshot that is this dissertation, is contextualizing the landscape of art education in the U.S. Art education is a key metaphorical landmark in this educational landscape, a landscape that too often deems students, their families and communities, and their teachers as problems to be solved. We can see art education as a place of rest, that shady spot providing a bit of respite from heat and sun. It has the potential to both protect us and give us the opportunity to reset and reimagine, the opportunities we need to continue to run or walk or move however we see fit. But we are

“running.” This educational system is a long, long road on which art education has struggled to find its stride and its place.

Too often, narratives of failure surround urban education (Barone, 2008). Educators exist within these narratives. There is an inherent tension, a sometimes, hyperbolic contradiction that positions educators as both problem and solution. We could hear all at once from the media: “They aren’t doing their jobs, and they are the guides for future generations.” Art educators also live in and inhabit these tensions.

Teaching artists, often equipped with far fewer resources than art teachers and other core content teachers, must contend with such tensions and contradictions within and outside school walls. This is merely a point of comparison, not competition. Similarly, the arts exist within and are mired in these tensions and contradictions. Often seen as extraneous or just for the talented few among students, the arts, like teaching artists, exist between ideas of necessity, legitimacy and autonomy, and what may be deemed traditional educational spaces and practices and those that are more creative and innovative or progressive.

On the Ground: Situating Art Education

Art education, often described as adjacent or adjunct to other core content areas, serves as a space, as the ground on which and for which other content areas may meet and embrace. Through “active and participatory engagement with the arts,” students “learn analytical reasoning, effective communication, and collaboration by developing knowledge, skills and competencies” (Diaz & McKenna, 2017a, p. 3). Those skills and competencies are applicable across academic disciplines and beyond. They not only shape strong “habits of mind” (Diaz & McKenna, 2017a, p.1), but they provide true opportunities for learning, which involves more than memorizing facts and concepts. It requires moments of risk and failure, moments of

creativity, patience, innovation, critical thought and self-reflection. And the impact is lived/practiced. Participating in art education should be encouraged. As Diaz and McKenna (2017a) contend, students who participate in arts programming often do better academically than peers who do not; they are also more likely to get better grades, be more positive about school and graduate high school. They also contend that students at an economic disadvantage often benefit the most from art education; however, they are the least likely to have access to it (Diaz & McKenna, 2017a, p. 3).

These findings come from the Arts Education Partnership research database (Diaz & McKenna, 2017a, p. 3). What they demonstrate is both the impact of and imperative for arts education. That the arts have such a drastic effect on students academically and socially is to be noted. Also of note, is this call to provide wider access to arts education. That's where arts programming, often after school or in the community, comes into play.

Art Education and Arts Integration

Just as teaching artists can be distinguished from art teachers, arts integration can be distinguished from art education. Teaching artists come into art educational spaces often independently, whether in-school or after school, whether as part of a community organization or arts institution. They are often freelance/contract educators. They may provide art education through residencies (in school programming for an extended period of time, whether a week, a full academic year, between or beyond), after school or outside school walls. Art teachers, on the other hand, teach primarily in schools during school time; they hold teaching credentials in the arts.

While art education encompasses a spectrum of arts programming and teaching and learning practices, arts integration specifically incorporates or integrates the arts and artistic

processes into core content classes, like math, science and history, alongside core content teachers, during school time. Further, arts integration, as defined by Pelletier Lewis and Humphries Mardirosian (2016), involves an all-encompassing view of the arts as they coalesce with and become a part of other academic disciplines (p. 6).

Art education, whether through arts integration or not, promises both student and educator the possibility of learning critically and creatively, of exercising individual knowledge and skills in expressing their unique and growing capacities in school and outside of school (Diaz & McKenna, 2017a). Art education can be viewed as a means of synthesizing education's inherent possibilities across academic disciplines and all contexts (physical, social, cultural, etc.) (Stixrud & Marlowe, 2016).

Art education and arts integration are necessary as an active and central part of our education system. The complexities inherent in our educational system are both wide and deep. Confronting a past and present filled with inequity and discriminatory practices, the U.S. education system must contend with its call and its responsibility—that is, the adage that “education is the great equalizer”—and the realities that too many students face—those narratives of inadequacy and failure.

What is promised through art education is a creative and thoughtful approach to teaching (and learning from) all students. For instance, Diaz and McKenna (2017b) posited the idea of teachers utilizing the “creative process as pedagogy,” whereby students have the opportunity to access and express their own knowledge and learning in a multiple ways—whether poetic, kinesthetic, visual, oral, etc. (p. 22). This use of creative process as (arts/artistic ways of thinking and doing) as pedagogy serves all involved. In these instances, teaching is learning, and learning is teaching (Freire, 1998, p. 31). Not only that, it involves every student in holistic and

purposeful ways. It takes into consideration the whole student and encourages the promotion of understanding educators as whole people as well. It takes into consideration the inequities many students and teachers face. It places students and teachers at the center of learning and thinking about or reflecting on the world and society. It provides the capacity to address what Love (2019) calls the “educational survival complex” (p. 27). The “educational survival complex” distills an image of students learning just enough to survive, learning that schools are microcosms of the wider world. Schools are not always the sites of safety and retribution some claim they are; rather, they can also mimic the challenges, the suffering and inequity students face outside school.

Already in practice, in some capacity, around the country, arts education can do more than serve as a model for/of reform; it has the capacity, if taken up more broadly and more intentionally, to transform educational spaces and provide the learning, the education students, especially those too often pushed aside or out, deserve.

Access to and Impact of Art Education

As stated earlier, art education is often most impactful with students who are marginalized in some way or a myriad of ways, students often pushed aside in or out of formal schooling. Rather than continuing the cycle of systemic violence thrust upon and inherited by students, there’s a need for the insertion of more art educational practices and programming. It’s not only a means of providing an outlet; it is a means of evoking and embracing participation from students holistically. It supports their work toward self-defined success:

Over the past decades a rich neuropsychological literature has developed, indicating that engagement in the arts activates emotional, attentional, and motivational systems in the brain, while at the same time facilitating brain development, learning and memory. Moreover, the very qualities and skills that are widely assumed to be most important for success in the twenty-first century marketplace, e.g., flexibility, creative thinking, original problem-solving, and the ability to understand and relate to others, can now be

definitively connected to engagement with art in virtually any form. (Stixrud & Marlowe, 2016, pp. 71-72)

While the argument stands that engagement in arts education aids in preparing those involved for success in the twenty-first century marketplace, that is not necessarily the impetus for arts educators—it seems to be a deeper concern for student well-being.

As revealed in this inquiry, student-defined success differs from student to student. Teaching artist-defined success differs from artist to artist. What has become clear is that art education supports the cognitive development and marketable skillsets, Stixrud and Marlowe (2016) mentioned, but it does so much more. The skills mentioned demonstrate a view of students as whole people who deserve an education that sees them as people, as people with various histories/backgrounds, with aspirations and goals, with feelings and their own unique and growing knowledge. Art is a means of releasing or activating all of the above (Greene, 1995).

The arts can serve as a foundation for students' learning (academic, experiential, and affective). It seems prescient that so many in the field of arts education see this potential and recognize that it is not being exercised in ways that could benefit all (Diaz & McKenna, 2017a; Markey, 2016; Stixrud & Marlowe, 2016). Despite and, perhaps, because of the devaluing of arts education generally,

there have been continued beacons of hope that have illuminated the educational landscape. Individual classroom educators, arts instructors, and teaching artists understood...that profound educational experiences could happen within the worlds they...created in their classrooms. These experiences frequently coincided with the arts being an intrinsic part of the educational equation. (Markey, 2016, p. 121)

What these educators understood and enacted in their teaching was/is the developmental and restorative power of the arts. For too many students, “school is a battlefield” (Love, 2019, p. 49).

Love (2019) explained the lived experience of schooling for many:

Those of us who make it through school leave with skills and scars that are necessary for survival in this racist, sexist, and capitalistic world. The scars of systemic oppression are real and traumatic. Sadly, in that way, school is a battlefield. (pp. 48-49)

Those scars are unfortunately instrumental in learning to deal with, learning to survive in this nation and world. Unfortunately, those scars are either unaccounted for or used in perverse ways in the policies that shape schooling in the U.S. A somewhat willful ignorance, or rather, the use of student suffering as the reasoning for such policies (e.g., No Child Left Behind and Every Student Succeeds Act) necessitates and drives the work of teaching artists. What they see in their students is possibility despite the scars/scarring. In writing of educators' (core content educators, art teachers and teaching artists) ability to move with and beyond the scarring, Markey (2016) acknowledged that those educators seek to develop students' cognitive abilities as well as their "socio-emotional collateral" (p. 121-122).

Art educators, particularly, seek to leverage the multimodal competencies exercised in learning art practices and integrating artistic processes into other core content areas, to aid students' growing academic knowledge, social acuity, and sense of civic responsibility. They utilize the arts to teach and embrace the whole student. They recognize the power of the arts to activate cognitive processes and potentially heal some of that educational scarring.

In a nation, an education system where success is too often predicated on standardized test scores and prescriptive knowledge, art education is a necessary salve. That it is underutilized and undervalued is a symptom of the systemic oppression Love (2019) and many others (see for instance, Greene, 1995, Freire, 1998, and hooks, 1994) have articulated.

What has become clear in this inquiry and in my own experiences with art education, and through the work and research of scholars and educators like Stixrud and Marlowe (2016) is that the inclusion or integration of the arts into our educational system and beyond nurtures student

well-being and provides the appropriate developmental challenges toward academic and socio-emotional growth. Stixrud and Marlowe (2016) explained that through research it is clear that integrating the arts into students' everyday lives is possibly the most apt way to cultivate full learning opportunities for students: “[the arts] cultivate a state of relaxed alertness, provide orchestrated immersion in complex experience, and allow for active processing experiences—experiences that are vital to student success in school and in life” (pp. 81-82). Those neurological states most associated with successful learning outcomes (relaxed alertness—e.g., less stressful attention—and active processing, etc.) are activated through the arts. And while school is one place to begin this integration, arts educational opportunities outside school walls are also instrumental in nurturing student success and well-being.

Community-Based Art Education. Art education operates in a multitude of spaces and necessarily is integrated into the lives of students, teachers and community members. One form of art education, community-based art education, takes this confluence of lives as the center of its work. Harris Lawton (2019) defined community-based art education as a space within art education where engagement with community, for instance, service learning, and art with social change in mind connect (p. 206). It is, as Harris Lawton (2019) asserted, a means of focusing on community (including students and educators) assets and the complexity of the human experience through the arts (p. 206).

Community-based art education takes place in a myriad of spaces—from educational institutions and community organizations to correctional facilities (Harris Lawton, 2019; Ulbricht, 2005). Designed to provide all involved with opportunities to connect within and across borders, community-based art education seeks to provide a foundation, to levy spaces for personal and social transformation (Harris Lawton, 2019, p. 206). In a way, providing space,

outside of school walls and schooling (in general), community-based art education allows for those scars to heal. Likewise, community-based art education engages participants in holistic and multiply encompassing ways. In addition to the prospect of larger social transformation, there are concrete opportunities for individuals and collaboratives to learn new skills and implement community-focused projects.

School-community partnerships are not new, and in the realm of art education, they are often a common feature: “according to Basmat, Spiegelman, and Coopersmith (2012), 42% of public elementary art programs had partnerships with cultural and/or community organizations...At the secondary level, 44% of public secondary arts programs had partnerships with cultural and/or community organizations...” (Harris Lawton, 2019, p. 208). Typically taught by licensed art educators and teaching artists who have training in youth and/or adult development, education and art (Harris Lawton, 2019, p. 206), community-based art education seeks to focus on bridging learning and collaboration, communities and educational institutions.

At its core is a concern for art’s purpose and work in the public arena, whether addressing issues related to the environment, criminal justice, health and well-being, communities in conflict, technology or community renewal (Ulbricht, 2005). Teaching artists may have specific personal and professional passions, whether new media and its impact on youth or generating spaces for intergenerational communication and collaboration (Ulbricht, 2005). In working with teaching artists, gaining an understanding of how those passions are expressed through teaching and creating can provide insight into ways to incorporate students, their existing knowledges, and communities in the classroom.

While in-school arts programs provide room for creativity and social growth, they exist within the very concrete and, at times clinical, approaches to teaching and learning that depend

on teacher-centered, assessment-driven curriculum (e.g. teacher as lecturer, as holder/bearer of knowledge). Schlemmer (2017) posited,

Whereas current educational policy effectively serves to remove teaching and learning from the context in which it occurs, community arts embrace a social context that is constantly shifting and explores multiple perspectives that demand new and equally diverse forms of pedagogy. (p. 28)

Allowing students and teachers the practices and possibilities inherent in their community and cultural contexts, creates a path for learning to happen in innovative and mutually expansive and reciprocal ways. Allowing for a convergence and divergence of perspectives positions teachers and students in contexts that both support them and provide space for critical inquiry (e.g., investigating and representing community dynamics).

At the Horizon: Teaching Artists Inhabit Borders and Limbos

Anzaldúa (2012) describes the border between the U.S. and Mexico as “una herida abierta,” an open wound (p. 25). Anzaldúa went on to write: “A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary” (p. 25). Borders and borderlands are thus both physical places (often invisible and known only in a kind of collective memory) and emotional states.

In the landscape that is education in the U.S., there are a myriad of borders and borderlands, open wounds always in need of a fresh dressing. Art education is a kind of borderland—very real, emotionally wrought/complex, and incredibly nuanced. Teaching artists, who work within and inhabit multiple spaces within art education, are also living along, teaching/learning along that steep edge. They embody or represent a kind of border between tradition and innovation, between the fact of educational scarring and the prospect of educational

healing. They embody the idea of the artist as border crosser (Gatzambide-Fernandez, 2008), the educator as a whole person holding multiple identities, filled with the space of possibility.

Okello (2019) wrote of limbos, specifically through a Black feminist lens. I take up the ideas of borders and limbos to signify the depth of movement teaching artists enact and embody. According to Okello, “limbos signal to readers/viewers a breathing portrait of possibility, predicated upon the necessity of ongoing self-defining praxis...in the face of schooling procedures that function to still the body” (p. 36). The stilling and scarring of bodies and minds is often a call to/for the work of teaching artists that not only do they inhabit those borders and limbos, but their students do too, we all do in some capacity.

Teaching Artists

A teaching artist is, more concretely, a specialist who works within schools and offers new perspectives on specific content areas or provides new content that works with that which is already being utilized in the classroom (Markey, 2016, p. 124). Instrumental in incorporating arts educational practices in school settings, teaching artists offer a “fresh perspective” and, often, innovative, holistic pedagogies. Necessarily enmeshed in multiple practices and, often interdisciplinary, teaching artists do more than teach technique. They center student voice, identity and experience. They must learn who their students are. They must incorporate what their students already know in developmentally and culturally appropriate ways. They must, therefore, embed in an arts educational curriculum an understanding of difference, of personal and student purposes, a call to/for care, and the drive for social change (Dewhurst, 2018; Jocson & Cook, 2012).

Stovall’s (2006) presentation of the work of four poetry educators expounds on these claims. For instance, he wrote of Tara, a poet and educator who’s approach to writing, especially

for students intimidated by the prospect, seeks to center the gravity of their (the students') creativity. It pulls them into the act of creation. It challenges them to think about the substance of and emotional impact of poetry. For Tara, it's about making poetry, at times challenging and unfamiliar to students, more accessible (Stovall. 2006, p. 66).

What is required of artist educators like Tara and other teaching artists is the means and motives to encourage and empower students to think critically about themselves and their world(s). It requires an understanding of who they are—how they are coming to define themselves/their identities—and where they are developmentally. It requires the cultivation of a rich appreciation for students' interests and experiences, for teaching a craft as a practice of care and with a deep sense of responsibility. The power of seeking out and understanding difference comes through in the practices of teaching artists. These educators do more than teach, for “Artistic education must shift its role from imparting information and knowledge, to becoming a space where information is exchanged and knowledge constructed on the basis of public interaction and not private study” (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2008, p.255). It is about collaboration, about relationships—urban arts education must be centered on expressions of critical care.

Embracing Multiple Identities: Artist and Educator

Jocson and Cook (2012) spoke about the role of the artist educator in an interview. Cook spoke of the role of the artist educator as one garnered “[t]o affect the future, heal the past, or transform the relationship to others” (p. 94). To do this, according to Cook, “is to be concerned with my own transformation in the present moment, and change the way that I live in the world” (Jocson & Cook, 2012, p. 94). Here the artist and the educator are one; they are aspects of a growing self: “A central part of my teaching practice is concerned with skillfully building

healthy environments where participants can document *transformation* and magnify awareness...I aspire to cultivate a problem posing experience in dialogue across disciplines that can benefit everyone” (Jocson & Cook, 2012, p. 91). The problem posing curriculum and dialogue serve to anticipate the challenges inherent in teaching and learning. It provides opportunity where there is often silence—regimented curriculum, unidirectional attention and focus toward the teacher, etc. Cook serves as an example of the possibilities inherent in the coalescence of art and education, of professional identity and craft.

Existing at the border(s) between two, often divergent professions, art educators are often tasked with defending their work and their identities. The profession is one “that is often marginalized within both the domains of art and education” (Harris Lawton, 2016, p. 59). For an artist, teaching can be a means of developing a sustainable living. To teach may be considered a supplemental practice for some artists. For others, it may be integral to their artistic craft(s). In the art world, teaching may be seen as a bridge rather than an end. In the field of education, the arts may be deemed less rigorous and, perhaps, less useful than other academic disciplines. Art is considered a core content area. However, it still exists at the periphery of educational practices. What Harris Lawton (2016) is referring to is that limbo. For some, teaching artists may be viewed as not quite (fully) either (educator or artist). Professional identity, in this sense, is a complex foray into one’s educational history, one’s craft(s) and teaching philosophy as illustrated by Cook’s comments.

This foray is fertile ground for exploration; it is the ground arts educators tread on and the horizon to which they seek. According to Jenlink (2014) it is a kind of “geography of recognition” (p. 23). This geography of recognition, the will to understand one’s identity, is

tantamount to another form of translation. How do teaching artists interpret, relate and (re)present their professional identities? How does that translate into their teaching practices?

Collins (2019) looks to Anzaldúa as well. Collins (2019) wrote that Anzaldúa used her positioning within multiple groups not as a means of distancing herself from them, but rather, as a means of better understanding self fully and with complexity (p. 32-33). “Groups” can be read as identities here. What Collins (2019) explicated is that Anzaldúa’s theorizing resided not in the abandonment of certain identities, but in embracing the “sameness and difference” of those identities within self and across contexts. Teaching artists are irrevocably enmeshed in this embrace. Their stories reiterate the possibilities inherent in the embrace—that who one is is not sedentary or stultified by a particular identity, but rather ever-evolving and encompassing multitudes. Inherent in that evolution and in those multitudes, there is contradiction, there is the will to change, to set forth a new path, one that provides room for all of one’s identities to meet and wrestle and embrace.

Mapping identity, translating those struggles and choices, goes beyond training into the world of practice. What is the function of such translation, such consciousness for teaching artists? It is transformative practices for teacher and student:

Consciousness, I suggest, is in part defined by the way it always reaches beyond itself toward a fullness and a completeness that can never be attained. If it were attained, there would be a stoppage, a petrification. There would be no need for a quest. (Greene, 1995, p. 26)

This quest for the teaching artist is not easy or safe, but it is necessary. The necessity inherent in the work teaching artists do is the essence of art, the essence of learning. In a sense, the integration, the translation inherent in being both artist and educator begins to center art and making as modes of learning integral to student growth: “One aspect of this is the valuing of art as a mode of learning important and even essential as an aspect of the general development of

individuals regardless of their vocational orientations” (Thornton, 2012, p. 53). No matter what future a student works toward, lessons learned in/through the arts are critical to its (the future’s) development. The arts provide a sort of synthesis of self and educational pursuits—that is a synthesis of knowing self and knowing self through learning, through recognizing, existing in, and embracing that kind of liminality.

