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You Belong Here: A Critical Look at Community Engagement in Museum Education Through K-16 Place Based Pedagogy

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Introduction

Growing up in a diverse community within Elgin and eventually moving to a rural town I was able to witness multiple examples of distinct cultural ways of knowing. In both a more urban and then a rural context, I could see the importance of community as I was so welcomed into the households of friends and neighbors of all backgrounds. I was able to experience holidays and celebrations, like Media Noche and Diwali, outside of my own culture, witnessing the richness and beauty of each person's community. Even in differing backgrounds, I experienced a sense of belonging. My interest in learning about many cultural perspectives deeply informed my love of museums. My family was lucky enough to eventually have means to travel as I got older, and I was able to attend all sorts of cultural institutions from history museums to art museums. While I enjoyed these excursions, I noticed the disconnect between the visitors and the institutions. People were just being herded through gallery spaces with more care being placed on the items being shown instead of the people looking at them. I have struggled myself with a sense of belonging in museum contexts and while I felt enjoyment from visiting these spaces, I often felt that I was not supposed to be in them. The items in their own spot lights sanctioned off felt as if they held the utmost value in comparison to those who gazed upon them. I loved the joy of discovering what was behind every corner, but the sterile environment and guards made most places feel like tombs of relics not for consumption.

Finding My Place in Museums

My love of museums and the arts naturally turned to wanting to be a part of that field. I came to community-based art education as a practicing artist wanting to share art through a more connected way of teaching. I wanted to help create space where exchanges of knowledge and appreciation of art were inclusive and welcoming (Belenky et al., 1986). Working in both community-based arts organizations and museums I have seen firsthand how approaching education from a community driven place leads to a more connected and empathetic space. My

mission was to make all those who walked into an arts institution feel like they belonged there. My journey to finding my place in museums started with the desire to change the perception and practice of elitism within them. With artists like the Guerrilla Girls and movements like Change the Museum calling out institutions for their racism, pandering and nepotism museums need to completely rehaul how their education functions and how institutions connect to their community. The Guerrilla Girls highlighted the above issues in their pieces *Guerrilla Girls' Code Of Ethics For Art Museums* (1990 *Figure 1.*) and *What's New and Happening at the Guggenheim for the Discriminating Art Lover?* (1992 *Figure 2.*). These pieces showed the major problems plaguing museums and their roles within the community. In my position at a midsize museum I began researching better methods of community engagement and changing museum education to a people centered approach. As a museum educator it was my role to promote this change by synthesizing the museum collection with community through collaboration. How can the museum collection connect with the community when most work is from outside of the local area? How can you expect the community to connect to your collection when it does not reflect your demographic? By sharing with the community at every level of museum programming, from curator to docent, to education program, I sought to move the museum from an object oriented space to a people centered space.

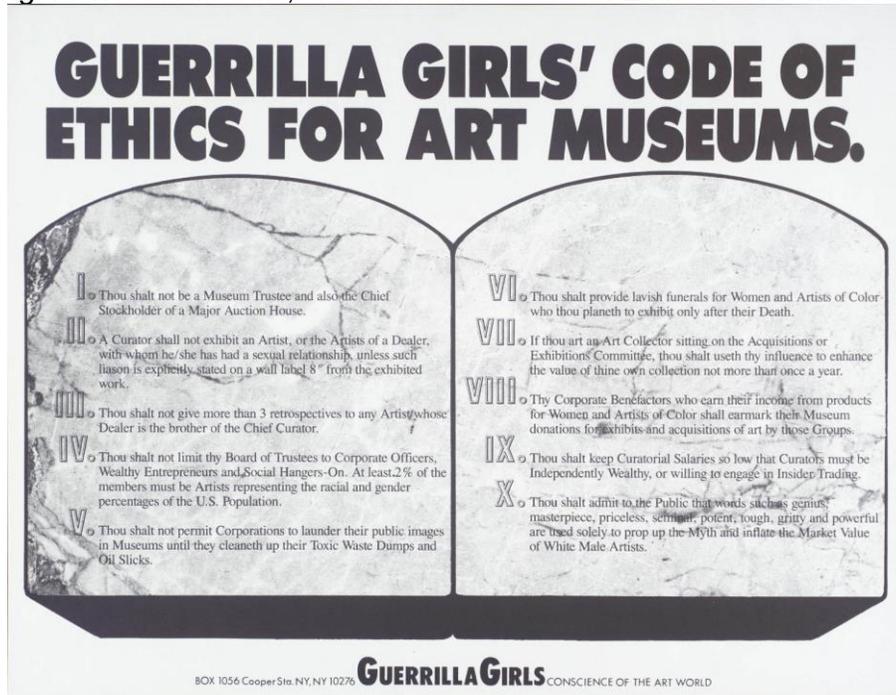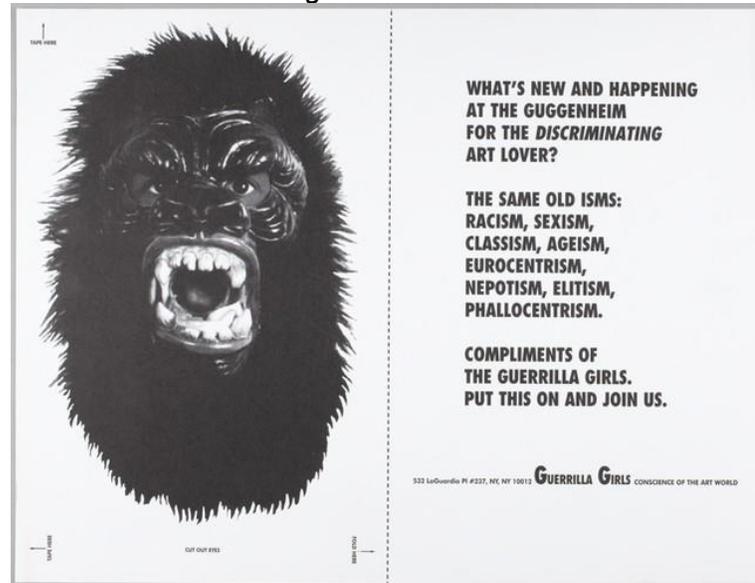*Figure 1.* Guerilla Girls, "*Guerrilla Girls' Code Of Ethics For Art Museums"* 1990

