2024

Collaborative Aesthetic Experiences and Teacher Learners: Arts-Practice Research in a Teacher Education Classroom

Theresa A. Catalano
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, tcatalano2@unl.edu

Inoussa Malgoubri
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, imalgoubri2@huskers.unl.edu

Jennifer Bockerman
Virginia Commonwealth University

Hector Palala Martínez
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, hectorpalala@huskers.unl.edu

Mackayla Kelsey
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, mackayla.kelsey@husker.unl.edu

See next page for additional authors

International Journal of Education & the Arts

http://www.ijea.org/ ISSN: 1529-8094

Volume 25 Number 13 July 31, 2024

Collaborative Aesthetic Experiences and Teacher Learners: Arts-Practice Research in a Teacher Education Classroom

Theresa Catalano
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, USA

Inoussa Malgoubri
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, USA

Jennifer Bockerman
Virginia Commonwealth University, USA

Hector Palala Martinez
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, USA

Mackayla Kelsey
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, USA

Leonardo Brandolini
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, USA

Ilia Shcherbakov
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, USA

Citation: Catalano, T., Malgoubri, I., Bockerman, J., Palala Martinez, H., Kelsey, M., Brandolini, L., Shcherbakov, I. (2024). Collaborative aesthetic experiences and teacher learners: Arts-practice research in a teacher education classroom. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, *25*(13). http://doi.org/10.26209/ijea25n13

Abstract

This paper explores the experiences of six teacher learners and one teacher educator in a graduate course on aesthetic education at a Midwestern university in the U.S. Using collective autoethnography and arts-practice research, the researcher/participants examine how aesthetic experiences were activated in the learning environment and how this activation supported the development of transformational rethinking that led to the changing of formed habits of teaching. Findings reveal how aesthetic teacher education can be therapeutic, aid in building connections between the teacher and students (and among students), inspire wonder and discovery, facilitate the valuing and including of cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students, compel new perspectives, and promote attunement to process.

Introduction

As teachers and teacher educators who appreciate and value the arts in our teaching, we often feel stuck within the rigid boundaries and structural entities of the educational systems in which we teach. These systems often prioritize "efficiency and effectiveness over the empowerment of teachers and students as active meaning makers and creative agents." (Hwang, 2019, p. 507). We do not agree with this prioritization, yet we often put forth little resistance because we believe there is not much we can do to change it. With this dilemma in mind, we (six teacher learners and one teacher educator) participated in a course on aesthetics and arts-based education in Fall 2022 entitled "Arts and Aesthetic Education for Multilingual Learners". The course was taught for the first time by Theresa and designed for doctoral students in education who are all current teachers of different levels (some K-12, some university), and from different areas of specialization and different countries, but are all interested in working with diverse multilingual student populations. The course was transformative, and it left us all wondering how one class alone managed to empower and inspire us to let go of our habitual (and rigid) ways of teaching in order to teach the way we knew we should. Thereupon, we decided on the following guiding questions for our study:

- How can we activate aesthetic experiences in the teacher education environment?
- How can this activation support the development of transformational rethinking and change formed habits of thinking and seeing for practicing teachers?

With a goal of inspiring other teacher educators attempting to incorporate aesthetic approaches in their teaching, we sought to shed light on exactly how the environment was created to support this transformational rethinking in a teacher education program, and to

model for teacher learners and teacher educators a few ways to incorporate aesthetic experiences in their classrooms. To do so, we engaged in collective autoethnography, a sub-genre of narrative inquiry which enabled us to have an active role in co-constructing meaning from our experiences and to view them as phenomena 'under study' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 479). In this way, we (researcher/participants) used our diverse perspectives in an autobiographical self-reflexive exploration of our own assumptions and perspectives (Chang, 2013). We combined collective autoethnography with arts-practice research (Phelan & Nunan, 2018), an orientation that loosens the relationship between 'art' and 'research' but also allows us to "legitimize ways of knowing and becoming from the heart as rigorous methodology" (Bhattacharya, 2013, p. 625). As such, we were able to use the embodied knowledge gained from our experiences in the class to attune to the learning and teaching process, thus validating it as a way of being in the world, but also as a legitimate approach to research.

Aesthetic Teacher Education

Defining Aesthetics and Aesthetic Education

John Dewey (1934/1972) viewed *aesthetic* experience as an intense encounter in which we feel a sense of vitality. In aesthetic play, "the ordinary becomes noteworthy" (Lim, 2005, p. 367, citing Dewey 1934/1972), and one begins to undergo "new ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, and moving" (Greene, 1986, p. 57). Traditionally, aesthetic experiences have been associated with works of art, but Dewey argued that aesthetics is "in all walks of life—including learning" (Moroye & Uhrmacher, 2009, p. 88) and well-conceived aesthetic experiences can arouse curiosity in children and encourage exploration, indirectly forming the basis for a concern for nature, social awareness, and cultural identity (Lin, 2012 in Shih, 2020). We agree with the scholars here that aesthetic education should be about facilitating a heightened awareness of and appreciation for our lives, our environment, and the people in them, and helping people perceive and appreciate beautiful things which allows them to grow into global citizens. We now turn to aesthetic approaches to teacher education, which is the focus of our study.

What Should Transformative Aesthetic Teacher Education Include?