Making Meaning: Narrative and Identity

The challenges inherent in teaching and learning the arts are many. From engaging in and being critical of the often “myopic historical renderings of art education” (Kraehe & Acuff, 2013, p. 301) to developing lessons and projects designed with social change in mind, arts educators are pulled between “tradition”—e.g. neoliberal tendencies in education—and innovation. In addition, difference, intersectional identities and their complexities enter learning spaces daily: “Sociocultural factors such as race, class, gender, and sexuality are inherently tied to art teaching and learning through curriculum and pedagogy...However, art educators often find themselves unprepared when sociocultural difference becomes a point of contention within their classrooms” (Travis & Hood, 2016, p. 321). The work of teaching artists is multifold. They do more than teach, and they often inherit such contention in their classrooms/learning spaces. What do teaching artists have in their proverbial toolbox to address and redress such contention?

Though the work of an educator is one fraught with challenges, it is the challenge of teaching, of sharing/shepherding knowledge that can spur curricular and pedagogic innovation.

According to Gude (2012),

The work of making quality art curriculum has to begin the way most artworks do—with an inkling, a simultaneous knowing and not yet knowing. Then the hard work begins. Vague hunches must be embodied in specific content or vividly imagined details must be elaborated into complex curriculum structures (p. 79).

What is abstract or distant must be specified and brought closer, and what begins as a nuanced thread must be broadened to reach students. Curriculum development is like another form of art making, and it's about more than what students concretely create. It is about what they take from the process: "For us, the art is not just the things that students make and display, but also the lived experience and methodologies of making meaning generated through a range of individual and collaborative activities" (Gude, 2012, p. 78). This reiterates the relational and iterative aspects of art making. It is a means, a tool for broader understanding and meaning making.

Our narratives, the stories we tell ourselves, the stories that shape us are integral to how we come to (see) learn(ing) and teach(ing)—whether we believe we can, whether we can commit to the central purpose of learning/teaching. hooks (1994) asserted, educators should accept the prospect of self-actualization in order to teach and engage students in ways that allow them the opportunity "to live fully and deeply" (p.22). A central purpose of education is to encourage students to enhance their ability to "live fully and deeply." Artist educators, like teaching artists, who exist on the borders, in limbo, along that steep edge, must seek out (and do) the kind of self-actualization hooks wrote about. A necessary aspect of that critical reflection is a recognition of self and world (the structures and systems that shape both). That work toward self-actualization is translated into praxis, into the pedagogical practices and philosophical tenets that shape teaching artists' work.

In the Sky: Theories of Mind, Heart, Voice, and Community

Set above the horizon, we crane our necks, our eyes adjust to all-encompassing light: we look to the sky, an unfathomable expanse, an openness words can't quite contain, and we are certain, even if for just a moment that there is a space for us, a place we can make for us. It is not quite the future, but a space of possibility one can imagine for one's students, for oneself, and its

implications for the wider world—or, more aptly, students' immediate communities. How are teaching artists able to stay grounded and look toward, reach toward the sky? It is through lived experience, their own education and training, through community and imagination, through creative connections and critical reasoning/reflection.

We theorize all the time; just as we story ourselves into being, we theorize the happenings of our everyday lives:

When our lived experience of theorizing is fundamentally linked to processes of self-recovery, of collective liberation, no gap exists between theory and practice. Indeed, what such experience makes more evident is the bond between the two—that ultimately reciprocal process wherein one enables the other. (hooks, 1994, p. 61)

Criticality, Social Change, and Art Education

Art education is about understanding and forwarding what the arts do for students, not only as artists, but across academic disciplines into life—that is, what participation in the arts activates academically, socially, and emotionally (Stixrud & Marlowe, 2016). In concert with very real physiological (e.g., emotional support, stress reduction) and academic impacts is the promise to raise consciousness (Freire, 2000/2017)—that is, the capacity to provide students with the tools and frameworks to see, inquire into and challenge inequity. This provides the prospect of looking into identity, discrimination, access to resources, etc.—any subject that taps into what is important to students across social, cultural, and political dimensions.

This is not an easy task. It challenges educators and students to move along that steep edge into the unknown. Learning is a complex foray into the unknown, according to Dewhurst (2018). It is ultimately steeped in uncomfortable moments, whether when asking a student to answer a question in front of their peers or to work with someone new on a project—those moments are sometimes celebrated and sometimes they end in failure, but we learn through discomfort; we learn when we step outside of our comfort zones (Dewhurst, 2018, p. 10).

The premise that we learn when we move outside of our comfort zones, when we make mistakes, when we fail, when we begin to question ourselves, our motives and aspirations, the world around us, is one that is both deeply meaningful and unremarkable at once. Challenging students to see just a bit beyond their current sight/perspective, providing them the opportunity and the support to try new things and maybe fail: these are cornerstones, the promises of holistic, student-centered, and critical-conscious-raising activities.

It is the promise of imagination, of imaging self, action, and purpose in new and dynamic ways (Greene, 1995). For instance, “New sites of agency are erupting at the borderlines of cultural instability, in the transgressive act of re-membering and through the disavowal and refashioning of consciousness in the in-between spaces of cultural negotiation and translation” (McLaren, 1994, p. 218). The promise of activating imagination, especially in times of such instability, is an articulation of the very real work of the arts. The cultural instability McLaren suggested, those spaces of negotiation and translation, are not merely metaphorical or symbolic; they are the tensions, questions, doubts, etc. we live in/with/through that are both individual and collective and invariably impact youth and those who work with them. Art education, in this sense, is a site of “re-membering” and “refashioning.” It’s not just the practice of training toward technical ability. This remembering and refashioning constitutes a call for critical consciousness, that criticality is not divorced from academic work, but rather, part and parcel of life work, cultural work—that is, there is no separation between academics, social life, and cultural production (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2008; Dillard, 2012).

Critical Pedagogy. Criticality as posited by critical social theorists and more especially in the world of critical pedagogy requires an examination of the world, of education with an understanding of the power dynamics at play (socially, institutionally, etc.) and calls for just

action toward social change. Critical pedagogy is also a means by which educators can approach their work, its content and the direct and latent manifestations of it in their students' lives: "In critical pedagogy the theoretical domain always interacts with the lived domain, producing a synergy that elevates both scholarship and transformative action" (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 12). This is the work and world of the arts educator, the domain of arts education—its possibilities.

If, as Gaztambide-Fernandez stated, "the curriculum of artistic education is about developing identities, knowledge construction, and visions of the future," then "the center of learning activity should be the spaces in which young students engage popular cultural practices and enact their role as cultural workers of the present" (p. 256). The work of the cultural worker or artist educator is about more than standing up to social and systemic injustices; rather, it is about raising consciousness, about forwarding a path for students out of and above the languages of privilege or the underserved, into the realm of personal and social change; it is about transformative practices, transformational making and remaking.

What about this inquiry leans into the call for critical meaning making and remaking? In working through the concepts presented here, I found myself in a constant state of re-reading, rewriting and remaking. I found that what was required was a grappling with those concepts/ideas, my experience in the research process and in writing. I had to, in many ways adjust and re-adjust my lens and perspective. The conceptual framework follows. It leans into the ways situating various theories within and around this inquiry lead to that critical meaning making and remaking.

Adjusting My Lens—A Conceptual Framework

What does it mean to take the wide-angle view, to continue to ask of self and research what O'Connor (2019/2020) asks, "But what would constitute depth of field and three-

dimensional quality in education research that seeks to explore the micro-level structuring of educational inequality and also the multidimensionality of minoritized subjects” (p. 472)? What I seek to understand and (re)present in this dissertation is both the multidimensionality and how, in this case teaching artists, view and address some of that micro-level structuring. To situate, explicate, and present what was learned through interviews and documents, I want to share some of the concepts, some of the theories that shape my thinking about the stories shared/expressed.

The attempt to take a wide-angle view means articulating existing theoretical positions and frames that may aid in explaining and (re)presenting my own interpretations of these teaching artists words and work. Yes, to arts education and yes, to better understanding teaching practices, but how do these manifest and take shape within and across a city, through the lives and embodied knowledges of teaching artists? To both situate and explicate, I look to several theories: critical theory, critical place inquiry (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015), Black feminist approaches to being, teaching and learning, intersectionality, and decolonial theory. I connect to Black feminist thought in order to approach this writing and (re)presentation of self in this work and in the broader notions of identity and story as enactments of poieses. As mentioned earlier, “Poieses refers to meaning making emerging through artistic means and modes” (Mulvihill & Swaminathan, 2020, p. 21). I look to intersectionality as a frame for seeing the work of these teaching artists in light of the various contexts in which they work. I look to decolonial theory as a means of situating what the arts can do and how they can function to unsettle the dis-order of this urban context as well as how teaching artists can serve as examples of what it means to move between and beyond the educational contexts they work in.

Critical Theories

In thinking about how stories shape lives and can serve to disrupt the master narrative, critical theories are included. Critical theory, which includes multiple frames and lenses, is in essence the study of systems and structures of power, how they seek to pilfer and control:

critical theory, considered a socio-cultural and political theory, examines relationships of domination and subordination that create social inequality in society...For critical theorists, the ability to look at the contradictions inherent in a society is a starting point to develop forms of social inquiry that interrogate “what is in reality” and “what should be.” (Kim, 2016, p. 36)

Utilizing a critical theoretical approach in this inquiry required an understanding of the reality in which teaching artists teach/learn and live and the realities their students face. It also required that I seek out the “what should be,” that I ask teaching artists how teaching artists’ work can/could shape the future—the futures of their students, their own futures and the future of urban art education in the city.

Critical Place-Based Theories. Theories of place, while necessary in most qualitative inquiries, are not always included. Here, the voices, stories and philosophies of three teaching artists take center stage. However, the context(s) in which they work and reside, the context(s) in which they have continued to form their identities and teaching practices is also on stage, not just as mere setting, but as another actor playing a central role in the way art education takes shape and shapes what could be. As Patel (2016) articulated, “Understanding all research as being placed does not mean that we cannot know or connect across spatialities, but simply that we must be cognizant that there is not an automatic transferability to knowledge, skills, or dispositions” (p. 61). Teaching artists are distinct and unique individuals. Their histories, their philosophies of living, learning/teaching have taken shape over their lifetimes. To suggest that what they do can be easily transferred to other contexts would be disingenuous:

it is the specificity, the rootedness of place, that makes it so important in social science and in human imagination. We urge readers and colleagues to reconsider place and its implications, not because it offers a generalizability and universality are impossibilities anyway, in no small part because place matters and place is always specific. (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015, p. 21)

By situating them within various landscapes—that of urban art education, that of the city in which they live and work, that of arts in that city, etc.—there is a call to recognize the specificity of that situatedness, to acknowledge it and learn from it. Perhaps there are elements of their pedagogies and philosophies that can be translated, but what is important here is the prospect of holding their stories, their praxis as examples of what is and what could be.

Art education, as a staple, as part of the core curriculum, exists under the auspices of the same neoliberal frame as other core subject areas. This inquiry is about showcasing what is possible when the voices of those at the forefront of art education are given the space to reflect, share and forward a different understanding of the “basics” of art education.

Although art educators may debate where art fits in the hierarchy of school subjects and they may disagree on what ought to be included in the art standards, the logic that art is a part of basic education is mainstream and relatively uncontroversial. (Coalition for Racial Equity in the Arts and Education, 2020, p. 16)

What remains in question are the ways in which art educational programming is meted out. Who has access to and, thus, can benefit from art educational programming? I include, at length, an excerpt from the Coalition for Racial Equity in the Arts and Education (crea+e) (2020) because it serves as an example of the ways in which art education has been subsumed or coopted into the neoliberal frame surrounding the U.S. education system:

the basic discourse of art education advocated in previous eras has not resulted in a system of K-20 art education that serves all students equally well, least of all those for whom crises of educational neglect and social exclusion have foreclosed possibilities in the arts. Rather than making educational inequity visible and knowable, basic art education discourse aligned with disciplinary specialization—art as a *special* subject in schools, artists as *specialists* with credentials and associations, and *specialized* professionals licensed to teach art... Both discourses avoid race talk. Indeed, they

exemplify color-muteness, a pattern of silence that masks race-based exclusion, aggression, and inequality in art education. (Coalition for Racial Equity in the Arts and Education, 2020, p. 17)

What teaching artists demonstrate, and writers and educators have articulated (Dewhurst, 2018; hooks, 1994; Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016) is that art education can serve as a profound disruption to, as a model for what education in the U.S. has long promised. However, without critical reflection and dialogue surrounding equity in art education, specifically, it will continue to serve as yet another educational space of “color-muteness” or silence surrounding inequities writ large.

Black Feminist Thought. I look to scholars, writers and educators who have acknowledged and articulated the need to see past, to reckon with such complacency and silence in education, generally, and art education, specifically. Looking to Black feminist thought as a space of possibility and challenge, this inquiry seeks to understand and further articulate the challenges inherent in and the possibilities afforded through urban art education when such silence and complacency are addressed.

Black feminist thought (Collins, 2019; Okello, 2019) as a foundation for the prospect of change in education, presupposes historically excluded students’ opportunity to flourish despite discrimination and inequity. In direct opposition to the color-muteness described by crea+e (2020), utilizing a Black feminist lens acknowledges the role of identity in shaping institutions and policies, our everyday lives, while also recognizing the power inherent in accepting difference as a norm. Presenting difference as a norm gets us far closer to change than striving toward sameness.

In addition to contextualizing urban art education, taking up Black feminist thought also serves to center identity, to center voices—too often marginalized—and make visceral the realities of teaching artists:

This Black feminist arrangement represents aesthetic movements that make of constraint and crawlspaces, capaciousness and exodus, always and in all ways responding to the query, *how do we exist in the bodies that we hold in this historical moment?* Upending popular social narratives as evidence of their social worth Black feminist limbos...make vivid (demand that one see), while in the wake...a resistance to rational discourse and policies that problematize Black motion. (Okello, 2019, p. 45)

Okello's description of the space and utilization of Black feminist limbos, reminded me of Ali's call for excellence, for conversations/dialogue/discourse and liberating frameworks for teaching practices. That in the spaces, marginal though they may be, there is room for transformation and liberation. It is not without challenge. Teaching artists set forth thoughtful and thorough work in their pedagogies.

In engaging teaching artists in sites of remembering (their histories, their ideologies and philosophies as they play out in their pedagogies), I hope to have shown here how such remembering and (re)presenting can serve to not only complicate the space of urban art education, but also shift, provide examples of how transformative teaching practices can begin to crack the sort of neoliberal foundation of (art) education in the U.S. (Re)membering, according to Dillard (2012), can serve as a

response to our individual and collective fragmentation at the cultural, spiritual, *and* material levels, a response to the false divisions created between mind, body, and spirit. It is also a response to our on-going experiences and understanding of difference and identity. (p. 17)

Intersectionality

In working with teaching artists and listening to their stories, who they are is paramount to understanding and, thus, analysis. Teaching practices and pedagogical beliefs are not merely

aspects of a teacher's professional skills; they are integral and integrated into a teacher's professional identity: "Where diversity is a project of including bodies, intersectionality is an antistatification project, one committed to foregrounding exclusion and its effects" (Nash, 2019, p. 24). Intersectionality asks that we develop the impetus to see beyond and between difference in order to include rather than exclude.

I came to this inquiry and the process of data collection and analysis, of the interviews/narratives and other documents collected, with an understanding of the intersectional aspects of life and work, identity and teaching practice (Collins, 2019; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2019; hooks, 1994). I take my understanding of an intersectional approach from those attuned to its many manifestations and purposes, and who have articulated its analytic use:

intersectional theorists consider how people are multiply situated and how coercive power and systemic oppression cannot be fully understood by asynchronous examinations of structural or relational power. Intersectionality recognizes that identities are mutually interlocking as well as relational...Prior conceptions of social identity imagined individual and group identities as additive and ordinal, with one identity being the primary while other identities were subsequent or secondary to the main identity. (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2019, p. 53)

In taking this approach, there is an acknowledgement of my own intersections, my own moments of wanting to dissect or separate this from that.

There's a need to strive for the complex rather than seek reducibility: "As an analytic tool in qualitative inquiry, intersectionality requires us to ponder our interpretations of individual and social identities, human relationships, and social environments in more complex ways" (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2019, p. 53). Narrative, inherent in who we are, how we think and move through the world, matters. It's the means of establishing self within self and self among others (Clandinin, 2013).

Intersectionality as an analytic tool or “critical social theory in the making” (Collins, 2019) can serve as a frame for this inquiry in that it allows room for difference, for multiple perspectives and objectives, for multiple theoretical constructs, for the variance in identity and representation inherent in most qualitative inquiry. It allows for a systematic approach to variance in thought, identity, and knowledge bases.

Decolonial Theory

Decolonizing perspectives, informed by Indigenous perspectives, seek to undo the real and symbolic violences of colonialism. Decolonization is determined to thwart colonial apparatuses, recover Indigenous land and life, and shape a new structure and future for all life. (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015, p. 11)

“Resistant knowledge projects,” as espoused by Collins (2019; see also Smith, 2012), seek to engage research and learning from the perspective of peoples and knowledges too often cast aside or appropriated. These resistant knowledge projects, often in line with postcolonial, decolonial and feminist theories, require a call to action, a call to buoy the voices and perspectives of those working against the grain of the now normalized neoliberal practices and processes in education. According to Collins (2019),

Decolonizing processes of knowledge production is essential. This is why decolonizing methodology is so important to resistant knowledge projects (see, e.g., L. Smith 2012). Criticizing and reforming dominant knowledge production practices is essential, but imagining new alternatives for transformation is equally essential. (p. 114)

It’s not just a matter of decentering the status quo but imagining and practicing with the future in mind—a future predicated on acknowledging and uplifting difference.

Teaching artists can practice this resistant knowledge in multiple ways. As a researcher, I can practice this in multiple ways. Homi K. Bhabha (1994) termed the space of enunciation beyond and between norm and possibility as the “Third Space.” This site, at once physical and psychological, exists in classrooms and community spaces everywhere:

It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity of fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew. (Bhabha, 1994, p.88)

It is a space that allows for the intersectional to thrive, that provides room for new ways of existing, new modes of learning and teaching—decolonial methods as praxis.

I attempted to enter this third space in method and action, in interaction and analysis. Bhabha refers to Fanon’s articulation of cultural identity and the power of theory: “For Fanon, the liberatory people who initiate the productive instability of revolutionary cultural change are themselves the bearers of hybrid identity. They are caught in the discontinuous time of translation and negotiation” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 88). These “liberatory people” are none other than the teaching artists who move across educational spaces, physical and psychological. These spaces, this third space, exists as the in between, as liminal and growing in possibility. It is at the precipice of translation and negotiation, of other and self, self as other and other as self—it is the space in which change can take shape, where personal and academic growth can thrive; it is the space of the recognition and creation of culture, where differences among others and within self are acknowledged and explored. As a qualitative researcher working with the intersectional in mind, this third space, the call of the decolonial, comes into play in method, interaction, articulation, and (re)presentation. It is about confronting and acknowledging a multiplicity of self and the multiplicity of others. I aspire to understand and (re)present the worlds, works, beliefs and practices of teaching artists in an effort to demonstrate the power of person and place as a kind of third space.