Figure2. Guerilla Girls, "*What's New and Happening at the Guggenheim for the Discriminating Art Lover?"* 1992

Museums as Primary Educators in Communities

According to Gonzales (2019), museums are some of society's primary educators, along with

families and schools, so working for education with social justice in mind can contribute

positively to the environment in which it resides (p. 2). Museums historically are steeped in practices that marginalize non-European communities (Gonzales,2019) When these institutions are "object-oriented" it only creates an environment of disconnect and sets these institutions apart from the community that supports them. Simon (2010) spoke about this treatment through her experience as a museum member, "I am rarely welcomed as anything but another body through the gate. This lack of personalization at entry sets an expectation that I am not valued as an individual by the institution. I am just a faceless visitor" (p. 39). To create a stronger sense of belonging and connection, museums must shift their educational practices to community engagement and place-based pedagogies. Smith (2010) observes, "Place-based education is learning that is rooted in what is local— the unique history, environment, culture, economy, literature, and art of a particular place. The community provides the context for learning, student work focuses on community needs and interests, and community members serve as resources and partners in every aspect of teaching and learning." (p.23). When museums connect to their communities not only do they stay relevant, but they also retain engagement.

Museums as Unique Places of Discovery: Fostering Dialogue and Collaboration

Museums are unique places of discovery and so their approach to education will be unique in its execution. Every aspect of the space aids in its educational mission from layouts to the didactics on the walls. Nina Simon states, in *The Participatory Museum* (2010), that museums must move from "me" to "we" and that in order to do so they must personalize the institution through an audience centered approach (p. 32-34). Museum educators and curators need to take on a proactive role of engaging with their community by having open dialogues and collaboration with members in order to facilitate a better way of knowing and understanding (Simon, p.5). Place-based participatory pedagogy creates a platform for these spaces to begin to move from the "me" to the "we".

Problem Statement and Research Questions

Historically museums exist as object centered spaces with little consideration of the community and artists that support them. Therefore museums as pedagogical sites must reorient themselves to become people centered spaces incorporating participatory pedagogical experiences for both community members and artists.

1. How can museum education better incorporate community centered participatory pedagogical experiences?

    a. In what ways can museums develop community centered educational practices that reflect community values?

    b. In what ways can museums develop community centered curating practice?

    c. In what ways can community centered museum education departments become agents of social change?

Significance of this Study

There is a lack of research in place-based pedagogies in museum education. It is important now more than ever to recognize the need to center community in museum education. This study will seek to investigate how museums can exact meaningful change through their educational practices and create a sense of belonging in museums for their immediate community. The outcomes of this study will help museum educational departments critically examine their practices and move towards pedagogy that connects.

Definition of Terms

<u>Place Based Pedagogy:</u> A student-centered form of pedagogy that emphasizes inquiry into topics of importance in the community.

<u>Object Oriented:</u> The practice of putting the value of an object above the value of a person.

