

Creating the Learning Space: Teaching the Arts in CBR by Catherine Etmanski

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Fiction is knowledge. Poetry is knowledge. The arts are ways of knowing. The lingering belief that knowledge is and must be proof, proposition, muscle for prediction and control is bound inextricably with our Western belief in the individual as a separate, autonomous being. It is bound inextricably with our need to tame the earth and its creatures, and it is bound inextricably with our fear of the unknown. We have wanted to accumulate knowledge and to use it as foundation, as fact, as colonialist, neocolonialist, and imperialist commodity, as clout, and as cultural capital. But we are fooling ourselves if we think we can trust knowledge more than we trust fiction to guide us, to teach us. Knowledge, like fiction itself, is liminal space. It never arrives. It is always on the brink. (Nielsen, 2002, p. 206)

Preamble: A Shift in Perception

I admit I didn't really get arts-based research at first. Like many graduate students, I had preconceived ideas of what research meant, ideas no doubt formed by the lingering beliefs

about knowledge Nielson points to above. It took time to unlearn my assumptions before I could embrace arts-based research. I clearly recall the ‘ah-ha’ moment when I grasped that the theatre and other arts-based methods I had been learning in various facilitators’ trainings were not somehow superfluous to the research process; rather, they *could in fact be* my research process.¹ In that moment I was beginning to ‘get it’—and the joy of learning in this way continues.

What I understand now, and what I did not understand before, is that there are ways to co-create knowledge, to conduct research, to learn and teach one another that involve people as whole human beings. As some of the contributors to this collection have also demonstrated, research can honour and respect our own and our participants’ agency and complex identities, and can engage our whole body, all of our senses, our imagination, heart, spirit, *and* our intellect. In this chapter, I focus specifically on how the arts can be employed in Community Based Research processes and how I have shared in the classroom what I have learned since that pivotal moment.

This chapter provides an account of the design and strategies I used for teaching a graduate level course titled, *Cultural Leadership and Social Learning through the Arts*. I relate this account by first providing a brief overview of arts-based and arts-informed research practices, accompanied by several resources for the reader to reference for further information. I then outline the course and describe how I endeavour to create a classroom environment and curriculum conducive to learning about, with, and through the arts. Next, I provide a detailed account of the experiential workshop participants facilitate as their major assignment in the class, including two key lessons I have learned through multiple offerings of

this class. I conclude with a few reflections on what this chapter contributes to the teaching of Community Based Research.

Introduction to the Arts in CBR

Arts-based processes are not (as even I may have previously assumed) fun, but somehow unnecessary activities. In a world troubled by complex, interconnected challenges – challenges that knowledge produced through Western science has played a role in creating – the arts are not secondary to the so-called real work of science. They are essential. The complex nature of the challenges we currently face means we can no longer rely upon tried and tested strategies and solutions. We need to find new possibilities for collectively co-creating innovative solutions and learning our way forward. While all forms of community based research have this intent, as will be discussed below, arts-based CBR offers unique ways to build empathy and understanding and tap into our collective creative potential.

The process of creating art *is* inquiry and, in that sense, *is* a kind of science. Both art and what has traditionally been conceived as science “involve the use of systematic experimentation with the goal of gaining knowledge about life” (McNiff, 2008, p.33). In this realm where art is understood as a medium of inquiry, “epistemological standpoints of artists and social science workers collide, coalesce, and restructure to originate something new and unique among research practices” (Finley, 2008, p. 72). Inquiry through the arts can be understood as a science that recognizes how we perceive the world through multiple senses, not only through our rational minds. It is a science that allows us to access other ways of thinking, doing, being, and knowing.

Art is a fundamental and universal aspect of human expression. Art transcends time, space, place, culture, and class. Elemental beauty can, of course, be found in nature, but wherever there are humans there is human-made art. Yet somehow the arts have become relegated to the domain of professionals; that is, they are reserved for people with recognized skills and training and some measure of what has traditionally been called creative genius (see Battersby, 1989, for a critique of this idea). Of course, learning to adeptly utilize specific artistic media does require practice and the refinement of skill—my intention is not to discount the work of professional artists. However, the unfortunate consequence of a division between those seen as possessing artistic talent and those who are not is that many people in this society develop an early aversion to or wound around the arts. Some individuals feel hurt, embarrassed, or inadequate in their ability to express themselves and communicate using an artistic or creative media and therefore avoid it (marino, 1997). Moreover, in our contemporary global capitalist society, art has mostly become a product to consume rather than a natural right of human expression (Diamond, 2004; 2007). For some, this repression of the creative spirit is seen as a form of oppression and, hence, reclaiming the arts can lead to healing, building community, and increasing our innate abilities to communicate using a broader range of strategies. Whether created by professionals or in community settings, the arts can also support us in perceiving, understanding, thinking about, and innovatively addressing the socio-ecological, economic, moral, and intellectual challenges of our times.