Conclusion

In moving through this metaphorical and conceptual landscape, I’ve presented both the project and prospects of urban art education. At its foundation, the ground, it is a space of

possibility for all involved, educators and students alike. At its horizon, where person meets profession, etc., there is a call to acknowledge and include difference, to listen to, and include the multiplicity of purpose and identity established in the lives and work of teaching artists. This liminal space, that multiplicity can serve as an example of the intersectional at work. And, in the sky, there is space created through the work of teaching artists that surmounts inequity and promotes access to and opportunity through art educational programming. What follows in Chapter Three is a discussion of the methodology, where I move through my research process, a process in which all of the above has served as a guide, a kind of map, a lens.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This qualitative inquiry takes its lead, follows various methodological lines—it is an act of piecing together narrative and poetic inquiry, critical theorizing (Denzin & Giardina, 2016) and a call “to make love and ethics the grounding and central motivation” (Endsley, 2016, p. xxiii) forwarding a new theoretics, new frames and modes of inquiry, pedagogy, and action toward social change. This is a means of juxtaposing, bridging, and moving in earnest toward such ends. Moving in ways, foreseen and not, this inquiry wholeheartedly considers “love and ethics,” care and purpose in art education.

I interviewed three teaching artists over the course of three months (October – December 2020). I interviewed each teaching artist once over Zoom. Two teaching artists provided documents: an artist statement, teaching statement and a pedagogical map/timeline (Annamma, 2017; Keats, 2009). After each interview the audio recordings were manually transcribed and analyzed. In this process there was movement backward and forward; this became a process folding in on itself, iterative and ultimately resulted in an abductive approach to the analysis. Moving from ideation and interviewing to transcribing, coding, reflecting, analyzing and writing—and moving between and back into all of the above—is a methodological form and a means of theorizing/working toward theory in a more natural way, a less mechanical (though still rigorous and organized), less prescribed way:

In essence, abductive analysis is how we think—building questions from what we sense to be true from our partial perspectives, pausing to develop a ‘theory’ or explanation of the social world around us, then testing that explanation through lived experience or by seeking out alternative explanations that in turn change our initial partial perspective. (Collins, 2019, p. 149)

What follows are the methods, the means for activating, synthesizing, and attempting to represent the love and ethics, care and purpose shared by these three teaching artists. It is grounded in their words and stories, their experiences and pedagogical innovation.

Rationale for Research Design

To see, to listen fully to the stories shared by Ali, Bea and Constance, an acknowledgement of narrative as lived, shared, as an analytic, and as an interwoven aspect of all lives was explored. I've attempted to uphold that interwoven aspect throughout the process of data analysis and throughout the writing of this inquiry. Kim (2016) wrote, "telling stories is the primary way we express what we know and who we are. We tell stories about particular people and their unique experiences, and those stories tell us" (p. 9). We live and express our living through stories, stories about ourselves and others, about different times and places. These stories situate us physically/temporally and psychologically; they are embodied, not only in the telling, but also in the actions we take or don't take.

In collecting (through interviews and documents submitted by the artists) the stories of Ali, Bea and Constance, I attempted to gather their unique perspectives, histories and their shared reality as teaching artists. While their experiences take center stage in this inquiry, I've attempted to share them with rigor and fidelity (Kim, 2016, p. 111). They, in their singularity and in their seeming connections (across time and space), reveal much about themselves, the landscape of art education in the city, and through my interpretation, a bit about me—my critical, arts-based ontological frame.

There is no separation. Our lives, during and after interviews, are continuously entwined. As Clandinin (2013) so clearly articulated in *Engaging in Narrative Inquiry*:

Narrative inquirers always enter into research relationships in the midst...in the midst of researchers' lives enacted within particular institutional narratives...in the midst of

social, political, linguistic, and cultural narratives. Our participants are also always in the midst of their lives. When our lives come together in an inquiry relationship, we are in the midst. Their lives and ours are also shaped by attending to past, present and future unfolding social, cultural, institutional, linguistic, and familial narratives. (p. 43)

During this narrative inquiry, we were all in the midst—in the midst of personal successes and challenges, in the midst of a pandemic and the accompanying feelings of isolation, grief, a searching for belonging, and a desire to shape a more hopeful future. We were in the midst of external narratives and interal(ized) narratives, whether through memory or prompted by interview questions and responses. All that Clandinin (2013) described came up—the cultural, social, institutional, linguistic and familial—and resonated with me and across interviews.

Taking on the task of a narrative inquiry came about through personal reflection and research. We are our stories. We live them, share them, and find ways to express and understand them. The arts are a means of expressing and coming to understand our storied lives, our collective and personal histories/memories.

I came to narrative inquiry with identity and memory in mind—that we are also always in the midst of being (various identities at once) and reliving and retelling past actions and identities through memory. It is all an interwoven practice of being and belonging (hooks, 2009/2019). Art educators, teaching artists in particular, are also always in the midst, thrust into it, finding ways to be and adapt and teach with understanding and an ethics of care (Yellow Horse & Nakagawa, 2020). This ethics of care views the present, views educational scarring as the impetus for teaching with students' well-being in mind. What it dictates is a critical/thoughtful means to/for care. It is a means of working with students and community to develop teaching practices that incorporate existing knowledges, and it acknowledges/addresses expressed needs.

What these artists shared were what Clandinin (2013) called “stories to live by” (p. 53). In the interviews we traversed ideological/conceptual and very real landscapes. As Clandinin (2013) wrote:

A narrative way of thinking about identity speaks to the nexus of a person’s personal practical knowledge, and the landscapes, past and present, on which a person lives and works. A concept of *stories to live by* allows us to speak of the stories that each of us lives out and tells of who we are, and are becoming. This highlights the multiplicity of each of our lives—lives composed, lived out and told around multiple plotlines, over time, in different relationships and on different landscapes. (p. 53)

The hope in this narrative inquiry was to hold all of the above, to, in some respect, gather those aspects of these artists’ stories as artists and educators. It is an attempt to center their lives as well as their teaching practices and philosophies—like our identities and histories, our professional practices are enacted through/over “multiple plotlines, over time, in different relationships and on different landscapes.”

A Critical, Arts-Based Lens

This dissertation is a kind of conceptual collage, one that considers closely that which already is and that which can be. In thinking about Ali, Bea and Constance, whose words, lives and work made this inquiry possible, I would be remiss to not acknowledge their roles in teaching and learning with a critical lens, a critical, socially just and reflexive imperative. Rolling (2013) defined “conceptual collage” as “A critical-activist research and teaching/learning strategy generating the (re)conceptualization of knowledge through the rendering of new stances and conditions that contend with extant meaning” (p. 124). The critical-activist research or teaching/learning methodology and practice(s) Rolling wrote about necessitate understanding critical-theoretical stances (e.g., intersectionality, critical pedagogy, decolonial theory) as they relate to the role of and possibilities inherent in art education.

Reaching beyond the center, past the master narrative (Barone, 2008) of what education is or can do (Rolling, 2013), required that I seek out voices, artists teaching and working, living against the grain, artists who have chosen and developed philosophies, identities and teaching practices that may exist within but intentionally resist the status quo.

In preparing for this research, I reflected on my own onto-epistemological stance(s) regarding art education, proposing that teaching artists consciously and thoughtfully work (from the margins) to counter and resist the master or grand narrative surrounding education generally and art education (its often limiting role in the narrative) specifically.

With that, the collage, in theory, in analysis and (re)presentation began to take shape. As Faulkner (2020) noted, “We can use multiple methods to engage in metatheoretical aspects of seemingly disparate theory and models across contexts and research traditions to allow different and larger understanding than reliance on one tradition provides” (p. 37). The seeming cacophony of theory, method, and analysis presented here is intentional and representative of the diversity of and commonality between the teaching artists, the myriad of ways in which we story ourselves and our work, the necessity of expressing such stories in ways unique, profound and accessible. The inherent messiness of honoring story, lived experience, identities, the conceptual topographies these artists traverse is/can be challenging, but it is ultimately meaningful—the poiesis embodied and enacted in our individual and collective stories.

What holds all this is the critical stance from which I operate, the criticality with which teaching artists see themselves and their work, and our collective critical view of the operationalizing of inequity and discrimination in the education system—operationalizing that seeks to disentangle arts education, move it to the side, standardize it, etc. This dissertation necessarily takes on what Rolling (2013) named “a critical-theoretic art-making model” (p. 10).

This model “draws upon critical theory literature and defines art as *a system of critical reflection*, a relativist and liberatory activity rendering invisible assumptions, values and norms newly visible,” and it can “critique unjust social relations and empower marginalized individuals and communities within the arts practitioner’s social world...within this system, arts practices behave to alter the status quo” (p. 10). Hence the use of poetic inquiry (Faulkner, 2020) as analytical tool and mode of (re)presentation. Hence the inclusion of my voice, vision and experiences in the writing of this dissertation. Hence the centering and bringing together the voices of three teaching artists. Hence the collage of arts-based research methods with narrative inquiry surrounded by a critical frame, within the traditional dissertation structure (in terms of data collection, analysis and in the writing itself).

This research “approach[es] knowledge acquisition as occurring within a changing world where persons and phenomena do not always follow the rules” (Rolling, 2013, p. 4). There’s no fixed world here, no theory of (de)finite identity. It is research that accepts the mess and flux inherent in our everyday lives, in the way we story ourselves: “[A]n arts-based ontology accepts a universe of variances and supports knowledge that presents itself as a local interpretation of reality, valid within its own context, yet fully subject to reinterpretation or translation into other contexts” (Rolling, 2013, p. 5). This is a collage, pieces combined—stories, identities, teaching philosophies and practices—that is in and of itself another piece, partial and complex. There’s no call for generalizability, but rather, a (re)presentation to be held toward understanding, held with care and criticality, held as assemblage, as unfixed, unfinished, and growing.

Arts-Based Educational Research (ABER) and Poetic Inquiry

While this inquiry remains unfixed and unfinished, it is situated in an arts-informed or arts-based educational research (ABER) paradigm. With growing utilization, ABER stands to

counter traditional (qualitative) research systems of analysis and representation (Mulvihill & Swaminathan, 2020) while also strengthening those systems. That strengthening takes place in diverse ways, whether through multiple perspectives and voices, through multiple modes of presentation, or through creative analytical and theoretical frames (Mulvihill & Swaminathan, 2020; Rolling, 2013). What it requires is the formation of new (in)sights and vision, not just for research but also for our education system and for society. The arts, learning through/with them, have a way of both broadening and sharpening one's sight:

We only see what we look at. To look is an act of choice. As a result of this act, what we see is brought within our reach—though not necessarily within arm's reach. To touch something is to situate oneself in relation to it... We never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves. Our vision is continuously active, continually moving, continually holding things in a circle around itself, constituting what is present to us as we are. (Berger, 1972, pp. 8-9).

Research, like a creative act, is a means of seeing, of gathering and gaining perspective, of expanding our reach. Taking on an arts-informed approach, this dissertation sees research as a creative act and creativity as yet another intellectual and affective approach to understanding self and world. If we take Berger's notion of seeing as relating, as forming relations between self and what is in our line sight, objectivity in the research process is impossible. What must be acknowledged is both the seer and what is being sought/what has been seen. Taking on ABER and poetic inquiry in this dissertation was inspired by my own creative leanings as well as a means of demonstrating to readers what art can do, what it does. It is not frivolous or disconnected from the rigor and assertive solution seeking often associated with other academic disciplines. It is just as rigorous, just as complex, just as valid, and necessary for coming to language, knowledge and understanding—it is how we live and learn.

What may seem circuitous and messy in the aggregate is often carefully approached and thoughtfully enacted. We do not live or think or move in a straight line, despite our attempts to

do so; rather, we come into our seeing and being through relation, through associative logic (Faulkner, 2020, p. 43), through questioning and problem-posing (Freire, 2000/2017). As Mulvihill and Swaminathan (2020) put it:

Arts-based educational research has at its core an aesthetic way of knowing that is best understood as sense based, encompassing emotional, perceptual, embodied and nonlinear ways of knowing that might not be accessible through traditional epistemologies or linear research methods...It embraces the idea of multiple realities and plural voices. Epistemological eclecticism and pluralism in terms of lived experiences are seen as essential to arts-based research as they promote the creation of new knowledge and insight as well as a way to disrupt taken for granted ways of understanding. (p. 20)

My hope as a poet and educator is to demonstrate that multiplicity of knowing. That it is not a means of differentiation or separation, but rather what can connect us. It is to promote the idea that aesthetic ways of knowing are real, legitimate and sound ways of experiencing, questioning and responding to/expressing our world.

Poetic Inquiry and Artful Analysis. Faulkner (2020) asks two colleagues, “What does poetic inquiry mean to you?” One responded, “Poetic inquiry invites me into the in-between space between creative and critical scholarship. Such a space is reflexive and critical, aware of the nexus that is both self and other, both personal and public” (Faulkner, 2020, p. 16). My use of poetry in this inquiry feels similar. It represents interpretive frameworks, a collapsing of and the collective resonance inherent in the artists’ voices. It represents a means of understanding, of showing how we can come to understand—that iterative process of moving through and returning to, to gain deeper understanding and insight.

I’ve used a combination of interpretive—that is poetry created from my mind (see Chapter Two) and my interpretations/analysis of data—and found poetry—that is poetry retrieved from the artists’ words in interview transcripts (see Chapter Six), or what Janesick (2016) refers to as “found data poems” (p. 59). While poetry is not the center of this inquiry, it

has been/is instrumental in the way I see narrative/story, the way I come to analysis and (re)presentation. It “is imaginative and forces you the writer to be creative and push your imagination somewhere it has never been before. Creativity is active” (Janesick, 2016, p. 61). In utilizing found poetry and moving through this inquiry with an aesthetic or creative imperative, this inquiry suggests not only the use of creativity, the arts in education, but beyond into social science research, into and across various disciplines (e.g., science, math, history).

Artful analysis, as defined by Mulvihill and Swaminathan (2020) is a more holistic and comprehensive approach to data analysis and representation (p. 161). Utilizing artful analysis allows for that broadening and sharpening of sight, “By using arts, for example, found poetry...artful analysis entails opening the reading and interpretation of the data to a peripheral vision, one that is intuitive and vulnerable” (Mulvihill & Swaminathan, 2020, p. 161). Akin to O’Connor’s (2019/2020) wide-angle view, aesthetic approaches to research can allow one to delve deep while seeing broadly.

Research Setting and Sample

The City

The research took place in a Midwestern city. Each of the artists are residents of the city. Two of the artists were born in the city. The city is large—a major metropolitan area, often cited as major transportation hub and iconic destination for the arts—and contains a diverse array of neighborhoods, communities, and community configurations. This diversity of neighborhoods and communities speaks to the city’s historic roots as a primary destination for immigrants, those seeking work and those seeking refuge from racial discrimination (e.g, the Great Migration of African Americans from the south during the mid-20th century). Such an enclave of difference is not without its own issues of racial and socioeconomic disparities. These artists live in and travel

amongst/between these configurations. This inquiry seeks out that movement, the ability to move within and across communities.

The Teaching Artists

“As teachers move between these two places [in-school and out-of-school places] they can, and often do, experience dilemmas and tensions. One way to understand how teachers manage these dilemmas is by attending to an interconnected set of stories” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 65).

In attempting to understand the impact of teaching artists, it was important to find, listen to and, ultimately, share a range of stories, linked/connected by place and artists’ aspirations. Ali, Bea and Constance, the artists interviewed for this narrative inquiry, have many similarities and differences. Portraits of each can be found in Chapter Four. Ali identifies as a Black, queer male. Bea and Constance identify as females. Constance identifies as a Latina. Bea did not outwardly discuss her identity in terms of race/ethnicity, but she is originally from a Latin American country. Though, they vary in age (all adults), they have a wealth of experience as artists and arts educators/teaching artists.

Ali identifies as an interdisciplinary artist. He works in writing/poetry, dance, and theater among other arts. Bea is a storyteller. She primarily works in theater but has a background in dance and music. Constance is a dancer. She has done work in theater and sometimes utilizes creative writing in her teaching practice.

The city is their home, but each of them have had the opportunity to travel extensively. They share a deep-seated care for and sense of responsibility regarding their students. They understand the nuances of the city, the growing needs of their students and how the arts have impacted them as well as their students personally and professionally.

Data Collection Methods

This study went through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. I obtained IRB approval after providing and revising required documentation (e.g., recruitment emails, adult informed consent form, etc.). I contacted Ali, Bea and Constance through network sampling (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) or research of publicly available data regarding teaching artists. For instance, I looked to a publicly available directory of local teaching artists. When scheduling the interviews, I also sent each artist the adult informed consent form. I asked each to read through the document, ask questions if they had them, and return the signed consent form via email. Once contacted, and after receiving participant consent, each individual, one-on-one interview was scheduled (over Zoom) and recorded. Interviews, long held as fruitful, complex and reliable means of gaining information, of working toward understanding the varied experiences of others (Siedman, 2013), were utilized in order to do all of the above. Interviews were conducted between October and December 2020. Each interview was between 60 and 90 minutes in length. Each interview was distinct—showcasing how each artist’s work and teaching practices are unique—yet, there was somehow a feeling of familiarity with each artist. Each artist had a unique story about how they were introduced to the arts, for instance. At the same time, certain characteristics of their stories were similar (i.e., each was introduced to the arts at a young age). I have profound appreciation for their time and willingness to share so openly of their histories and teaching experiences. I could not ignore the seeming/growing affinity with them as artists and educators.

Interviews

The interview protocol for each individual interview was relatively the same (plus or minus a few questions). The interview protocol appears in Appendix B. Asking the same/similar

questions of each artist allowed for continuity and the formation of a kind of community among them (though they never met). Interview questions were designed with specific themes in mind—the themes of identity, pedagogy, teaching philosophy, and artistic development and chosen artistic form(s).

In developing the interview questions, I determined that an understanding of where each artist had been, where they began their journey into the arts, and how they defined themselves was paramount to establishing a foundation for the remainder of the questions. As Seidman (2013) wrote, “Because we understand that meaning is best achieved in context, we take the time to establish a contextual history for the participants’ current experience” (p. 20). What I learned through those initial questions was instrumental in the analysis and ultimately the writing up of the findings.

The interviews were semi-structured, following the protocol and including follow-up questions for clarification and an expansion of ideas or experiences shared in the teaching artists’ responses. I only spoke with each artist once. During each interview I asked between 10-15 questions total. After each interview, follow-up emails were sent to express my appreciation and to request documents (e.g., artist statement, teaching statement, pedagogical map/timeline). It was clear, as I began speaking with each artist, that they were not only willing to share about their teaching experiences, but that there was also a call to share their purposes, life reflections and hopes for the future. After each interview, I spent time writing my own reflections about the experience, about ideas shared and spawned via the interviews:

A participant’s reflections during an interview may spawn new realizations and interpretations of the past. Hence interviews can be sites of emergent reconstruction of meaning...Interviews *are* emergent interactions; they are embodied interactions that occur in specific situations and times...Interviews give us one window for grappling with and grasping the significance of our participants’ stories. (Charmaz, 2016, p. 46)

These interviews were entryways into their lives and experiences as artists and educators. I center their voices, ideas, experiences, and hopes as a means of shedding light on one aspect of the landscape that is urban arts education.

