Using Art to Reveal Democracy (Hint: It's A Little Punk Rock)

Josh Montgomery iD
Northland College, USA

Pete Moran iD
University of Wyoming, USA

Gabriel Swarts iD
St. Bonaventure University, USA

To cite this article:

Using Art to Reveal Democracy (Hint: It's A Little Punk Rock)

Josh Montgomery, Pete Moran, Gabriel Swarts

Abstract

-What is democracy? We asked this of our pre-service teachers but, instead of soliciting a response via more traditional methods, we assigned them a collage and artist's statement. The overarching goal was to model curricular applications of art that they may carry into their own p-6 classrooms to enable engagement with complex concepts. In exploring their work, however, we uncovered compelling ideas about the efficacy (and appropriateness) of the use of art to interrogate cultural ideals. If we started the project seeking to model classroom activities, we ended by uncovering many of the themes troubling contemporary democracy. We found in our pre-service teacher's artistic conceptions clues to the origins of current social discourse. Through assessing their artwork, thematically coding the statements, and follow up interviews, our examination of their experience of working within art and with democracy revealed perspectives about both. In this paper we address ways we as teacher educators may aid in both expanding the curricular choices pre-service teachers make in future classrooms and in creating the informational and reflective space to prepare them for civic engagement.

Introduction

We as teacher educators/researchers initiated an exploration of an existing project-- democracy through art. We modeled this learning activity, exploring a complex term like democracy, using the creation of a collage on poster paper and an explanatory artist's statement that pre-service teachers can incorporate into their future classrooms. After completion, we endeavored to think more deeply about what the project might mean, particularly as we confront the challenges to civic discourse and participation. Additionally, we sought to determine whether this was an appropriate way to engage pre-service teachers in thinking about classroom practice, and whether art was the correct vector. In this paper we delineate the resultant discussion.

Through pre-service teacher completion of the project and our artifact collection, interviews, and careful reading of artist statements, we were able to explore complex topics offering two powerful benefits: 1. the project allowed students to reflect on complex topics and instructors a glimpse into the abstract thinking processes of students, enriching communication and 2. it allowed instructors another way of investigating learning through expression, revealing something beyond the ordinary (Hughes, 2011; Ranciere, 2009).

Through utilizing art, and reflecting about the outcomes, both as pre-service teachers, and as faculty researchers and curriculum designers, we hoped to better initiate learning experiences for our pre-service teachers. This in

turn may lead to better potential learning experiences for K-12 students in classrooms across the culture. With this goal serving as lodestar, we asked the following questions about the art in democracy collage and artist statement project:

-Can we, through art, create an authentic experience of complex ideas like democracy?

-What can pre-service teacher expressions about democracy through artistic expression tell us about broader attitudes towards both art and democracy?

As we journeyed through the research, we also, through the inductive nature of basic qualitative research, opened new avenues of exploration, and challenged some of our own understandings of how we utilize art in classrooms and how we approach democratic ideals in education. Too, a central tension was exposed regarding the conservative nature of education and the potential reactionary punk rock explosiveness of artistic expression (Harrison, 1990). The project at the core of this discussion is indicative of Dewey's (1934) proposition of a pragmatic aesthetics, a way of participating through art that builds understanding and promotes consciousness and awareness of students' place (Swarts, 2014). This is an art anchored in humanness, a street art that, available to all, contains an expressionistic center of communication, politics, and the social, providing the mediating agent between individuals and the culture (James, 1963). When pre-service teachers engage in the process of summoning a vision, finding existing symbols to communicate that vision, arranging the symbols to create a narrative and then reflecting on the experience, they are, ideally, participating in art as a wider expression of the culture (Dimitriadis and Kamberelis, 2006).

Through this project, and our glimpse into inner worlds, we begin to discern the values and modes of democratic education of our pre-service teachers as they prepare to enter the field. Perhaps this gives us the foundation to begin to think about how we alter our practices in a college of education to better equip teachers to enter a profession that, as Dewey (1916) suggests, requires teacher-artists to expose and encourage deliberative debate and to investigate daily democratic practice as a way of life (Swarts, 2018). When we asked our pre-service teachers to express, through art, the meaning of democracy the resulting works compelled us as teacher educators to think more completely about how we make decisions related to curriculum and exposed larger questions about the goals of teacher preparation (Acuff, 2018). We challenged them, and they challenged us.

Democracy, Art, and Democracy-in-art

Democracy

For the sake of this paper and for this literature review, we will define democracy as it is most commonly understood: rule by the people (Mulgan, 1968). This simple conception reveals complexities we explore briefly through the merger of two lenses, Stanley's (2005) historical and Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) citizenship, to establish the translation through education of the rules of belonging (Garrison, 2004; Urban and Waggoner, 2009). That democracy and education are inseparable ensures the enduring question of who establishes the rules of belonging, becoming the source of near constant school reform (Tyack and Cuban, 1995). Stanley (2005) sums up this tension through the dichotomy of transmission or transformation. Transmission tends to produce Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) responsible citizen, viewing democracy as an agreement to obey the rules and

perform civic duties. Transformation, conversely, mirrors in many ways the goal of creating justice oriented citizens, ones who, beyond merely participating in the functioning of democratic systems, actively seek to expand the access of all (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004). The decisions teachers make within the classroom, often defined by demographics, influence the rules for belonging students that absorb (Duarte, 2016; Engebretson, 2018; Geboers, et.al., 2014). As Stanley (2005) suggests, if practicing teachers intuit a political system too complex or distant to influence beyond the traditional 'rights and responsibilities' mode of civics education (vote, obey the law, serve in the military, pay your taxes), they likely produce students who carry this as a civic ideal—the rules of belonging. This echoes the current discourse surrounding what kids should know, Stanley's and Westheimer and Kahnes' dueling conceptions finding expression in contentious debate over, for example, the 1619 Project and 1776 Commission.