<u>Tokenization:</u> The practice of selecting a small number of persons to represent a group of people. A practice commonly used to avoid larger discussions of discrimination.

Limitations of this Study

This study was limited in scope because of restrictions put in place due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Museums are severely scaling back all departments and some are not open to the public as of this study. The COVID pandemic has led to cut backs and reorganizing that is greatly affecting museum education missions. In some instances, entire departments are being eliminated which further makes this study difficult. Programming in person has all but stopped in the region. This will make observation of programming impossible at this time.

Literature Review

Critical Perspectives & Place Based Pedagogy

The field of museum education is seeing a demand to change course by those who work in the field and patrons. The need for art museums to stay relevant to their community has led to institutions reexamining their place and educational missions (Rose, 2006). Dewey (1934) states in *Art as Experience,* "Works of art are means by which we enter, through imagination and the emotions they evoke, into other forms of relationship and participation than our own" (p. 333). Mark Mattern further investigated this in his writings on Dewey stating, "Dewey believed art is a potent form of communication through which community is developed and political action is undertaken" (p. 54). Dewey's work critically calls out that democracy is necessary for the process of education. Art is connected to everyday experiences and so incorporating the everyday lives of the community into museum education will lead to a more democratic educational experience. Allowing for communities to be more participatory and active in their own art educational experience allows for deeper meaning and understanding. Mattern (1999) explains this further, "Seeing how others live also potentially provokes examination of one's own

beliefs and practices." (p. 63). Mattern (1999) and Dewey (1934) are both examining how people, art and education coexist and react with one another. The places, people and objects in museums are not separate parts within a system, but instead interconnected entities working together.

Traditionally, pedagogy in museums was based strictly on the presentation of an object and its historical information. Meaning, that the entire design of a show was centered on the object and its relationship to the space it was in with little to no regard given to the people who would be viewing it. As museums move towards concentrating on educational missions the emphasis still relies heavily on the interaction with the objects (Williams, 1996). Object based museum practice dehumanizes the items and separates them from the places and people that interact with them. This act of dehumanization creates a pedagogy that disregards those it aims to engage. According to Freire (1970), this form of pedagogy creates a system of oppression and dehumanizes those involved (p. 54). Combining the hands-on approach of John Dewey (1934) with the critical lens of Freire (1970), museums can work towards a democratic form of place-based pedagogy.

Place-Based Pedagogy: A Person-Centered Approach

Place-based pedagogy is a student-centered approach that puts emphasis on inquiries of topics that are important to the community. Gray and Graham (2007) outline the significance of place in their article *This Is the Right Place: Community-Based Art Education at Utah's Springville Museum of Art*: "In contemporary life, a sense of community is often splintered by the inexorable forces of the global economy and mass media. Places are owned, used up, and thrown aside. In the process, the sense of belonging to a particular community is lost" (p. 304). This sentiment rings true if we think about how the landscape of a community changes with time. Places like museums and other cultural institutions bring a value to a community by supplying it with a sense of place. Gray and Graham (2007) state that place-based education

can be used as a model for teaching and learning because it strengthens children's connection to others, to region, and helps to overcome alienation and isolation that is often associated with modern society (Gray and Graham). Museums are perfectly suited for the multidisciplinary experience of place-based pedagogy. The community's engagement is treated as a resource that keeps the museum's education relevant (Gray and Graham). A deeper sense of place allows for more connective and democratic learning experiences.

Place-based pedagogy's collaborative and participatory form creates a space for museum patrons to engage in their own learning. Pop Villeneuve and Martin-Hamon (2007) highlight some important things to consider about place-based pedagogy in museums," Museum educators should take on a proactive role, learning about community values and interests and communicating a desire to collaborate, while also being receptive to opportunities initiated by and within the community." (p. 261). Villaneuve and Martin-Hamon are making it clear that place-based pedagogy consists of many working parts, but it is the responsibility of the museum and patrons to work together. Museum pedagogy should be a democratic participatory educational experience and divorce itself from the traditional elitist system. In order for museum pedagogy to overcome this desire to center objects over people, the museum must make efforts to actively engage the community.

Community Engagement Through the Arts

Museum education must go beyond traditional education experiences like docent led tours and lengthy didactics. These traditional methods are often impersonal and tell those attending what should be important to them (Simon). Utt and Olsen (2007) state, "Museums are not just destinations or tourist attractions; rather they are active participants in community dialogue" (p. 301). Engaging patrons through participation and collaboration will help museums understand what is important to the community and how to make their work pertinent. Community

engagement is not simply inviting community members to view the art, but instead should be a discourse that becomes an open dialogue to exact meaningful community participation.

