

Releasing the Social Imagination: Art, the Aesthetic Experience, and Citizenship in Education*

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This paper is about releasing the social imagination through art in education. This research examines possibilities to use the aesthetic experience as a means to awaken students' consciousness for advancing democratic values, including multiple perspectives, freedom, and responsibility. Drawing from Maxine Greene's (1995, 2001) philosophy of social imagination and aesthetic education, this inquiry aims to enrich discourse in the field of curriculum studies, creativity, and citizenship education. Six educators initiated a social imagination project separately. They designed, implemented, and assessed a semester-long project founded in Greene's philosophy of social imagination. The participants challenged habitual ways of thinking about self/other, culture, and community through active engagement between art and the subject. The aesthetic encounters with art (a) fostered the participants' wide-awakeness about the society and (b) engaged participants to imagining "things as if they could be otherwise" (Greene, 1995: p. 16). An emphasis on the aesthetic experience through art contributes to advancing democratic values in a pluralistic society.

Keywords: Maxine Greene; the Aesthetic Experience; Social Imagination; Arts; Citizenship

Introduction

This paper intends to enrich conversations in the field of curriculum studies, creativity, and citizenship education by rethinking the values of art and the aesthetic experience. A major educational discourse in art is about how to increase students' creativity in developing new ideas, implementing the ideas, and advancing innovative practices in schools and society. A mandated curriculum, followed by higher testing scores, controls the current experience of students and teachers (Pinar, 2012; Taubman, 2009). Art is utilized as a tool to increase students' academic achievement (Hirsh, 2010; Tishman & Palmer, 2006) or to represent their disciplinary knowledge (e.g., van der Veen, 2012). Multiple approaches to advance students' intellectual capacity are important and art has contributed to engage students in learning. By rethinking the roles of art in society, we join this conversation of highlighting the values of art in education and creativity. This paper examines the value of art from its capacity of releasing the imagination, not from functionalism for outcome-based educational practices.

This paper is grounded in Maxine Greene's (1995, 2001) philosophy of art and aesthetic education. Greene's philosophy provides a perspective to consider art not as a private space but as a public domain for social transformation. Greene's philosophy

about aesthetic education originates from this idea of "how to awaken" subjects' consciousness through their aesthetic experience. According to Greene, an active engagement between works of art and the subject increases his or her critical consciousness through reflective encounters with art (Miller, 2010). Imagination plays a critical role to awaken the subject's consciousness towards social injustice and to "look at things as if they could be otherwise" (Greene, 1995: p. 16). Drawing from Greene's philosophy of social imagination, this paper explores possibilities to rethink art and the aesthetic experience as a means of awakening students' consciousness towards democratic values, including multiple perspectives, freedom, responsibility, and diversity. According to Greene (1995), social imagination is the capacity "to invent visions of what should be and what might be in our deficit society, on the streets where we live, in our schools" (p. 5). This inquiry explicates the ways in which educators advance student's democratic values by enacting a participatory, active engagement with art. By analyzing six social imagination projects, this paper examines the roles of art and imagination in education.

Greene (1995) states that the aesthetic experience garners various means of dialogues "where nothing stays the same" (p. 16). This inquiry provides opportunities to explore the roles of the aesthetic experience in education for developing democratic values. This paper has two major overarching questions: 1) In what ways do educators create dialogues about the roles of art in education drawing from the participants' aesthetic experience? 2) In what ways does an extraordinary experience with art enable educators and the participants to examine multiple, shifting meanings of culture and communities? These questions, at the end, provide an opportunity to imagine alternative possi-

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bilities for discourse and practice regarding art, creativity, and social transformation.

The Aesthetic Experience and Wide-Awakeness

Among many philosophical concepts that Greene uses, this paper mainly focuses on her notion of wide-awakeness. Greene gives credit for this notion of “wide-awakeness” to Alfred Schutz and Paulo Freire. According to Schutz, wide-awakeness is a heightened plane of consciousness—consciousness representing “the ways in which he or she thrusts into the world” (Greene, 1995: pp. 25-26). Wide-awakeness is also connected with Freire’s (1970) notion of conscientization or critical consciousness. Conscientization is working on an in-depth understanding of self/others and the world through praxis—that is reflection and action. It is conscientization that allows the subject for the exposure to perceived social and political contradictions.

The aesthetic experience indeed begins from the encounter with works of art, which might nourish our wide-awakeness (Green, 1995). The aesthetic encounter with poetry, music, dance, performance, painting, or literature not just widens the world but also makes people live in the moment. That is, educators might nourish students’ wide-awakeness by asking them about what contribution dialogues among community members could generate.

What does this “dialogue” mean to educators? How is it connected with imagination? An extraordinary experience, by Dewey’s (1980) term, explicates what Greene introduces regarding the aesthetic experience. She challenges the common ways that people usually look at works of art from a habit-driven life. This is what Dewey mentioned as an ordinary life. In contrast, an extraordinary experience awakens people by breaking habitual ways of thinking and behaving as well as makes them see things differently (Dewey, 1980). Furthermore, Greene (2001) refers to Dewey’s distinction between the aesthetic and anesthetic experience. Like a person is lying down on the surgical bed after an anesthesia process, an “anesthetic experience” shuts off the senses to occur around him or her. Within this context, Greene proposes that aesthetic education should strive to develop an experience of wide-awakeness, as opposed to numbness to social issues. Engaging fully with works of art provides educators with a vehicle for getting participants to a point of heightened consciousness and reflectiveness.