Art

Here we refer to art in the realm of education. We subscribe to the importance of art as an effective tool in classroom contexts. However, in exploring the utilization (itself a fraught term) of art in this project we uncovered some potential sources of discord surrounding the role of arts in democracy and in expressions of democracy. Perhaps most relevant is the possibility and appropriateness of using art as a tool to access complex subject matter, whether in P-12 classrooms or teaching methods courses. Through observing artistic expression, even the sort that echoes the street instead of the gallery, we glimpse something of the undergirders of a time in a culture. In the works under consideration, there are clues to current thinking about politics and the society—a sense, as James (1992) writes, of the possible, even though we may lack the frame to fully comprehend what we are looking at. Through this lens pop art (the everyday expression of a mass of people), as opposed to gallery art (that which is walled off from the masses, a self-conscious marker of sophistication) we access a mode of sense-making, a sort of secret door, even if the complex whole remains unknowable (Buhle, 2017; Cruz, et.at., 2015; James, 1992; Ranciere, 2009).

As part of the collage assignment we arrived at a potentially less intimidating way of allowing pre-service teachers to probe their thinking about an ecologically multilayered topic (Graham, 2007). Utilizing art in the form of a collage also enabled participants to explore more deeply their thinking regarding democracy, and allowed us, in the role of instructor/researcher, a novel way of gauging thought processes (Hughes, 2011). Ecological intelligence can be measured through art projects, and we can assess the underlying content, or at least the thinking about the content (Bradshaw, 2016; Eisner, 2004). As students work through the project, they must, while having an end in mind, use critical thought and deliberation to piece together the vision they are attempting to communicate (Hughes, 2011). In other words, in a collage they balance communication to an anticipated audience, using images that may or may not relate to a specific vision, with images, words, or phrases to translate complex visions (Rodriguez and Stankowiecz, 2016). This constitutes a reflexive, symbolic, and critical thinking process, involving interpretation, synthesis, and creation allowing participants the space to conjure a work of art designed to initiate dialogue with someone else through using symbols pulled from the commons (Payne, et.al., 2017).

There is a conundrum if we concede that art tends to be subversive and allows often marginalized people a chance

to get ideas into the public sphere. In contrast, education is seen by many in positions of authority as delivery of the dominant values of the nation, ensuring students become responsible members in the prior determined narrative of the community. Through art, we challenge that dominant power structure. The question arises whether we can use a subversive medium to arrive at a traditional conception (Maxwell, 2018). In using art, a suspicion arises that we automatically challenge norms and values defining democracy. Or, more succinctly, we use punk rock to communicate suburban ideals. We risk coloring the water when trying to get a grasp on what pre-service teachers really think about democracy by having them use a subversive medium. Or, to the contrary, perhaps art, owing to its revolutionary potential, *is* the best form for getting these future teachers to critically assess their attitudes and beliefs about democracy (Maxwell, 2018).

Expanding the critique, Koutras (2018) writes that if democracy begins with the idea of equality, pedagogy does not. There is a teacher, and a student, and in this case there is also a researcher, all creating a power imbalance. When we ask students to critically address their conception of democracy, we do so in the context of a graded assignment. There is the risk that they are not thinking deeply about democracy, but about how to best communicate a version of democracy that will please their instructor. It may be what they think we want, as opposed to what they really think (Leporati & Jacklosky, 2021). We risk the appearance of curation as opposed to creation, studio churned out hits as opposed to garage band anarchy. We also persist in a realm where students are conditioned to abide by norms which may inhibit creative or emotional expression (Stark and Bettini, 2021). Added to the above concern is the threat of the collage to participant's well-being. If pre-service teachers fully engage in the experiential nature of the project there is the risk that they experience discomfort at the challenging not of ideas, but of identity and a sense of reality (McDermott, 2002). Participants may find the process fraught, uncovering hidden conceptions, or unintended controversy, or we may uncover master narratives, all subject to our own misconceptions (Yassi, et.al., 2016).

And yet these challenges appear to be surmountable. It may be necessary that we surmount them. As we move to a more regimented approach to education characterized by standardized curriculum and assessment and the de-professionalization of educators, we have embraced the version of American schooling that favors a human capital valuation of learning. Education becomes a numbers game and the more creative modes of expression are pushed farther to the corners in the schedulization of the day (Eisner, 2004; Sim, 2018). By neglecting arts and modes of creative expression in schools we have inculcated a null curriculum. Arts in pre-service teacher education are given short shrift around the world in favor of science, math, and English (Bolden & Ijdens, 2017). Consequently, teachers come to undergrad teacher preparation programs with little confidence or perceived competence in making art. This likely leads to less artistic expression later in their classrooms, and perpetuates the cycle again (McLaren & Arnold, 2016).

Democracy-in-art

We may start with an easy idea- artistic expression is vital to functioning democracy. Or, more aptly, artistic expression is key to understanding how a student (or anyone), perceives democracy. As James (1992) writes, a popular and expansive art is not just accessible to all, but the prime way we communicate our thinking about our

culture. In this form democracy is not something to simply be *memorized*, in the way that it is often taught, say, as in how a bill becomes a law, or checks and balances, or slavish adherence to the constitution as founding document, but instead as something that is *experienced*, over and over, in changing circumstances (Payne et al., 2017; Rosengarten, 2008). Perhaps democracy is a fluid set of tools for interacting and connecting with other people and institutions. Thus teacher-citizens are not simply responsible for character education, instead they must inculcate the qualitative process skills necessary to critically assess and interact with institutions (Fairley & Wilson, 2017; Sim, 2017). If we can incorporate the qualitative thinking powers required by artistic expression in classrooms, then perhaps we can get closer to the ideal proposed by Dewey (1934) of art as ultimate expression of the protean nature of our interactions in a complex culture. When confronting democracy in terms of artistic expression we actively engage students in learning, allowing them to be present in the experience and reflective afterward (Wildemeersch, 2019). Art in this context may allow for the self-reflection necessary to move beyond the rights and responsibilities understanding of democracy and into the critical engagement form.

Research has shown a significant correlation between preservice teacher's readiness to critically engage and their attitudes about democracy (Uluçınar & Aypay, 2018). If experiential learning, like through the collage and artist statement project, leads to critical reflection and engagement in forms of democratic expression it reflects Dewey's (1916) writings in Democracy of Education. As we approach something akin to experience with reflexivity, students gather images that they believe will communicate their ideas, single images cobbled together to build a coherent whole that effectively represents, or communicates, a complex idea (Hildebrand 2016). Within the difficult process of translating their work into artist's statements, we establish a need for self-conscious understanding here—they must understand themselves—and an acknowledgement of a socially constructed commons—they must understand their audience (Garrison, 2004). This is both direct experience and reflective experience, a single project that requires pre-service teachers to participate in the construction of a complex idea and the reflection of how their selections accurately conveyed their vision to an external audience. It is both internal and external, leading to awareness of democratic values in a very human way (Eisner, 2004; Hildebrand, 2016; Uluçınar & Aypay, 2018).