Document Collection

I asked each artist (via email) if they'd be willing to share an artist statement or statement of their teaching philosophy. One artist, Ali, provided both an artist statement and statement of teaching philosophy. After each interview, due to time constraints, I followed up with each artist to see if they'd be willing to create/develop a pedagogical map/timeline (Annamma, 2017; Keats, 2009). In seeking this document, I wanted to know how each artist viewed their trajectory in art education. What were the pivotal moments for them and why? How had they seen/described their change as an educator and artist over time? In asking this of them, I also offered to provide an example. One artist, Bea, took the time to create a pedagogical map/timeline that highlighted her teaching experience, the various subjects/disciplines and concepts enmeshed in her teaching practices as well as the age/grade level taught. It is a thorough and systematic schema of her teaching history/experience. These documents have been instrumental in contextualizing the stories shared.

It was important to collect documents to aid in contextualizing and extending their stories. Keats (2009) noted that,

These types of texts are very helpful and useful when participants have difficulty recording emotions, impressions, or aspects that were difficult to put into words. Without a nonverbal means of expression, participants may be limited in how they articulate their experiences. (p. 187)

While the teaching artists shared rich details regarding their lives and livelihoods as artists and educators, the documents collected, not only contextualized and deepened the stories shared in the interviews, but also provided insight into the teaching artists' own perspectives about their

work; they provided insight into their patterns of thinking and their means of addressing/writing about the impact of their work and of the arts in education and in society. The documents submitted provided a glimpse into the teaching artists' minds and histories. Combined with interview transcripts, these documents presented a more (though not entirely) complete picture of who these artists are, what they've done, their philosophies, identities and how they approach their work, both creative (personal arts practice) and educational (teaching practice). The documents provided another avenue for understanding how all the above inform each other.

Data Analysis Methods

Interviews were transcribed via manual transcription. Manually transcribing the interviews, while tedious and time consuming, allowed me more familiarity with the ideas, stories and experiences shared (Waller, Farquharson, & Dempsey, 2016). I was able to begin thinking about the various concepts that arose in each of the interviews and across interviews. In addition to listening to and re-listening to the audio files, I read and re-read the transcripts, and took notes while developing a coding system and coding manual. The documents collected were treated much like the interview transcripts. They were read and re-read, notes were taken while reading them and after, and they were manually coded.

Coding and Theming: Interviews and Documents

Coding the interview transcripts was a multifold process. While coding a single interview transcript or document, my mind referred back to another transcript or document or back to the conversation had. In deciphering distinct concept codes for each of the interviews and documents, there was also an intentional linkage between/across transcripts and documents. I wanted to alert the reader of the commonalities and differences between the teaching artists—what they shared and what made them unique in their histories and teaching practices. The idea

that a community, even if only in writing/theory, could be formed through this inquiry was instantiated in the analytical process.

According to Charmaz (2016), “Coding is a way of getting to the fundamentals to work with data and define what stories suggest. Coding can accomplish more than data reduction or thematic synthesis. Rather, it can break data open to view it anew” (p. 49). Emergent codes served as a means of helping me make sense of what I heard in interviews and read in documents. My interpretations are not facts; rather, they are what I felt was suggested through the stories and documents shared. I used *in vivo* coding initially (Saldaña, 2016, p. 105)—that is taking words directly from the interview transcripts or documents as the code itself. This allowed the artists’ words to shape the coding process. After printing and reading through transcripts and documents to get a feel for the stories, experiences and ideas shared, initial coding and ultimately concept coding began: “Concept Codes assign meso and macro levels of meaning to data or to data analytic work in progress...A concept is a word or short phrase that symbolically represents a suggested meaning broader than a single item or action” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 119). My use of concept codes led me to take stock of not only the experiences shared (full of rich detail), but the ideas that came from and shaped them, and that spoke to the broader meaning behind those rich details. It was, in essence, the concepts I took from the artists’ words as well as the concepts they shared, whether explicitly or not. Some of those concepts were reinforced in the documents shared.

A code is, as Saldaña (2016) wrote, “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, an/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 4). The concept codes used were the beginning of my understanding/my coming to understand the depth of the stories shared, how I came to internalize them and how

they spoke across interviews and documents: “Initial Coding creates a starting point to provide the researcher analytic leads for further exploration...All proposed coding during this cycle are tentative and provisional. Some codes may be reworded as analysis progresses” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 115). Coding is not just assigning words to data segments; it is part of the analysis.

In conducting the interviews, in listening to them, in reading and re-reading the transcripts and documents, I realized that my interpretation is just a piece, a fragment of what was shared. It is difficult to translate the laughter, the grace, the openness with which these artists shared their stories and ideas about teaching and learning. As Charmaz (2016) stated, “Grasping participants’ meanings and experiences requires openness and diligence and an awareness of context and culture we may lack...Interpreting their stories requires humility, caring, and attention to silences” (p. 47). I hope that I’ve pieced together this fragment(s) with such humility and openness. I hope I’ve paid due attention to not only what was said, but what was embodied in the conversation, in the experience of speaking with these artists—the silences and pauses, the smiles and jokes, the warmth.

Taking into account the themes used in designing the interview questions, I combined those with statements, words, and ideas shared by the teaching artists to create those initial concept codes. Emergent themes—subheadings in Chapter Four—include the teaching artists’ “origins” as artists and educators, their growing “identity” (professional and personal), the ways in which they spoke about “teaching and learning” and how “access” to art education is necessary and rewarding for all involved. These themes, whether lifted from interview transcripts (e.g., identity) or created based on concepts shared (e.g., access), serve to showcase the depth and wealth of experience these teaching artists possess.

Abductive Analysis. In seeking out the thoughts, experiences, stories and teaching philosophies of these three teaching artists, I moved from an idea—the idea that teaching artists live their praxis, work in the world of pedagogical innovation, and create with/from their whole selves—to the action of speaking with teaching artists about their lives, pedagogies and creative practices. This indicates the need to follow our inclinations with clear reasoning and a purposeful methodological response. What I learned from speaking with the artist both fit/did not fit my own ideation/theorizing.

I wanted to create the space for them to share, for their theorizing and living to shine as a beacon of possibility—not as a how-to guide or to generalize. It's not about finding the information to fit your theory/theorizing. It's about creating the conditions to seek out information, make space for it (all of it) to settle and meld and grow, and then just sit in that space, wander around it, let it call to you just as you called to it.

I was drawn to the notion of abduction because it describes, as Collins wrote, the way the mind works, but it also contains the organizing principles for that space to fill itself, the organizing principles for that space to make even more room for thinking and theorizing and questioning. According to Tavory and Timmermans (2014),

abduction is the form of reasoning through which we perceive an observation as related to other observations, either in the sense that there is an unknown cause and effect hidden from view or in the sense that the phenomenon is similar to other phenomena already experienced and explained. (p.37)

The act of transcribing, coding, reflecting through notetaking and memo writing: all of these key elements of analysis are cyclical (Saldaña, 2016, p. 9). They fold back and onto each other in the research process.

Researcher Writings and Poetic Analysis

I wrote reflective notes after each interview, while transcribing and while coding (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). It was important to keep a record of my interpretations, of what I came to understand, what questions remained or (re)entered. It was important to hold those conversations, the ideas they stirred, the emotions they brought about. I wanted to record the changes, challenges and commonalities faced in the process of interviewing and reading and re-reading documents.

The use of poetry came as a means of analysis and representation. It was important to honor the creativity these artists carry and share. Art has a way of both making clear and complicating. It renders whatever is being depicted, whether visually, theatrically, musically or via the written word, more real, more visceral and accessible:

What art does—through minute description, through the use of metaphor, by taking an odd point of view, or simply through unnatural line breaks in poetry—is to force us to confront our everyday experience as unfamiliar and thus to gain a deeper appreciation for it. (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014, p. 56)

Through poetry, my hope is to render this experience clearly and complexly. It is a means of coming to understand what this experience means/can mean wholly and in its variegated parts.

Reporting through Portraiture

Portraiture as advanced by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), is a meeting of seemingly disparate disciplines—science and art; it is where borders converge, where the portraitist is able to come to and cross/move along the various intersections of scope and (re)presentation. In Chapter Four, each artist is assigned a section, a portrait of sorts rendered through their words—via interview transcripts—and my interpretations.

While not as intricate or aesthetically whole (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) as portraits done or espoused by Lawrence-Lightfoot, the portraits rendered here move within the

context of a single interview and along the interstices, the borders of/within the city. I've created snapshots of each artist, snapshots that display their unique and distinctive characteristics, while also showcasing commonalities among them. Context is one common feature. As Travis (2020) asserted,

Portraiture as a methodology goes beyond visual representations of individuals to create a portrait that conveys the complexity of the contexts, narratives, and practices within a phenomenon or situation, seeking balance between generalizability and particularity withing research. (p. 104)

I wanted to, through portraiture, tap into or highlight each of the artists. Giving them their own room, their own space, while also bringing them together. Through the particular—as in synecdoche—the whole or the more universal is articulated and realized.

What drew me to portraiture and to the poetic framing and analysis of each artist and the city was this notion as articulated by Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005), “I think that one of the most powerful characteristics of portraiture is its ability to embrace contradictions, its ability to document the beautiful/ugly experiences that are so much a part of the texture of human development and social relationships” (p. 9). These snapshots—on their own and together—are only partial renderings of the lives, philosophies, and teaching practices of these three artists. As such, they are also only partially representative of the work and lives of teaching artists more generally. The purpose of the portraits/snapshots is to allow readers the opportunity to get to know these three artists much in the way I did—both as individuals, and through the research process, as a collective.

Trustworthiness

In integrating what was gleaned from multiple data sources, I hope to have moved, as a researcher, in line with Lincoln's (2004) four trustworthiness criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is a means of underscoring the believability or

accuracy of the inquiry (Lincoln, 2004, p. 2). In this case, am I writing and (re)presenting the words and experiences of these teaching artists credibly? To ensure credibility, I collected and used documents from two of the three artists to further contextualize (and complicate) their interview responses.

Transferability, or “the report's ability to be utilized in (transferred to) another setting similar to that in which the original case was conducted,” is possible via, what I’ll call, translation (Lincoln, 2004, p. 2). What is (re)presented here has been collected, analyzed and interpreted—it has gone through sieves of varying sizes. I propose that it be more like translation because it is through my interpretation, through the various conceptual and methodological lenses described; it is not an exact replication of the interviews. In order to move through this process of translation, I took notes after each interview and during transcription. I use poetry as a vessel and vehicle for bringing these artists’ voices together. It is a shared experience and endeavor. Rather than transferring ideas or methods to a similar setting or set of circumstances, my hope is that this work can be translated into other educational arenas, whether in terms of research approach and (re)presentation or by way of finding ways to center the voices and visions of those who choose to be a part of the research.

Dependability, or “the logic of the research process” (Lincoln, 2004, p. 2), was achieved through seeking out input/feedback from a critical friend (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) and faculty guides. I sought this input once during data collection as a means of calibrating my interpretations and proposed (re)presentations. I sought the input of faculty after data collection and analysis to aid in best (re)presenting the words of the artists and the work of this inquiry.

Confirmability is the ability to track that (re)presentation back to original data sources (Lincoln, 2004, p. 2). Confirmability was achieved through rigorous and detailed tracking and

filing of all data sources. All data collected, notes taken and analysis were systematically organized throughout the process to ensure I could not only look back to/find information easily, but also to check my own interpretations throughout the analysis and writing processes.

Pseudonyms were given to each artist to ensure their anonymity. A research journal was used throughout the process to take notes after each interview, to write immediate and formulating understandings of data sources and other readings. All of this in addition to taking a reflexive approach to working through this research process have aided in generating a robust, rigorous, and ethical inquiry.

Honoring each artists' story means understanding and supporting their individual theoretical frames, their self-determined identities and positionings and understanding my own in this process:

Indeed, if we didn't occupy multiple positions at once, and if positions were not so internally complex, it would be a very boring world to live in...In becoming social scientists, we usually explicitly learn to take on different theoretical positions rather than only one privileged way to understand our observations. (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014, p. 44)

Limitations and Delimitations

The circumstances surrounding the pandemic proved to be a constraint. Contacting and sustaining contact with other teaching artists proved difficult. It is also a challenge to ask artists of their time when there's so much uncertainty. Likewise, the prospect of interviews being conducted via Zoom was, while necessary, not ideal. However, despite speaking through a screen, there was a level of comfort and familiarity with each of the artists.

I sought adult teaching artists with at least three years of experience teaching both in and outside schools. Speaking with experienced teaching artists was necessary to ground the growing complexity of teaching artists' professional identity. It was also necessary to have a clear sense

of their pedagogical growth and development. All three teaching artists reside in the city. The city serves as a means of demonstrating the similarities and differences that abound within the same urban art education setting.

The landscape of the arts in the city, as alluded to in interviews, is nuanced. As an outsider on many levels, it can be a challenge to navigate. I am not a teaching artist. I am not from the city. I have not engaged in the arts in a way that would provide some inroads into teaching artist networks or arts organizations. This work is bounded and bountiful in its approach and (re)presentation.

Conclusion

Moving through this inquiry, from ideation to action/method to analysis demonstrated the power of story, the possibilities inherent in sharing our stories. My approach to this inquiry, while proposed and planned, did not always move in those predetermined directions. That's the way of questions, of inquiring and relating; we never really know where we'll end up.

I can't make any promises regarding the potential translation of this work. What I offer are the stories, my interpretations and analysis, my coming to terms with not always having the language to shape the meaning felt and made in this process, in my conversations with the artists. But it's not about a neatly packaged product:

Qualitative research aims to come to terms with observations. In conducting and analyzing research, we often try to convince ourselves, and later our readers that these empirical observations tell us something beyond the particular instances we have been privy to. Much as we do in our everyday life, we assume that the things we see, hear, and otherwise experience may signify something. Our observations are indicative of a larger pattern. Theory construction, in these terms, is the production of an understanding, of a new claim regarding the empirical world, that we hope others will take up, argue with, refute or employ. (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014, p. 23)

As you read the latter half of this dissertation, I've created a space to listen and consider what these three artists offered. It is not the sum of who they are or what they've experienced; it is a

particular instance(s). In bringing their voices into the fray of so many others regarding the imperatives and possibilities inherent in art education, this is a small offering, a small gesture beckoning for more stories and spaces to listen, consider, reflect and act.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS—WHAT MAY HAVE BEEN REVEALED

“Complex personhood means that the stories people tell about themselves, about their troubles, about their social worlds, and about society’s problems are entangled and weave between what is immediately available as a story and what their imaginations are reaching toward” (Gordon, 2008, p. 4).

Introduction

The stories people tell are entryways; they are points of contact and connection. Gordon’s (2008) concept of complex personhood reifies a sense of knowing and belonging, a sense of movement within personal story toward shared reality/existence. This research would not be possible without the stories of Ali, Bea and Constance. They are the center and the connective threads. They are the voices I’ve longed to hear, voices that need to be heard. What they shared, their stories of coming to the arts, of maintaining artistic practices and teaching, demonstrate both “what is immediately available as story and what their imaginations are reaching toward.”

“What may have been revealed” seems appropriate for the title of this chapter. What was revealed was illuminating and inspiring. These artists’ stories are both unique and relatable. Much was shared, and what I hope I’ve done is articulate and conceptualize some of the ideas, experiences, hopes, and determinations shared. This foray into the beliefs and identities of these three artists was thrilling and encouraging. Ali, Bea and Constance shared their stories and gave insight into the world of their imaginations, their philosophies about teaching and learning, the potential for growth in seeking and sustaining thoughtful and critical art practices. One shared their artist statement and statement of teaching philosophy. Another shared a timeline/map of their pedagogy. In this chapter, the words of Ali, Bea and Constance serve as portraits (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997), perhaps more abstract than realist, perhaps zooming in on only a few features, but portraits, nonetheless. Each artist has a section. Each section delves into similar

though not inherently identical themes. I wanted to show their connection to each other without losing who they are as individuals.

The portraits are organized by themes that emerged from their interviews, documents and through my interpretations. The themes are carried across all portraits. There is a distinction here between the individual and the collective, between that which is reflected in the words, the language of one artist and all three.

Ali

“Be okay with where you are and know that there’s room for you to grow and be as excellent as you want to be. Define your excellence in your own right. Define your communities of excellence in your own right. You have the opportunity to do so” (Ali, 2020).

This is what Ali teaches. As he explained, teaching and learning are not about judgement or being all-knowing; rather, they are about recognition and growth. He hopes that his students, whether in a K-12 setting, college or in adult learning communities, come away with a deeper sense of who they are, what they think—that they “[d]efine [their] excellence in [their] own right.” And that embodying your definition of excellence does not mean being perfect; it means clearly defining who you are in various spaces, clearly reflecting on that self-definition and shepherding it with a certain criticality and grace. With humor and sincerity, Ali shared what it was like growing up in/learning with an arts organization, with mentors and peers, who did just that.

Origins

It is no mistake that Ali is the interdisciplinary artist and educator he is. After all, he carries both a reverence for and critical understanding of both the arts and education: “Yeah, I carry both. I walk with both,” he said. It is no mistake that he can recall, very specifically and thoughtfully, incidents of his impact on students’ lives and learning. That it is his impact, he may

deny (generally). That it is arts impact, he may attest to. Art impacted him. He has performed, written, and resisted from a young age. Ali's entry into the arts was not one of eager admission or great fanfare. Art impacted him in a way he never foresaw, in a way, perhaps, he couldn't imagine—as a 14 year-old—that he, at one time, even denied.

[M]y friends and I used to make jokes...we was like, we don't want to go and talk about 'the man.' We don't want to go and talk about politics...This stuff is stupid. It's stupid...And it's so damn funny, we used to say that, and now...[it] is my life.

“It” is the arts organization he joined as a teen, an organization that embraced him and “completely changed the way in which [he] navigated [his] life and [his] Black, queer, male body” (Ali, 2020). That organization, his foray into the arts, gave him the time, agency and language to better understand himself and his world and all the ways they connect.

Identity: Embodied Multitudes

Ali said it best, “I don't think there's one terminology or position that can encompass me or a lot of us.” As an artist, an educator, a Black, queer person, Ali embodies multitudes. And as he stated, that embodiment is not specific to him; we all possess multitudes. It's just a matter of recognizing and tapping into them. He said:

I came in as a dancer, which means I was responsible for choreography, song ideas, whatever...could be incorporated into a performance...after that, they [of the organization] were like, we don't want there to be just one track...So, we went from footwork, breaking, African, jazz, ballet, Caribbean—like they trained us...Like we would get a taste of each art form to make us interdisciplinary.

Where Ali began is not where he is presently. For instance, he now openly talks about “the man.” From dance to poetry to singing to drawing, Ali got a taste of various arts practices. This movement between and through different art forms shapes his present work and it informs the way he teaches, the way he lives in, looks at/to the world. The arts, his training and (un)learning

in the arts organization aided in that development on so many levels, from the personal to the academic. It got him through high school, on to and through college and, now, a master's degree:

I feel like I wouldn't have been able to survive [college] and its racism without [the organization's] backing...I wouldn't have been able to feel empowered to apply to [graduate school]. That never seemed like an opportunity to me or to even pursue a master's degree. What the hell? That's unheard of. I'm the only person in my family to hold one, so these things just seemed impossible and without [the arts organization]...I wouldn't have been able to feel like I can tackle whatever the hell I want to tackle.

Education is one thing—and it's a big one in this land of opportunity—but the confidence, the empowered sensibility to tackle the things you want to tackle (big and seemingly small) is a gesture toward the possibilities inherent in quality, rigorous, thoughtful and robust arts education/training. The arts organization provided space(s), the time, and support Ali needed when he didn't realize it:

I joined [the arts organization] completely blinded, I feel like...I just kept building my toolkit and it put me on this path towards joy and justice and education and really fine tuning what that means for me...because I wasn't—I took school serious, but it was a point when I fell into a depression and school stopped being a priority for me...so, it would be days where I wouldn't go to school. I'd go to [the arts organization]. It would be days where I would cut class and be at [the arts organization]. They didn't know this at the time until it was time for me to graduate and they were like, "What you been doing, Ali? What you been doing? So, having [the arts organization] be that net and like non-judgmental space made me realize I need to pour into myself the way I'm pouring into [the arts organization]. And so, that's when I started taking arts education and my education, life serious.