According to scholars in the field, aesthetic teacher education that is transformative includes various essential components which we have synthesized below:

- Initial opportunities for classmates to get to know and trust each other and build a community in which the languages and cultures of students are valued (Catalano & Morales, 2020)
- Content and methods about aesthetic/arts-based approaches (Attwood, 2020)
- Engaging teacher learners in experiences analogous to what they might teach their

own students (Frawley, 2013)
- Tapping into as many senses as possible (Moroye & Uhrmacher, 2009, p. 92)
- Opportunities for teacher learners to create and co-construct learning with their instructors (Attwood, 2020)
- Helping teachers attune to their "self, others, and the world through their bodies" in order to position them as improvisers of a "curriculum-as-lived" rather than "curriculum-as-planned" by others outside the classroom (Hwang, 2019, p. 522)
- Self-reflection (together with teacher educators) that raises student consciousness and helps them connect to aesthetics' concepts (Frawley, 2013; Gouzousasis et al., 2013: Moroye and Uhrmacher, 2009)
- Creating spaces in which people can reimagine the world as a more just and equal place (Dewhurst, 2013) and use the arts "as a vehicle for transformational ends" (Moroye & Uhrmacher, 2009, p. 87).

Keeping these components in mind, Theresa designed the course of study to include multiple opportunities for each of the elements to be experienced by the teacher learners (and herself). Featured activities included forum theater from Theater of the Oppressed (Boal, 2000) string art installations, digital life maps and photo journals (Berriz et al., 2019; Meehan & Nora, 2019), dance story intercultural exchange, slam poetry, 3D collages, Judy Chicago dinner party recreations (MacIntyre Latta & Chan, 2011), 80s video project, and microteachings in which each teacher learner presented on an optional article from the course using an aesthetic/arts-based approach. Due to the scope of this paper, we cannot describe every activity in detail. Instead, we chose to describe three of the most impactful activities and explain how elements discussed above were included in them.

Examples of Class Activities in an Aesthetic Teacher Education Class

Dance Story Intercultural Exchange

In this multimodal, multilingual, and multicultural project, teacher learners in the arts education class were paired up with Japanese agriculture students (in a two-week exchange program with our university to study English) and students in an undergraduate multicultural education class. The teacher educator and leaders of other groups also co-created and participated with the teacher learners. The guiding question for the activity was "How can arts and community-based learning benefit multilingual learners?" Since one area of focus of our course was on multilingual learners, before the workshop, participants read excerpts from interviews with globally mobile people from Catalano (2016) and Catalano & Morales (2022) about the power of dance and drawing on the local community as intercultural pedagogy. Once together, efforts were made to build community and trust, and become comfortable working together. Figure 1 (from the google slides for the event) shows one activity that

represents our efforts to prepare participants for this work across differences before we began to dance together.

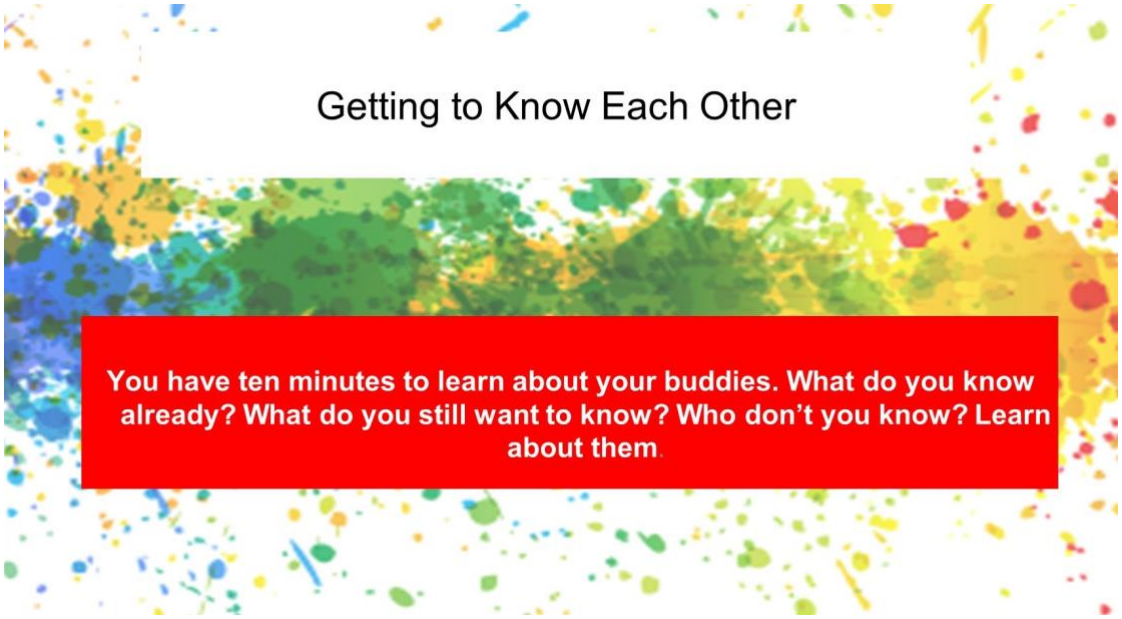


Figure 1. Getting to Know Each Other.