After pre-service teachers constructed their collage, they were asked to write an artist's statement describing the process and how the selected collection of images achieved their vision of democracy. The artist statement had two potentially impactful consequences: first, it allowed our students the chance to think more deeply about the collage making assignment, the images they selected, and the order in which they positioned them to communicate an idea revealed a metacognitive process and second, it allowed us as instructors and interpreters of the work the extra insight into the inner processes of the artists (Greer, 2015; Hughes, 2011; Johnson, 1982; Payne et al., 2017). Using art to communicate complex ideas has promise in the classroom. Collages, when paired with artists statements, allows for the "reflective expressive strategies of the artist" (Hughes, 2011 p. 228). Thus, the importance of the artists' statements is twofold- it allows the artist the reflective space to think more deeply about the phases leading to their unique expression, and it allows us the interpretive tool necessary to more fully understand that expression (Greer, 2015; Johnson, 1982).

Through art we can get closer to a more artistic conception of connecting the individual experience of democracy

with the educative experience resulting in something closer to Walt Whitman's democratic spirit (Swarts, 2018). If we are to contradict the contemporary model of education, seeing schooling as a numbers game designed to maximize human capital, then encouraging students to critically engage with complex ideas and master mythmaking like democracy may be worthwhile in creating democratic beings, not just capitalist beings-- creating citizens, not workers (Dewey, 1916; Sim, 2017).

Allowing students to participate in the inquiry, instead of simply accepting it from an authority, is democratic at its core-- it is people power. Further, the experience becomes communal, one shared across time and space. As students gather images and ideas for use in a new way, images produced by their culture but repurposed by them in the inquiry-based project of making new meaning from old, they find the self in relation to culture (Alazmi, 2017). Students engage in teasing out complex subjects by piecing together disparate cultural relics, or of making old images new through a unique personal vision, even if that vision is deeply informed by the cultural construct of past and present and even if that conception of art is sometimes constrained by temporal and hierarchical systems (Langfeld, 2018; Tavin & Tarvo, 2018). Students exploring questions that do not have easy answers develop thinking and reasoning skills that may lead to a better grasp of diversity, enable challenges to authority and tradition, equip them to—collectively-- improve outcomes, and realize possibility in ways representative of democracy (Alazmi, 2017; Green & Condy, 2016; Eisner, 2004; Payne et al., 2017; Scullion & Armon, 2018). Emphasizing art can lead to growing competence and confidence in the classroom, for both pre-service teachers and, one hopes, their future students. (McLaren & Arnold, 2016).

Method
Methodology

We chose a basic qualitative design to best reflect our participants' experience of their world (Crotty, 1998; Lincoln, et.al., 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As the experience that defines the research changes, so must the analysis unique to the situation. The goal was not to establish a generalizable study, instead we sought to create a unique interpretation of an experience, one that is subject to shifting interpretations. Democracy, as indicated by our participants, is a difficult concept to define. It is equally difficult to attempt to describe those definitions.

Democracy itself is an emotion, if it was not, then all of us could have some objective understanding of it as a philosophy-- it is simply this, and that and this-- a textbook definition. But it isn't. It is attached to perception, perception that is grounded in emotional attachment to experiences that define, whether large or small, the definition of democracy. It is not an overarching societal level philosophy, but instead a deeply personal one that informs identity.

It is also one that helps to define membership in a tribe that one seeks to belong in. Thus, we don't define democracy so much as our conception of it defines us. It is part of the master narrative that determines our place in society (Gee, 2015). One that has been instilled from the very beginning, around campfires, dinner tables, or classrooms. Thus, a qualitative frame makes the most sense to us, related as it is to the social world and the concepts, behaviors, and the people in it (Anderson, 2010).

Participants

The research concerned a group of pre-service teachers at a mountain west university all of whom were taking a methods class in art. Of the 28 participants, the majority were female. The university is in a rural state with a small, homogenous population. The participants overall lacked diversity.

Data Collection

We collected data in the form of collages, artist's statements and conducted follow up interviews with two participants. We collected data with the understanding that the project concerned real world events, aware that our measurement would lead to new, inductive understandings and would, according to Dewey, never be complete (Hildebrand, 2016). During the entire process we kept notes in the form of a journal as a tool of self-observation informing the unfolding vignettes and contextualizing the emerging narrative. We sought to contextualize themes in the artifact collection with the expanding conceptions of art in democracy exposed by the review of literature (Kawulich, 2005). All data was analyzed through the evolving framework provided by both a historical foundation established by Stanley (2005) and a practical application framework established by Westheimer and Kahne (2004).

We utilized schema described by Saldaña and Omasta (2018) as an in vivo method of qualitative data coding to honor the participants' words, phrases, and images. From this approach we identified themes that presented from the works. We broke the coding into two sessions related to the statements and the collages. Further, meta-themes emerged requiring a deeper look at the artistic expressions and explanations. We contrasted the artist's statement codes with the collage codes to merge the two into a coherent data analysis. We then selected eight works for interviews, of which two responded to sit down discussions. The discussion allowed us to probe individual thinking more deeply, and to provide something of a model for thinking about how pre-service teachers approached the project. We first analyzed the collages themselves as standalone works of art, coding for themes in both composition and usage of symbols. We then read closely the artist's statements, both in relation to the individual works of art they accompanied and as standalone documents looking for common themes and dissonance throughout. When we had established compelling themes, we followed up with several students who had especially interesting takes on the assignment. The demarcation of interest was based on the researchers' discourse, field notes, and the meta-narratives emerging from student work (Emerson et al., 2011). We conducted the interviews from the following epistemological stance: to seek clarification of vision, to measure our own interpretations against that of original student intent, and to seek expansion (and minimize misinterpretation) of reflective practice on the part of students (Yassi et al., 2016).