Greene (2001) differentiates aesthetic education from art appreciation or art education. A major difference between art appreciation and aesthetic experience is the connection of how educators “awaken” students who are sleeping or indifferent to what is happening in the world. By definition, aesthetic education is “an intentional undertaking designed to nurture appreciative, reflective, cultural, participatory engagements with the arts by enabling learners to notice what is there to be noticed, and to lend works of art their lives in such a way that they can achieve them as variously meaningful” (Greene, 2001: p. 6). This emphasis on reflective and participatory engagement with works of art in aesthetic education is different from traditional art education in that the latter mainly focuses on the examination of different media and art creation. Rather, aesthetic education promotes a general enjoyment of the art as well as “cultivate(s) the disposition to choose to engage with diverse art forms, to attend and explore and take risks” (Greene, 2001: p.

23). Aesthetic education, overall, begins from posing open-ended questions about one’s own aesthetic experience through art (Greene, 2001).

Greene’s elaboration of the importance of wide-awakening students’ consciousness is predominately centered on her philosophy. When students are indifferent about what is happening in the world, Greene’s explication about wide-awakeness engages educators to question what they can do to awaken students’ consciousness through art. In the following sections, I examine the ways in which works of art contribute to becoming wide-awake regarding a new shape of world and communities. Before moving to actual analysis of the social imagination projects, I briefly address modes of inquiry and major data for this paper.

Methodology

Aesthetic inquiry serves as the mode of inquiry. Aesthetic inquiry explores the meanings of aesthetic experience—that is, the interaction between a human consciousness and works of art (Greene, 2007a). A graduate research course of “Advanced Curriculum Studies” in a Southwest, land-grant mission university provides the context for this inquiry. This coursework aims to “complicate conversation” in curriculum studies by examining diverse approaches to knowledge, culture, and education (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995). The course required six enrolled educators to design, implement, and assess a semester-long project founded in Greene’s philosophy of social imagination. Educators utilized artworks (e.g., poetry, literature, painting, dance, film, etc.) with their own community members. These educators discussed the power of art and explored the ways in which they can examine social deficits “as if they could be otherwise” (Greene, 1995: p. 16). The six communities included: (a) 14 freshmen college student, (b) 5 middle school participants, (c) 16, 4th - 8th graders in a tribal after school program, (d) 7 native American women, (e) 22 fourth graders, and (f) 25 high school students. **Table 1** shows descriptions about the projects and community members.

Class discussions, student reflection papers, final papers, and project presentations in the Fall 2012 semester serve as the data sources for this paper. Six educators had opportunities to revise their original social imagination projects with support of the instructor and other peers. Six educators described and analyzed their social imagination projects with guiding questions: (a) background of conducting the project, (b) Greene’s theoretical influence on the project, (c) methods, (d) important issues while sharing the aesthetic experience with community members, (e) the meaning of social imagination, and (f) implication for curriculum/educational inquiry. The instructor, the first author of this paper, analyzed the way in which educators conceptualize the notions of social imagination. Narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008) comprised a major mode of data analysis method to create themes for discussing possibilities and impossibilities of using art for social imagination. Among multiple data sources, class discussion and the accumulated 122 pages of the six educators’ final papers were mainly utilized for data analysis.

In addition, the instructor’s autobiographical subjectivity has been the foundation of the analysis and interpretation of Greene’s philosophy and the six educators’ conceptualization of social imagination (Moon, 2012). When the instructor read and analyzed the data sources, he kept asking himself about the ways in which Greene’s notions of wide-awakeness and social imagination influence his autobiographical subject, and thus engage him into imagining different perspectives about culture,

Table 1.
Social imagination project description.

Group name (Facilitator)	Activities and participants		
	Members	Art engagement	Meetings
Jumping through the glass (Shawn)	14 freshmen college students	<i>Dali Atomicus</i> by Philippe Halsman	Three meetings 90 min/meeting
Penta-String (Ana)	5 seventh graders	<i>Baskets</i> (Korean, Cherokee Nation)	Three meetings 90 min/meeting
“O” is for Otoe tribe (James)	16, 4th - 8th graders	Creating own literature: <i>O is for Otoe</i>	Eight meetings 90 min/meeting
Indigenous women aspire (Alison)	7 native American women	<i>To the Indigenous Women</i> by Ryan Redcom	Three meetings 90 min/meeting
Art and conformity (Lisa)	22 fourth graders	<i>Il dolce suono</i> by Gaetano Donizetti	Five meetings 30 min/meeting
The art space (Jason)	25 urban high school students	Mural: Excavating Values created by participants	Three in-depth interviews 30 min/meeting

diversity, and multiple perspectives. In the definition of the autobiographical subject, Smith and Watson’s (2000) theorization of life narratives is adopted. That is, he necessarily attended to the discursive constructions of subjectivity through memory, experience, identity, embodiment, and agency. Overall, the autobiographical subjectivity has impacted the interpretations of the six educators’ projects.

Releasing the Social Imagination

Drawing from Greene’s (1995) philosophy of social imagination, the six educators utilized art and the aesthetic experience as vehicles of looking at things differently. Throughout the project, the educators created environments where participants took active engagement with art, and shared different perspectives without pressure. Members of the community could imagine alternative possibilities through empathizing with other’s situation, sharing perspectives, and representing their feelings through art. During the social imagination project, the six educators facilitated participants not only to pay attention to the artwork but also to spend time elaborating upon what they experience through sight, sound, or touch. This active engagement with art ultimately opened participants up to urgent social issues, alternative perspectives, multiple ways of viewing the world and injustice. This section describes and analyzes the six social imagination projects separately. A couple of overarching themes generated in the analysis of each project, including (a) wide-awakeness through the aesthetic experience, (b) multiple perspectives through sharing reflexive thoughts, and (c) value of diversity within Eurocentric, patriarchal educational practices. Overall, the educators witnessed communities in progress through the aesthetic experience.