Every community is complex and has varying levels of diversity. To approach museum education as one-size-fits-all alienates museum patrons and disengages the community. Simon (2010) suggests that collaborative projects are key, "Collaborative projects are institutionally-driven partnerships in which staff members work with community partners to develop new programs, exhibitions, or offerings" (p. 231). Simon outlines that consulting with experts and community representatives ensures authenticity and accurately portrays the community. She also states that collaboration gives patrons buy-in to their own education, the museum and community as a whole (p.232). By engaging in collaboration museum educational sites will be able to address the issues that communities face and become welcoming spaces where patrons feel like they belong.

 Lawton (2019) furthers this notion by stating how museums should be engaging sites: "Community art is a creative form of community engagement that embodies aspects of social practice art and community-based art education. Community art, like social practice art and community-based art education, is participatory and collaborative" (p.205). The primary differences that Lawton describes are the educational aspects that go beyond just engagement. She observes,

> Community-based art education is primarily about fostering asset-focused, community-based teaching and learning experiences with and through art. Community based art education takes place in both educational institutions and communities. It provides opportunities for participants to develop art skills while learning from one another about their community as situated in the larger context, and by building meaningful connections through artistic collaborations that inspire personal, social, and communal transformation. (p.206)

Museums can foster engagement, be proponents of education, and bastions of societal change.

Museums as Agents of Change Using Social Justice Practices

In *Exhibitions for Social Justice*, Elena Gonzales (2019) mentions the long-held debate about whether or not museums should act as temples or forums. It is widely accepted now that the role of a museum is a forum, but most spaces do not achieve this. Gonzales states, "Museums have the power to help our society become more hospitable, equitable, and sustainable" (p.1). The curation of this participatory experience falls on all members and should reflect the purview of the society it engages. Not only should museums reflect and engage the society, but they should also contribute to it (Gonzales). Incorporating social justice practices in museum pedagogy allows for community collaboration and, in return, provides contributions back to the community.

In contrast Ng (2017) states that while the inherent nature of this type of work is good it can become tokenizing. Ng mentions that most days of the year museums center around their historically white eurocentric origins and allyship, but instead should ensure that they are fully engaging and collaborating with every person of the community. The onus is on the institution to keep re-examining their practices and commit to community engaging work every day of the year. Ng summarizes how important this work is:

> We need a strong team of allies to get us through the tough parts of change-making, to listen to and understand visitors, to help set a direction informed by racialized and marginalized voices, and to establish ways of working together that are supportive, rooted in social justice, care, and consideration. There is no more urgent of a time than now to do this critical and necessary work. (p.151)

Reflecting on their own efforts to contribute to a better society, museum educational programs can go beyond just collaboration and instead create a truly engaging democractic museum community.

Beyerbach and Ramalho (2011) take social justice museum education further by calling on museum educators to bring activism into their pedagogy. They state that engaged citizens are informed and active parts of a community since "…incorporating activist art practices can raise questions, inform, and mobilize action on social justice issues" (p. 206). Art has the power to bring together seemingly different parts of the community into a shared experience. This harkens back to Dewey's (1934) belief that art is a form of communication through which a community can further engage. Activist pedagogy and social justice practices help museum educators and community members examine questions as artists and recognize the power of the visual voice (p.209).

In this study, through collaborative brainstorming, interviews and observation, I will explore how museum education can better incorporate community-centered participatory pedagogical experiences. I will also employ arts-based methodologies highlighted by Karen Keifer-Boyd in *Arts-based Research as Social Justice Activism: Insight, Inquiry, Imagination, Embodiment, Relationality* (2011)*.* Her social justice approach to arts-based research involves critical listening to untangle connected histories, bearing witness and revealing power structures, and allowing for members to claim their own voice. The historical precedent of COVID-19 occurring simultaneously with an election presents us with an opportune time to investigate these ideas connected to community voice, social justice and museum participatory pedagogy. Now more than ever, collaboration is the key to a museum institution's survival and growth in this tumultuous time.

Methods & Methodology

This qualitative study will incorporate critical action research and arts-based ethnographic research methodologies to explore how each research site utilizes participatory place-based pedagogy in their curricula. Merriam (2009) states that critical action research studies challenges power relations that are based on common social structures. Action

research's main goal is to bring together researchers and participants in a communal way so that decisions can be made together (p. 49). Critical research will be key in this study as it is taking a critical look at how museum education can move toward community centered place-based pedagogical practices.

The use of arts-based research within this study will help us determine how participants are expressing themselves and making meaning while engaging in programs that employ place-based pedagogy (p. 65). The purpose of taking an ethnographic approach in the arts based research is so that we can focus on the culture and beliefs of the community so that it can be accurately reflected by the institution. Since place-based participatory pedagogy relies on participation, arts-based will be the most effective way of measuring a program's efficacy since direct participation is required.