Results

As we proceeded through a process of in vivo interpretive coding, we found striking similarities across all collages and statements, evidence of strong social components. We also noted some distinct outliers, evidence of independent voice. First, we look at the themes emergent in the works, then assess those few that showed different

narratives. For this section, we start with the collages, then analyze the artists' statements. We then correspond the statements and collages according to Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) and Stanley's (2005) lenses, matching themes to the three types of citizen engagement in democracy.

There were striking similarities, more so among the collages. Nearly every collage featured the military, many times this was the most salient feature, iconography of various military branches spread throughout the works. This was more obvious than in the artists' statements. Most collages featured presidents, although almost all were from the 1990s onward, either Clinton, Obama, Bush, or Trump. All featured symbols used to represent government. These consisted of monuments, buildings, and memorials, among the most common the White House, the capitol building, as well as the Lincoln Memorial and Mt. Rushmore. The symbols as we coded them also included images of eagles, the flag, the Liberty Bell, the Statue of Liberty, and founding documents. Variations on these symbols appeared in all collages.

The most common imagery outside of distinctly American semiotics were 'I voted' stickers, appearing in nearly every collage, and political party icons, typically represented in cartoonish fashion by the donkey or elephant. Equally common were depictions of money. When freedom was included, it was always in text. When freedoms were described, they always concerned the first two amendments to the constitution. The most common specific reference to freedom was the images of guns by a substantial margin, followed by various incarnations of the first amendment; press, speech, and religion. Diversity, ironically, was represented monolithically-- it was almost always represented by a childlike drawing with every color of the rainbow, or was represented by hands, whether raised or interlocked. Education showed up only four times, represented by books or, again, childlike renderings of schoolhouses.

There were outliers (and provocative imagery) among the collages, those that did not match the themes or commonalties of the majority of pre-service teacher work. One of these was a collage of all business logos, with the word money most prominent. Another featured an image of a revolver looming over the statement black lives matter. The final of these that did not match the thematic thrust of other work was also the only one of them that transcended the collage task. It featured a central figure, white, in a suit. His eyes were Apple loges, his smile the Amazon shipping logo. All around him were situated negative imagery- people yelling, people in conflict, people pushing narratives aggressively. Over his shoulders businesses representing fast food and pharmaceuticals figured prominently. It was a compellingly critical take on the concept of democracy.

When coding, themes were fewer in the collages than when reading the artist's statements. Meaning was also more saliently communicated in the statements. There were themes related to the project itself, and to conceptions of democracy. Based on the ideas expressed in the statements, we were able to place the works into one of three categories established by Westheimer and Kahne (2004). Like the collages, the statements were strikingly similar in vision, with, again a few outliers.

Nearly all pre-service teachers mentioned the difficulty of capturing democracy in the project, most also suggested that the concept was different for everyone without going into detail. One desired to make a statement about

democracy, a critique. Several used the collage shape to extend a message. All but two presented democracy as a core American thing, although several noted its Greek origins. There were some meta themes: the idea of democracy as under threat and needing arms or a military to defend it. The most striking meta theme was the idea that we have power in a democracy, but the only way to express that power is through voting, and voting is presented as a powerful act, the most powerful for the clear majority of the artists' statements. Voting is presented as triumphant.

There was also a tribal undercurrent about who belongs and who doesn't. It was about identity, how we appropriately identify as members of a democratic and capitalist system. Multiple perspectives conflated democracy with capitalism. The dollar was a significant theme. One statement utilized money as a concept to introduce the idea of people as economic individuals, with freedom expressed through economic choices. There were not as many gun references in statements as in the collages. Freedom again featured prominently, particularly freedom as enshrined in founding documents. The Declaration of Independence and Constitution were used as shorthand for documents establishing individual freedoms. As part of the meta theme of tribal identity, there was an interesting conflation, presenting the American story and democracy as one and the same, along with capitalism. Religion was surprisingly absent from all but one of the statements, fairness showed up twice. Equality, particularly when paired with opportunity was common. Democracy was explicitly linked with capitalism in six, there was also the idea that without money the government can't function. This also came up as criticism in several, citing the corruption of politics through money.

There was a link between typical civics education-- rights and responsibilities-- and the explications. There were detailed descriptions of separation of power, checks and balances, and the three branches and how they work together. The president, interestingly, came up most often as a sign of democratic process. Even if congress is demonstrably more democratic, few mentioned congress, or their local congressperson, and fewer still discussed local level political action or discourse. Statements were almost exclusively national in scope.

Of the 28 total art in democracy collage projects, 19 fell into a rights and responsibility framework, a mirror of participants' experiences of civics, government, and US history course work. These, based on coding and interpretation, were firmly ensconced in Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) responsible citizen model. They reflected an attitude of a narrative of the individual, one that accounts for rights as delineated in founding documents and paying some heed to issues of equality and diversity. In many ways, as shown by the predominance of childlike images of social justice, it is a grade school approach to teaching civic engagement. It is, in short, character education. This is not surprising as participants in the sample are all future primary school teachers. Three of the collages and statements represented something of a mix, acknowledging rights and responsibilities but indicating a desire to harness collective power to ameliorate continuing social injustice. Three works represented direct critiques of the system, indicating a need to enact social reform to address enduring issues of inequity and all of these three showed a theme of the corrupting influence of money in politics, shorthand for democracy in many cases. These three appeared most comfortable in Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) participatory citizen framework. One collage and statement represented something of Westheimer's and Kahne's social justice orientated formula, an appeal to using the democratic system to assert transformative power to

address entrenched inequality, ensure justice, and resolve historical wrongs. The work assumed the role of critical engagement in the political system to enable equal justice for all people.
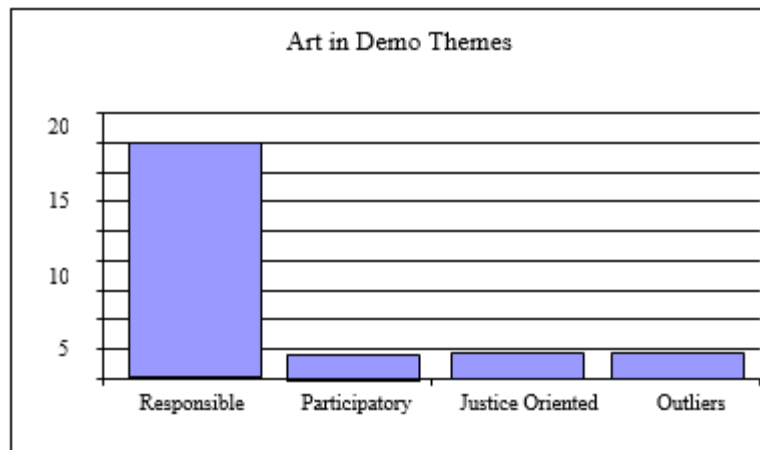