We then formed mixed groups (teacher learners, Japanese exchange group, and multicultural education students) and chose one of the stories of migration from our readings that we could relate to in some way to discuss. After the discussions, we engaged in multiple activities designed to help us become comfortable working with each other and our bodies. This meant specific instruction on how to map emotions onto our bodies (as opposed to just faces), and how to create abstract ideas collaboratively with our groups (for a full explanation of the dance story activity, see Catalano et al., 2021). Finally, Theresa instructed participants to create their own dance stories based on the stories of migration they read and discussed. Figure 2 shows some of the ways in which they were taught how to create stories with their bodies (keeping in mind that none of the participants had much dance training).

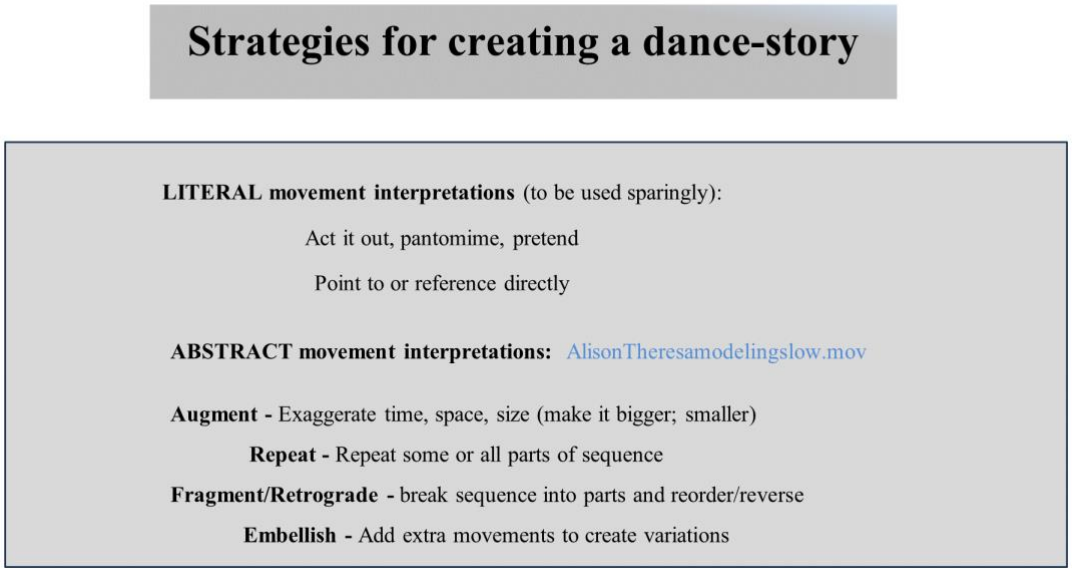


Figure 2. Strategies for creating a dance story.

Theresa provided possible song choices to accompany our movement or allowed us to choose our own. We then had 30-40 minutes to create our dance story together using our bodies, all of the languages we knew (through translanguaging, to be discussed later), and any other multimodal tools to communicate together while co-creating. After we created our dance stories, we performed them for each other, and each group tried to guess what we were trying to represent about migration experiences in our abstract performances. In addition, we reflected in groups on what we learned about ourselves and each other through the experience, as well as what we learned about migration and how the way we (and the media) talk about migrants is often very different from the realities people experience. We also reflected together on how we might change the way we talk and think about migrants and migration based on what we learned in the activity. Finally, we discussed the value of re-telling stories collaboratively with our bodies, including what the dance activity added to our experience that only reading the stories could not achieve.

Slam Poetry

During the course, we studied pedagogical translanguaging and culturally responsive pedagogy (e.g., drawing on the languages and cultures of students in their learning) and how each could be facilitated through engaging with the arts (Jonsson, 2017; García & Kleyn, 2015). We then brainstormed how translanguaging and the arts intersected, and we watched a video (Button Poetry, 2016) that illustrates the social justice potential of translanguaging in SLAM poetry where performers drew on their own migration experiences and those of their

families. We then created our own SLAM poems while also incorporating our languages into the poetry, helping everyone understand through choreography and other multimodal means. Figure 3 shows celebration after one group's slam poem which was called "Grad School Lament".

Figure 3. Grad School Lament.

In their SLAM poem (which was designed to engage audiences and make them think about social issues) using their home languages (French and Spanish in this case), the teacher learners compared themselves to "travailleurs de mine d'or, pourtant ils n'ont aucun lingots d'or [gold mine workers without gold bars], and "workhorses", adding, "no estamos locos, estamos cansados" [we're not crazy, we're tired]. Like the video they watched to prepare to create their own poems, performing the slam poetry was emotional for students since they used their bodies (See Figure 3) voices, and home languages. Students then reflected on the benefit of doing slam poetry with their own students and how translanguaging was easily incorporated into slam poetry as an inclusive way to affirm students' identities and value their languages and diverse backgrounds.