Site of Study

The site of this study will take place at two locations: The Art Center in Elgin, IL and Art Museum of Elmhurst, Elmhurst, IL. The Art Center is a community-based arts organization that services the community of Elgin, Illinois and has extensive K-16 art education program offerings. The Art Museum of Elmhurst is housed in Elmhurst, Illinois and serves a larger area of people. The Art Museum of Elmhurst focuses on inspiring the community through engagement with the arts with their programs for all age groups.

Due to the pandemic the research for this study was conducted offsite. Conversations were scheduled with participants at the end of November 2020. These conversations were conducted via the video chat program Zoom. Questionnaires were given at this time as well with results being completed on November 30. These questionnaires were distributed to the Art Museum in Elmhurst by Joey and were in a google survey format. A separate nien part questionnaire was given to Erica at the Art Center in Elgin via email.

Participants

This study will follow various participants at the Art Museum of Elmhurst in Elmhurst, Il and The Art Center in Elgin, Il. These participants will be from the community engagement and educational departments at each location. These two locations were selected based upon their demographics, size of institution, and suburban locations in close proximity to Chicago. We will be able to gain a better understanding of how participatory pedagogy works at smaller institutions so that it can be adapted to larger spaces with wider audiences.

For this study I chose to have informal "conversations" with participants instead of more traditional styled interviews. This terminology was carefully chosen as it gives participants the chance to speak more freely about their experiences and feelings than an interview style would allow. The crux of this study is about giving voice to those within the community so having conversations instead of interviews further represents the points within this study.

I initiated conversations with Nate, the Community Moves Director, and Ivy, the Latino Outreach Coordinator, at The Art Center in Elgin. A questionnaire was also given to the director Erica as an interview could not be arranged. Through these conversations I was able to look at how The Art Center is approaching community outreach, educational practices, and social justice initiatives. I also had a conversation with Joey, the Education Director, at the Art Museum of Elmhurst. In addition to this conversation, a questionnaire was sent to other participants which included volunteers, docents, floor staff, curatorial staff, and fellows. The questionnaire gave me insight into the perspectives of staff not directly associated with education or outreach, and how they view the Art Museum's outreach efforts.

Data Collection Methods

Data for this study was collected through a series of conversations and questionnaires with various staff members, as well as photographs of past programs provided

by each site. Due to restrictions caused by the pandemic, in person observation of programs was not possible. By using these varying methods of data collection and speaking with different members of each organization, I was able to identify themes and questions that were common at each place. Follows is the methods in which data was collected:

1. Conversation Transcripts: 25-40 minute conversations were had with multiple participants from each location between November 20-28, 2020. These conversations were run through the Transcribe app which produced written data with timestamps. After transcription the notes were edited and abbreviated, names were added for ease to follow. Notes were then sent to participants for any additional edits before being analyzed. After a third listen and read through notes were analyzed for emergent themes and coded accordingly.

2. Conversation Notes: During the conversation process notation was made in my field journal. These handwritten notes were used to facilitate follow up questions as well as notation of important parts of conversations that may address the research questions.

3. Questionnaire Data: Two questionnaires were created for this research project. The first survey was a google form which consisted of nine open ended questions that was sent to floor staff, fellows, volunteers, docents, and curatorial staff at the Art Museum of Elmhurst. The questions pertained to their thoughts and feelings of the space set up as well as how they felt programs connected with the Elmhurst community. A second questionnaire was sent to the director of the Art Center in Elgin, Erica, as schedules would not allow for an in person conversation. This questionnaire consisted of 9 open ended questions sent via email to the recipient.

4. Photographs: Photographs of programs at the Art Center in Elgin from this past year were supplied by the director Erica. These pictures show their popular

Community Moves Programs as well as their new venture SSAM (Side Street Art Mobile). Additionally Joey shared photos from exhibitions this past year at the Art Museum of Elmhurst.

5. Online Data: A sample of a summer program was sent to me from the director of The Art Center in Elgin. This was a keynote file, which is also available for free on their website, which contained a week's worth of ocean themed art projects for 4th-6th graders. This was part of their online summer camp program for the summer of 2020. This file contained written instructions, supply lists, videos presentations, and contact info so that students could call/video chat/email artist educators with questions.