For these reasons, many researchers in the methodological traditions associated with Community Based Research (CBR) are increasingly calling for “research that more closely follows the imaginary and improvisational processes and practices of artists, poets, and

musicians as compared with inquiry that is commonly associated with the logical-rational approaches in the sciences and social sciences” (Garoian, 2011, pp. 157-158). Such arts-based and arts-informed approaches to research have been gaining momentum in the academy over the past few decades.

What distinguishes these approaches from others is that the arts are employed at various stages throughout an inquiry process. For example, just as surveys, interviews, and focus groups may be used as methods for gathering and generating information (traditionally understood as data collection), so too are arts-based methods such as theatre, photography, quilting, and so on. Arts-based methods can also be employed as means for processing and understanding information (data analysis), or as media for presenting information to a wider audience (representation and dissemination of results beyond text-based formats).

It should be noted that the arts are not inherently participatory; in other words, not all arts-informed or arts-based researchers have a predisposition to the action-oriented or participatory approaches to research adopted by CBR practitioners. Individual researchers might collect data through more traditional means and then, in the solace of a studio for example, pull out an easel and paintbrush to help them delve into their data. The research objectives, as well as the researchers’ skills and orientation will determine how the arts are employed throughout the research process: which artistic media are best suited to the work and at what point in the process it makes the most sense to introduce them. For the purpose of clarity, in this chapter, as in the course it documents, I am interested in approaches to research that integrate the CBR principles of participation, relationship-building, action, and justice, while employing various artistic media as research methods.

In general it is useful to understand that the arts are not just tools; rather, they provide a unique epistemological starting point—the arts provide different ways of knowing as this chapter’s opening quote suggests. What we can come to know through symbolic images – in the theatre, in photographs, in poetry, through story, dance, and so on – may be different from knowledge accessed via direct questions and conversation alone. CBR practitioners who employ the arts recognize “in the creative process the integration of intuitive and rational modes of understanding through engaging the whole of the person (emotions and intellect)” (Simons & McCormack, 2007, p.297). Employing the arts as research methods can bring to the surface pre-conscious or previously unarticulated concerns and desires (Davis-Manigaulte, Yorks & Kasl, 2006), sometimes bypassing the censorship of the brain (Jackson, 2002). Many of the learners in my classrooms are surprised, as I was, by how powerful, deeply personal, and potentially transformational arts-based research processes can be. Moreover, because symbolism can go straight to the heart, arts-based methods are powerful in revealing our shared humanity and therefore building understanding, empathy, and trust amongst research participants (necessary in most CBR processes) and also between participants and audience (useful in CBR work for social change).

Multiple approaches to the Arts and Research

Just as the practice of CBR draws from various methodological streams and traditions (see the introduction of this volume), so too do arts-based and arts-informed approaches to research. Community-based adult educators in Canada and many other parts of the world have long embraced the arts as a means of investigating the human experience and stimulating

learning (e.g. Clover & Stalker, 2007; Harris, 1998; Kidd & Byram, 1979). However, in the academy, specific methodological traditions have emerged to reflect the various ways the arts are employed in processes of inquiry. This is particularly true in disciplines related to education. The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) of the University of Toronto, for example, founded an informal working group in 1998, which blossomed into the Centre for Arts-Informed Research in 2000. Scholars at the University of British Columbia (UBC) promote another tradition, *artography*, which they describe as inquiry through “an ongoing process of art making in any form and writing not separate or illustrative of each other but interconnected and woven through each other to create additional and/or enhanced meanings” (Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzouasis, Grauer, 2006, p. 1224). In addition, a key US-based proponent of the arts in research is the former President of the American Education Research Association (AERA), Elliot Eisner (e.g. 1981; 1997). Following a 1993 address to the AERA, “the Arts-Based Educational Research Special Interest Group of AERA was formed and quickly grew” (Cole & Knowles, 2008, p. 58). These are but a few examples of traditions that have influenced the arts in CBR.