80's Video Project

This assignment came about because teacher learners were assigned Hwang's (2019) article on seeking rhythmic attunement. In her article, Hwang talked about visual thinking strategies and how she used pictures/photographs to engage students in the subject matter because the openness of the pictures "invited students to be more actively engaged in their own imagination and interpretation" and reflecting on this helped her attune to her own teaching process and agency (Hwang, 2019, p. 514). Inspired by this article, Theresa decided to focus on several photographers whose works became iconic of the 80s (e.g., Tisha Murtha, Jamal Shabazz) and to model how to use photographs as an impetus to engage in social issues with students. To make the activities of the day more coherent, Theresa decided to have "80's day" in which everyone was invited to wear clothing reminiscent of the 1980s. This was the week before final projects were due, and it was time to start reflecting on the class as a whole and its most important takeaways. Prior to the 80's day activities, Theresa assigned students to work together to create an 80s style music video (using their own song or lip syncing) and she provided a few examples for them to see. In the video, students needed to capture the essence of the course and what aesthetic education meant to them after studying about it for one semester. Figures 4-6 from the video showcase the creativity, humor and sheer joy students expressed in being assigned this type of activity. Note the hairbrush microphone in Figure 4 and use of TV for 80's style background in Figure 5.

Figure 4. Lip Syncing Songs from the 80's.

Figure 5. 80's Video.

Figure 6. Library Scene from 80's Video.

One interesting aspect from the video worth mentioning was the intertextuality in which the teacher learners wove elements they had experienced in the course into the video. For example, part of the video contained a scene from Hector's microteaching. In his microteaching, Hector was assigned to discuss Maxine Greene's (2011) article "Releasing the imagination". In this article, Greene talked about Elizabeth Streb's work on defying gravity. In his microteaching, Hector showed this video (see The New Yorker, 2015), and connected Streb's work to Greene's article that talked about how the "physics of movement" and the "geometry of space" involved in dance can be a metaphor for how aesthetic experiences

"break with the banal, the routine, the mechanical" and awaken us to take leaps and break walls we could never imagine (2011, p. 3-5). Hector instructed us reflect on Streb's work and Greene's article, and then assigned us to choreograph our own movement piece together that expressed our frustration with the system, standardized tests, and the way in which we felt trapped in scripted curriculum or set ways of teaching that did not allow for aesthetic experiences. He also challenged us to resist this system somehow in our performance. Figures 7 and 8 depict the activity which Hector filmed for us. Figure 7 shows us in our artistic rendition of defying gravity (performed to the tune of "I love it" by Icona Pop) in which we stood on top of chairs and pushed ourselves off onto the ground.

Figure 7. Defying Gravity.

Figure 8 shows after we descended from the chairs and began kicking them, using the chairs as a metonym for the neoliberal system which was a barrier to teaching in experiential ways for which Dewey and others in aesthetic education have argued.

Figure 8. Breaking Down Barriers.

This microteaching was so memorable to the teacher learners that it found its way into the video project. Figure 9 illustrates this intertextuality and how the microteaching activity re-appeared in the final video project (in animated form via special effects).

Figure 9. Intertextuality: Scene from End of Microteaching Performance in Video Project.

As a final note about the video project, Theresa decided that it was important for her (as in the other projects in the course) to do the same assignments as the students so that she could understand their impact, make them better in the future, and engage in her own aesthetic experiences to model for students. As such, she dressed in 80's gear with the students, and Figure 10 is an excerpt from her own video in which she performed to Cindy Lauper's "Girls just want to have fun", while expressing her understanding of the value of the class.

Figure 10. Kids Just Want to Have Aesthetic Play.

The above activities included all of the elements discussed in the previous section, such as providing content and methods about aesthetic/arts-based approaches (e.g., Catalano 2016; Catalano & Morales 2022; García & Kleyn 2015; Hwang 2019), engaging teacher learners in activities to get to know and trust each other and through their bodies, attune to self, others and the world (e.g., Figure 1, dance warm-up activities). In the projects, the teacher educator co-created with students and reflected on the process together with them. In addition, all the activities modeled things the teacher learners could adapt for their own classrooms, such as the warm-up activities, the use of translanguaging in slam poetry (which also modeled how to value students' languages and cultures), and video projects. They also tapped into as many

senses as possible through use of movement/dance, music, and the visual arts, and they included spaces for self-reflection and reflection together as a group. This helped learners connect their experiences to aesthetic concepts, but also, it gave them space to reflect on how the arts can be a vehicle for transformational ends, such as when students studied about the way translanguaging in slam poetry could be a form of social justice for people to express their identities and reclaim their languages/cultures.

The Teacher Learners and Their Projects

We now transition to a discussion of the data for our project, which was based on our experiences in the class. Our data process reminded us of the film *Inception* (Nolan, 2010) except that *Inception* was about a dream within a dream (or multiple series of dreams), but our data collection was art within art. That is, in order to answer our research questions about aesthetic teacher education, we needed to reproduce our experiences using an aesthetic approach. Consequently, we each created individual artworks in January and February of 2023 (after the class had finished) that metaphorically represented our understanding of how the aesthetic experiences were activated in the class and how that changed our habitual ways of seeing, teaching (and learning).

During the exhibition of our artwork, we each had time to silently observe and reflect on each piece before engaging in discussion. As part of the exhibit, we intentionally adopted an embodied approach, walking around and physically interacting with certain works, such as Jennifer's installation involving charcoal (see Figure 11). We formulated our experiences through emotional responses, personal connections to the content, and perceptions of meaning. Our varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds were woven through many of the pieces, often in nuanced ways we sought to unpack. For example, using Leonardo's collage (to be discussed shortly) that incorporates Spanish words and imagery, we discussed how our knowledge of the Chicano civil rights movement influenced interpretation. As educators in various contexts, we were able to relate social justice themes to our own critical reflections on serving historically marginalized youth. Our goal was to ask clarifying questions about influences that were less familiar to us, thereby building an understanding of cultures different from our own. We gained a deeper understanding of each other's cultures, identities, and artistic perspectives through these discussions.