Imagining Alternative Realities through Jumping

Shawn, an instructor for a freshmen orientation course at the university, designed a project to form connections beyond what participants simply see in the artwork. Instead, this community attempted to establish deeper connections between each participant’s unique perspective and how the artwork creates a space regarding alternative possibilities within a democratic society. Shawn chose art that possess a surrealistic quality in particular: *Dali Atomicus* by Philippe Halsman (see **Figure 1**). This photograph provided enough ambiguity and a strong vehicle for engaging with the participants’ imagination.



Figure 1.
Dali Atomicus by Philippe Halsman.

Halsman depicted Salvador Dali jumping in the air while everything else in the room appeared to be levitating off the ground. In addition, a bucket of water had been thrown from off camera along with three cats that were tossed along with the water. Each participant wrote a story about what they believed was happening in the photograph. A great sense of empathy emerged through the sharing of the participants’ ideas and by asking the participants to describe how they thought Dali was feeling.

Fear, surprise, startled, excited, mischievous, and being-caught in the act were all identified as potential emotions expressed by Dali. Mike interpreted the reality in the photography as follows:

I see a man that doesn't like to be constrained by worldly limitations. He wants to paint his own reality, to be free. He wants the power to do this, to be an individual. The symbolism of the cats, I think present these things (individualism and power). Also, I think the man could be struggling with some sort of inner conflict between the love of two women. Maybe he had a mistress on the side, unknown to his wife, whom he painted on the canvas to the right. The cats might show this as well, using the term "cat fight". Fear—no gravity: World is in free-fall, trying to paint the world back to the way it was. (Mike, personal communication, October 22, 2012).

Mike used metaphors of “cat fight” in connection with this surrealistic image. His emphasis on free or no-limitations was an outstanding analysis with interesting, active engagement with the photograph. By having the community members engage in dialogue with the artwork, many participants attempted to empathize with those who may feel powerless when up against a force they perceive to be beyond their control. While sharing the participants’ experience with *Dali Atomicus*, they share their impressions with the art.

Mike: He just wishes he was in control, but he’s not.

Shawn (facilitator): So what do you think this force, that’s obviously pushing against him, what kind of forces do you think this might represent in society?

Pamela: Government.

Shawn: Government. How so?

Pamela: Like, things that we don’t necessarily want to do or rules they push on us or even rules that they should push on us they need to, like pollution restrictions...

Shawn: What other forces can you think of that are pushing up against us?

Elisa: Time.

Shawn: Time. How does time? So you feel like life is a constant battle against time?

Elisa: Well, “it” doesn’t necessarily have to be a battle. The old you get the faster it goes.

Shawn: Seems that way.

Mike: Is it not a battle? I think it’s a battle to the end when you die.

Shawn: So you view it more as a struggle against time? What are we struggling against though? This is open to anybody.

Pamela: I like the concept of time, especially in regard to this picture. Time is eventually going to catch up and those cats are dry for now but eventually time is going to run out and they’ll get wet.

Shawn: Any other forces that you feel are playing against us sometimes?

Rebecca: I think sometimes gender or race. I think that can hold us back. Maybe limits people’s potentials for advancement...

Pamela: The mentality of us versus them.

As the above conversation shows, the participants openly shared their imagined vision and a foundational theme of “freedom” generated from the community’s engagement with art. They also identified several core forces to limit his or her freedom, which included government, time, gender, and race. Shawn, the facilitator, was intently interested in how participants view the world and how they conceptualize their roles as democratic citizens. For example, Rebecca thinks that gender and race “can hold us back” and limit the subject’s “potential for advancement”. Pamela develops this notion of restriction by highlighting people’s habit of mind to divide groups between “us versus them”.

The ultimate goal of sharing participants’ experience with the art was to establish discourse regarding the search for alternative possibilities, empathy, and understanding regarding social deficit through the artwork. This complicated dialogue provided participants with an opportunity to think about how this concept of forces working against them applied in their own lives. Providing participants with the opportunity to experience true engagement in their education represented a core priority in Shawn’s teaching, and this project gave Shawn an opportunity

to practice facilitating a more devoted form of engagement.

The participants experienced the photograph in a more active manner by returning to important themes generated before. The facilitator asked each participant to partner up with another participant and tasked him or her with photographing each other in the act of jumping. While comparing two different photographs, the participants developed interesting interpretations of their experiences in the project. For example, Olivia made a profound observation about the differences between a normal picture and a jumping picture: “In the pictures where we’re jumping, we look more natural, I guess you could say. We don’t look posed or fake. We look more like ourselves.” (Olivia, personal communication, October 29, 2012). Comparing two images in **Figure 2** below apparently shows the differences between “normal” picture and a “jumping” picture.

Interestingly, this statement actually captured part of the inspiration for Philippe Halsman creating the *Dali Atomicus*. Philippe Halsman had noted, “When you ask a person to jump, his attention is mostly directed toward the act of jumping and the mask falls so that the real person appears” (Panzer, 1999). Brandon commented, “Maybe people feel that they shouldn’t conform and they try so hard to be unique. So it’s like we’re conforming to not conform. We kind of, like, lose who we are.” (Brandon, personal communication, October 29, 2012). These statements echo this same principle of the importance they bestow upon the freedom of choice and how even though they consider themselves to be free, they often feel constrained or restricted in certain ways especially within the context of society.

Maxine Greene (1988) writes, “We might think of freedom as an opening of spaces as well as perspectives, with everything depending on the actions we undertake in the course of our quest...” (p. 5). The informal nature of this social imagination project provided participants with a supportive outlet in which their perspectives and unique worldviews were not only welcomed but also encouraged. It is therefore interesting that the community used in this project converged upon the concept of freedom. This revelation highlighted the power of social imagination

Weaving Baskets, Empathy, and Multiple Perspectives

The Penta-Strings group is a community that aims to create a



Figure 2.
Normal and jumping pictures.

space of possibility and to promote multiple perspectives (Greene, 1995). The community members in the project learned more about each other and how each views the world as the result of their dialogues. This community mainly worked with baskets for sharing multiple perspectives about social phenomena. Ana, the facilitator of this group, had a passion for basket weaving and her interest motivated the participants to have reflective thoughts about their aesthetic encounters with the basket (see **Figure 3**).