Practitioners of arts-based and arts-informed methodologies are often perceived as “artists-and-teachers-and-researchers” (Springgay, Irwin & Kind, 2008, p. 87). In other words, as is the intention with this book, the methodology and pedagogy are already deeply intertwined. In teaching this course, I am endeavouring to create a methodological and pedagogical space where research not only intersects with art, but also with social change—through education, activism, leadership, and community development. The remainder of this chapter will focus on the strategies I used in an effort to create this space. Readers who are interested in gaining more of a background on the arts-based and arts-informed methodological traditions

introduced above might consider reading such texts as, Barndt (2006); Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund (2008); Clover & Stalker (2007); Knowles & Cole (2008); McLean (2010); McLean & Kelly (2011); McNiff (1998); Sullivan (2005) as well as special issues of the *International Journal of Lifelong Learning*, 31:4 (2012); *Action Research*, 9:1 (2011); *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 116 (2007); *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 107 (2005); *Convergence*, 38:4 (2005); *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*, 16:2 (2010); *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 48:3 (2002), all of which focus on the arts. These are but a few suggestions; the above authors and editors will lead you to many other influential works in this field.

Overview of the Course

Located within the Faculty of Education's Master's of Leadership Studies at the University of Victoria (UVic), this course is informed by theory from leadership, adult education, arts-based methodologies, and CBR. While the bulk of classroom learning is comprised of hands-on workshops in a variety of art forms (further described below), these are directly linked to theoretical debates on the topics of: aesthetic quality and symbolism; individual and collective art-production; methodological issues in research; the inherent values of both process and outcome; the role of the arts in society; the historic division between arts and crafts; communication via artist intention and audience perception; and healing, empowerment, social transformation, and collective resistance through the arts. To engage in this experiential *and* theoretical learning, I ask that all participants, myself included, come to class prepared to learn using our full bodies, all of our senses, our hearts, and our imaginations.

In my three offerings of this course to date, participants have arrived with a range of experiences in the arts: some with formal training, others with no training and little experience. Throughout the course we endeavour to find the ways in which each one of us is *already* an artist (which will be further discussed in the section defining what constitutes art in the context of this class)² and encourage each other to expand the limits of what is possible for our own creative expression by learning and teaching each other.

Creating the Learning Space

Since working with the arts can become surprisingly personal, surprisingly fast, I have learned to take the time necessary to create a space conducive to light-hearted play and open-hearted communication. I place a strong emphasis on building community early on, introducing activities where people can learn one another's names quickly and ensuring people are working with new learning partners on a regular basis to generate more one-on-one connections across throughout the group. I ask that people take responsibility for their own well-being and I provide support or intervene where appropriate.

Facilitators and instructors will often speak of creating a 'safe' environment for learning, whether in community workshop settings or in classrooms. In recent years I have become increasingly wary of this idea—not because I inherently believe learning should be dangerous; rather, because I do not believe we can accurately assert that an environment is safe for another person. We can only name safety for ourselves. Individual personalities and histories of trauma, coupled with latent ideologies of racism, sexism, ableism, classism, and so on mean

that complex dynamics often emerge in group settings. Butterwick and Selman (2006), for example, discuss the politics of feminist coalitions and provide examples of how arts-based processes can support us in listening across differences. While some facilitators are incredibly skilled at addressing such power inequities in a group setting, others are not, and we all have our own areas of learning or ignorance. In my experience as both a facilitator and participant in countless workshops, I have noticed that even when a facilitator has named an environment as safe, dynamics are often such that people will express their concerns more privately, away from the larger group setting, and occasionally simply leave without explanation.

Let me be clear that as facilitators I believe that we can – and ought to – do our best to create a safe learning environment: that is, a space where people feel comfortable enough to share both their insights and their concerns, where respectful disagreement is not only tolerated, but encouraged, where mistakes are accepted as part of the learning process, where people feel welcomed for who they are, and secure in being themselves in spite of our imperfections and human idiosyncrasies. However, this ideal is not always possible in practice. As facilitators, then, we can remind other learners that simply because they/we feel safe does not mean that everyone does. We can also be mindful that we do not necessarily know the boundaries of one other's comfort zones and we certainly do not know the extent of one another's wounds.