Data Analysis

After completion of data collection all data was compiled, organized and analyzed using a coding method. Notes from conversations, transcripts and questionnaire data were color coded and organized corresponding to its relevant research question. A chart of the coding system and corresponding questions are listed below in *Table 1.*

Table 1. Color Coding System for Notes

Research Question	Color Code
How can museum education better incorporate community centered participatory pedagogical experiences?	Orange
In what ways can museums develop community centered educational practices that reflect community values?	Blue
In what ways can museums develop community centered curating practice?	Green

In what ways can community centered museum education departments become agents of social change?	Purple

The data was then analyzed again for recurring themes. These themes include *"Community Engagement Methods"* (CEM)*, "Approachable Art Education"* (AAE)*,* and *"Social Justice Practices"* (SJP)*. "Community Engagement Methods"* looked at ways organizations were already practicing community engagement within their space. The theme*"Approachable Art Education"* addresses how each organization views education within a non academic setting. *"Social Justice Practices"* emerged as each place discussed their perceived roles when it comes to social justice in the arts. Categorizing developing themes found within the data will aid in finding validity in the claims that participatory place based pedagogy will create a more inclusive environment within museums and shift emphasis from the importance placed upon objects to people instead.

Ethical Issues

Confidentiality within this study will be the most difficult issue to address. Since the study will involve two institutions which are smaller in size and well known to their community, anonymity of participants will be highly difficult as they are recognizable parts of each institution. Pseudonyms will be used for each location and persons involved to help protect the anonymity of those participants.

In addition to anonymity issues there is possibility for researcher bias within this study. As I have worked closely with one institution and attended the other, biases may arise within the context of this study. Since I as a researcher have created topics to be discussed within our "conversations", bias may arise when participants answer in ways that might be contradictory to my experience at the institution. According to Merriam, " Leading questions reveal a bias or an assumption that the researcher is making which may not be held by the

participant." (p. 122). By using the conversation format this should avoid the use of leading questions and allow the participant to speak more freely thus avoiding potential for bias. As a researcher I will need to be more observant of my own language and listen carefully to the participants' answers to keep biases from arising.

Findings

Through the conversation I had with participants at both sites I was able to discover some common problems and approaches that art institutions are facing. The research questions I have been ruminating about seem to be a topic of much conversation at art institutions in the area. Yet, this study seemed to bring about more questions than answers. All participants were very eager to discuss what they had been doing but most had trepidations about where to go from here. Although the topic of place-based participatory pedagogy has been kicked around a great deal in current literature there seems to be a lack of it in practice. There was a significant amount of acknowledgement of the problems that art institutions have with bringing about a sense of belonging and the hurdles of community engagement. Although places have started to change their practices there is more work that they are facing. Especially with the way in which the need for art education is changing during the pandemic. These conversations did uncover some significant themes that may help guide institutions into successful place-based participatory pedagogy.

Community Engagement Methods

Community engagement has become a predominant part of both The Art Center and the Art Museum of Elmhurst's educational goals. Not just in the sense of bringing in people to the space but to have a meaningful experience that connects with them. Each institution expressed that this however, was a major hurdle as they are only reaching small portions of

their respective populations. Ivy's job at The Art Center in Elgin was specifically created to reach the largest population of the city that they currently were not reaching.

As the Latino Outreach Coordinator Ivy's main mission is to connect with the community through programming that is meaningful to the Latino Community of Elgin. Ivy's approach to community engagement is to get out on the street and meet people. By inviting community members into the space on a more personal level, they hope to start a conversation that hopefully initiates a longtime relationship with the Art Center. Ivy also started researching programming that would be dynamic and appeal to a broader audience (Ivy, conversation November 20,2020). This led to the development of a multicultural cooking show and an exhibition from inmates at Dixon Correctional Facility. Ivy's sentiments about being out and in the community echoes the ideas that Villeneuve and Martin-Hamon (2007) discuss about museum educators taking a proactive role by learning the interests and values of the community they serve. They stated that being offsite and interacting with people in other capacities starts a relationship that would not be possible if they weren't on the streets.

Nate, who is the Community Moves director, also stated that community engagement is a huge part of his educational goals at The Art Center. The main program, Community Moves (*Figure 3.*), focuses on bringing art education to the people by visiting local schools and events that happen in the Elgin area (Nate, conversation November 24,2020). Nate also stated that for him its all about access:

> Alot of it is access and that's something that we work on a lot, making sure everyone has access to art education. Including the fact that you know, all of our programming is either free or it's a small suggested donation. It's super important to have those options out there for people because we're losing more and more of it in the schools. And I mean arts education isn't just about learning about art. It's about

learning to think creatively and critically and that's something that's

needed in any field no matter where you go.

Through his work with the community Nate recognized that not everyone has access to programs and by bringing the programming to them they are able to better connect with the community. With their new mobile programming vehicle SSAM (*Figure 4.)*, they will be able to bring more to people who cannot make it to the Art Center site. Offering art experiences for free or by donation they can also serve those who wouldn't even consider attending due to financial restraints.