The community members shared their first impressions of the basket, including smooth, braid, cross-formation, and decorative. The basket provided them an opportunity to imagine other objects like a wheel, doorknob, boat on the wavy ocean, a balloon in the sky, egg carrier, stretching, ballet, and yoga. During the meeting the participants added different narratives to the new idea whenever they discovered something different and new. When Ana asked the participants to draw any memories related to the basket, several participants shared their stories. The basket reminded Chen of her grandmother in China who used to work at farms. Susie imagined her mother's patience to take care of her family. Mike imagined the artist's hands while weaving rough materials and emphasized pains to weave the basket.

The Penta-Strings community explored another basket by visiting a local museum. They observed a Cherokee basket and talked about their experience with the art. Although the community observed the same basket, each member reported a different observation and shared his or her unique narratives. Chen discovered that weaving patterns and colors were exactly opposite between the inside and outside. If a cross pattern appeared in brown on the outside, the image inside of the basket appeared in red. Clark responded to Chen's observation by saying, "I did not notice the specific pattern of a vertical line for the first time, but now I see it." The participants discovered that the horizontal and vertical patterns had a numeric rule of 1-3-5-7-9-7-5-3-1. Every community member shared his or her new discovery while sharing thoughts and feelings about the basket. **Figure 4** exemplifies the multiple perspectives from community members when viewing the basket.

Each drawing was different with the observer's position. Some drew the basket sitting on the floor and some drew it in a standing position. When the community members showed their



Figure 3.
Korean basket.



Figure 4.
Multiple perspectives about the Cherokee basket.

drawings to each other at the same time, the different ways of representing the basket evoked a big exclamation. Most of the members drew the whole basket with the patterns, but one focused just on the digitized pattern of the cross. Even though the most of participants ignored the bottom part of the basket due to its location, one member showed the pattern on the basket's bottom. One member even drew the basket casting a shadow. The community members shared a variety of perceptions, stories, and insights through close observation of the art.

Releasing the imagination is related to releasing "the power of empathy, to become more present to those around, perhaps to care" (Greene, 2007b: p. 4). Empathy serves as a powerful tool for releasing the imagination for possible social transformation and actions. The ability to experience empathy does not just happen by itself but rather requires a person to focus on the importance of the effort involved when caring about others. The Penta-Strings community revisited the value of empathy in releasing their imagination about their lived experience as well as the meaning of community.

The sharing of thoughts and feelings created a sense of community based upon respect and an appreciation for the value of different opinions. Members listened carefully to other member's thoughts and respected other's points of views. They noticed that some dialogues differed from their daily talks when they shared their thoughts about art. Ana used the metaphor of onions when she analyzed her project with the Penta-Strings group. The community members' thoughts became more profound as they were exposed to the same works of art, much like peeling an onion's layers. Imagination and empathic experience have multiple roles, including creating multiple perspectives. The Penta-Strings community shared their aesthetic experience with art which possibly enriches the democratic values of multiple perspectives as well as showing respects to other citizens' opinions.

"A" Is for All: Imagining an Inclusive Society

Children's literature represents an important, powerful resource for advancing children's imagination about self/other, society, and the world. James designed a social imagination project with the use of children's literature. During an after-school program at a tribal nation, James facilitated 4th to 8th graders to review an alphabet book, *P is for Pilgrim* (Crane & Urban, 2003). He problematized the children's book that conveyed inaccurate and stereotypical images of native Americans. This Eurocentric, hegemonic practice through this children's

book shaped the way in which native participants looked at themselves as well as the way in which non-natives participants viewed native Americans. Mendoza and Reese (2001) indicate, “books, the text and illustrations together present a set of images of native Americans, and thus a particular way of thinking about them, that is inaccurate and potentially misleading” (p. 7). James recognized this mis-recognition and/or non-recognition of native American communities represented in a children’s book like *P is for Pilgrim*. James argued that this mis-recognition of native Americans does not help either native children or non-native children in that the Eurocentric paradigm of what native Americans were and still are not properly portrayed.

Using Greene’s definition of social imagination, James created a children’s alphabet book to depict “what is” the definition of native American in society. Children in this project engaged with *P is for Pilgrim* on multiple levels of reading-aloud, contemplating the meaning of the book, and discussing the book as small groups. After this active engagement with children’s book, Otoe tribal nation children exchanged the story of their culture with the use of their narrative imagination. Children had the opportunity to voice what they see as otherwise when it comes to the way Otoe tribe as well as other tribes are folded into the representations of native American culture.

In the creation of the alphabet book for this specific tribe, all 16 children worked together. Each group had four members and worked with a couple of letters. The facilitator asked each group to come up with a word that described what being Otoe tribe member meant to them. Each student came up with his or her own word corresponding to the letter. Once each student had come up with their word, the facilitator asked participants to discuss their words and explain why they chose those words. A poetic imagination was embedded during this project. Drawing from the Otoe tribe’s creation story, an eight grader initiated the idea of creating a phrase out of the letter “A”: that is, *All things are connected—animals, plants, humans*. The actual creation story is as follows:

Nothing existed at the beginning, except an abundance of water. It flowed everywhere, eventually pushing all life out of it. In time, the water receded and land surfaced. Vegetation sprouted. Forests reached towering heights. In the recesses of these forests, animals and birds dwelt. All life spoke the same language.