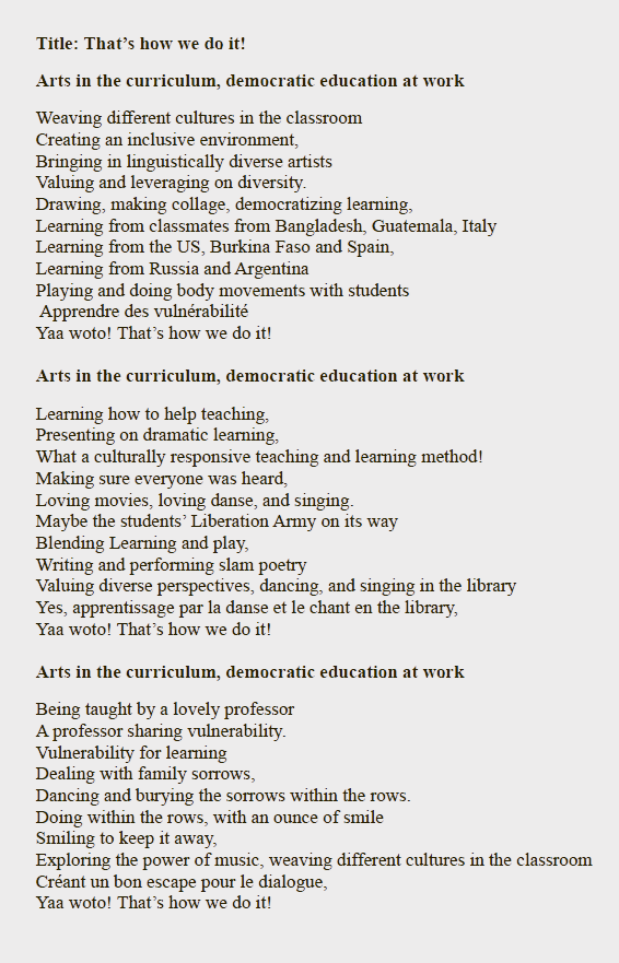
Our artwork metaphorically represented our takeaways from the class, which were exhibited and discussed together on March 28, 2023 in a two-hour reflection session recorded and transcribed on Zoom and adapted by Theresa and Jennifer afterwards. Staying true to arts-practice research, art colored every phase of our research process. Hence, experiencing the aesthetic and artmaking activities together in the class became the original data and then the newly created art by each researcher/participant and was used as the vehicle to help us reflect

on the course and our experiences in it (which we analyzed thematically on May 16, 2023, and present in our findings section). Below is a brief description of each researcher/participant and the artwork they created as part of the iterative reflective process of analyzing the course and our experiences in it.

Jennifer is a doctoral student in arts-based education and a middle school art teacher from the U.S. Jennifer began work on *Tripping the Loop* (see Figure 11) in her middle school art room where her students quickly became curious, begged to get involved, and requested that the artwork be returned for their interactions after it was used for the study. The interactive installation invited participants to walk between the iconic schoolhouse desk chair, over the black charcoal, into the white chalk pile, and back as many times as they wished overlapping black footprints over white and white footprints over black. Participants were asked to contemplate what each element might represent, what the experience prompted them to feel or think about, and how beginning a course with an interactive artwork might change how they feel about a course and their various roles in the course. Jennifer is currently working on a study about her students' experiences with the project.

Figure 11. Tripping the Loop.

Inoussa is a doctoral student in education who specializes in language education and arts-based education from Burkina Faso. A former middle school principal and English teacher, he currently teaches preservice teachers to work with multilingual learners. For his artwork, he created and presented a poem that summed up his experiences in the course utilizing his languages of Mooré, French, and English to get across his meaning. Figure 12 depicts his poem which he performed for us during the reflection session.



Title: That's how we do it!

Arts in the curriculum, democratic education at work

Weaving different cultures in the classroom
Creating an inclusive environment,
Bringing in linguistically diverse artists
Valuing and leveraging on diversity.
Drawing, making collage, democratizing learning,
Learning from classmates from Bangladesh, Guatemala, Italy
Learning from the US, Burkina Faso and Spain,
Learning from Russia and Argentina
Playing and doing body movements with students
Apprendre des vulnérabilité
Yaa woto! That's how we do it!

Arts in the curriculum, democratic education at work

Learning how to help teaching,
Presenting on dramatic learning,
What a culturally responsive teaching and learning method!
Making sure everyone was heard,
Loving movies, loving danse, and singing.
Maybe the students' Liberation Army on its way
Blending Learning and play,
Writing and performing slam poetry
Valuing diverse perspectives, dancing, and singing in the library
Yes, apprentissage par la danse et le chant en the library,
Yaa woto! That's how we do it!

Arts in the curriculum, democratic education at work

Being taught by a lovely professor
A professor sharing vulnerability.
Vulnerability for learning
Dealing with family sorrows,
Dancing and burying the sorrows within the rows.
Doing within the rows, with an ounce of smile
Smiling to keep it away,
Exploring the power of music, weaving different cultures in the classroom
Créant un bon escape pour le dialogue,
Yaa woto! That's how we do it!