As mentioned above, working with arts-based media can occasionally bring to the surface previously unknown, or unacknowledged insights. While I – like many other classroom instructors – am not a trained counsellor and it is not my explicit intention to employ the arts as therapy in the classroom setting, at times the experience of working with the arts can

nevertheless bring strong emotions into the learning space. This can be unexpected for some participants and particularly unsettling when one's expectation may have been to 'have fun' while using the arts. In addition, because many people have been told that they can't sing, can't dance, can't draw, and so on, some (though of course not all) people feel quite vulnerable when expressing themselves creatively. For all the above reasons and more, I believe it is my responsibility as a facilitator to alert people to the possibility that strong, unexpected emotions can sometimes arise—though I do not suggest that this must or inevitably will happen in the context of the class. (See Zingaro, 2009 for further discussion on this topic.) Facilitators who are new to arts-based practices would be well-advised to prepare for this possibility as well. It is useful to know what support services are available, for both participants and facilitators alike.

Somewhere along the way, I picked up three facilitator's guidelines that I find to be quite useful in setting the tone for learning: (1) take care of yourself, (2) respect others, and (3) assume positive intent. I will elaborate on what these mean to me below and when I speak these in a group setting, I normally ask participants whether they have anything to add.

To me, taking care of ourselves acknowledges that we are accountable for our own learning. This is not an effort to shirk responsibility as the instructor; rather, it is a simple reminder that while I have taken the time to design a thoughtful learning process, and will do my best to be flexible and sensitive to the needs and levels of energy in the group, I cannot read minds. Teachers have a certain amount of power in the classroom due to the nature of the position, but we are, after all, only human. If some aspect of the class is not working and I am clearly unaware, I need participants to tell me so that I can respond (within reason). Sometimes it is simply not possible to attend to the various interests in a classroom. In asking participants

to take care of themselves, I am also clear that while I encourage everyone to move beyond their own comfort zones, I do not make participation in all activities a *requirement*, nor do I ask people to explain themselves for sitting out. This guideline also recognizes that adult learners have the capacity to take initiative to get what they need from the learning environment.

To me, the second guideline of respecting others is not only about common courtesy, it is also about the nature of participation. I ask participants to keep in mind that participation does not mean overwhelming each other with all our observations, questions, and reflections; we can choose which of these to share with others, and which to keep to ourselves. Participation also implies a careful balance between listening to, acknowledging, and encouraging others, and likewise respecting when they choose to be silent. While patterns of participation tend to reveal themselves quite early in the class, this guideline can help participants to develop and demonstrate self-awareness around their contributions to, and presence in, the group setting. This is particularly useful in inter-cultural settings where the concept of respect can have multiple interpretations.

Occasionally the issue of confidentiality arises when we speak of respect. Participants generally ask that people not repeat personal stories or identifying details outside the class, which is a fair request. However, since people will inevitably talk with each other about the activities experienced in class, I also ask that participants choose not to share private details that they would not want repeated elsewhere, which helps to ensure their own privacy.

The third guideline of assuming a positive intent encourages us to try not to take others' comments personally. In group settings, as in the rest of our lives, people occasionally make assumptions, speak from a place of ignorance, and unintentionally cause harm. As facilitators

we have a responsibility to unpack such comments and attempt to mitigate harmful effects, of course. However, rather than self-censor in an effort to avoid saying the wrong thing, working with the first two guidelines of respecting self and others, I encourage us all to seek clarification and approach such moments as opportunities for learning and growth.

In introducing these guidelines to the class, often I will ask people to spend a little time in pairs or small groups discussing the strategies they have found work well during group learning processes. We then report these ideas back to the larger group and discuss their implications for the context of our own classroom. Because I often teach educators, people will sometimes have their own preferred facilitation strategies. I have found that this process of discussion gives people the opportunity to have the expertise they bring to the group heard and validated and I will often learn new techniques from the participants as well. We do not record these ideas as formal agreements as some facilitators do, but they do provide a reference point in our collective consciousness as we move forward. Finally, since not everyone has been exposed to the participatory learning strategies I employ in my classrooms, (particularly in the university context) to help set the tone, I will occasionally provide a handout of resources related to stages of group development (Tuckman & Janssen, 1977), a critique of the Banking Model of education (Freire, 2003), participatory decision-making (Kaner, 2001), and the experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984).

The points of discussion listed above are intended to help foster a welcoming learning space—a space where people can bump up against their learning edge through play and experimentation. The tone I describe above relates to ways of *being* in the classroom. To better

understand ways of *doing* in the classroom, I will turn to a discussion of the overall curriculum design.