Greene (1995) states, “far too seldom are such young people looked upon as being capable of imagining, of choosing, and acting from their own vantage points on perceived possibilities” (p. 41). If social imagination is indeed the ability to create visions of what can and should be in society, then this alphabet book project provided Otoe tribal nation participants with the opportunity to give their vision of what being native American and, more specifically, being a member of Otoe tribe means. By providing a different perspective to introduce Otoe tribe culture, the participants effectively showed others what they see from their own perspectives. By releasing their poetic, narrative imagination, participants enriched others’ understanding of not only Otoe tribe culture but also of native American culture. By doing so they also provided an alternate view of what is a socially acceptable representation of native Americans with what could and should be.

Drawing from Greene’s (1995) theory, James conceptualized social imagination as a community coming together to imagine what could be instead of what is. Otoe tribe participants prac-

ticed their social imagination by coming together to share multiple ideas about who they are as Otoe tribal members.

Wide-Awakeness through Poetry: “I Am... Not Yet”

Alison, a native American woman, organized a group of native American women for her project, as shown in **Figure 5**.

Alison complicated the participants’ identities while reading and discussing Ryan Redcorn’s poem, *To Indigenous Woman*. Below are some stanzas of this poetry.

I’m sorry we have not fought harder for you... I am the dysfunctional man... I know a woman’s place better than I know my own... Ask her and she will tell you... I stole her tongue, replaced it with guilt... Saddled it with blame... Rode off on it like a horse... So choose your words like chess pieces... Burn your hopes like cedar... Pull that smoke over you like a blanket.

Reading, listening to, and discussing the poetry, the community had opportunities to share thoughts about what it means by an “Indigenous Woman”. The poetry operated as a platform to discuss racism and sexism that the participants have encountered in their daily lives. The facilitator chose the Ryan Redcorn poem because the poet gathered experiences of native women who have suffered violence at alarming rates. The community focused upon the line *I know a woman’s place better than my own* to begin the conversation.

Alison: How do you identify yourself when you wake up in the morning?

Sally: I remember when I was working at... The girls I was working with would say, “Oh I don’t know. I’ll just get a job at the casino after I graduate.” How do you help to instill there is so much more you can do that’s out there? All the stereotypes “are” out there, even in your child’s homework (laughs). I don’t think we do a very good “job” instilling what is good about being a young native woman. What can you learn about from the assumptions people are making about you? And turn it around to be more positive. How can we help you to find your own voice what you wake up saying, “I’m proud to be this, I’m proud that I’m going to do a speech in class about native American women and represent...”

Alison: Identity is NOT an easy thing to figure out. I’m still studying what it is as a group or individual, I’m still learning too.

Willa: Well I kind of feel like you, you know how you say like, native first or something, that’s how I feel, I go out and I don’t want people to think I’m a typical native woman that



Figure 5. Indigenous Women Inspire community.

drinks, sleeps around like that kind of negative things that people say about native women. It makes me want to do better and prove to them that's not what I am. That's what I think about every day, almost.

Alison: And it just started from that same place. Showing them I wasn't all those typical stereotypical image(s) of what an Indian girl is.

I am what I am not yet... This is a phrase from Maxine Greene who seeks out her subjectivity neither from the past nor present. Rather she always leaves her identity open with possibilities. This Indigenous Women's group challenged stereotypical images about them through education and media. *To the Indigenous Woman*, which is written by a male, brought up more open-ended questions of what it means to live not only labeled as native American but also as women of color. This notion of "I am... not yet," which Pinar (1998) used as a subtitle for an edited book about Maxine Greene, provided a lens to ponder about the meanings of life—life that is living in a strange place of lost, solitude, and in-the-making.

Drawing from this social imagination project, Alison emphasized the power of lived experiences and narratives. Those narratives enabled the group to find their voices to step into a gargantuan field of possibilities. Greene (1995) says, "We have to be articulate enough and able to exert ourselves to *name* what we see around us—the hunger, the passivity, the homelessness, the 'silences'" (p. 111, emphasis in original). Throughout the project, Alison imagined the field in which Greene is talking about. The field is foggy yet vast and endless with mountains in the distance and she feels coldness. In this field she felt completely alone, but she knew that in this field existed the elements of silence, racism, marginalization, recognition, identity, culture, youth, like the cold dead bodies of those who fell in the Washita Massacre. Involved with the community, Alison envisioned herself tackling the field of possibilities even though it was frightening to unlock the gate and walk into it with just feelings of anger and hostility. According to Greene (1995), the power of imagination is "to be conscious of them, to find our own lived worlds lacking because of them" (p. 111). Greene's view on social imagination allowed Alison to gently and discreetly open the gate. Discussing their identities reminded the community of the importance of imagination to carry on. Moreover, this helped community members to become aware of the field of possibilities that lies beyond simply speaking of it.

Conformity Yet Differences in Imagining Realities

How can the aesthetic experience make children feel connected to each other and responsible for the part they will play in the world? Lisa chose *Il dolce suono* for her 4th graders with the hope that the dynamics of the opera would capture the children's attention and allow for enhanced dialogue. Lisa created her social imagination project while reading about Greene's idea of wide-awakeness—the idea that "teaching can be a summons on the part of one incomplete persons to other incomplete persons to reach for wholeness" (1995, p. 26). Lisa assumed that the experience of listening to a moving piece of music would create that true attentiveness Greene described.

Lisa encouraged children to take time to reflect on the music themselves and with others. She hoped that this reflection would lead to the discussion of social issues and would create a meaningful space where her class could learn from each other and question more things about the world around them. The

children experienced the music with as little visual stimulus as possible. They listened to the music before visualizing it with multiple artistic representations. They kept journals while listing words that came to their mind. Allowing the children to free write in their journals helped solidify their own opinion. The children used metaphor to represent what they heard, with the use of poetic imagination.

Dave: I saw lightening and the ABCs all bunched up and random colors.

Colin: A monster chasing after a ship.