Figure 12. That's How We Do It.

Having taught English in Russia, Ilia now teaches Russian to American students. He is pursuing a doctorate in instructional technology and his passion lies in blending video gaming and language learning. Figure 13 depicts Ilia performing the song he created for his part (Shcherbakov, 2023) in the research.

Figure 13. Privet [Hi].

Mackayla (from the US) is pursuing a doctorate in education focusing on emerging media arts. Her teaching, research, and art practices explore embodiment through creative computation and interactivity. *The Sensing Wall* (see Figure 14) is a social sculpture and interactive performance object that is a play on the old idiom, if walls could talk. However, in this piece, it considers if walls could listen, and if a wall could feel. So, one person is invited to sit behind the wall, and there's a basic script to follow as a starting point, and then everyone else is invited to interact with the piece on the other side. Figure 14 shows the sculpture while Figure 15 shows what it looks like when one participant is in the sculpture, and the other interacts with them.

Figure 14. The Sensing Wall

Figure 15. Mackayla and Inoussa Interacting with Project.

Leonardo is a doctoral student in education from Argentina and Spain who has taught Spanish at the university and high school/elementary level as well as courses for preservice teachers on multicultural education. He created a collage to recognize those who are “marginalized and subjugated in society,” and to illustrate how “imagination and creativity are the source of social justice and the arts” (Hanley, 2013, one of the readings assigned in the course). Figure 16 depicts his collage.

Figure 16. The Other N(H)ombres.

Hector is originally from Guatemala, and a doctoral candidate in instructional technology as well as a former bilingual elementary teacher and college instructor. He currently teaches instructional technology courses in our teacher education program. During a reflection session, he presented a heartfelt digital poem in Spanish dedicated to his ill father. The poem (Martinez 2023), adorned with music and visuals, serves as a tribute to his father's dedication to work and love for his family and the opening image of the poem can be seen in Figure 17.

Figure 17. Mi Papá.

Theresa (from the US) designed and taught the aesthetics education course studied in this paper. She formerly taught elementary school, Italian, Spanish and English as an additional language and is currently a language teacher educator. Her project came out of the sad news she learned in the middle of the semester that her mother had been diagnosed with cancer. Figure 18 depicts her painting (in four phases) that was inspired by a music video by Stromae called 'Quand c'est' (a play on the word 'cancer'). In the video the disease is depicted through visual metaphor as a monster with long tentacles zapping up its victims.

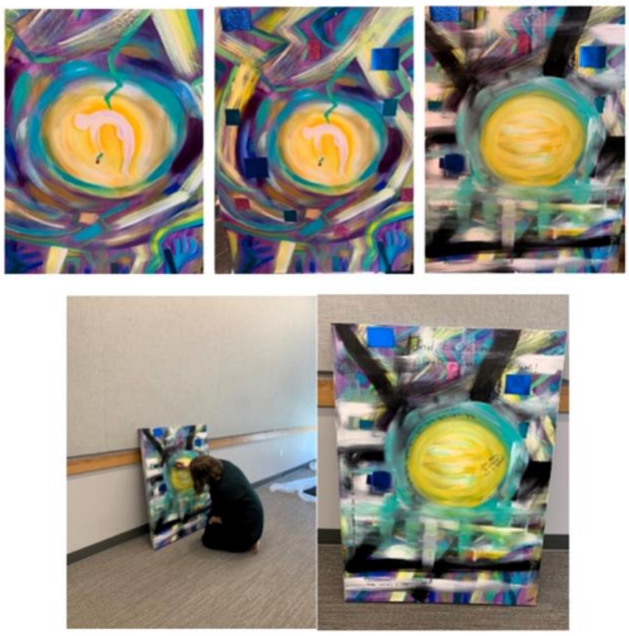


Figure 18. Qui Est le Prochain? [Who is Next?]

She began with the initial piece that depicts a person being struck by cancer and brought up to heaven (similar to the video) which she created in October, when she found out about her mother. Phase two occurred in February after her mom had surgery and the cancer was removed, and she added colorful stickers to represent this hopeful news. Phase three happened at the end of February when she heard there was a possibility the cancer had spread, and in anger and disappointment, she added thick black lines to the painting and filled in the image in the center to show ambiguity for the future. Phase four occurred during the March 28 reflection session in which she asked students in the class to add words of support to her painting, as part of the therapeutic quality of the interactive artmaking process which she discusses in our findings section.

Reflecting on our Aesthetic Experiences and their Value

After individually reading and coding our reflection session on March 28, 2023, we met again on May 16, 2023 to discuss themes that emerged from our reflection session. This section presents the major themes of our discussion which aim to answer our research questions. In each section, we provide a few examples for each theme and refer back to the literature for our analysis.

Artmaking as Therapeutic Practice

The course under study took place in Fall 2022, the first semester of relative normality after emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic and the first time most teacher learners were able to go to class without masks in several years and teach their own classes fully in person. As such, it was a difficult time for many of the teacher learners who felt burnt out from the pandemic and had to deal with numerous challenges related to teaching in a post-pandemic era, in which many felt disembodied from the "dynamic and complicated lived curricular experiences of their teaching and learning" (Hwang, 2019, p. 522).