When he began participating at the arts organization, Ali admits, he was in it for the fun—he was 14 after all—for the “glitz and glam,” the opportunities to perform and be with friends. But now, he sees a different impact, the impact of his changed life and mindset. And that life, his life as an artist and educator, has taken on so much of the world's, the city's issues and possibilities. Anchored in the sensibilities inherent in brave space and calls for social justice, Ali's connection to and through the arts organization have led him down a path of self-discovery and self-determination. Seeing and living the intersections of various identities, Ali named it as such; he

recalled Kimberlé Crenshaw and the foundations of intersectionality: “[T]hat’s based in Kimberlé Crenshaw...our intersections—race, able-bodied or disabled bodies, sexuality, economic status—like all the interlockings of our intersections and our oppressions. That’s how I think about it.”

Identifying as “Black, blckity-Black Black,” as queer, as male and male-presenting, as the first in his family to earn a master’s degree, as his mother’s only son, Ali inhabits and holds the “issues” that are always, seemingly, at the forefront of calls for change—issues of racism, homophobia, educational equity and opportunity, police violence, belonging and community development. He said,

I identify as black...I identify as queer...because I feel like queer is all encompassing. It’s the culture. It’s the language. It’s the nails. It’s the, you know, the music. Queerness is such a beautiful umbrella for them all. And so, I claim it in my heart because it’s limitless.

It’s limitless, and, thus, the multitude that is Ali, is also limitless. There’s too often the narrative of limitations when it comes to speaking about, writing about or developing policy with regards to communities that have been historically excluded. It’s too often about what is lacking, what is perceived to be needed. Ali ruptures that narrative, the bounds it could hold, the categories it perceives to be “other”—that is, white heteronormative stances as the default. That default is faulty, and it is dangerous.

Ali’s work and life are a direct and intentional challenge to that because it is his life, the lives of his students and so many people in the city and beyond. He said, “I believe what I believe, and I feel like if something feels funny or weird as it pertains to Black people or folks of color, I’m going to speak up on it, every time, all the time.” He shared an example of confronting/challenging biased assumptions in his own learning experience:

I had a really, really deep debate with one of my professors...just about poverty, and she just like said something that didn't sit right with me, and I was just like, wait, you can't say that. It's dangerous...you just added a negative stereotype to this neighborhood about poverty and these people [other students, mostly white] are going to connect with a face like mine. Absolutely not. So, we went back and forth for a good 45 minutes. But that's important, and I always encourage my young folks, like don't take everything for face value in your classrooms. Teachers are learning as well.

He's one of those educators who openly learns through/while teaching. His message, and one I take to heart, is "Don't be afraid to [have those conversations]. Be empowered."

Access and Impact: Resistance and Healing/Healing as Resistance

[I]t's a space where young folks can come together, where you're not judged, so I was able to define and find my voice and my identity and my queerness and my masculinity and what that means for me—free of judgment. [They] were just like, you know, come and do you...it's our job to teach you. We're not expecting y'all to come in knowing everything. We're not expecting y'all to be these super elite, knowledgeable, intelligent robots, you know what I'm saying? Their only expectation was to be human, to be open, and not be racist, transphobic, homophobic, Islamophobic, xenophobic, like any of that...That was their only mandate. Other than that, come in, stumble and learn. (Ali, 2020)

We come to various spaces, including educational spaces, with so much, whether personal, familial, communal or societal. How do we begin to grapple with all that, often, difficult stuff for instance, Ali spoke of depression—in spaces designed to confine and curtail, particularly educational spaces where, to learn can, unfortunately, mean attempting to forget or ignore or avoid or forego those difficulties and even, in some cases, the joys of life? The arts organization Ali became a part of created space(s), "brave space," as he called it, where he was welcome to show up as he was/is and question/investigate himself, his identities as well as issues facing his communities:

I never thought about a food desert before. I never thought about how gentrification affected me and my neighborhood...I never thought about these things because I just—I didn't have the language at the time...but they [the arts organization] put me on a trajectory to ask questions...What's happening in our neighborhood, in our city, in our country?

The work of teaching artists, Ali's work, is transformative. His time in the arts organization empowered him to take stock of his surroundings and what is going on in society—that they are connected. It presented him with a toolkit, with new ways of seeing himself and the world. That is liberatory and, I argue, what education should entail. As an educator, Ali does not shy away from this questioning for himself or his students:

I cherish moments like that, even for myself, right, because I think I led [a workshop on heteronormativity] at a university and one of the students...checked me on...I think it was “intersex” and it was defined funny for them. And they were like, “No, this needs to be like...” Check me. That’s what this is about because how ignorant of me to be...presenting on this if this is wrong or if this triggers somebody. Let me know how I can make the change and do the work myself...I’m not no...expert. I am continuing to build my toolkit just as y’all are. Please feel free to ask a question or challenge anything I present because this could be a learning moment and teachable moment for myself as well.

And those moments are transformative and iterative. Questioning once can lead to questioning again and again. These moments are also opportunities to present or pose solutions. They are opportunities to both confront and heal—confront distinct or incongruous challenges and heal from/toward more equitable solutions. Again, not shying away from difficult or challenging subjects, Ali also spoke about abolition, about transforming society, about what talking about it with students, can look and feel like. It is not easy:

I think I led a session at a high school. I think they were juniors...it’s hard for them to think about abolition or a world without prisons or a world without police, so we have these conversations about restorative justice, community accountability, defund the police, transformative justice...They’re like, “What the hell is that?” Like, “I don’t see—this person just raped someone. Why would we not want to jail them?” And I’m like, “Jail ain’t gone fix them”...That becomes a back and forth...I can’t blame them because it took me a minute to really think about what abolition means...I think these are the most difficult conversations because these are folks who have suffered.

The work Ali does and the work other teaching artists do is not easy, but the transformative, the restorative opportunities inherent in it are worth it, for “our lives, our survival,” as Ali said. Art is a way toward that healing and restoration:

I think it conjures something deep inside of us [that a regular conversation cannot]. I think that as we think about art being used as a tool for resistance. That this is our way, that to push that narrative to wider audiences and while thinking of art as a tool for healing, right. I think about the both/and: how can we resist and heal at the same time...our art as a tool for healing because we're traumatized. Black folks are traumatized consistently... We're traumatized and so our art, I feel like, could be used in a way that can help us kind of get through that [the pandemic, the repeated loss of Black lives]...breathe through that.

There's something about art, engaging with it and creating it, that allows perspective to broaden, that allows us to feel a little more deeply. It can house/be the language we are trying to find to situate ourselves, the challenges society presents. Ali asks us to breathe through it. To recognize the trauma (of the past and present) and seek a way forward, through it for the future.

Teaching and Learning: The Future

I asked Ali specifically what his visions for the future are. Taking the context of the present moment and past/present traumas, Ali's vision for what could be is one predicated on living without fear and being free of systems of authority and power that seek to hinder progress, especially for people of color:

[W]e've dismantled all that...when people have come together to think about how we can exist and live without that system, right. What accountability looks like for us moving forward. What does capital look like? Does capital get destroyed as well?...That's where my dreams are. Just like a world without this...free of anti-Blackness, free of colorism, free of all the ills and vices that have been placed in our face due to white supremacy and whiteness.

This dream, this call for a future free of racism, colorism, and "all the ills and vices...placed in our face," is not just wishful thinking for Ali. It is in the work he does as an artist and as an educator. He is explicit in his approaches to teaching and learning—the purpose of the work is that of dismantling, resisting, and healing. That to make that world closer to possible, art education must become an imperative; it must be taken seriously. Ali said,

Folks don't take arts education seriously. They think the arts are just something nice to do, the SEL [social emotional learning] importance in the arts needs to be...thought

about...like I said, our students are carrying, we're carrying all this trauma every day of our lives on our skin. So, we need an outlet. Arts education is that outlet.

It's not only that outlet; it is a means for resisting, for seeding change and saving lives. Art education is a means of equipping all involved (teachers, students, members of the community, etc.) with the tools necessary for critical, creative thought and approaches to making change. That is, seeking change through a critical lens, a lens that seeks to understand the role of power in one's life and a lens that underscores the power of creative and collaborative action toward a more just world.

This may seem cliché or somewhat romantic, but Ali is living this criticality with a sense of care, compassion, and urgency. As he said, "Art can save a life." He knows. He knows how it has impacted his life. He's also seen it transform the lives of his students and other young people he works with.

He told me about a mentee of his, someone he met at a poetry event. They met while touring sites in the city where the event was being held. Ali described their first encounter:

I remember walking...we were tired. We were hot, dehydrated. I was like, get me...in this building with air conditioning. I hear this loud girl behind me...And so, she's just like loud and living her life with her poetry [group]...I don't know what connected our spirits...but...I was like, 'I'm going to get to know this girl.' And once that decision was made, she poured a lot of what she was going through.

And she was going through, had been through a lot as a young person. And just as she shared past traumas with Ali, he was able to pour into her with encouragement. Years later, she was able to meet some of Ali's friends and told them, "Ali saved my life." Not knowing what she meant, Ali asked. He found out that she'd been in a dark place and that his "light" helped her. Ali didn't know the depth of her struggle at the time, but his light, his guidance carried her, helped her through it. To that Ali said,

And that is due to the arts. If it wasn't for our connection of...poetry and us meeting...who knows what our fates would've been...Just to have connections with my students where they know, like, I am genuinely here for you to be the best you, right. You have autonomy to be the best you. I'm here to support what that best version looks like.

Ali's support, his unwavering and encouraging support, is not something extraneous to who he is or what he does as an educator; it is embedded, something he deems necessary in a time and country rife with division and violence. As Toni Morrison (2019) stated in "Art Advocacy," "What all of us know, you and I, is that the situation is more than dire—it is dangerous" (p. 93). To be a person, a voice ringing out in the dark of this time, or in this case, a dark moment in his mentee's life, provides a sense of hope through clarity and compassion in a time of so much chaos.

When Ali spoke about the future, his dreams for it, he said he has a lot of questions, but "it makes [him] feel good." He said,

[O]ne day Black folks aren't going to feel like this or deal with this...one day my great-great grandson will be like...I remember, I read about in 2020 they did X—you know...And that...makes me feel good...because I know one day, we won't have to do this...We won't have anti-racist trainings because racism won't exist.

In moments like that, I felt like one of Ali's students. How do we begin to design and divine such grand visions for ourselves and others? It is to give of self and time what they are asking to be given. This is challenging work. Art is not an easy subject; it isn't always neat and pretty. The art Ali is referring to, the art education he renders clear and necessary, is one that also encompasses multitudes, one that engenders collaboration, one that encourages self-determination and community-building. It is critical and complex and tightly woven into the fabric of this moment, the city he lives and works in, and the actions, the practices of so many like him. We need that energy, that encouragement and openness. It is serious. We need Ali's work to help us articulate not only what art does/can do, but to see more clearly the society, the systems in which we are

enmeshed, the histories we've inherited. Ali said, "We could change all this." We could reshape the world, our existences in it, among each other. But that change requires listening to the voices and acknowledging the work of teaching artists like Ali.

Bea

"So, I think that for me, the main thing of my—in my teachings, in all my teaching has been like a transversal, transversal power of knowledge" (Bea, 2020).

I read "transversal" as intersecting, as the part or piece intersecting with other parts or pieces. Its origins in the language of math, geometry specifically, are fitting. Bea, an actor, an instructor of music, of visual arts and culture, has been teaching since she was a teenager. The transversal, the fragmentation in an effort to piece-by-piece, put together a whole or at least come to some understanding of how the pieces connect to each other is in line with the thoughtful, reasoned and innovative ways in which Bea sees art education, teaching, learning and life. Knowledge moves, in language(s), across perceived borders, within a discipline and across disciplines. It is a matter of recognizing the pieces and the whole, of seeing them at the same time. This vision requires experience, humor and foresight. Bea, who is originally from Mexico, spoke candidly about language(s), community, family, teaching and what it means to take on a life of/filled with the arts.

Origins

The idea of the transversal, of a fragmented approach to teaching the arts stems from Bea's initial training as a dancer; it is where she got her start as an educator. The technical approach of her training and subsequent instructional practice informed, not only the way she taught dance, but also the way she sees the arts. They are integral to academic life and social well-being. She spoke about her beginnings in dance, her start with theater and music:

I was trained in dance. I was trained in music. And I also started doing theater at a very, very young age...I never was interested in becoming a dancer. That wasn't true for music or for theater. Music and theater always were two careers that I was very interested, and actually it was very difficult to make the final decision before college to what—what I was pursuing.

Making that decision proved difficult and, at times, was a painful endeavor. For instance, there were times when family support was not there the way she'd hoped it would be. While the path was not always clear—in terms of which discipline she'd go into—it was always clear that she'd be an artist.

Education, becoming an educator, was sort of a natural offshoot of her arts training. As she stated, it is often what artists do to help sustain their practices and lives. For Bea, because she started teaching as a teen, it seemed a natural fit. While she knew she wouldn't become a professional dancer, she did realize it could pave the way for others. Her understanding of technique (ballet) could be helpful to young students. She's also a storyteller and integrated that into her approach to engage with students in creative and meaningful ways. She shared her reasoning for teaching dance:

I started becoming an instructor of dance because, for my mind, for my body, it was very clear that dance was a little more difficult than other art forms...but, so in a way, I understood what were like the tiny steps to—to learn how to do dancing. So, I was really picked, selected by my teacher to become her assistant...Since I was probably 17 or 18 years old, I started helping her.

Bea has been an educator for more than 30 years. The arts have been a part of her life for even longer, and as she said, she understood then, as a teen, for her mind and body, that dance wasn't the ultimate path, but it was an instrumental part of the path. Dance was just one of her beginnings. It became a foundation for her teaching approach—taking a lesson, an art form, a project, bit by bit, piece by piece, step by step to ensure understanding of the parts and what would be the whole or end result.

She's taught several subjects within the arts and communication. She's taught students at all levels, from toddlers to college students to adults within various communities. Whether teaching music to toddlers or non-verbal communication to young adults (college students) and adult learners (including parents and teachers), Bea has done so with the understanding that her time, her work and approaches to teaching and learning are best realized through community. When sharing about her home, she spoke about place, about family and community as central to her own educational and artistic foundation:

In Mexico, there's these institutions called casa de la cultura. And, those spaces are just like neighborhood...neighborhood center for culture, where, you know, there's lots of afterschool activities and weekend activities with cultural instruction and cultural clubs, you know, that approach many art forms: music, dance, and, of course, theater. So, I was part of many of those.

The cornerstones of place, its physical and communal/relational manifestations, also includes familial and cultural traditions. I asked Bea to share a little more of her personal story, specifically about her introduction to the arts. What she told me was something that she'd come to, been thinking about over the past few years, and something that she hadn't expected. She said,

[T]his narrative that I'm going to start...started just a few years ago...like I never recognized what I'm about to say till later...In my family there were a lot of educators...from all the family there were lots of people that were educators. Many of them, like elementary school, public school educators. Some others, like my father, he was a physician but ended up...being a teacher in the school of medicine. So everyone ended up...teaching in one way or another.

She comes from a long line of teachers, from her great-grandparents and grandparents to her father. While that was/is formative, it was familial and cultural traditions that began her entry into the arts. It was the art of poetry recitation to be exact:

[I]n Mexico in general—I think it's Latin American—there's a big tradition of poetry reciting...And then, as kids, from early ages, as soon as they are able to start speaking, they will be...learning, by heart, some of those poems and then be able to recite them.

It's like a sport, but in my house, it was really an Olympic sport. I mean everyone had to do it.

And it wasn't just the memorization and recitation of the poems, it was the power of voice, of intonation and inflection, the need to, somehow, carry forth the meaning of the poem through one's voice. Bea said,

I think it has to do with that very early training of understanding the power of [the] interpretation of words. Not just say the words, but how you say the words, cause that's—that's the art form of poetry reciting. It is the powerful way in which you are saying or pronouncing those words.

That early understanding of personal interpretation, of relaying meaning, the power inherent in that, was her original introduction to the arts. And, though she may have only begun to think about it again for the past few years, that idea of the power of interpretation and voice remains a part of her artistic practices and her approaches to teaching and learning. In that introduction and her ensuing experiences in the arts, an appreciation and passion for the arts was instilled and explored. She began to study theater and, ultimately, decided that was the route she wanted to take, but other art forms and ways of knowing continue to shape her work as an artist and as an educator.

Identity: Forging a Multifold Path

Being an artist, being a teaching artist is not easy. It is difficult work—formative and compelling, but also difficult. While Bea knew she'd pursue the arts—and theater in particular—who'd she become through/within them was somewhat of an unknown. The path to the present wasn't direct or linear. It was multifold and iterative. Though she had formal training in dance and theater, she also found music.

Her path requires all of the above. As a performer and educator, they are all essential to her craft and teaching practice. Bea shared a little about those formative years, and how she came to decide on, to claim “performer” as her artistic identity:

I started getting some of the education and training to become a teacher in the Royal Academy, dancing. So, I never pursued the dancer part, but I did go ahead and start some training as an educator...I did...instruction probably 10 or 12 years of my life. At the same time that I was, on the other hand, becoming a performer, a theater actor.

She continued, “But at the same time, I kept doing a lot of music. So, in the moment of deciding music or theater, I became an instructor of dance.” All three art forms (e)merged at once. She explained, “So like the three things happened at the same time. And I think from then on those three art forms have been weaving my career, my performing career but also my education and as an educator.” Claiming all three as necessary and weaving through her career, Bea still utilizes all that she has learned and experienced through the arts when she teaches.

It all informs her work as an educator, and her work as an educator also informs her craft. She spoke of a play she directed, a play she adapted from a classic Spanish story. She spoke about how it was a success in local/community theater and later, after some negotiation, a success on a larger, more mainstream stage:

[W]hen they [the mainstream theater] decided to produce me—let me say, it’s a Spanish classic...I did the adaptation to relocate it in Mexico...So, it had dancers and musicians and actors. So, I had like 27 people on stage...with everyone being a part of the play.

In order to reproduce and adapt that classic, Bea utilized artists from various disciplines, but she didn’t stop there. She had the opportunity to hire professional musicians, dancers and actors for each and every role. Instead, she pulled artists from the community, performers of all ages and levels of experience. She said,

I had the chance to get all professional musicians, dancers and actors on stage. And I decided not to do that, and to give the opportunity to people who were starting their careers...Great performers, but the realm of aficionados. Some people that were

learning, like I included kids that were in school...I brought even the principal of [the school], who is a dancer, or she knows Mexican folkloric. So, I invited her to perform.

She explained, "I want that audience to see what our community is." The arts, as Bea spoke of later in the interview, are not just for a chosen few or those who can afford it; it should be for everyone. What better way to adapt the play and show community than to include members of the actual community? It is this sense of access and community building that drives much of Bea's work. She's worked with people of all ages, in both school and community settings. Her approach to teaching and learning is inclusive in that sense; there is room for everyone, space for everyone to learn in their own way and share their unique knowledge.