Andy: I thought of Harry Potter and the Deathly Hollows because the music sounds like something I've heard. Where they're actually in the Hollows. The scary parts.

Lisa (teacher): Like when Harry almost dies?

Andy: Yes, It made me think of pop rocks, like how loud it was.

Lisa: Can you explain more?

Andy: Like how loud they are in your head when they eat them.

Lisa: What does that sound like?

Beth: Like this (snapping) (then the whole class joins in snapping).

In addition to this poetic imagination activity, the class had activities to represent what they heard with the use of images and movement. Greene (1994) posits that releasing imagination could come up with "alternative possibilities for living, for being in the world" (p. 494). Grounded in Greene's notions of wide-awakeness and social imagination, Lisa wanted children to be fully conscious and to allow for that consciousness to flow through the community.

Lisa was dedicated to the ideas that teaching children to pose questions and using the community to create answers might change the world. She hoped to engage children into the aesthetic experience by listening to an opera aria and let them imagine the alternative possibilities—the possibilities that were created by Martin Luther King, Jr. and the leaders of the civil rights movement. Lisa analyzed that she could not actually observe children's aesthetic experience with the aria. She thought that multiple factors prohibited children from achieving active engagement with the art, including limited time, large class size, difficulty of understanding the aria, and their developmental stage to imitate other peers' work without independent thinking.

Almost at the end of a series of activities, Lisa gave everyone a popsicle stick. The children wrote one thing that should be changed about the world after she briefly described social justice. This definition was simple and at an appropriate level for 4th graders when Lisa used words like "unfair" and things that should be stopped in the world for all people to live happily. Afterwards, they took turns and shared what they had written on their sticks. Four children wrote about a wish for peace and no more wars, two wrote that there should never be any more crashes or accidents. Two days earlier a teacher's daughter was seriously injured in a drunken driving accident. Three children said that random violence or assassins should be stopped. One said that poverty should end, and another said everyone in Guatemala should have shoes. Several others wished bullying would stop and that people would respect others differences and one really wished people would recycle. Lisa asked the children about the role of art for social change.

Lisa: Can art make a difference with these things?

Susan: An artist could draw a picture about world peace that

would be so good that people would want to have peace.

Susie: You would do better if you created a disgusting picture to keep people from doing war.

Lisa stated that it was an amazing moment for her to hear children's thoughtful ideas about the art and possible social transformation. Lisa analyzed how "wide-awake" her children behaved in that moment although they might not realize it. The instructor's analysis of Susan and Susie's ideas reminded him of Goya's painting, *The Third of May 1808*, followed by Greene's interpretation about the painting (See **Figure 6**). Greene said:

Goya painted the disasters of war, painted the tortures people, and dead people, and he, under each painting, said, "How can this be? Can't we do something?" Imagine each painting etched a picture of a firing squad, a picture of a tortured face, or a dead person. Underneath each painting, he says "How can we bear this or how could this happen?" It's very moving to me... The very idea that kind of contradiction in his painting makes many people "moving". I would like to think art has the capacity to awaken people, but we know it doesn't always. I'm not interested in didactic art. But I am interested in the kind of art that wakes you up. That makes you notice, makes you see things you wouldn't ordinarily see (Greene, personal communication, February 1, 2009).

Lisa argues that social imagination for the elementary school children has to involve exposure to real social concerns and the creation of a safe space where they can practice identifying with each other and discovering their own uniqueness that is often difficult for this age. Goya's painting might not be appropriate for fourth graders due to its message of violence. Yet, literature like *Oliver Twist*, as Lisa suggested, provides children with concrete images and ideas about social inequity (i.e., child labor). Such literature allows children to imagine and share thoughts. In her past teaching experience, Lisa noticed her students had a more meaningful and multidirectional discussion when they reviewed an article about child labor in America to support a children's book they read in which the main characters worked at the age of 12. The class found pictures of textile mills in the UK and migrant farm workers in Texas, and the children talked extensively without Lisa's help on the nature of societies with child labor. That was freedom for them.



Figure 6.
The Third of May 1808.

Lisa offered the materials, and they collected and directed their own thoughts. This was definitely a moment where the students were "... able to envisage things as if they could be otherwise, or of positing alternatives to mere passivity" (Greene, 1988: p. 16).

Lisa's suggestion for a successful social imagination project connects with Greene's (1998) support for working against social injustice. She emphasizes that social justice represents a cliché in education, and educators and students should begin the conversation from a concrete example around the subject. In that sense, art, especially literature, and the aesthetic experience with works of art provide more concrete examples in the society rather than discussing social problems with abstract ideas or utopian ideals.

Unexpectedness, Open-Endedness, and Community In-the-Making

As an art curriculum specialist, Jason had interest in exploring the value of art creation and developing community values. Jason's project, titled "Excavating Values", aimed to create a space through mural art for participants to interact with perceived personal and social values. In the mural art, several democratic values were depicted: Integrity, citizenship, honesty, education, courage, and responsibility. Jason hoped to create a space that invoked imagination. Jason focused on the ignition and capacity of the imagination through the space in which the fine arts afford. His social imagination project was not only focused on creating mural art in a high school building, but also attempted to examine the narratives of high school students in an alternative school as they actively engaged with the creation of school murals. Most notably, the students depicted community values as a format of mural art, and Jason examined their aesthetic experience with the creation of an "art space". Through active engagement with their own art creation, participants elaborated upon their experience of interacting with the art.

Participants in this mural project showed the power of this collaborative work to challenge their daily routines and habitual ways of interacting with teachers and friends. In other words, mural project made it possible for the alternative high school students to see reality as something other than or more than their engaged reality, which in turn allowed for further recognition of alternative possibilities. After completing the mural project (See **Figure 7**), Jason had a focused group interview with participants.

The following demonstrates participants' active engagement with the art and their reflexive thoughts:

Jason: What does this mural do for your cafeteria?