Figure 1. Emergent Civic Types

Three statements were outliers in the sense that we had difficulty fitting them into a single framework. One was aspirational, one global, and one was focused solely on the individual in relation to economic choices. It is not to say that they did not fit, just that we struggled to interpret them in a way that matched the framework. All were interesting in their own way. All enriched the experience of data analysis for the researchers. One of these outliers we assigned as aspirational, the collage was abstract in the attempt to render an "idyllic democracy," featuring a child by a lake in contemplative pose. The artist's statement that accompanied the collage was akin to a prose poem, its creator refusing to adhere to a similar procedure as their peers. It was artistic, and thus, ironically, difficult to consign to any strict framework. Another of the outliers was unique in that it did not, as all of the others, contain itself fully within an American context. This outlier took a global view of democracy, featuring images from various cultures as it assessed democracy not as a uniquely American institution, but one that was emergent and submergent across the planet. The final of the outliers was exceptional in that it assigned a powerful sense of individuality to participants in a democracy. If most of the collages and statements addressed freedoms and individual power in some way, this particular work focused solely on it, characterizing democracy in a strictly economic decision-making way. The collage featured only corporate logos and terms associated with economics, and the statement suggested that humans in democracies were Adam Smith-like independent operators, democracy itself serving as an expression of market based decision making that allowed rational actors to determine, solo, what worked best for them as individuals. It was an unselfconscious reflection of the belief in the invisible hand.

We conducted interviews with two of the participants. Both indicated, in collage, statement, and when discussing in person, democracy as a difficult concept. Both interviewees explained the central struggle of finding existing images to communicate the vision they had in their minds. In both interviews participants expressed a desire to sound smart when discussing the topic. I confessed that I would also struggle to define and communicate an idea as complex as democracy. Several times I pointed to specific images that represented something to me-- for example, an image of Thurgood Marshall in one collage as evidence of the accession of influential people of color-- to have the artist tell me they were looking for images that looked like they represented something they

were communicating, diversity, or an image of stately power. In all forms of communication, rights and responsibilities was the dominant form of democracy.

While some participants critiqued democracy as corrupt and voting as the illusion of power, most indicated the power of voting as individual right, one equated with expressions of freedom. The majority of artistic expression presented government documents, buildings, monuments and American symbols as the dominant expression of democracy. Most also explained this as a civics lesson in how the government works. For those indicating a rights and responsibility approach-- Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) responsible citizen-- democracy was conflated with the United States Government and was static and impersonal. For those falling into latter categories, according to coding, democracy represented a system serving to check government authority and corruption, a method of changing outcomes to improve the lives of people. There was a distinct difference between the former, which had strong depictions of political parties and military branches, and the latter, which often featured images of refugees and collective energy.

Discussion

Democracy is a difficult concept. Expressing democracy through art adds a layer of complexity (Eisner, 2004). There is a theme of distance, both between using art to engage in the classroom, and in the act of participating in a democratic system. We are interested in how these things come together in a classroom, and what that reveals about larger cultural contexts. This led to our research questions. Can we help pre-service teachers get at the sinew of democracy by having them create a collage and then write about it? And further, can we determine their attitudes and conceptions of democracy by regarding their work?

Through art, people, including pre-service teachers, can achieve something of this deep dive into considering amorphous philosophical consideration of concepts like democracy. Anyone can be an artist, it may be the most natural default setting for us as a species (James, 1963). This represents art as discourse, a direct communicative conduit, from person to person, establishing a sphere of "reason that interrupts the violence of disenchanted thought" (Feola, 31). Art cannot be solo in this context, there is expression, and someone(s) to interpret it as compelling dialogue (Campana, 2011; Blandy, 2011). If a vision represents some core beliefs, then one can communicate it to others without all of the fuzz of contemporary communication, it is, therefore, base, it is cave paintings, it is in some sense universalized. It is, provided we can pick up a guitar with a little or a lot of expertise and turn up the amp, punk. We can get students (and pre-service teachers) to show us fundamental beliefs, or even the underpinnings of the beliefs. They desire communication and that communicative effort requires another perspective to decipher it, a process that leads, potentially, to understanding. Understanding grants it authority, grants our students some authority in the classroom because we as instructors are going to engage them in dialogue, we try to figure out what they are saying, and this process facilitates a sense of agency and power (Campana, 2011; Cruz, et al., 2015). Praxis is revealed in the many ways it combines sense-making efforts-- educator/student, pre-service teacher/experienced teacher, researcher/ participant, center/periphery-- to create something new.

And yet, we are in an educative phase that is withdrawing from the desire for critical engagement with concepts, instead focusing on a human capital paradigm. We educate for jobs, in a neo-liberal framework (Bialostok, 2015; Sim, 2017). When thinking of human capital, the value is placed on output and schools seek to maximize that number, mimicking a managerial state to impose ever more curricular controls as they seek to squeeze out the space for educating civic minded citizens to instead create lifelong consumers (Bjork et al., 2015). Thus, in many of the collages we see represented scenes of money and governmental authority in the form of monuments and monumental buildings. Democracy, in this sense, is equated with production, with capitalism, with human capital (Koutras, 2018). Under this aegis, democracy becomes the way in which we enrich ourselves. It is not problem solving, instead, problem making.

However, through these acts of re-creation we can unlock human potential to identify and solve real problems (Dewey, 1934). This idea in itself mirrors the process of the artist, it also creates a temporal relationship to the work of art, one must, just as the artist did, conceive the pattern of images in one's mind (and through the lens of experience) to make meaning. It is discourse across time and space. And it has form and meaning, across this space, the physical manifested through individual-in-collective thought experienced anew. These collages, simple as they at first appear, carry with them the weight of artist intent, effort, and experience, a way of introducing the idea of art as collective experience, and one that can uncover possibilities in community engagement and problem solving (Campana, 2011; Blandy, 2011). Through an art in democracy collage and artist statement project, we provided students the opportunity of voice and access to the commons ensured by the practice of democracy empowering them to think critically about their modes of belief. More importantly perhaps, pre-service teachers may take this experience and carry it into their classrooms, giving their own students a glimpse of genuine democratic engagement through art and statement.