Access and Impact: Making Connections

Creativity, innovation and reasoning can happen all at once. They exist at once and can function as a means for integrating all we know, learn and experience. Bea sees art as a central expression of the mind at work: "I do think art is a lot of expressions that we see everywhere. I think it's part of our mind." She went on to say that she's researched and taught multiple intelligences for many years. She is interested in what art can do and the ways in which we think through the arts, through expression, whether it takes shape in theater or music, physics or history. It's about how we think—taking those pieces and figuring out how they fit together, not in a specific way or the right way, but in a way that works for the individual and their immediate communities. Bea continued,

So, all of these things kind of, you know, nourished from each other, meaning our mind is able, you know, if we are lucky...we have our five senses and all those...channels that are bringing information towards us...it also happens in our mind and then we have also all those different channels to show, to express, to communicate what is happening in our mind already...and to process either—to get it inside and also to express it. We are definitely talking about our brain...Because that's the way we are perceiving the world. We are seeing and we are sensing.

Learning, then, is inherently about connections—connections taking place in the brain and those taking place externally, in the space and time of experience. Art influences and provides a means for expressing those connections in the myriad of ways they manifest. Bea shared an example of making those connections more explicit within different arts practices and across other academic disciplines:

So, one of the examples was one of my first, actually, arts integration residence I had a in a school...at the time I arrived, which was like 2000, 2001, 2002, it was already harshly gentrified...And then at the point that I arrived, a school that fought to have two buildings because the old building wasn't enough for their population, and they finally got an annex to be built. At the time that I arrived, that annex building was getting emptier and emptier.

Bea sets the scene for the arts integration residence and the projects that ensued. The school was a reflection of societal and community changes. These changes were integral to the work she and the students did during her residency there. She spoke of the history unit in which she and the teacher integrated various art forms:

[W]e were working, it was a curriculum about history and then we approached, you know, all kinds of art forms because we did things in paintings; the kids were doing interviews. They were interviewing [community members]...I think that was just an amazing, an amazing unit...What seemed to be like very fragmented, like little research, little dances, a poem here, you know, a little dialogue here became something put together and presented to the community...It worked. It worked very nicely. And at the same time, the kids were learning, you know, were learning how to write, learning how to research, were learning how to interview.

This is the power of art, the power of connection, making purposeful connections between content areas, the arts, and community. When speaking of the importance of the arts, about what art can do in the world and for those who engage with it, Bea said,

For me, that has always been the arts, a beautiful way of expressing all that you know, and your point of view, your worldview...your feelings, your thoughts that sometimes you cannot express with words because you don't have that language.

It's that grappling with language, with what we experience and perceive about ourselves and the world that Bea shares through her work. Taking it piece by piece, thinking through our intentions and actions with(in) community. It is that integration of mind and act, of art and community, of art across content areas—that's how we develop the languages necessary to express ourselves and (re)shape our worlds.

Teaching and Learning: A Philosophy of Fragmentation

Just as community is integral to her work as both an artist and an educator, Bea shared a bit of her teaching philosophy—what works and sometimes doesn't in her pedagogy. Returning to the "transversal power of knowledge," as Bea put it, she continues to discuss what that means and looks like as she teaches:

Like, if you know a little piece of this area, this subject that is math—I'm learning math. Yes, but this little piece, guess what, has to do with biology and, you know, then this piece of biology totally has to do with geography. So, I think I have—that has been like my, in a way, my passion when I am teaching and for many other things, even my own life.

Taking cues from her example, this approach to teaching and learning—that taking something piece by piece and connecting it within and across disciplines, reminds me of how critical approaches to teaching frame and include those pieces: questioning, inquiring into a specific community or societal issue, etc. Again, there's no hard-set separation. It's all connected. Bea continued to explain her approach:

Like how every piece of learning can also be a door for a very, very different realm. You know, so eventually throughout your education...you might be learning about theater, and you feel you're not interested in theater; it doesn't matter because maybe one of those pieces will, you know, link you to something that you are really interested—that might be literature...or it could be history, could be physics.

What I heard from Bea as she explained this fragmented approach to learning and teaching, taking "fragments of knowledge" and letting them live within and between subjects was a call

for exposure and access to the arts and intentional linkages from one subject to another to another. Why not relate or introduce visual arts in a math lesson or unit? It has and continues to be done, but not on a wide scale. According to Bea, arts integration is a space for such connections: “[D]uring arts integration, there’s arts education that happens... [I]n arts integration what you want is to be a helpful tool for the teacher in place, for the curriculum we are—we are trying to approach through the arts.” Bea made a point to distinguish between arts integration and art education—that arts integration is embedding the arts into an established, typically non-arts discipline or content area, like math or science or history. It can serve as a tool for understanding concepts and increasing student engagement. It is a means of leveraging the power of the arts and the content area in which it is embedded. It is a means of engaging the whole student.

Constance

“I’ve taught all over the place, but I think the sweet spot for me is being in the community” (Constance, 2020).

Community is where it begins and ends with Constance. An artist (primarily dance), an educator and an activist, Constance has chosen this work for many reasons, chief among them, her students’ growth and well-being, the development of their vision as artists/creators and people, their exploration of the arts as a means of better understanding themselves and their world. Through travel, through rich engagements with community, through work/teaching that has demonstrated the possibilities inherent in care, a sort of critical care, Constance has overcome, sustained, embraced and embarked upon the work that she seeks to define and that, at the same time, defines much of who she is.

Origins

Like the other teaching artists I spoke with, Constance began her arts training and her teaching career at a young age. She began dancing as a child and trained in many dance schools

in the city, each with their own training techniques and teaching philosophies. Their impact on her personally and professionally remain.

Though primarily a dancer, Constance also trained in theater and incorporates other art forms into her teaching (i.e., creative writing). What compelled her movement and evolution as a young artist, continues to move her now. One of the places where she trained centered self-reflection, a sense of artistry and community. She described that dance school this way:

They are heavily influenced by the African diaspora and so everything comes from a place of self-reflection, of artistry as opposed to dance being like a sport...so like, training dancers who, yes, are technically sound, but who dance—who are trying to connect to the audience, right. So, and a lot of their pieces are—like also have a social justice connection, which is a huge part of, you know, how I work.

This training had a major influence on her and the way she's evolved as an educator and as an artist. She said later, "Those things made dance accessible." As someone who grew up without a lot in terms of material resources, as someone who identifies as a minoritized person, who didn't fit the stereotype of a dancer, Constance credits that dance school and others for providing a space for her to learn and flourish despite perceived barriers. She said,

I was always, you know, a plus size woman, even when I was younger—I was a plus sized girl. You know, I had like all these things: I was poor, right. I grew up poor. So, there were all these barriers to how can I be a professional dancer. But things like that, like being grounded in those things made it accessible. It made me realize, "Oh, no, no, no. I'm an artist. I'm a young artist, but I'm an artist."

Being grounded in community, in seeing the world as a place to be (re)made through social justice, in the activity of self-reflection and artistry as opposed to just having the technique, provided Constance with the knowledge, experience and confidence to pursue and achieve a career as a professional dancer, here in the U.S and abroad. Engendering that sense of empowerment is what she tries to do as an educator.

She claims the label or title of activist in addition to artist and educator. That claim is not separate from who she is or what she does, can do as an educator. She told me that that aspect is really personal:

I think in addition to all of the training I had as a young artist, about how to create socially aware work, that's great, but if you—I feel like, you know, as an artist, if you're not kind of constantly questioning the world around you, you kind of have nothing to pull from...So, it has, not only its roots in my artistic training, but it has its roots in, you know, how I've grown to be, yes, the kind of person who looks around and has strong feelings about things one way or another and has strong feelings about things that need to change...And constantly questioning...how can I be a part of that change?

This is a central question for many at a time of so much turmoil, nationally and worldwide. But that question is rooted in what Constance does, how she approaches teaching because teaching is one way she can contribute to change. “You know, right from where I'm standing right now,” she continued, “as an educator, as a, you know, as anything, as a woman, as a Latina, like what can I do?” These questions are not something she shies away from in an educational space; she brings them with her as a means of teaching and creating a sense of community.

“It's not just empty words,” she said. “I'm really, like, sharing from a very personal place. You know, that I understand this experience of feeling passionate about something, about being disgruntled about experiences...this is not—I'm not trying to pull something from my students that I don't actively engage myself in daily life.” There's no inherent or forced separation of that questioning, of that evolution; rather, it is central to her teaching practice—not only why she teaches, but how and to what affect.

Identity: Movement and Motivation

At the beginning of each interview, I asked the teaching artists how they'd describe their professional identity—e.g., who are you in the work you do? What title or label do you prefer? Constance led with motivation: “I would describe it as trying to be a motivator.” That motivation

stems from her own experiences with the arts and from her desire to support students and community through her chosen art: dance. Her core message as an instructor and the way she approaches teaching has evolved, as she said, but at its center is this tenet of motivation. She said,

I think initially, when I started teaching I felt like...I was going to be this hardcore dance teacher, and I was going to raise these phenomenal dancers, and then, as it evolved, I realized I just wanted to be the kind of person who motivates, especially young people but all...all of my students. Like motivating them to be better people because they encounter this art, dance.

Constance's own evolution as an educator is rooted in a kind of tension between wanting to train dancers and teach toward community and care. Why should there be a distinction? That evolution, her progression toward just wanting to be a motivator speaks to the ability to teach the content or craft and do so with a deep sense of responsibility and care, care for student success and well-being.

Access and Impact: What Art Can Do

Self-evaluation and re-evaluation are what the arts offer, that and so much more, according to Constance. Access to the possibilities inherent in arts education should be available to all; it should be embedded in students' day-to-day lives and activities. Constance wishes it was a core component of students' educational experiences:

What I wish—what I wish was, is I really wish it was a foundational part of their day. I really, like, the, you know, the idea of [an art school] being this place for young artists...Like your day should be a mixture [or core academic disciplines and the arts]...It should be that...It should have always been that in my opinion. How we came so far from it, you know, is really just, it's a social issue. It's a social justice issue.

The arts, access to them shouldn't be, "this...exclusive, special thing," according to Constance. It should be a standard or foundational part of all students' education, not just a select few. And what might such access entail? What might it yield?

After sharing how dance and theater training impacted her personally—that through them she was able to move through perceived barriers—Constance talked about what art can do:

There are scientific studies that show that it [art] helps you learn. It helps you retain information. It helps you...creatively look at problem solving. So, I hope—I really hope that that has helped my students no matter what they're doing.

Constance's students may not become professional dancers, though some have pursued that career. No matter what they decide to do with their lives, in/for their futures, she hopes the arts have a positive impact. She hopes that it empowers, that it inspires the way they see themselves and the way they look at the world.

There are times when Constance has come upon a bit of resistance from students; they may doubt themselves, their ability to work creatively. Students may say things like, “No, I can never do that.” But through scaffolding and collaborative creation, students can come to realize that making art is something they can do. Constance said, “But, I think that's one of the times where no matter what age you are, you see, like, ‘Oh, I can do, like, I can do that.’” “That” is an exercise that transitions students from writing (whatever is on their minds) to translating that writing (maybe a word) into movement, and eventually into a choreographed phrase.

In the way those who taught her made dance accessible, Constance attempts to do the same. And the impact can be manifold, especially during a time often referred to as the convergence of multiple pandemics. She said,

I mean this is a time where we can use the arts as like a therapeutic, as a, you know, way to kind of process...I think for anybody who views art as a part of their life, it's a part of processing this pandemic...So, I think it's going to be very telling to see how it looks on the other side...I think it's going to help tell the story of what this was like for everybody.

Coupling the arts with the power to process, to cope with and perhaps gain some healing through present circumstances, speaks to Constance's belief in art's ability to empower and encourage students, not just as artists, but in and across other academic disciplines and as people.

Teaching and Learning: Critical Care

Teaching is more than a profession; it is, according to Constance, a kind of life work, one filled with devotion, with acknowledging and working through challenges, one filled with a deep sense of responsibility for students' well-being and growth; it is centered in a kind of critical care.

It is critical in the sense that the care shared with students is thoughtful and thought-provoking. It is as Constance said, "life or death." And giving of self, such care can be hard to come to and move through. Being an educator is not easy, but Constance believes it is very necessary:

It feels like, as an educator, you have to go into your classroom and turn off all the other, you know, bologna...turn all that off and just...be fully present. Because our students, they need everything. They need everything, every moment. They need as much as they can get so that they have any chance of being able to...do amazing things.

Everything else just kind of recedes when teaching, according to Constance. It must be so that she can be fully present with and for her students. It feels "almost life and death" because Constance sees what's possible in the classroom and what students bring with them when they enter it. She said,

It feels so important, you know. Sometimes it feels heavy. Sometimes it feels like, man, this is do or die. This classroom, however many students I'm facing, they need every ounce of my attention, energy, creative whatever, you know, maneuvering...They need every ounce...doesn't matter what else is going on before I step in that room or get on that Zoom. Nothing else matters. Let me give them one hundred percent.

Centering students' experiences, their voices and time matters to Constance. It matters, and it can make a difference. Centering students and creating a sense of community in the classroom is what Constance sees as necessary and beneficial to all. She said, "I try to create a community...But I want—like, I want there to be that sense of community so that everybody feels not only responsible but empowered." That students feel like a part of the class comes with

some responsibility. If, for instance, they are creating a “community piece,” they’ll all have a role to play, not only in the final performance(s), but also in its creation, in its direction. That students, through the process of ideation and creation, feel empowered is the ultimate goal.

Constance acknowledges that while that is the goal, it is never completely certain how things will turn out. In reminding me of her own evolution, she said,

And I feel like if I—if I take the other stance of...kind of the like the beginning of my teaching career, of “No, I’m the teacher. You just do what I say, and this is how it goes,” which is very traditional like dance training...I really try to make it a place where we’re learning from each other, but we’re also creating together...So nobody ever feels like less than, which is another thing I feel like...arts training should provide. It should make you feel better. It should make you feel empowered.

The impetus to feel better and create/carry a sense of empowerment comes from the community built, the care and thought Constance puts into her teaching, and from questioning self, society and world. Like Ali and Bea, there’s a desire to educate not only in an art(s) but through them—asking of students to think about their world in new and deeper ways:

[I]t’s evolved from, you know, the idea that I’m a dance teacher. I’m going to teach dancers. It definitely has...evolved into feeling like this work is more about...human connection...the biggest evolution has been going from, “No, it’s not dance for dance’s sake.” Like this is—there’s a bigger mission here, and the more young people I can work with to try to get them to the point of being artistic, of being creative, of looking at the world and really, really evaluating and looking at themselves and really evaluating—that’s what makes it worth it.

And driving the call for care, for empowerment is access to the arts for all. The impact is great.

Constance is proof. Her approaches to teaching and learning are proof. Being artistic or creative is about more than technical skills; it’s about creatively and critically engaging with and evaluating oneself and the world.

The City

“Stories thus carry out a labor; creating, maintaining, and/or shifting narratives about places in which we live and how they produce us and us them” (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015, p. 34).

What is the labor, the message carried through the stories of Ali, Bea and Constance, particularly as they relate to the place, the city in which they do their work? Their stories are both produced by and help shape the city, its beauty, its challenges and all of the nuances that make it uniquely and perplexingly embracing. This is not lost in the ways in which these artists pursue their work, the ways in which they create, the ways in which they cultivate the care and consideration with which they teach. The city as a physical space(s), the city as shaped by historical and sociopolitical dynamics, is considered here as a means of contextualizing and situating the stories Ali, Bea and Constance shared. At the same time, this is also a means of acknowledging that this one place has myriad meanings for each artist, that it is not the only place they've lived and worked. My hope in including, in reserving some space for place, is to understand and acknowledge it as another voice, as another marker of /within the stories shared. Place is not neutral. It is not silent observer of human acts, something prescribed to a backdrop (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). It is integral to who we are, how we interact (or not), and how we express our various identities, how we navigate our profession(s) and institutions.

The arts are a kind of path or gateway to knowing a place. They are also a path or gateway to travel, particularly for these artists. Whether the city is a place of origin or a kind of second or third homeplace, it is a place, as described by these artists, that both embraces and braces for difference—that is, it, even with its challenges, can embrace difference, but it must also contend with issues of economic depression and withdrawal, segregation, discrimination, educational inequities and a kind of loss ascribed to what it means to be an artist there.

Identity: Shaping Space

Change is inevitable, or so it seems. While much change has taken shape in the city's cultural and artistic spheres, there's still want for more, at least for Constance. As a dancer,

having traveled all over the country and the world, she looks to her travels as points of comparison. As a plus-sized dancer, the city did not and perhaps still doesn't fully embrace her. Other cities she traveled to and lived in seemed to embrace her more wholly. They had, according to Constance, a more expansive view of who a dancer is and can be. She said of the city: "I think [the city], you know, has a little ways to go still in terms of embracing difference and not being so kind of closed minded." What about a place makes it feel closed or closed minded? Certainly, the ways individuals and groups experience it, but there's also a sense, according to Constance, of a kind of plateau or pause in terms of progress/change. She said, "[I]t can sometimes feel a little stifling." That stifling feeling may not emerge for everyone or every artist in the city, she continued, but for her, after seeing how artists are "treat[ed] and respect[ed]" elsewhere, it has become very clear. Change is necessary, according to Constance, not only for her as an artist, but for all, especially young people. And there are signs of change, she contended:

I see great changes though. Like, I see, for instance, I see Latino playwrights being utilized much more than...ten years ago. I see some [dance] companies in [the city] that I don't think would've gotten...much attention...getting funding and getting the attention they deserve.

While change is sought, it is also taking shape in the city. Ali said of the city: "I think that [the city] is such a beautiful city. It has such a rich, richness to it...I also think that we have...organized, no-nonsense youth. And that...is inspiring as hell." The no-nonsense youth Ali referred to are shaping much of that change. There is a sense of clear and purposeful organization, whether in the present or looking to the past. For instance, looking to Ali's past experiences with the arts organization that embraced/embraces him, there are places and people in the city determined to see a shift, not only in arts and culture as Constance mentioned, but in the city's institutions, policies, practices and its education system.

Access and Impact: Approaching Loss

I cannot fathom the depth of loss perceived in the fluctuating and uncompromising disengagement with critical art practices, with the common misunderstanding associated with creative, innovative change in what school becomes in the presence of/with art. There is a certain grief associated with departures from the core curriculum. This grief—demonstrated in cuts in funding, etc.—lives in the bodies and minds of students, educators, communities. Art sheds a light and plumbs the depths of these losses. Teaching artists, working, residing in a sort of limbo or liminal state, are always in some way addressing this [loss] grief. It is an unexpected and often unexpressed (explicitly) grief. It shows up in policies and programs designed to address some “ill” manifestation of loss, of desperation. But it’s not all sad. There is/can be joy, joy of knowing self in relation to the creative act, the act of making, whether a mask or a metaphor. No, art did not save me. No, art cannot define me [wholly]. There is a combination of contexts and mind muscle that serve as safety and possibility. Away from here is still here somehow.

Teaching and Learning: Social Change

Ali, Bea and Constance, as educators in the city, are instrumental in aiding youth to see beyond and shape/forward a self and city that embodies the same purposeful ingenuity, diversity and creative work for social change. Ali takes pride in and inspiration from the city’s youth. He also questions its citizens generally, namely adults:

Like all of our youth are on the same page. Why the adults can’t get on the same page, I don’t know. But our youth are like...“We don’t like it”...and just [to] be able to know that that’s happening in my city makes me feel like there’s some work I need to do as an adult in adult space to try to get us to the way our youth are.