Designing the Experience: The Spiral Model

A balanced relationship between reflection and action is the essence of praxis and central to learning and teaching Community Based Research. It is also essential to what Arnold, Burke, James, Martin, and Thomas (1991) refer to as the ‘spiral design model’ of experiential education: an iterative process for group consciousness-raising and action informed by theory and reflection. Arnold, et al.’s spiral design model suggests that learning is an ongoing spiral, similar to Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning cycle. This model teaches us that as facilitators of experiential learning processes, we can start by eliciting participants’ experiences, look for patterns, then offer new information and theory. We can then support participants in practising new skills, planning for action, and experimenting with this action. The next phase of the spiral begins when we reflect on this collective action, add more theory, plan new actions, and so on through iterative cycles of action and reflection.

This course uses the spiral model as its basic design (see Figure 14.1). On the first day of class we spend significant time getting to know one another, through conversation as well as through theatre-based activities based on David Diamond’s (2004; 2007) Theatre for Living techniques. In particular, I elicit participants’ experiences with the arts (Step 1), as well as any patterns and themes in preconceived ideas about what cultural leadership and social learning through the arts could mean (Step 2). Building on these experiences, we then move into an in-depth exploration of the course theory over the next two days of class (Step 3). Each learner

writes a summary of one of the assigned readings and we begin teasing out the emerging themes and tensions in the literature. We link these emerging themes to people's experiences. With grounding in the theory, we then move into a series of arts-based skill-building workshops designed and facilitated by the participants (Steps 4 and 5). There is classroom time devoted to collectively reflecting on what we learned from each workshop: what worked well and what we might do differently in other contexts (Step 6). I will discuss these workshops in more depth below, but the key purpose of these is to provide an opportunity for experiential learning and a loop in the spiral of action and reflection.

Steps in the Spiral Process	
1.	Start with participants' experience
2.	Reflection: Look for patterns in experience and areas for learning
3.	Theory: Expand knowledge with assigned readings and link to experience
4.	Planning: Design in-class workshops
5.	Action: Facilitate and experience workshops
6.	Reflection: Discussion of workshops in class; independent reflection in learning journals
7.	Theory: Independent review of literature beyond class materials
8.	Planning: Write first draft of a proposal (to be refined in collaboration with supervisor)
9.	Action: Conduct research or community-based project once the class ends
10.	Reflection: Write final project to complete degree
11.	Ongoing learning

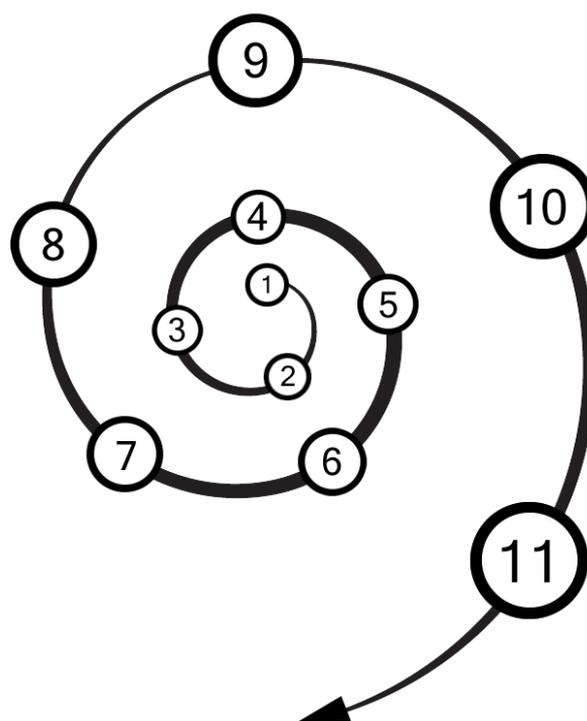


Figure 14.1 Steps in the Spiral Process

While these workshops are taking place in the classroom community context, learners are also documenting individual lessons learned in the more private context of creative learning journals. The journals support learners in synthesizing lessons learned and also provide me with a window into their experiences: alerting me to any issues I may need to clarify more publicly and also allowing me to build individual relationships with each participant. While some learners write in standard academic prose, others choose a different creative format for expressing themselves (examples below). When time, energy, and inspiration permit, I endeavour to reciprocate in kind by generating my own creative piece in response.