Through the art in democracy collage project, we arrived at a hitherto inchoate goal-- witness the unrepresentable (Ranciere, 2009). This emerged at two levels, the irreducibility of a term like democracy, and the impossibility of representing (or interpreting) it through art. Despite the challenge, we sought to engage pre-service teachers in a thought provoking activity designed to absorb them in terrain defined by vagaries of experience and accessed through the ordering and re-ordering of image and representation (Ranciere, 2009). This is the goal of the collage project, a way of reordering existing reality in the form of existing images-- to make something new from something not-- into a coherent representation of a pre-service teacher's view of democracy. These collages took different forms, and yet all share strands of commonality, reflecting the social milieu in which students are immersed. As students work through the collage and then write a reflective description of the action, they began to think more deeply about why they arranged a certain group of images this way, or that, and why they focused on these symbols, and not those. And, in spite of individual effort, through common emergent themes, we see the culture leaking through. The struggle between what the student saw and desired to convey and the limitation imposed on them by the availability of images to communicate their ideas exposes the discourse. Student collages were an amalgam representing someone else's translation, of something likely vitally different, that forced a discourse between self and culture (Alazmi, 2017). This entanglement with both idea and process, through the images created by someone else, suggests something akin to Bruner's (1965) attempts to make the familiar unfamiliar, and in so doing elicit a more self-conscious process of thinking.

Pre-service teachers recognized this struggle with artistic expression when they confessed a lack of experience with it-- they had lower confidence, and consequently may be less likely to engage in this type of learning activity later. Art represents a reflection of democracy; it is difficult and complex. To succeed in this evolving project, we need to see democracy not as a tribal identifier, not as insurance of our individualism, but as a collective effort to ensure the best outcomes for all of us (Nussbaum, 2010). In these collages is evidence of both, the idea that a conception of democracy identifies a person as a certain sort of person, one with an individual stake in a shared world. How one interacts with other humans is expressed through the collages and statements, whether self-determined or as evidence of collective identity. Some of this is revealed in the creation of the collages, a tapping of a collaborative "narrative imagination," or our ability to see from other's perspectives (Nussbaum, 2010. p 95). This is crucial to understanding diversity, equality, and fairness. Art in the classroom, as demonstrated by pre-service teachers, is an effective way to expose youth to methods of shifting point of view, allowing multiple perspectives. All of us already have these tools, it is just a matter of engaging them in the classroom.

Perhaps through art we allow pre-service teachers the opportunity to engage with a complex topic in the most effective way, a process described by Rancière (2009) as the competence of the incompetent, a leveling that allows any participant or student to reflect on democracy, even if poorly equipped previously to do so. Rancière, similarly to CLR James (1963), illustrates the potential of artistic expression as equalizer through sophisticated communication across imposed ability levels. The DIY nature of street art, like punk music, has the potential of upending the official brokering of what voices will be heard, it has the power of subverting approved discourse and tilting the democratic commons in new directions (Campana, 2011; Desai & Darts, 2016; Drass, 2016; Relles & Clemons, 2018). This belief allows creation and translation, a dialogue between artist and audience that undermines any idea of inequality of intelligence (Wildemeersch, 2018). Everyone, through a self-expressive collage project, can build meaningful connections between knowing and feeling within the shared cultural narrative (McLaren & Arnold, 2016). When investing in the creation and interpretation process we acknowledge a diversity of viewpoints (Feola, 2018). Indeed, this was among the most common themes in the artist statements-- democracy means different things to different people, thus opening the door to a needed re-engagement in discursive activity. When students intuit that they are creating work that will be viewed in different ways by different audiences, they participate in genuine qualitative reasoning, a higher demand on cognitive ability (Dewey, 1934). Perhaps going forward students can use something similar to engage in difficult and controversial issues requiring deliberative processes (Payne et al., 2017). Like democracy, the project represented a process of struggle and growth.

Conclusion

Instead of assigning students the composition of a formal paper on what democracy means to them, we offered students the chance to get at the sinewy, experiential stuff of learning. In the doing and thinking about art, students arrived closer to a core of democratic thought, the action that people initiate when they inhabit space, or more apt, when they reinterpret and communicate in that space (Payne et al., 2017). As students engaged in creating collages, they interacted within the common space of democracy in this (pop) culture. Whether they sought imagery from

magazines or the internet they were accessing and re-purposing collectively generated symbols with meaning and that meaning was altered through their re-narrating on the page. This represents a small experiential way for students, consciously or not, to engage in democratic processes of communication; the creation or "reframing of material and symbolic (communal) space" (Ranciere, 2009, p 24). Pre-service teachers constructed a collage, reflected on it, and shared it with us. As such, it was a communal exercise, re-purposing images from someone else that mean something else and transforming them into a new interpretation even if prescribed and controlled within democratic constructs of education.

Recommendations

We urge teacher education practitioners to incorporate art in the classroom in the effort to create the symbolic representations of thought and the expression of ideas that are unutterable in any other form. In short, art through this project serves to express a form of idea that could not be expressed in another way, thus qualifying it as unique experience. As pre-service teachers work through the artistic process, they express emotion as they cobble together raw resources in the form of images from print media, and create something wholly new, a representation of their interaction with complex ideas, their melding of art and democracy into new understanding (Ackerman, 2001; Dewey, 1934). It feels more like the street (and less like the gallery), more like punk, than anything else we do. If they merely wrote down thoughts on a paper, in standard essay form, they would be stating previous learning, a form of regurgitation, but, through the experience of merging forms with ideas in a new medium, then reflecting upon it, they arrive at something resembling the praxis-based liberatory education intended to empower students to participate actively in their society (Freire, 1970; Relles & Clemons, 2018).

References

Ackermann, E. (2001). Piaget's constructivism, papert's constructionism: What's the difference. *Future of Learning group publication, 5*(3), 438.