In our reflection session, we discussed the therapeutic nature of collectively creating and exhibiting (or performing) our artwork together. Theresa talked about the way in which her own painting and the four-phase process she underwent was cathartic for her and made her feel supported and cared for. This was especially true when the teacher learners wrote inspiring and supportive comments on her painting, which she now proudly displays in her office. She also felt that the experiential and embodied practice of walking barefoot on the long paper and putting charcoal on our feet and wiping it off (for Jennifer's piece) was grounding and reminded her of grounding therapy that helps children calm down and manage emotions. She notes the way these kinds of activities could be useful for our own students:

> And I felt like that's part of what we have when we have students that are struggling. This can be an outlet for them, you know? Whatever the content area is, you know it's so valuable because it gives them this way to, if we open up these spaces, we can create a basis for them to help them deal with what they're dealing with in their lives, and a lot of us are going to have students that are dealing with a lot of shit outside of school, right? (Theresa, Reflection session)

Inoussa makes a similar point:

> It was also a way to weather some difficulties that students might be going through… (Inoussa, Reflection session)

In our discussion of the artwork and the course, we found that not only was the artmaking and reflecting on it in the course therapeutic for ourselves, but it helped us understand better how it might really help students in our own classes who struggled with various hardships such as moving to a new country and having to learn a new language. Furthermore, the collaborative nature of working together for the purpose of creating art became a "social choreography" that helped us develop "body-place awareness" and an increased desire for civic participation (Brown et al., 2023, p. 2). An example of this hails from the dance story project in which we had to be aware of our bodies and the interdependence created through being careful not to step on each other's toes or to support someone's body in a pose. The dance stories we created drew from our own experiences, but also from readings and discussions that made us aware of difficulties that migrants in our community face, and it helped us think about actions we could take in the local community to make our city a better place for globally mobile people.

Making Connections

In our collaborative analysis through open coding, we identified, discussed our interpretations, and merged "connection" and "community building" into the broader theme of making connections. We balanced our perspectives, recognizing subjectivity. During the reflection, we all agreed that the various activities we experienced in the course helped us connect emotionally, such as in Jennifer's comment:

> …It is a vehicle through which genuine inquiry can be generated, and a process through which learners are embraced as creators and forge connections with the teacher (citing Macintyre Latta, 2013). …I definitely felt in the class that we bonded through the opportunities to be vulnerable with each other. To dance in front of each other. To make and read poems in front of each other. (Jennifer, Reflection session)

Jennifer's comment speaks to the way in which aesthetic experiences heightened our senses and forced us to interact in intimate ways, such as dancing together, improvising in theater activities, and performing our slam poems in front of each other. This theme of *connection* aligns with Moroye & Uhrmacher (2009) and Noddings (2005) who point to the way in which students need to be emotionally engaged and need to care about a topic in order to learn. Building intellectual, social, emotional, and sensory connections with people helps students to bond with you the teacher (and each other), which leads them to want to learn more. Hence, our own experiences with these aesthetic activities helped us to see how they could help us build relationships with our own students, something that education scholars cannot emphasize enough (e.g., Milner et al., 2019).

Wonder and Discovery

Frequently in our reflection, we talked about how the artistic process led us to make discoveries about our own teaching, and about ourselves. Inoussa reflects on this while talking about Jennifer's piece:

> I see it like a continuum. So I can see the color just changes, throughout it's like - It's kind of evolution of the color, because the more you move like the thicker it gets and… I started something with like a lot of wonder...I was like afraid, fear of getting lost, but then …it was a process. (Inoussa, Reflection session).

This process of wonder (and even fear) made Inoussa reflect on his own teaching and how he could instill this sense of wonder and inquiry in his students. Inoussa also pointed out how the collective creation of art such as Jennifer's piece led to self-discovery:

> …by creating something together we get to know each other better and we discover something here. (Ilia, Reflection session)

This idea of self-discovery was something we had also studied in the course when reading Bhattacharya's work (2013, 2020) as Theresa comments on here:

> And this idea of discovering something about yourself as part of the research. You know that that reminds me about Bhattarcharya's work—it's not that you the researcher are separate, that you have to distance yourself from the project – you are the project. (Theresa, Reflection session)

Theresa's comment brings to light how the conversation also turned to the power of arts-practice research and the process we were undergoing at that moment, and how it helped us discover things about our own identities and teaching. In this way, the research became a way

to regain contact "with the process of learning something new, of being introduced to a medium never known in a particular way before" (Shih, 2020, p. 568). Accordingly, we were enriching our own "aesthetic intelligence" which allowed us to increase our appreciation of beautiful things and sense of wonder, and helped us to continue to grow (Shih, 2020, p. 569). This process of wonder and exploration was especially evident in the video project in which we had to discover what impacted us most and represent it through a particular genre (for example, 80's style music videos).

Embodied Experiences Compel a Change in Perspective

For Maxine Greene (1986) "informed encounters with works of art are always new beginnings. New perspectives open in experience; new possibilities of seeing, hearing, feeling are revealed" (p. 57). Through the aesthetic activities of the class (and even through our recursive process of using art to reflect on art) such as when we translanguaged in slam poetry, we were able to denaturalize our world and see what we took as the natural way to do things (for example, monolingual assignments for students), in a different light. Jennifer talks about this new viewpoint while discussing Mackayla's sculpture in which people had to put their ear or eye and hands through the wall and people had to interact with them.