The youth Ali spoke about come from all backgrounds, ages and experiences. These youth seem to have similar understandings of both the problems the city faces and the progress necessary to make space for all. This is inspiring and promising, but as both Ali and Constance shared, each

in their own way, there is resistance to such promise and change. According to Ali, “there are still little nuggets of the city that are completely resistant.” And that resistance, according to Ali, is focused on a lack of support for or unity around the mattering of Black lives. He continued:

There are parts of the city that don't care about what our youth are doing or don't care what, like, organizers are doing to—to, you know—center Black folks because until we center Black folks...nothing else is going to be done...And so, I think that until we get to that page, we'll still be disgruntled and disconnected and not work towards justice and liberation and that's because people ain't thinking about the other person.

Saying and repeating that Black lives matter, Ali seeks to disrupt the status quo and challenge, not only himself and his students, but all, anyone in the city—challenge them to see beyond themselves and be prepared to move/act toward equity and justice for Black people, thus everyone. That's where the beauty and the usefulness of his teaching philosophy and pedagogy come into play; it's where Constance's critical care comes into play; it's where Bea's discernment and thoughtfulness come into play. Education, especially in the city, is (should be) about more than school or schooling; it should be about the inspiration and expansiveness Ali mentioned, about the ability to self-reflect, evaluate and re-evaluate self and world as Constance made clear.

Conclusion

To see the change so widely deemed necessary, we have to see other people. We have to want to see them for who they truly are, in all their complex personhood (Gordon, 2008). The arts allow for a different kind of vision, one that is sincere, thoughtful, creative and critical. I see this in Bea's example of her residency in a school situated in a neighborhood that had undergone and is undergoing significant shifts in its culture and history. Her residency there provided an opportunity for students to learn and engage with those shifts and histories. That work also

included community members, community organizations and institutions. Again, this resounds with Ali's call for seeing each other, for truly collective efforts toward change.

That change requires unified and critically thoughtful movement as well as an acknowledgement of the spatial and social histories that shape the city. It is a history of segregation, one not entirely unique to the city—we can see the manifestations of the history of segregation all over the country, but that does not mean it should be ignored or accepted as the only pertinent history or the only path to be maintained for the future. This history also asks us to acknowledge that social structures and cultural institutions reflect it. Constance said, “I mean cause, you know, [the city] [is] very historically segregated, right, has definite challenges with race relations and even with classism, and we can't help but reflect that in [the] arts.” With artist educators like Constance, Ali and Bea, there's not only that recognition but work to reveal and transform it, beyond just care for art and cultural organizations and institutions. This also applies to the city's educational system.

Constance acknowledges that the city is not singular in its history and challenges, but even with that recognition, those challenges still feel enormous and deeply personal:

I mean, we're not unique, but, you know, I think we have a lot of issues in our educational system. I know it's happening all over the country. I guess, you know, maybe when you live [in the city], you feel like it's so much worse for your children. It feels like the role of an educator is so much deeper and more important because the system feels so broken.

The care with which these artists see themselves, their students, their city is remarkable. It speaks to the possibilities inherent in learning even when the “system feels so broken.” And even within that system, there are glimmers—as in these teaching artists, their work and that of so many others—of possibility and change, of seeing within and beyond self. Bea spoke about her experience arriving in the city and about the power of language(s) and art:

I think for society, it's very, very, very important to—especially, that was true for me arriving to [the city]. Visiting schools—I have visited schools where there's 30 languages, 30 native languages in that building. And I know every language is also a point of view. It's a worldview. Languages allow you to see the world in a different way...So, what other helpful tool we have but the arts? Cause the arts really cross, you know, cross a lot of languages and, kind of, help us...At least, you know, the visuals—something [that] can allow us to communicate...and understand each other and respect each other and see how intelligent every person is in the way they are expressing what they know. For me that has always been the arts, a beautiful way of expressing all that you know and your point of view.

The arts are not separate from what we know; they are a means of expressing what we know, who we are and how we see the world. Engaging with arts in this way, in a city that can be both beautiful and broken, allows for those seeking change to enact their own means of mending, of transforming the brokenness to reveal the beauty, beauty that can be expressed by all in the form(s) that make the most sense for self and can also be understood by others.

CHAPTER FIVE: ENACTING POIESES—A DISCUSSION

Introduction: Revisiting Borders and Limbos

From here, the expanse of arts education appears limitless; it also appears to be a space just beyond what is near: an outstretched hand, a desire to reach those limitless shores. It is just beyond one's reach, a horizon always moving farther and farther away as one gains some distance, as one, without too much assurance, attempts to move closer to it.

The promise of arts education is one that I know. As a former visual art student, as a poet, I benefit(ted) from its expanse and its embrace. But as Ali, Bea and Constance shared, the horizon, no matter how majestic or moving, no matter how much it beckons, can be both disarming and fleeting.

Origins

I return to the idea of the borderland, that art education is a space of possibility, of potential, and, also, a site of conflict and contradiction: “Anzaldúa’s work interrogates the depth of emotional conflict infused by desire in the borderland. Borderlands, like the invisible lines upon the earth’s surface...are locations of psychic, physical, and emotional conflict” (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015, p. 41). It is both a site of loss and a site for gaining sight, for (re)gaining recognition of self, of others and the world.

At a time when distances are both near and far, invasive and collapsed, the arts can provide some clarity, space to express and share how the world is viewed, how one can approach and appear in it. This is a time of collapse, of loss, of so much willingness to give, and even with the giving there is confusion. How do we proceed? What comes next? Who are we in the midst of and after this moment of pandemic, of civil unrest and an awakening of sorts?

These teaching artists visit upon horizons all the time: horizons of identity, of practice, of relation and community. Just as they approach their work with rigor and purpose, they seek out the seemingly elusive horizons - in a time of neoliberalism - and reach and reach and reach. And sometimes they get there. There's a spark, a certain curiosity and growth, a coming together, an understanding of the self-seen; this is what they see and encourage in their students. Those moments drive their work. Their own past experiences and hopes for the future drive their work. And in moving toward these horizons there are lessons to be learned and shared; there's an imperative, a call to care; there's a questioning and holding of identity; and there's movement toward the expansion of minds, hearts and perspectives through arts education.

Identity: Voice and Self-Determination toward the Intersectional

Intersectionality is invoked in this work as a tool and a lens through which to see, in part, the work these artists do. Though Ali was the only one to mention intersectionality, or an intersectional approach, by name, all three teaching artists addressed or spoke of difference (whether race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, etc.) as it relates to student learning. For Constance, it is the way the arts are presented or can be interpreted within/by a community and acceptance or non-acceptance when participating in arts educational programming.

These teaching artists, whether they explicitly state it or not, are involved in the work of social justice, work toward educational and social equity, work for more inclusive systems/structures of learning and teaching. Inherent in that work is a struggle against perceived norms, against (un)accepted practices, educational subjects, and materials. It is a struggle against existing systems/structures of authority and power. Only one artist, Constance, self-identifies as an activist. Identity (in both a broad and deep sense of the concept) is only part of intersectionality's theoretical and action-oriented foundations. Identity plays a major role in this

dissertation. I do not go into nor do I highlight imbalances of power or various systems of oppression as they relate to these artists' lives and lived experiences; rather, my intent is to provide a space for further investigation into the ways in which systems of authority and power can directly or indirectly harm or influence the work of and programming surrounding teaching artists.

Earlier in this text, I mentioned the fact that sidelining art education is not an accident of history. While art education and arts integration, more specifically, are gaining more attention and use, there is still pushback when it comes to calls for increased funding for arts programming or for more widespread access to it.

There is room for intersectionality here. Joseph, Haynes, and Patton (2021) implored readers to “stop using the term *intersectionality* unless they are using it thoughtfully and with conviction, meaning illuminating power and oppression that moves beyond analyzing multiple identities” (p. 124). As stated, these artists, inhabiting and determining multiple identities, also directly and indirectly address power and oppression in their work as teaching artists.

Ali, Bea and Constance spoke of decreased funding. Constance spoke of what it is like to present oneself and one's work to a school administrator only for it to be rejected or dismissed as inappropriate or not useful:

[W]hen it comes to being able to offer programming or work even in a school, that's a huge challenge, cause the arts are the first to go. It's the first thing cut. So, I would say that is, you know, kind of first and foremost cause we don't necessarily see a value for what we do as artists, as teaching artists. And then I would say beyond that, there are, you know, some very specific challenges with like with cultural, cultural bias. So, for instance, 'Latinos don't do ballet.' I've actually had an administrator say that to me. (Constance, 2020)

There are several layers of imbalance in Constance's story. First, that the arts are usually the first thing cut in a school. Second, that there are perceptions, biases we all carry. Unfortunately, those

are not always allayed in our professional lives. The thought that ballet is not for everyone, or that it's inappropriate for some decries a system that doesn't see or necessarily appreciate the value of the arts.

In looking into intersectionality, I've seen a distinct and consistent call for clarity, thoughtfulness and intention when using it (see Collins, 2019):

We boldly state that if education researchers are using intersectionality as a frame for understanding difference rather than for understanding power and oppression, they are participating in the colonization of the concept. (Joseph, Haynes & Patton, 2021, p. 124)

My hope is that through the words and shared experiences of Ali, Bea and Constance, an understanding of/for an intersectional approach to teaching and learning can continue to take shape (Love, 2019). It counters present disparities (e.g., access to internet and other materials for remote learning, use of culturally responsible and relevant pedagogies, etc.) and forward a future in which those once historically excluded gain opportunities to access, explore and succeed in art education and education, generally.

Access and Impact: Radical Imperatives in Art Education

The history of art education is filled with moments of breaking barriers and long stints of invisibility. In recent history, there have been waves of acceptance, inclusion, and even moments of triumph. The arts became a core academic subject in the U.S. in the 1990s, joining subjects like math and history (Remer, 2003). While this acknowledgement and inclusion has brought about new movement—the inclusion of more art educational programming outside of school and the proliferation of arts-centered primary and secondary education institutions—there remains a sense of dis-ease with full integration. This dis-ease comes in many forms, from underfunding in-school arts programs to the separation of art teachers and teaching artists (as distinct entities in

school communities). It settles into the experiences of artists like Ali, Bea, and Constance, who are advocates for more integration of the arts into school and beyond.

Identity Work/Working with Identity

What the arts provide, in addition to stress reduction, socio-emotional regulation, collaborative engagement and technical skill, is the space to investigate self and world (Dewhurst, 2018; Diaz & McKenna, 2017a/b; Greene, 1995; Stixrud & Marlowe, 2016). Ali, Bea, and Constance spoke about specific examples of lessons they've taught or co-taught, where students were able to widen their perspectives about themselves, community issues, the city, extending their sight into/onto the world. For instance, each of their experiences entering the arts demonstrates the push and pull of inclusive and equitable access to the arts. Their origins in the arts and their identities are shaped by it (the arts and the communities they are/have been a part of). Further, their approaches to teaching and learning demonstrate the same thoughtfulness, criticality and care they seek to share with their students.

The arts and the arts community kept Ali in school; it propelled him to graduate from high school and seek more education. Bea fought for full inclusion of the community within her artistic practice as evidenced by the success and reach of her play. Constance came to a clearer understanding of self through dance, which pushed her to be just as caring and inclusive in her teaching practice.

Part of that work, as Ali spoke about, is recognizing the difficulty inherent in it—in having discussions about issues like police brutality, mental health, identity and inequity:

Sociocultural factors such as race, class, gender, and sexuality are inherently tied to art teaching and learning through curriculum and pedagogy...However, art educators often find themselves unprepared when sociocultural difference becomes a point of contention within their classrooms. (Travis & Hood, 2016, p. 321)

Straddling various lines/borders within and outside of schooling, teaching artists are often uniquely qualified to tackle such tenuous subjects. As Dewhurst (2018) put it, “To teach and learn about identity requires an acceptance of the messiness of the process. As in art, when talking about identity, there are rarely easy or clear-cut answers” (p. 12). Ali, Bea, and Constance didn’t purport to have the answers. What they provided were ways of thinking about and through the messiness of addressing socio-cultural issues in an educational space.

I’ve attempted, in this inquiry, to contextualize that thinking and those spaces. In centering the voices, the experience and expertise of Ali, Bea and Constance, I’ve attempted to demonstrate that the spaces between - between research and affect, between artist and educator, between experience and expertise - are not as wide or disparate as they may seem:

to what extent does social research align itself primarily with dominant discourses, ignoring the expertise of those who suffer most? If methodologies insist that being ‘too close/involved/emotional’ is a bias, but ‘too far/disengaged/rational’—in the face of injustice—is not, to what extent have we fundamentally clouded our theoretical and empirical insights? Is it not particularly problematic in the study of oppression that we have, in fact, widened the space between ‘expertise’ and ‘experience?’ (Fine, 2006, p. 95)

I take Fine’s questions to propose that educational research be a space of centering the voices in the midst of the phenomena under investigation. This is not new. However, the ways in which research participants are often (re)presented defies or, rather, situates itself in opposition to their expertise, their unique and growing knowledge.

In asking Bea, Ali, and Constance about their work and experiences, about their ways of thinking and moving and teaching, it was important to position myself as an interested party, eager to learn from/with them. They are well aware of the identity work involved in and necessitated by urban art education, by education generally. They are aware of the challenges students may face; they have been there. They are uniquely positioned to listen to, center and hold the experiences and aspirations of their students. As Toshalis (2010) wrote:

Urban teaching is identity work...To achieve equity in schools and classrooms requires that teachers sustain a near-constant awareness of others' unique perceptions and identities. As teachers negotiate classroom relationships with youth across cultural, gender, linguistic, racial, sexual and socioeconomic differences (to name a few), identities get exposed, deconstructed and disrupted in the classroom as a matter of course. (p. 15).

An awareness of and concrete yet flexible approach to addressing that exposure, deconstruction and disruption is necessary if art education (read also as general education) is to continue the work of creating the spaces, the impetus to address the inequities inherent in it and society. Part of addressing all of the above is the critical care Constance asserts, the questioning and challenge Bea and Ali spoke about. This requires—yes, an individual propensity for seeking out positive change, for utilizing creative ingenuity to address social ills—but also a collective harnessing of individual strengths, knowledge, experience and creativity; it requires the spirit of community.

Teaching and Learning: Critical Care—An Imperative

Care can be defined in a multitude of ways. The Care Collective (2020) defines care as, “our individual and common ability to provide the political, social, material and emotional conditions that allow the vast majority of people and living creatures...to thrive - along with the planet itself” (p. 6). They go on to describe the present state of care(lessness) in the world, a “banality of carelessness” (p. 6). Constance’s drive to create community in her classrooms; Ali’s desire to empower his students to embrace who they are and what they believe; Bea’s quality of discernment toward what students need to learn and maintain their own knowledge: these are all examples of thoughtful, critical care. This is thoughtful, critical care in a world, an education system that often sees students and treats the vast majority of them like cogs in a wheel, like vessels to be filled, like a set of metrics and test scores to be analyzed. Educators are likewise not viewed as the whole and complex people they are. Too often, the work of teaching is stripped down to content (re)production and assessments. This demonstrates that banality of carelessness.

The very spaces where and the very people with whom students are sent for development and growth have become places too often devoid of care. As a caveat, it's not that care doesn't take place in educational spaces; rather, it is too often contrived, isolated, or stifled. What became evident when speaking with Ali, Bea, and Constance was their understanding of context (physical/spatial, cultural, social, political, etc.). They shared a deep understanding of how the arts can be complicit in and can serve to disrupt the all too dehumanizing systems of education students, their students, face. I'm thinking of Constance in particular. Her work serves to support students as they expand their perspectives, their visions and goals while acknowledging the function of the educational system as one that is predicated on their "success" as measured by standardized test scores, as meted out through often unfair rules and regulations, policies that are devised to maintain a certain order.

There's also the recognition that their work is a step forward. What they are proposing through their work and their lives/identities is an ethics of care (Yellow Horse & Nakagawa, 2020), another way of teaching, learning, listening, and relating. Their ethics of care is centered in student empowerment and well-being. Whether it's Ali's call for self-defined excellence, Constance's call for communal responsibility and empowerment, or Bea's call for students to find meaning in the everyday, in their communities, in each other. Their pedagogies are distinct and serve to counter that "banality of carelessness," but they recognize that that is just one means, one response to the overwhelmingly pervasive carelessness in some educational spaces and in the world. It is not a simple or easy fix. As Love (2019) so aptly wrote,

No type of pedagogy, however effective, can single-handedly remove the barriers of racism, discrimination, homophobia, segregation, Islamophobia, homelessness, access to college, and concentrated poverty, but with antiracist pedagogy combined with grassroots organizing...Pedagogy should work in tandem with students' own knowledge of their community and grassroots organizations to push forward new ideas for social change, not just be a tool to enhance test scores or grades. Pedagogy regardless of its name, is useless

without teachers dedicated to challenging systemic oppression with intersectional social justice. (p. 19)

It is about centering the knowledge, voices and visions of students—that learning, true education is about more than test scores and grades; it’s about student growth and well-being, their ability to critically think about and engage with ideas, each other, their worlds. The experiences of these three teaching artists, how they encountered and claimed the arts, demonstrates that.

Growing up and working with community organizations and institutions that cared for them, how they viewed themselves and the world, served as models for their own teaching practices. One’s teaching philosophy and practices are a form of sight; they are a lens on/into what matters to one as a teacher and as a human being. There’s no separating the two. What Constance, Bea and Ali see in their students is a future of possibility through self- and community empowerment.

If we are to truly exercise care in our work and in the world, it requires a certain sight, a certain criticality, seeing and living with compassion, thoughtfulness and, perhaps, grace. I take the words of Love (2019) and assign them to the work of these three teaching artists, the lives they live, in the way they teach: “They need to be rooted in an abolitionist praxis that, with urgency, embraces what seems impossible: education for collective dignity and human power for justice” (p. 13). Ali, Bea and Constance teach with such urgency and sight. Their ability to do so stems from their own histories, experiences, and hopes for/from the arts. Who they are and how they came to be who they are matters in understanding how they approach teaching and learning alongside their students.

Conclusion: Encouraging (and Theorizing) an Aesthetics of the Spirit of Community

For Bea, Constance, and Ali, the arts are a tool for survival, for living and learning. If it weren’t for the arts organizations and the artistic communities they grew up in or became a part

of, there's not telling where they'd be. This is serious. It is serious and demanding work, work that requires the whole self as Constance said, work that integrates one's knowledge, experience and imagination. The work of being a part of and creating community within and between educational spaces is, in many ways, an act of resistance, a departure from the neoliberal norm, a means of centering students' lives and well-being. Collins (2019) wrote of the work inherent in "resistant knowledge projects (p. 159)." Smith (2012) leaned into and explicated what that can truly mean, what it can look like:

To resist is to retrench in the margins, retrieve 'what we were and remake ourselves.' The past, our stories local and global, the present, our communities' cultures, languages and social practices - all may be spaces of marginalization, but they have also become spaces of resistance and hope. (p. 4)

The message Constance, Bea, and Ali shared through their stories was one of such hope. Despite being positioned marginally, they could still create and hold space for themselves and their students to find solace in who they are and show/exercise a deep respect for one another. Again, this is not simple or easy. It is often messy and very challenging work, but somehow, they are able to structure it, to give it meaningful shape in educational spaces, and develop a kind of vocabulary, a language of possibility within that shaping. That is the everyday theorizing inherent in living, in teaching and learning.

The city is featured here, as more than mere backdrop, as a character, as an influence on the lives and work of these three artists. Careful to situate their work within their unique stories and contexts, this inquiry is as much a means centering them as it is centering the place where they make room for themselves and their students—as they are, as the people they aspire to be.