Acuff, J. B. (2018). 'Being' a critical multicultural pedagogue in the art education classroom. *Critical Studies in Education, 59*(1), 3553. doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2016.1176063

Alazmi, F. M. (2017). Art education as a means of promoting democracy: Preparing pre-service art teachers for social justice education (Ph.D.). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1961605443). Retrieved from http://libproxy.uwyo.edu/login/?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1961605443?accountid=14793

Anderson, C. (2010). Presenting and evaluating qualitative research. *American journal of pharmaceutical education*, *74*(8). doi.org/10.5688/aj7408141

Bialostok, S. (2015). Risk theory and education: Policy and practice. *Policy Futures in Education, 13*(5), 561-576. doi.org/10.1177/1478210315572519

Bjork, C., Johnston, D. K., & Ross, H. A. (2015). *Taking teaching seriously: How liberal arts colleges prepare teachers to meet today's educational challenges in schools.* Routledge.

Blandy, D. (2011). Sustainability, participatory culture, and the performance of democracy: Ascendant sites of

theory and practice in art education *Studies in Art Education, 52*(3), 243-255. doi.org/10.1080/00393541.2011.11518838

Bolden, B., & Ijdens, T. (2017). Introduction. In (Ed.s) Ijdens, T., Bolden, B., & Wagner, E. *Arts education around the world: comparative research seven years after the Seoul agenda. International Yearbook of Research in Arts Education.* Waxmann.

Bradshaw, R. D. (2016). Art integration fosters empathy in the middle school classroom. *The clearing house: A journal of educational strategies, issues and ideas, 89*(4-5), 109-117. doi.org/10.1080/00098655.2016.1170441

Bruner, J. S. (1965). *Man: A course of study*. Occasional paper no. 3. Educational Services, Inc., Cambridge, MA .Social Studies Curriculum Program. National Science Foundation, Washington, D.C. Retrieved from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED178390.pdf

Buhle, P. (2017). *CLR James. The artist as revolutionary.* Verso.

Campana, A. (2011). Agents of possibility: Examining the intersections of art, education, and activism in communities & nbsp. *Studies in Art Education, 52* (4,) 278-291. doi.org/10.1080/00393541.2011.11518841

Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: meaning and perspective in the research process.* Sage

Cruz, B. C., Ellerbrock, C. R., & Smith, N. M. (2015). "I have never witnessed students so engaged": The art of democracy in schools. *Art Education, 68*(6), 9-15. doi.org/10.1080/00043125.2015.11519342

Desai, D., & Darts, D. (2016). Interrupting everyday life: Public interventionist art as critical public pedagogy. *International Journal of Art & Design Education, 35*(2), 183-195. doi:10.1111/jade.12050

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy in education: An introduction to the philosophy of education. The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882-1953*. Democracy and Education Electronic Edition.

Dewey, J. (1934). *Art as experience.* Minton, Balch and Company.

Dimitriadis, G. and Kamberelis, G. (2006) *Theory for education.* Routledge.

Drass, J. M. (2016). Creating a culture of connection: A postmodern punk rock approach to art therapy. *Art Therapy, 33*(3), 138-143. https://doi.org/10.1080/07421656.2016.1199244

Duarte, M. (2016). Educating citizens for humanism: Nussbaum and the education crisis. *Studies in philosophy and education, 35*(5), 463-476. doi.org/10.1007/s11217-015-9489-9

Eisner, E. W. (2004). Artistry and pedagogy in curriculum. *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy, 1(*2), 15-16. doi:10.1080/15505170.2004.10411491

Eisner, E. W. (2004). What can education learn from the arts about the practice of education? *International Journal of Education & the Arts, 5*(4). Retrieved 01.30.2022 from http://ijea.asu.edu/v5n4/.

Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R.I., & Shaw, L.L. (2011). *Participant observation and fieldnotes. Handbook of Ethnography.* SAGE. dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781848608337

Engebretson, K. E. (2018). One novice teacher and her decisions to address or avoid controversial issues. *The Journal of Social Studies Research, 42*(1), 39-47.https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jssr.2017.03.001

Fairley, N., & Wilson, M. (2017). *Living democracy: Communities as classrooms, students as citizens.* Retrieved from https://ebookcentral.proquest.com

Feola, M. (2018). *Powers of sensibility: aesthetic politics through Adorno, Foucault, and Ranciere.* Northwestern University Press.

Freire, P. (1970) *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* Continuum.

Garrison, J. (2004). Dewey and the education of eros: A critique of the ideal of self-creation. *Jct, 20*(4), 147-161. Retrieved from

http://libproxy.uwyo.edu/login/?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/194687759?accountid=14793

Geboers, E., Geijsel, F., Admiraal, W., & ten Dam, G. (2014). Typology of student citizenship. *European Journal of Education, 49*(4), 514-528. doi:10.1111/ejed.12091

Gee, J. (2015). *Social linguistics and literacies ideology in discourses*. Routledge.

Graham, M. A. (2007). Art, ecology and art education: Locating art education in a critical place- based pedagogy. *Studies in art education, 48*(4), 375-391. https://doi.org/10.1080/00393541.2007.11650115

Green, L, and Condy, J. (2016). Philosophical enquiry as a pedagogical tool to implement the CAPS curriculum: Final-year pre-service teachers' perceptions. *South African Journal of Education,* *36*(1), 1-8. doi.org/10.15700/saje.v36n1a1140

Greer, K. (2015). Connecting inspiration with information: Studio art students and information literacy instruction. *Communications in Information Literacy, 9* (1), 83-94. https://doi.org/10.15760/comminfolit.2015.9.1.177

Harrison, C. T. (1990). *Punk, art and education*. (Doctoral dissertation, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro). Retrieved from

https://www.proquest.com/docview/303852661?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true

Hildebrand, David L. (2016) The paramount importance of experience and situations in dewey's democracy and education. *Educational Theory 66* (1-2) Page: 73-88 DOI:10.1111/edth.12153

Hughes, S. (2011). Behind the mask: Using arts-based learning to uncover, explore and improve action. *Citizenship, Social and Economics Education, 10*(2–3), 227–238. https://doi.org/10.2304/csee.2011.10.2.227

James, C.L.R. (1963). *Beyond the boundary*. Hutchinson.

James, C. L. R. (1992). In (ed.) Grimshaw, A. *The C.L.R. james reader.* Blackwell.