Figure 7.
Excavating values mural.

Adam: It makes the wall look great first of all, but I think—when kids are sitting down during lunch the quotes may make them understand the meaning of the images making them analyze life.

Jason: What do you mean by “analyze life”?

Adam: I think that people will read the quotes and think how to see themselves in reflection to change their life.

Jason: Change one’s life?

Adam: To be responsible and have courage to stand up and speak up by yourself like how the quotes say.

Jason: What does this mural do for your cafeteria?

Eva: The impact of our mural is already in effect. Participants are stopping in the hallway and actually thinking about what they are looking at and what the mural says. The quotes mixed with the artwork and words of encouragement really get your mind working. I have personally been thinking how will I apply these quote to my life.

Jason: How would you apply this to your own life?

Eva: The mural really inspires me to be a more honest, true person. I want to better myself in more than one way. I’m moving into my own apartment soon and it really makes me want to dig deeper into my creative side.

Over the interview, Jason had not brought up, in conversation, anything about imagining possibilities of something other, to these participants. This response emerged through this student’s own constructs. “To analyze life” was a profound statement in the respect to imagining a life or reality as something different. Analyzing one’s life requires both the imagination to reflect and the ability to imagine that reflection as to something possible, such as one’s current aspirations. The student’s elaboration went further from the analysis to the changing of a life. This changing derived from reflection, which was seemingly evoked by the artwork itself. Some key terminology is complementary to an imaginative state, including “to be more”, “better myself”, “thinking how to apply”, “thinking”, “to be”, and “analyze”. Students experienced the art as an imaginative facilitation. Furthermore, the students demonstrated a participatory engagement with art by imagining what it would mean “to be more,” not to mention their ability to even recognize that as a possibility. For instance, students recognized a “better self” as an accessible construct dependent upon what that means to each individual. Their abilities to imagine “how” and to simply “think” of possibilities and to “analyze” their own realities and constructs demonstrate participants’ active engagement and aesthetic experience with art.

Greene’s (1995) theories of releasing the imagination culminated within the students’ experience with the created artwork as being a component of “wide-awakeness”. The interaction with art or an aesthetic experience provokes imaginative thought as well as the ability to consider alternative possibilities within people. Being wide-awake is being imaginative. It is not just being coherent and with a capacity to react to perceived realities. It is being aware of perceived reality and being able to envision something other than as indicated from the end interview with the participants discussed above. Although students were unable to fully articulate wide-awakeness, the ability to understand these possibilities exists within those students. As a result, it would appear that a sub-conscious understanding occurred in relation to the creation of the artwork which indicated the more in-depth dialogue.

Discussion: Art and Social Imagination

Imagination is the ability to see the world from other perspectives (Greene, 2001). Imagination also gives credence to alternative realities. Dialogues with community members in the social imagination projects represented opportunities to interact with the possibility of something other than who they are and what they live with. Greene (1995) states, “At the very least, participatory involvement with the many forms of art can enable us to *see* more in our experience, to *hear* more on normally unheard frequencies, to *become conscious* of what daily routines have obscured, what habit and convention have suppressed” (p. 123, emphasis in original).

It would be a misunderstanding of aesthetic education to assume that mere exposure to works of art automatically increases participants’ sense of urgency or cultural sensitivity towards the world (Greene, 1995). The art of aesthetic experience begins from the invitation of complicated dialogues with self and others, and then imagining an alternative action for a society. When Greene introduces the notion of social imagination, the importance of wide-wakeness becomes clearer. Greene relies on the aesthetic experience and activity in a public space to serve as the catalyst for social imagination. The engagement with art thus encourages educators to deal with shifting, multiple meanings of self/other and making the subject more visible to himself or herself (Miller, 2010).

Imagination has become prevalent in TV commercials (e.g., Imaginarium by General Motors) or creative inventions of products. Whereas this commercialized and output-oriented business model limit the definition of imagination, Greene theorizes a different approach to imagination. Grounded in phenomenological existentialism, Greene (1995, 2001) incites educators to ask about what things could be otherwise. Namely, how do educators see social deficits around the corner of the street? What can I do?

“The Possible’s slow fuse is lit/By the Imagination” (Dickens, 1960 as cited in Greene, 1995: p. 22). Drawing from Emily Dickens’s metaphor about imagination, Greene (1995) explicates that imagination lights the fuse, a slowly burning fuse of possibility. Imagination opens not probability nor predictability, but possibilities. Greene’s definition of imagination connects with a larger picture of the society—that is, social imagination.

Imagination is often conceptualized as a private process. Social imagination, however, specifically attempts to bring a personal process into a public space. Viewing art through alternative perspectives, by way of community sharing and discussion, aims to achieve ideas for addressing the concerns of society can be achieved (Greene, 2001). Greene (2001) describes this process as imaginative action, which occurs in various phases. Ken Robinson (2011) suggests that imagination is the source of creativity, yet imagination and creativity are not the same. Robinson notes, “We can take a different view of the present by putting ourselves in the minds of others: we can try to see with their eyes and feel with their hearts. And in imagination we can anticipate many possible futures” (p. 141). Similar to Greene, Ken Robinson (2011) conceptualizes imagination, which liberates people from the current situation and provides the promise of transforming the present. The typical view of imagination is a process of internal consciousness, while creativity involves taking action, actually doing something. In contrast to this conventional concept of imagination and creativity, Greene (2001) postulates, “Imagination is not only the power to form

mental image, although it is partly that. It is also the power to mold experience into something new, to create fictive situations" (p. 31).