If the arts are a means, as described by Ali, Bea, and Constance, of bridging perceived divides, of altering/widening perspectives, of activating the whole self in educational spaces and outside of them, the city is yet another whole, another piece to be pieced together. It is where this

work takes shape, and because of the complexity of its presence, where this work is, perhaps, most meaningful. These teaching artists are, in many ways, continuing to not only shape their lives and practices (creative and teaching), but they are able to do so in the place they call home, in and with the communities they call home, where there is a kind of kindred connection and impetus for collective care and change. Ali, Bea, and Constance, their work and lives are also shaped by the city—its institutions and policies, its systems and structures. But, here they speak of the ways in which they are a part of shaping the city, in the individual and collective spaces where they teach and create art. Their stories are moments of both history and possibility. And they are movements—evocative, inspiring, challenging, partial, and beautiful.

CHAPTER SIX: A CONCLUSION

In art education, an important determination of the robustness of theory involves educational practice. We must be able to check theory against practice and explain how art and art education shape the ways people think, see, and act in the world.

—Freeman, 2014, p. 5

This critical narrative inquiry dips into the realms of critical theory, intersectionality, into the landscape(s) of art education, and into what it means to live, as teaching artists, in and through tension, in and through various borders and barriers. When setting out to do this work, I knew I wanted to learn more about the lives, identities, and pedagogies of teaching artists. Not sure what to call the milieu that is this dissertation, I began where I was/am, as a poet and educator, as a Black woman interested in the ways in which teaching artists move within, through and beyond the bound of the city's and the nation's educational systems.

What I sought from these artists, Ali, Bea and Constance, were stories of their living, learning and teaching. What came up in the (re)telling of those stories was so much more. I wanted to know who they are in various educational spaces. I wanted to know what influences or influenced their pedagogies, teaching philosophies and practices. I wanted to know how those influences and their subsequent practices fit (or not) into the spheres of art education in the U.S.

Clandinin (2013) wrote, "Teacher stories are stories teachers tell of themselves wherein they make visible their teaching practices and their lives" (p. 66). This dissertation is about pedagogies and teaching practices; it is also about the artists that make up, embrace, and embody those pedagogies, philosophies, and practices.

In education, narrative research is positioned to honor and affirm the complexity and ambiguity, the challenges and rewards, the meanings and values of individual teachers, students, and other educational workers, rather than to generalize experience and reduce it to numbers, trends, and formulae. (Anderson, 2014, p. 89)

This a foray into that complexity, the meanings and values held, shaped and shared by Ali, Bea and Constance. The aim is not to generalize their practices; rather, it is to share a kind of theoretics in practice, their philosophies of art, living, and learning in practice.

There are multiple lines to follow, to be crossed as a teaching artist. Not only in terms of professional identity (that is being both educator and artist), but also in terms of physical space - whether teaching in schools, community spaces, virtually, etc. I asked of these artists, who are you in educational spaces, who are you in life, and how do your experiences in all of those spaces enter into your practice as an educator?

In encountering and conversing with Ali, Bea and Constance, the “robustness of theory” was made clear. Though they didn’t call it theorizing as such, their experiences and explanations, their stories and philosophies, their hopes and inspirations regarding their work as teaching artists, led me to understand their work as critical praxis. The purpose of this inquiry into the identities, philosophies and practices of teaching artists was to explicate with clarity and urgency the impact of their work, the ways in which it broadens sight and deepens a personal and collective sense of purpose among educators and students.

My central questions were, “How do teaching artists perceive their professional identity? How does that identity inform their pedagogy and teaching practice?” What was revealed was the layered and complex nature of coming to and sustaining or augmenting one’s professional identity within and across multiple educational contexts. What was revealed through these artists’ stories and reflections was that that complexity is not lost on them; it is something they recognize and work through on many levels. Whether taken from past examples as they came into the arts or adapted as they began to teach, as they began to create and center community, that recognition and ongoing reflection led them to a sort of pedagogical dexterity/flexibility.

There's no one way to teach, and teaching requires an acknowledgement of what students bring with them into an educational space.

This project is one of recounting, of utilizing experience and memory as knowledge holder and producer. This is counter(intuitive). It is counter(hegemonic). Is it counter(theorizing)? No. There's a long history of thinkers, educators, social and political activists, etc. who put individual and group testimony (Collins, 2019) at the forefront of shaping understanding about the world, about specific issues. Black feminist thought (Collins, 2019; Okello, 2019) and theorizing, among others shape not only a history of learning in and through the arts but also shape its present trajectory.

Equally as important as describing and interpreting the world of meanings and values as they currently exist is the potential of narrative research to explore what may be. Embedded in being is becoming... That is, the seed of what may be is planted in the context of what is and what is imagined to be. (Anderson, 2014, p. 90)

The future, what is possible presently and how the past can continue to shape who we are and who/how we become, also came to the fore in this inquiry. Utilizing a critical narrative and arts-informed approach, this dissertation seeks to propel the work of Ali, Bea and Constance, insomuch as to share it, to attempt to understand its breadth and depth, to extend its reach in the world of qualitative education research, for educators, and for administrators and other education leaders. It is an imperative to listen to and chronicle stories shared, to address the harm induced by our education system and encourage the healing and growth necessary to forward a more coherent and just future.

These teaching artists have a wealth of professional and personal experience, spanning, for each, most of their lives. Each began their foray into the arts and into teaching/leading roles in their teens. Art revealed and led at once. It revealed society, self, and possibility. Though it hasn't been easy. It led them toward selves eager and ready to dismantle the inequities housed in

the society revealed. The possibilities inherent in such experiences open a way forward, especially during this time of grief, upheaval and unrest.

As we mourn the loss of so much life due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we've become acutely aware of all that is missing, misshapen, misguided and misused. These artists shared a breadth of knowledge (regarding educational practices, theories, schools of thought) as well as an awareness of the social lives of the students they work with. Context is key. These contexts shaped them. The city shapes them and their work - what they are working toward. This/These contexts shape their students. These contexts render reality palpable and concrete—thus their work becomes clear. Tend to the young. Tend the people around you. See this world in all its grandeur and light in addition to its narrowness, its atrocities. There is in these artists a spirit of rootedness—a sturdiness of consciousness.

How can this be translated between/across educators, across educational spaces and academic disciplines? There is no straightforward answer. There is not one way. Rather, there's the call to interrogate self (as educator) in a similar way: Who am I as an educator? What are my beliefs about myself and my work? About society and the world? About my students and my communities? What is my philosophy of teaching? Why? Who are the benefactors of my teaching, my presence? What have I/am I learning in the teaching process, etc.?

What does this mean for educational institutions, for art education, for the policies that govern each? There is no simple answer and, certainly, not just one. Ali, Bea, and Constance demonstrate the possibilities for art education and arts integration. They, through teaching practices centered on student knowledge and well-being, care and thoughtful pedagogical interventions, demonstrate what is possible both within and beyond regimented curricular standards, for instance. Aware of what needs to be taught, these teaching artists take on the

responsibility of listening, of cultivating community among/with students, of teaching relevant and revelatory content, content that does more than shape an idea of history or artistic techniques, content that opens minds and deepens reflective action for self and society. Their work, at once, bridges and broadens what is being done in classrooms and other educational spaces. It makes room for new possibilities, for innovation and change.

Dillard (2012) wrote, “We need a way to inquire that acknowledges both the joy and pain of history and contemporary times, of location and dislocation and the transformation of both in our work” (p. 10). I endeavored to inquire, as Dillard suggested, in a way that acknowledges all of who these artists are—in their work, in their teaching practices and in their beliefs about teaching and education. In this inquiry, I asked these teaching artists to pull from their pasts, to acknowledge present successes and challenges, and to imagine what the future, the future of art education, their futures, their students’ futures in the city and beyond, may entail. This inquiry seeks to showcase the work of teaching artists. It seeks to recognize their work and amplify their voices and visions in a system(s) that is too often blinded to the possibilities inherent in acknowledging and actively listening to educators’ voices. Bea, Constance, Ali and their students are not cogs in a wheel.

What happens when our full selves are allowed the agency and given the respect to engage in learning in ways that seek to encourage and highlight students’ full selves? There is the real possibility of individual and collective success—success not measured by test scores or prescriptive regulations on language use, behavior, etc. Rather, it is success measured by student and educator (educational community’s) well-being, by the ability to relate, to see beyond and through difference toward shared community goals and responsibilities.

In speaking with Ali, Bea, and Constance, I recognized the pulse of art education. When one takes the time to question, to communicate with and take heed of what teaching artists and other educators have gone through, witnessed, and shared, there is the real possibility of genuine inclusion, equity and change. This change is apparent in the ways we see educational success and in the ways we perceive the value of teaching and learning. Utilizing ABER imperatives was a means of showcasing that - that creative, innovative endeavors are not just resigned to technique or entertainment; they are a real means of educating, of healing, of demonstrating care and rigor in an educational setting.

Poetry is often my mode/means of expression. It carries the same complex histories and nuances of place in that it is/can be seen as both very broad/abstract and incredibly specific. As this conclusion of the work of Ali, Bea and Constance moves forward, I use poetry as a tool, a tool of expression and analysis (Faulkner, 2020). Taking the words of these three artists and juxtaposing them with and amongst each other, the poem that follows, “definite,” was formed. It is an amalgamation of quotes from each of their interviews, statements or phrases that in my initial analysis didn’t get coded; they are words that both in and outside of the context of each interview still hold meaning and, perhaps, even more when put together. As Mulvihill and Swaminathan (2020) contend, “As an example of artful analysis, creating poetry from data can allow one to see and understand connections and experiences of participants in ways that yield new insights” (p. 163). Though these artists did not meet each other, did not have a physical conversation with each other, I bring their voices together here, however briefly, through the poem.

It is both a point of arrival and a departure for this conclusion, containing many of the themes brought forth in the “Findings” and “Discussion.” This is a place of meeting, of

connection and a coming together. This is where what was learned can be shared, where these three artists may meet.

definite (a polyvocal found poem)

I think I'm still defining from a place of, you know, self-reflection, of artistry as opposed to it becomes many things like there's an artistry to it it completely changed the way in which I navigated my life in the strangest way kind of ongoing it was difficult for me, but I also loved I never thought about it my toolkit this path towards joy and justice it means way more to be doing this work so they poured into me more those spaces are and that was developed because you're an artist embrace it don't be afraid be empowered I had worked in many, like, small pieces of what the art form becomes later like the transversal part of the kind of art that I'll create I try to create community so, I arrived I may share a story or I think that started becoming be unapologetic at where you are I identify as that and I feel like if this little center you know what I'm saying everybody don't get this opportunity and I got lost that was in the learning process they're like a revolutionary how I learned from them then you create a movement really beautiful one person. one person being a step towards our own healing you know, it's one movement at a time use that little moment of feel full and, like, keep me committed to this it makes me feel good my own story just the awakening of this is not commonplace, right it's still creating that open space when we create these and constantly questioning, right I would love to see my direction I mean that's what we have. That's what we have we have skin and skin feels all of those things kind of, you know, nourished from each other I mean I guess they go hand in hand the immediate world I remember it has grown if there is another side and I just want to affirm you in this work it should be that.

What becomes certain in seeing their words together, in reading them out loud, is a sense of clear focus and purpose, a sense of self toward a collective promise to care and serve and learn and be in community. The arts, teaching - they are a path for these three artists, a way in which they've been able to navigate their own lives, the wider world, and the systems/structures in which they teach. This collective line, "you're an artist embrace it don't be afraid," says everything about their work, their journeys in/through/with the arts and education. They are a glimpse of the expansiveness that is possible with such care and purpose, with such attuned and dedicated attention to being and belonging. "This little center" of arts education, this point on the line or sphere or arch of teaching and learning may be a beacon of possibility and inquiry, a diving deeper into what it means to be an educator, an artist, a person within various identities,

communities and systems isn't as straightforward as what Constance initially thought about teaching - that "I am the teacher; you are a student" mentality. There is room for questioning, questioning self and world, questioning practice and approach. Another line, "and I got lost that was in the learning process," speaks to the nature of learning - not linear, but rather, more circuitous and leaning, a kind of reaching toward and looking back at once. That reaching and looking, for these artists, is mired in/with stories, their own and those of others: their students' and their communities.' Those stories are central to being human, to learning, to sharing knowledge and skills, to caring for/with others. It was Bea who said, "we have skin and skin feels." The elemental nature of teaching, the storied history of the arts toward social change ring out in these artists' stories. Through their work, "the immediate world I remember it has grown." This is a reason at the center of that "little center": growth, growth for all involved. And "it should be that."

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Appendix A: Adult Informed Consent Form

Adult Consent to Participate in Research

Teaching Artists' Stories: Enacting Professional Identity Across Contexts

Principal Investigator: Shanita Bigelow

Institution: DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois, USA

College: College of Education

Faculty Advisor: Amira Proweller, PhD

Key Information:

What is the purpose of this research?

We are asking you to be in a research study because we are trying to learn more about beliefs and practices of teaching artists in both formal and informal educational settings. This study is being conducted by Shanita Bigelow, a graduate student at DePaul University as a requirement to obtain her doctoral degree. This research is being supervised by her faculty advisor, Amira Proweller, PhD. There may be other people on the research team assisting with the study. We hope to include 5-7 people in the research.

Why are you being asked to be in the research?

You are invited to participate in this study because you are an experienced (at least 3 years of teaching experience) teaching artist who works in both formal and informal educational settings.

What is involved in being in the research study?

If you agree to be in this study, being in the research involves one to two interviews (no more than 1.5 hours in length per interview). Each interview will be recorded either using an audio recorder or an audio-visual recorder. Interviews conducted in person only require audio recording. Interviews conducted on an online platform, such as Zoom, will be recorded in both audio and video. It also involves the collection of documents, such as statements of teaching philosophies, artist statements, creative writing, etc. If you agree to participate you will be asked to submit one document of this sort. If you agree to participate in this study, you will also be asked to create a pedagogical map that highlights your thoughts and ideas, your history and training regarding teaching/pedagogy. You will be asked to produce this map during the second interview. It can be produced in the form of a timeline, a piece of creative writing or a drawing/visual representation.

More information about the interview process is below.

- Interview 1 will focus on questions surrounding your professional identity (e.g., how do you define your professional role or what label do you use) and professional history (to include training and ongoing professional development). It will also focus on your experiences as a teaching artist to include your own descriptions of your teaching practice/pedagogy.

- Interview 2 will focus on questions surrounding the impact of arts education personally and collectively, as in its impact on community and institutions. It will also focus on your overall experiences with the arts.
- Both interviews will have some questions that ask about identity and cultural and social issues.

The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed into written notes later in order to get an accurate record of what you said. Further communication will be established to consult with you about the accuracy of transcriptions and for any need for clarification.

Are there any risks involved in participating in this study?

If you choose to be a part of this study, you may feel uncomfortable (or sad or angry) about answering certain questions. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to. You may stop an interview at any time and request that audio recording stop.

Are there any benefits to participating in this study?

There are no direct benefits, but you may benefit from the research by learning more about your experiences and teaching practices. The final product (dissertation) will be shared with all participants. This may aid in ongoing development as an educator by learning from the experiences and practices of other teaching artists.

We hope that what we learn will help teaching artists understand the impact of their work and provide a space for educators to think about their own work and gain an understanding of the practices of other educators.

How much time will this take?

This study will take about two to three hours of your time over the course of two to three months. Each interview will be between an hour (60 minutes) to an hour and a half (90 minutes). Each interview will be separated by at least three weeks. The purpose of separating the interviews is to provide time to transcribe the first interview and further prepare for the second.

Can you decide not to participate?

Your participation is voluntary, which means you can choose not to participate. There will be no negative consequences, penalties, or loss of benefits if you decide not to participate or change your mind later and withdraw from the research after you begin participating.

Who will see my study information and how will the confidentiality of the information collected for the research be protected?

The research records will be kept and stored securely. We will remove the direct identifiers, like name or record number, from your information and replace it with a random code that cannot be linked back to you. This means we have de-identified your information. We will not use the information collected for this study for any future research of our own or share your information with other researchers.

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study or publish a paper to share the research with other researchers, we will write about the combined de-identified information we have gathered. We will not

include your name or any information that will directly identify you. Some people might review or copy our records that may identify you in order to make sure we are following the required rules, laws, and regulations. For example, the DePaul University Institutional Review Board, may review your information. If they look at our records, they will keep your information confidential.

To prevent others from accessing our records or identifying you should they gain access to our records, we have put some protections in place. These protections include using a code (a fake name and a study ID number) for you and other people in the study and keeping the records in a safe and secure place using a password protected computer.

The audio recordings will be kept until accurate written notes have been made, then they will be destroyed within two years of transcription.

Who should be contacted for more information about the research?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study or you want to get additional information or provide input about this research, you can contact the researcher, Shanita Bigelow, at bigelow.shanita@gmail.com or by phone at 312-485-8543.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the DePaul Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact Susan Loess-Perez, DePaul University's Director of Research Compliance, in the Office of Research Services at 312-362-7593 or by email at sloesspe@depaul.edu.

You may also contact DePaul's Office of Research Services if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.

You will be given a copy [can print a copy] of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent from the Subject:

I have read the above information. I have had all my questions and concerns answered. By checking this box and signing my name below, I indicate my consent to be in the research. (Please check box to indicate consent.)

Printed name: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B: Interview Protocols

Interview Protocol 1

Questions:

1. How would you describe your professional identity? Is there a professional label you prefer (e.g. teaching artist, arts educator, educator, etc.)? Why do you prefer that title or label?
2. Describe your training to become an arts educator. Was it helpful as you began to teach?
3. How did you begin your career in arts education? What led you to this profession?
4. Broadly, in what types of educational and community spaces have you worked as an educator?
5. What is your artistic medium of choice? Why?
6. Do you see a connection between your practice as an artist and your practice as an educator?
7. If so, can you describe that connection? Do the two complement each other? In what ways?
8. Do the two contradict each other in any way? If so, how?
9. How would you describe your teaching practice or pedagogy?
10. What pedagogical or theoretical models do you ascribe to, if any?
11. Describe a lesson you've taught that you thought went incredibly well. Why did it go well?
12. Describe a lesson or teaching activity that you thought didn't go so well. Why?
13. Over the course of your career how has your teaching practice changed? Can you provide an example(s)?
14. How do you account for that change/Why do you think your teaching practice changed?
15. How does the environment in which you teach impact your work? For instance, is there a difference between your work in schools versus community spaces?

Interview Protocol 2

Questions:

1. Tell me about your introduction to the arts. Was it impactful? Why or why not?
2. Aside from being an artist and an educator, how else do you identify?
3. Are these other identifiers integral to your work as an artist? As an educator?
4. What does it mean to be an artist in this city? An educator in this city?
5. What are your goals as an educator? How do you know if you are achieving them or not?
6. What are some of the social or cultural issues you've had to address as an arts educator? Can you provide an example(s)?
7. Are social and cultural issues a part of your curriculum or pedagogy? If so, why? If not, why not?
8. What is the state of arts education today, in the U.S. and in this city? Why do you think it is in this state?
9. What roles do the arts play in society? Can the arts have a positive social impact?
10. What roles can art play in the life of a student? Can you provide an example(s)?
11. Is collaboration with other educators, artists, or community members important to your work as an arts educator? If so, how?
12. Are you up for an activity?
I'd like to ask you to illustrate your pedagogical journey as an arts educator. Think of it as a pedagogical map. It might include everything from your character/dispositions and identities to your goals as an educator and the function of art in the lives of your students. This map, conceptual in nature (can be configured thematically, chronologically/historically, etc.), can be produced in a myriad of ways (drawing, collage, a detailed timeline, informal writing, etc.).
13. What did you think of that activity? Did anything surprise you?
14. Thank you for your time. Is there anything you'd like to add that I haven't asked about?