Johnson, E. H. (1982). *American artists on art from 1940 to 1980*. Routledge. doi.org/10.4324/9780429494192

Kawulich, B. B. (2005). Participant observation as a data collection method. *Qualitative Social Research, 6*(2). Retrieved from

http://libproxy.uwyo.edu/login/?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/869227631?accountid=14793

Koutras, K. (2018). Democratic art. *Esse, 92,* 14-23. Retrieved from http://libproxy.uwyo.edu/login/?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/2012119477?accountid=14793

Langfeld, G. (2018). The canon in art history: Concepts and approaches. *Journal of Art Historiography*, (19), 1-18. Retrieved from

http://libproxy.uwyo.edu/login/?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/2167792248?accountid=14793

Leporati, M. & Jacklosky, R. (2021). Peeling the onion. In I. Kinane (Ed.) *Isn't it Ironic? Irony in Contemporary Popular Culture.* Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003080350

Lincoln, Y. S., Lynham, S. A., & Guba, E. G. (2018). Paradigmatic controversies: contradictions, and emerging confluences, Revisited. In N. Denzin, & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*

(pp. 108–150). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Maxwell, B. (2018). When Teachers' Off-Duty Creative Pursuits Conflict with Role Model Expectations: A Critical Analysis of Shewan. *Interchange, 49*(2), 161-178. doi.org/10.1007/s10780-018-9320-y

McDermott, M. (2002) Collaging pre-service teacher identity. *Teacher Education Quarterly, Vol. 29*, No. 4, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23478451

McLaren, M., & Arnold, J. (2016). Transforming pedagogies: encouraging pre-service teachers to engage the power of the arts in their approach to teaching and learning. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 41*(5). dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2016v41n5.2

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research : A guide to design and implementation*. Jossey-Bass. Retrieved from

https://search-ebscohost-

com.libproxy.uwyo.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1022562&site=ehost- live

Mulgan, R. G. (1968). Defining 'Democracy.' *Political Science, 20*(2), 3–9. https://doi.org/10.1177/003231876802000201

Nussbaum, M. C. (2010). *Not for profit: Why democracy needs the humanities.* Princeton University Press.

Payne, K. A., Hoffman, J. V., & DeJulio, S. (2017). Doing democracy through simulation, deliberation, and inquiry with elementary students. *Social Studies Research and Practice, 12(*1), 56-69. doi.org/10.1108/SSRP-03-2017-0009

Rancière, J. (2009). *Aesthetics and its discontents*. Polity.

Relles, S., & Clemens, R. (2018). 'Do it yourself' scholarship: from punk rock to qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 31*(4), 312-327. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2017.1422284

Rodriguez, F., & Stankiewicz, M. A. (2016). Looking outward: Villemain's international perspective at the 1965 Penn State Seminar. *Visual Arts Research, 42*(2), 10+. dx.doi.org/10.1108/SSRP-03-2017-0009

Rosengarten, F. (2008). *Urbane revolutionary. CLR James and the struggle for a new society*. University Press of Mississippi.

Saldaña, J., & Omasta, M. (2018). *Qualitative research: Analyzing life*. Sage.

Scullion, R., & Armon, S. (2018). Democracy in a de-civilizing age: The rise of shameless personal truths. *International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics, 14*(3), 283-300. doi.org/10.1386/macp.14.3.283_1

Sim, J. (2017). How ideological differences influence pre-service teachers' understandings of educational success. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 42*(9). http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2017v42n9.8

Stanley, W. (2005) Social studies and the social order: Transmission or transformation? *Social Studies Today: Research and Practice* (ed. Parker, W. C.) Taylor & Francis, retrieved from:https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/e/9781315726885/chapters/10.4324/978131572688. 5-8

Stark, K., & Bettini, E. (2021). Teachers' perceptions of emotional display rules in schools: A systematic review. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 104*, doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103388

Swarts, G (2014). Global exposure: Using photography, art and imagination to connect students and their local communities to the world. *Ohio Social Studies Review*, *51*,(1) Spring 2014

Swarts, G. (2018). Revisiting a spiritual democracy: In search of whitman's democratic vistas. *The Palgrave Handbook of Citizenship and Education*, doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-67905-1_28-1

Tavin, K., & Tervo, J. (2018). How soon is now? Post-conditions in art education. *Studies in Art Education, 59*(4), 282-296. doi:10.1080/00393541.2018.1509263

Tyack, D. & Cuban, L. (1995). *Tinkering toward utopia. A century of public school reform*. Harvard Press.

Uluçınar, U., & Aypay, A. (2018). An evaluation of the relationship between pre-service teachers' critical thinking dispositions and democratic values in terms of critical pedagogy. *Journal of History Culture and Art Research, 7*(3), 1-17. DOI: 10.7596/taksad.v7i3.1545

Urban W. J., & Wagoner J. L. (2009) *American education: A history.* Routledge, Oxford.

Westheimer, J., & Kahne, J. (2004). Educating the "Good" citizen: Political choices and pedagogical goals. *PS: Political Science & Politics, 37*(2), 241-247. doi:10.1017/S1049096504004160

Wildemeersch, D. (2019). What can we learn from art practices? Exploring new perspectives on critical engagement with plurality and difference in community art education. *International Journal of Art & Design Education*, *38*(1), 168–181. doi.org/10.1111/jade.12168

Yassi, A., Spiegel, J.B., Lockhart, K., Fels, L., Boydell, K., Marcuse, J. (2016). Ethics in community-university-artist partnered research: Tensions, contradictions and gaps identified in an 'arts for social change' project. *Journal of Academic Ethics. Volume 14*, Issue 3, pp 199–220. doi.org/10.1007/s10805-016-9257-7

Author Information

Josh Montgomery

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6311-5647

(Corresponding Author)

Northland College

1411 Ellis Avenue. Ashland, WI 54806

USA

Contact e-mail: *antae_4@yahoo.com*

Pete Moran

https://orcid.org/ 0000-0003-2789-203X

University of Wyoming

1000 E. University Ave. Laramie, WY 82071.

USA

Gabriel Swarts

https://orcid.org/ 0000-0002-0370-034X

St. Bonaventure University

3261 West State Road, St. Bonaventure, NY 14778

USA