For example, when one student created a snow sculpture as part of her learning journal, I printed off the black and white photograph she submitted and coloured the details in with pastels. She included an artist's statement expressing how it felt like the image simply came through her—she did not plan the sculpture in advance. She also revealed to me that she was pregnant and was coming to terms with her identity as a mother and somehow creating the snow sculpture – a pregnant snow woman – became a very powerful experience for her. When I added colour to the details of the pregnant snow-belly, my intention was to demonstrate that I understood what the otherwise simple sculpture represented.

Another student submitted a set of boxes akin to Russian dolls, with questions on each box asking what was inside that we don't know we don't know and that working with the arts could sometimes reveal. I returned the box with small trinkets representing a mix of symbols based on lessons from learning about my own inner workings. I didn't explain what they meant, I simply offered the symbols in response to his questions.

A third student submitted clay sculptures and I returned one wearing glasses and another with a big heart—symbolizing the dance between emotion and intellect we had been discussing in class. This student often submitted her journal as a large scrapbook and began leaving empty spaces where I could respond, in written word or otherwise. (These examples were shared with permission.)³

For me, these creative journals were an invitation to play and to communicate in ways I would not normally communicate with my students. If the examples seem vague, or unintelligible to an outside observer, perhaps it is because they were intended as private conversations in response to students' thought processes. The point here is that these interactions represented a deeper connection between the learners and me, using symbolism that was grounded in the moment and based on classroom conversations and whatever simple resources I had on hand during the time I was reading/marking/engaging with the journals. What was interesting for me to observe was the very possibility that these creative pieces inspired me to reply in kind. This suggests that creativity is contagious; creativity begets more creativity. I would often read (or open) the journals right after class and throughout the week an idea would often spontaneously arise in my mind about how to respond. Not all students submitted creative pieces such as these, but if they were stepping up to the challenge of communicating beyond words, I tried to do so myself.

Aside from the journals, the class concludes with participants designing a plan for action in their own communities. They draw upon the lessons they learned experientially through the in-class workshops, as well as course theory and their own independent research (Step 7), to generate a proposal for a feasible arts-based process that could be implemented in their

workplace or other community affiliation (Step 8). While not all learners are able to put this plan into action, for many, the spiral of action and reflection continues beyond the scope of the classroom when this action plan turns into a proposal for their graduate research projects, which they carry out to complete the requirements of their degrees (Steps 9 and 10).

In-Class Workshop

The spiral design moves the learners through iterative cycles of theory and skill-building; in-class practice and reflection. Here I provide more details on one part of the spiral: the experiential workshops around which this course is built.

The in-class workshop serves multiple learning purposes. It:

- Enables participants to demonstrate their abilities to research and learn about an art form of interest and deepen their knowledge by teaching it to others.
- Provides an opportunity to practise facilitating an arts-based method.
- Encourages cooperation and social learning through group work.
- Allows participants to play and experiment with their abilities to communicate complex concepts and theories using a creative format.
- Finally, it enhances participants' capacities to lead and learn through the arts.

Working in groups, the participants design a workshop according to their prior skills and learning interests. Although not all participants who register see themselves as artists, all learners who choose to take this course are willing to experiment with creative, arts-based processes of some kind. The class then becomes a space where learners become teachers as they practice and hone their arts-based facilitation skills. The assignment criteria asks that they

teach the rest of us about the benefits, challenges, history, and practice of the artistic media the group has selected, engage us in a hands-on learning experience using this artistic media, and creatively communicate the theory and some key points of two required course readings that relate to this workshop. This last point is significant because I am asking participants to not only teach us about a particular artistic media – though that is of course an essential component of the workshop – but also to teach us concepts and theories *through* an artistic media. I will discuss some examples of the arts-based media below, but in the meantime I will mention that participants have, for example, taken up Foucault’s concept of ‘docile bodies’ through dance (drawing from Fremeaux & Ramsden, 2007), or provided insight into transformative learning and the ‘hero’s journey’ through theatre (drawing from Dirkx, 1998; Mezirow, 1991; Campbell, 1968).

Different facilitators will use different techniques for teasing out the symbolic connections between the experiential activity and the theory or issue under investigation. The most simple is to organize the discussion according to the questions: ‘What?’ ‘So what?’ ‘Now what?’ David Diamond uses the question ‘What’s inside this for you?’ (See Diamond, 2004; 2007; Etmanski, 2007b for more information). Other facilitators use the cycle of experience – analyze – generalize – apply (based on Kolb, 1984). As I introduce the experiential learning model to the participants, I encourage them – in their roles as facilitators – to move the group through a process of discussing what actually happened in the activity, to what it means in the context of their lives or the topic under investigation, and to how this knowledge can inspire action. Experiential learning is closely linked to the spiral design discussed above and in many ways it also reflects the purpose of action-oriented participatory research: What have we

learned from our collective experience? How can we now take action? Just as I gradually began to understand how the arts could enhance processes of inquiry, through this activity, I have the privilege of observing learners come to a similar realization.