By engaging with artwork, it provides community members in this paper with a window in which to view the world differently. Whether looking at artwork on canvas or other mediums, works of art possess the potential to simultaneously serve as a portal to another view of the world and also a looking glass that reflects the troubles of our own. Just as when the subject looks through a window, reflections of the subject can be seen overlaying the scene on the other side of the glass pane. By noticing what there is to be noticed, members of a community can begin to engage with this alternate perspective presented by the artwork as well as the varied perspectives that make up the community, which is united for a given purpose. Using the imagination to envision things differently acts upon a belief that something can actually be changed (Greene, 1995). Social imagination is the starting place for creating a different society. Furthermore, a citizen moves beyond sharing the imagined visions of how things could be, to enacting the changes the community can envision. Such inquiry in social transformation extends to the ways in which educators' social imagination takes a stranger's vantage point to think otherwise of the current sociopolitical, economic, and cultural deficit. When Greene explicates the definition of social imagination, it is apparent that she begins not from a utopian ideal but from a concrete idea of what is missing in our community: what deficit do we, as educators, see in the playground, classroom, and school? Greene's (1995) philosophy of social imagination—that is to connect imagination with the deficit in our society—asks educators repeatedly what could be otherwise here and now.

Indeed, educators imagine what could be otherwise through their daily experiences with difference, indifference, and their ability to identify potential changes. Greene's (1995) emphasis on social imagination begins from the subject's wide-awakeness towards society by active engagement with art for the aesthetic experience. Similar to Greene's theory, Robinson (2011) notes that the art appeals to an aesthetic experience in which the subject's senses function at his or her peak. The aesthetic experience is being in the moment of excitement, sadness, or astonishment. Like Dewey (1980), Robinson compares this to an "anesthetic experience" when we shut off our senses to what is going on around us. Sir Ken Robinson (2010) argues, "We're getting children through education by anaesthetizing them. And I think we should be doing the exact opposite. We shouldn't be putting them to sleep; we should be waking them up to what they have inside themselves." Thus, how does extraordinary experience awaken students from sleepiness to create new possibilities? Being wide-awake is being attentive to the social deficits and possessing the understanding of the multiple "being." This concept of wide-awakeness is primarily fueled by the subject's capacity to imagine something as otherwise (Greene 1995). Furthermore, imagination cultivates empathy which allows for meaningful framing.

Implication: Unfinished Conversation

Greene's explication of aesthetic experience differs from simply practicing how to create or use art during classes. Nor does it merely intend to expose multiple works of art to students. Aesthetic education, grounded in our aesthetic experience with art, enables students to understand this world by

opening a new channel for learning, where the exposure to works of art and the art creation process transfers these various experiences. Greene's (1995, 2001) philosophy implies how students begin a reflective encounter with works of art, and imagine how things can be otherwise. Sharing the subject's experience, interpretation, and meanings of works of art provides the foundation of building a community. Advancing a state of wide-awakeness involves moving beyond superficial discussions regarding the meanings of artwork. Rather, a contemplative engagement with art is connected with concrete and practical ideas of how to look at the reality differently (Greene, 1995).

With/in students' and teachers' lived experiences, norms dictate perceived realities indicating pre-determined futures. Imagination is a tool to challenge habitual ways of thinking about the future, which is neither fixed nor pre-determined. Greene stresses the imagination as being the catalyst to creative thinking and through creativity new possibilities are possible. Greene (1988) postulates, "Imaginative openness can make people more sensitive to untapped possibilities in their own lives. Imagination has been conceived as the capacity to look at things as if they could be otherwise" (p. 1). Drawing from Greene's philosophy of imagination, educators envision that imagination and the aesthetic experience are the very beginning conversation that illustrates the possibility of differing possibilities. Imagination serves as the vehicle for opening up possibilities and to begin the separation from normative thinking. Therefore, art and the aesthetic experience are important vehicles for looking at things and imagining reality as if it were different (Greene, 1995).

Works of art do not provide the right answer but they open new dialogues among students regarding what can be otherwise in a society. Most notably, in an educational context, Greene's (1995) theory of imagination brings other levels of engagement to educate students. With the assumption that only "educated" experts should discuss works of art, many classroom teachers are not familiar with discussing works of art with students. Yet, when the encounters with works of art are neither skill-based nor knowledge-based, educators garner new landscapes of learning. Greene's (1995) elaboration provides educators with a deeper reflection; "we who are teachers would have to accommodate ourselves to lives as... functionaries if we did not have in mind a quest for a better state of things for those we teach and for the world we all share" (p. 1). Reflexive thought or sharing becomes an important epistemology of who is known and who are knowers.

In addition, the encounter with works of art does not intend to use them merely as a "tool" to increase students' academic achievement when educators interweave works of art with math, ELA, or science. Greene's philosophy intends to examine what educators and participants can think of art as it is, not as a method for increasing tests scores of literacy and numeracy. Releasing the imagination is not simply to expose participants to diverse works of art. It is the discussion of an "emergent curriculum, the moral life, and justice in the public space" (Greene, 1995: p. 6). A participatory engagement with art is more important in a sense that educators and students are sharing their reflections with open-ended questions towards the world. How can things be otherwise? By accentuating the importance of sharing multiple perspectives, educators will be able to rethink our education by preparing students not only to face the future but also to face the present (Dewey, 2013; Ro-

binson, 2011).

With the prevalence of market-oriented discourse in education, open-ended questions and dialogues drawing from aesthetic education provide powerful resources to discuss the complicatedness of self, other, and community. Grounded in Maxine Greene's philosophy, educators will develop the ability to pose multiple yet difficult questions drawing from students' aesthetic experience. Students' inquiries about social issues create a new foundation where they construct a dialogic experience about self/other and community through open-ended questions as well as constant responses to other's perspectives (Gaudelli & Hewitt, 2010). Overall, the highlight on the value of works of art in education will be a salient inquiry for participants, teachers, and researchers in order to release the social imagination—imagination to connect the social world with a vision of alternative realities in school, community, and society.

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