Figure 3. Community Moves program at a local elementary school

Figure 4. Mobil Art Mobile out in the community

The Art Museum of Elmhurst is able to employ a slightly broader approach to their community outreach. Being a larger institution in a bigger city they have opportunities to work

with more groups that strengthens their community engagement. As the Education Director, Joey is able to initiate cross promotional programming with groups like Elmhurst LGBTQIA to connect with a larger part of the community. Joey also noticed that significant parts of the population were not attending programs or had little interest when visiting the museum space. This led to the museum starting a Teen Advisory Board that lets teens in the community have a voice about programs and outreach happening at the museum (Joey, conversation November 28,2020). The Art Museum of Elmhurst's collaboration is a great example of making connections in a more authentic way (Simon, 2010).

The Art Museum of Elmhurst also has a unique section in its galleries that was created specifically to address community outreach. Their hands on art space also referred to as The Wall was an area added that allows for those attending the museum to react to the exhibitions. This often includes art activities and writing prompts that remain in the space until the exhibition is over. According to Joey this gives the patrons an opportunity to reflect on how the show affects them and to share that with others. This past year, due to the pandemic, the space shifted to include an exhibit called *Art in the Post* (*Figure 5.*) This show invited community members to create postcards that would reflect on the year which would be hung together as a mobile in the hands on art space area.

Figure 5. Photo of *Art in the Post* exhibition 2020

Both institutions place importance on collaboration with patrons and other organizations to creative effective community engagement. The usage of community art creates a participatory and collaborative space that goes beyond just normal engagement (Lawton, 2019). Although they are actively seeking ways to engage the community both institutions know that there is still a significant amount of work that needs to be done to keep engaging those hard to reach populations.

Approachable Art Education

Another theme that emerged during conversations was art education that was approachable and meaningful. Both Nate and Joey touched on this sentiment when discussing their approach to curriculum building at their respective institutions. However, each institution approaches this in different ways.

The Art Center in Elgin has been incorporating visual arts, technology, music, dance and writing into their educational programs as a way to create a more connected pedagogy. Their belief that all forms of the arts are equally important is seen in their vastly diverse offerings. Nate stated:

Elgin is such an interesting diverse city and it's such a wild

mix of different class structures. It's important that we try to find

something that works. The city right now is growing into something

new everyday, so we're trying to be part of that.

By creating a curriculum that is multidimensional and with mass appeal, their hope is to make the educational experience vastly different from their experience in school. Nate stated that they want people to engage actively with their own learning and to open themselves up to discovery. Their choice of using artist educators further this point. Even using the alternative language of artist educator instead of teacher or instructor changes the connotations of the educational experience. By actively seeking those with non traditional education methods they invite collaborative pedagogy and foster discovery.

Joey, at the Art Museum of Elmhurst, also had very similar sentiments about approachable art education. What attracted Joey to the field in the first place was education in museums was from an informal setting. His perspective on curriculum was actually based on his experience coaching swimmers (Joey, conversation November 28,2020). Meeting people where they are and individualizing their educational experience was important in building approachable art education in a museum space. This philosophy connects with Dewey (1934) & Mattern's (1999) perspective on creating democratic education through community development. Joey also stated that consideration of the space in which education is occurring is important. Being a welcoming space with freedom to express is part of their overall mission (Joey, conversation November 28,2020). Joey stated:

I'm not too concerned if you walk away remembering x,y,

& z or knowing everything about this artist or that movement. But

if someone walks away having a better understanding of what

questions to ask and how to think critically and creatively that's

more important.

Each place took their space into consideration in this process as well. By way of questionnaire I was able to see how important a role space has on the education experience. The Art Center in Elgin makes an important point to make as many educational programs available offsite as possible to help facilitate more accessible collaborative experiences. For those programs that were on site Erica, the director of the Art Center, said that their goal was to make the space welcoming like home. By pushing back against traditional notions of how art spaces need to look and function the Art center has been able to facilitate educational programs that create deeper connections.

Both institutions believe that their role was to be a place of discovery and a platform for democratic educational exchanges. This people centered approach is exactly what place-based pedagogy aims for. The democratic learning space of The Art Center and the Art Museum of Elmhurst pushes the notion further that spaces that emphasize people over objects can connect deeply with a community. Their place-based approaches strengthen connections to their communities and fosters a sense of belonging (Gray and Graham,2007).

Social Justice Practices

One of the most difficult themes that arose during our conversations was that of art spaces as places of social justice. According to those I spoke with, social justice was always a part of the conversation even before this year. Historically art has been at the forefront of social change according to Nate (Nate, conversation November 24,2020). The arts have always been where people go to express their frustrations or views on what needs to change.