In addition, the groups are welcome to move beyond the walls of the classroom if this enhances the message they are communicating. Several groups have chosen this option, for instance, one group led us in a circle painting workshop in the centre of campus. Because it was held in a public space, this workshop engaged passers-by, and helped to demonstrate how the arts “can break down resistance” (Branagan, 2005, p. 38) through a non-threatening process. In short, these experiential workshops help us delve deeper into the theory, while simultaneously teaching hands-on skills for creative activism, facilitation, and community organizing.

Lessons Learned

Over the various iterations of this class, I have learned that how I set up this workshop makes a difference to its level of success. I will outline two key lessons I have learned in the sections below.

A broad definition of what constitutes art

First, in preparation for this workshop, I have learned it is important that participants have a broad sense of what constitutes art. While I recognize that this is a controversial topic in some circles, for the purpose of this workshop, I want participants to feel a sense of possibility and permission to play, rather than self-imposed restraint. In literature related to arts-based and arts-informed methodologies, aesthetic quality or ‘artistry’ is understood to have an impact

on the effectiveness of social change processes, particularly when the final product is made publicly available (see Clover, this volume, or Becker, 1994; Clover & Stalker, 2007; Etmanski, 2007a; Marcuse, 1978). This has proven to be a fruitful discussion topic and different classes have taken the conversation to various depths. I have also encouraged participants to develop their skills beyond this class if they are planning to undertake a larger CBR process in a particular artistic medium. However, in the space of the classroom, since the intention is not to develop in-depth skills in a particular artistic medium, but to cultivate our innate abilities to communicate through creative means (i.e. find our inner artists), I place priority on exposing learners to a range of possibilities.

During the period where we are making specific plans for the workshops, I ask the participants to collectively identify any artistic media with which they are familiar. We brainstorm ideas together and once we get going, participants will often list dozens, if not hundreds of possibilities. Ideas range from the more formal media of painting, sculpture, dance, theatre, music, and literary arts (and all the traditions and variations therein), to practices traditionally understood or perhaps misunderstood as craft, (see Carson, 2001; Freeland, 2001; or Lippard 1984 for more information on this debate) such as quilting, knitting, weaving, carving, pottery, and so on, to more contemporary art forms such as zines, beat-boxing, slam poetry, digital arts, culinary arts, ice or sand sculptures, and much, *much* more. Certain individuals have told me that they feel most like an artist when they are kayaking or fly fishing. In response I tell them that there are as many possibilities for this workshop as the participants' imaginations will allow. The only limitation is that they must address the assignment criteria listed above and stay within the time limit, which is approximately 1.5 hours, depending on the

number of participants. (While I value flexibility and recognize the Western obsession with time, in this particular instance I frame timing as a skill to develop in preparation for facilitating public workshops where time restrictions have been imposed.)

As participants cluster into groups, they can choose one particular media from this expansive list, or combine several. To date, this assignment has elicited an incredible breadth of activities from the learners, including an introduction to: Inuit art, sound-scapes, pantomime, theatre, computer animation, photo elicitation, quilting, fabric zines, rhythm and song, instrument making (and the subsequent playing and recording of music made with those instruments), photography, murals and graffiti, poetry, story-telling through narrative Métissage, digital art, mask making, circle painting, and various mixed media creations (painting, collage, sculpture, and more). While we recognize that we can only gain a superficial understanding of the chosen creative media within the timeframe, the workshops have always succeeded in moving our thinking in new directions and laying the ground for what is possible in the context of a larger community-based research, learning, development, or activist project. The levels of thoughtfulness and creativity participants have demonstrated, coupled with the fact that they have collectively organized all the necessary art supplies, has consistently been remarkable. This is especially so given that two of the three class offerings have been short, two-week summer intensives.

Group Work

The second key lesson I have learned relates to the dominant preference of working in groups. During the first offering of the course, I asked that learners facilitate the workshop on

their own, but in later offerings shifted to a preference for group-based facilitation (with an option for individual work). While group and/or individual presentations are common in graduate level classrooms, I noted that the requirement to facilitate *arts-based* content seemed to add a layer of vulnerability, complexity, and even competition I had not observed in other courses. I have already touched on other measures I take to create a welcoming learning space, but in this particular class I found that group work provides an additional layer of security, where learners can share the risks (and the grades) and can unpack the experience with each other about the overall process of facilitation.

There are several motivations for encouraging participants to work in groups and one is inherent to the values of participatory, community-based research practice in general: we improve our skill of working together by *practising* working together. While group work can often be more time consuming, collaboration and team work are skills like all others, and ones that of course transfer to our lives beyond the classroom setting. This classroom provides another venue in which to refine those skills. Working together encourages cooperation and social learning, which are essential to the topic we are investigating. As many educators already know, small group work also provides an opportunity for people to learn directly from one another's working styles and quieter members of the class can often express themselves better in small groups than they can in the larger class.⁴

A more technical, but equally important reason to divide the class into groups relates to scheduling logistics. With the in-class workshops taking an hour or more of class time, when participants work in groups this opens up space to go into more depth with the class readings and theory informing the practice, and also to go on site visits, engage with guest speakers, or

watch a film as is appropriate. Additional activities have included a site visit to the *World Upside Down* exhibit (see Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 2009), followed by a walk around the city to observe how ‘beauty is all around us.’ Classes have also included a singing workshop with Jazz artist Wendell Clanton, a guest lecture from theatre artist Will Weigler (both of whom are Victoria based), and the screening of Banksy’s (2010) film, *Exit through the Gift Shop*. Integrating these opportunities to interact with professional artists (or their work) adds another layer to the conversation about how the arts can promote social change.

Conclusion: Teaching the Arts in CBR as an Act of Love

In this chapter I have shared a few examples of how I endeavour to create a space for learning and the primary classroom activity through which I teach the arts in CBR. I have demonstrated that not only do the in-class workshops teach hands-on skills, they also promote the values of collaborative leadership and social learning. Like Bresler (2009), I offer these examples not as a prescription, but as an invitation for readers to take what is useful in generating their own pedagogical approaches. As I attempt to demonstrate in the classroom, there are as many possibilities for teaching the arts in CBR as facilitators’ imaginations will allow.

At a 2011 conference on Qualitative Inquiry, I met a scholar and music educator who teaches Arts-Based Research from a different perspective than I do (Bresler 2009; 2008; 2007). She draws upon an art appreciation approach and encourages prolonged engagement with artwork as a central tenet of her pedagogy. She asks learners to return to one piece of art over a series of sittings, each time considering in greater depth its form, texture, shape, colour,

sound, smell, as well as the interplay of the concrete with the abstract. She asks learners to consider the centrality of context—their own personal responses, the date and time, whether it is the first or second visit, and other contextual details related to who the artists are and the conditions under which they created the work. She asks learners to delve deeper into symbolic meanings, in particular for the works they ‘don’t like’ or to which they are not immediately drawn. She then asks them to consider: “What are the hindrances to empathy?” and “What don’t we know that we don’t want to know?” (Liora Bresler, personal communication, May 21, 2011).

To me, this last question is fundamental to the process of research. The spirit of inquiry asks that we move beyond our initial preconceived ideas about the world, into the more uncomfortable spaces where we simply don’t know. These spaces of unknowing, or – perhaps more daunting – spaces where our current knowing may in fact be wrong, are difficult to access in the context of our everyday lives. Moreover, in this world full of suffering, we – as researchers, educators, and activists – can certainly benefit from strategies for gaining truly novel insights on the complex challenges we seek to address through the practice of community based research. The arts, I know from my own experience, offer a way into these challenges that can take us out of our habitual ways of thinking, doing, knowing, and being in the world.

This book is about learning and teaching Community Based Research. Other contributors have highlighted the central importance of decolonizing practice and knowledge democracy in the context of teaching CBR (see, for example, Clover; Corntassel & Gaudry; Hall; Marshall et al., Mukwa Musayett, et al., or Williams, et al.) and this chapter does so as well. In

promoting the arts as a way of knowing, this chapter adds an assertion that inquiry through the arts can create a space to honour the whole person and all the senses in the classroom. When facilitated skilfully, learning through the arts in university classrooms can help us to develop greater compassion for one other, as well as deeper self-knowledge. In an academic culture still dominated by dualism, rationality, and competition, this is no small feat.

(References in full text)