The Art Center has incorporated several new programs this year to address social justice issues within the community. Their "Paint the Moment" program took place every Friday outside at the farmers market. This program invited artists from different backgrounds to live paint about issues that were important to them. This event actually caused a stir when an LGBTQ artist created "controversial" work. The event which took place in a family area was

deemed by some as inappropriate for that space. This raised a lot of questions amongst the staff that I interviewed. In order to be inclusive you have to create space for everyone, which means that some work will not be agreeable for everybody. Another program that was created to highlight social justice initiatives was a t-shirt screen printing weekend course that created t-shirts for Black Lives Matters, with proceeds from the classes and sales being donated. This was another program that brought attention as it was seemingly in opposition to the program that the Art Center runs with the local police department. Although these programs generated some pushback from a very small handful of community members the majority of people appreciated the diversity of programming and that it was a welcoming space for everyone. Both Ivy and Nate expressed that tensions make it hard to give space to everyone, especially when people have very strong feelings about the meaning and purpose of art. This year in particular ,however, has strengthened their mission to be inclusive no matter what.

Joey, from the Art Museum of Elmhurst, also stated that art institutions have a duty to participate in social justice initiatives. At the beginning of this year the Art Museum of Elmhurst started an EDI (equity, diversity and inclusion) initiative to evaluate their programming and outreach so that they can better serve the community. They began connecting with community members and groups that they had not previously worked with. This led to connecting with the local LGBTQIA project and the Blessed Union group at the local high school. The Art Museum also initiated projects over the summer that were coordinated in conjunction with the BLM marches that were occurring. They hosted a Chalk the Block event inviting community members to create chalk artwork with words of inspiration and encouragement for everyone to enjoy. This event was also mentioned by several participants who answered the questionnaire as being one of the most successful programs that connected with the community. In addition to the Chalk the Block event (*Figure 6*), the Art Museum also had signs made for community members to take, for free, that was in conjunction with the "You Are Beautiful" project by artist Matthew Hoffman. People were encouraged to put a "You Are Beautiful" sign in their yards. Although these

programs were met with great enthusiasm, Joey did state that a handful of community members

did not agree with these programs. The Chalk the Block event in particular was met with some

resistance from an older couple who wanted to erase the artwork and wording from the public

parking lot. Joey stated that although these programs were successful and attracted new people

to the museum, it was trying to deal with a bit of pushback (Joey, conversation November

28,2020).

Figure 6. Photo of participants at Chalk the Block event

Although both institutions stated that it was extremely important for art institutions to be a

part of social change, it does make it difficult for everyone to feel welcomed. Art is not without its

controversy, but for the most part institutions have not been at the center of change, more on

the sidelines of it. The Art Center and Art Museum of Elmhurst have been putting social justice

practices at the front of their educational mission which seems to be inviting a larger audience in

and even new community members. This topic in particular was difficult for most of the

participants to discuss as they struggled with how to avoid alienating groups while trying to

elevate others. Both locations reexamination of their social justice practices shows their effort is to maintain relevance and access. This reexamination is key to avoid, in the worlds of Ng (2017), tokenization or misrepresentation. The overall consensus was that art institutions have obligations to participate in social justice conversations and to provide a platform for voices to be heard.

Conclusion

The Art Center in Elgin and the Art Museum of Elmhurst educational practices show that place-based participatory pedagogy can create spaces that move away from object oriented to people oriented space. Each place has been able to create programs and educational experiences that have been engaging the community and both have been able to broaden their audiences. They have also made sure to be out and in the community which I believe is an integral part of how these two locations are staying relevant to their cities. It is possible for organizations,at any level, to integrate place-based participatory pedagogy effectively. However, in my analysis there are still a lot of hurdles that each place is struggling with.

Although these two institutions are taking great strides with their practices there were still a lot of unknowns that kept popping up in our conversations. There is still great difficulty in connecting with people and anticipating what will resonate with the community. As I searched through the data there were still so many questions that appeared to me. As Ivy had mentioned in their conversation with me, it's hard to please everyone. Although this pilot study showed that place-based pedagogy can be successful and is attainable by all levels of art institutions, there is still a great deal of work to be done to make it accessible for everyone. There is some literature available that pertains specifically to museum education, however more research needs to be done. Especially in our current climate with the pandemic, art is being lost even more at schools. This has pushed art organizations into the spotlight to bridge the gap and

to be a place of community healing. I believe that continued analysis of art institutions already integrating place-based participatory pedagogy is necessary to push institutions into a new era of "we" over "me".

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