> It forces us to think about a different perspective, right? That, that the walls are holding all of this. That the walls have seen everything, that they've also heard everything. And then we have to consider that position of being the wall when we're always in that idiom, not the wall. (Jennifer, Reflection session)

In our forum theater activity (inspired by Boal, 2000 and Caldas, 2018) we were also compelled to see things differently because people presented their view of critical incidents that had happened to them (or re-told their immigration experiences), and we had to participate in their reenactment of these events. The embodied nature of the activities helped us feel as if we were the people telling the stories (since we were part of its reenactment), and we were able to understand their point of view on a more visceral level. These experiences align with Samson (2005) who contends that embodied aesthetic activities bring us "from our own individual perspectives of the world to those of others" and help us "look at ourselves critically" and nurture and increase empathy for others (p. 80). They also help us understand the way we view the "Other" and invite us to imagine things differently. In doing so, they move us to "teach for equity and social justice" (Samson, 2005, p. 80). This social justice work was clearly evident in some of the student examples in our forum theater in which students expressed injustices they had experienced (e.g., being questioned on the bus because they wore a hijab or being told "speak English, this is America"). This led to us working together to help each other respond better and take action when these kinds of injustices occurred.

Attunement to Process

A final topic that came up frequently in our reflection session was how the creation of the artwork as a reflection on the course helped us to attend to our own processes as teachers, and embrace tensions and uncertainty inherent in our aesthetic experiences in the course, and ultimately, in our teaching. Mackayla discusses how creating and talking about *The Sensing Wall* led her to understand more deeply Pinar's (1972/1994, as cited in Hwang, 2019) idea of curriculum as a conversation and a matter of attunement to process:

> This really kind of invited me in to understand attunement, and I think first we privilege the visual so much, and then we privilege the auditory, but we don't really make room for kinetic or tactile and I have this belief that, like schools fundamentally disembody us, and I think that touch is such an important measure of like connection and the other thing, so I was thinking about like ways to attune other senses in connection. (Mackayla, Reflection session)

The wall served as a portal for individuals on either side to explore agency in how they interacted with the wall, each other, and themselves. As an object, the wall mediated interactions and expanded attunement to process through two elements: slowness and openness. Through slowness, expanding the duration of an experience, awareness of subtleties and nuances become more accessible. In openness, a responsiveness to the present moment and exploration of possibilities for engagement allowed for presence without immediate evaluation of the sensory experience. Mackayla's piece was both a multisensory object *and* an object that reimagined how the senses, in connection to each other, could be engaged through serendipitous potentials.

Mackayla's sculpture and reflection had the effect of helping our imaginations "deepen, diversify, and expand" (Greene, 1986, p. 57). This is because in spaces where we engage unpredictably from a space of agency and levity — both in how we give and receive in an interaction — we become free (Greene, 1986). We also agreed with Macintyre Latta (2013) that our role as teacher educators (or future teacher educators) was to help teachers "claim the creative space of classrooms" and to do this with students as co-creators (p. 105). Attuning to the process of engaging our somatic and kinesthetic channels ushered opportunities to experience our bodies as more centered mediums for learning and teaching, helping us see the value for both ourselves and our students.

Conclusion

Through reflecting on the value of collaboratively creating aesthetic experiences in teaching and learning, we encountered significant moments of transformation demonstrating the value of incorporating aesthetic education experiences into teacher education found in the literature (Dewey, 1934/1972; Greene, 1986; Moroye & Uhrmacher, 2009). Most notably, engaging in artmaking as a therapeutic practice offered personal catharsis and healing, and the co-creation and exhibition of art fostered opportunities to connect intimately, vulnerably, and empathetically.

In our analysis, we interpreted our experiences in relation to key concepts from the literature, such as Dewey's (1934/1972) notion of aesthetic experience and Greene's (1986) belief in the power of the arts to transform perspectives. Through our co-creation, experiences of wonder and discovery emerged, prompting us to recognize the importance of aesthetic process in tandem with the product. In acknowledging the process, we learned to both re-discover and re-affirm our identities and experiences in teaching and learning. Our findings both confirm and expand on prior studies — for instance, we described how aesthetic activities facilitated connection and community building among our cohort, aligning with Frawley's (2013) research. As we reflected on the emergent process of self-discovery and self-affirmation, we explored the significance of valuing social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds beyond our own. Expanding beyond ourselves, we engaged in the shared process of discovering and affirming the cultural and linguistic contexts in which we each exist, acknowledging interculturality as an embodied practice that can nurture inclusive teaching and learning spaces.

In addition, through our collective reflection we began to understand how centering our bodies and engaging our sensory channels shifted how we interacted and compelled a change in perspective. We attuned to more nuanced, subtle experiences such as encountering an unknown art medium, engaging in an underacknowledged sensory channel, or an unfamiliar language. In doing so, we were able to perceive the unknown, reimagine our possibilities, and enact new interactions. Our research also helped build deeper understanding of the value of aesthetic education in teacher development by foregrounding teacher learner voices and centering our lived experiences in the course (Bhattacharya, 2020).

In summary, this study offered us the transformative possibility to honor the dynamic, nuanced, and emerging contexts in which we each exist as teachers and learners, advocating for interculturality, creativity, and equity in our classrooms. Our collective exploration has enriched our lives, revealing the transformative power of embracing aesthetics in education, and empowering us as educators to foster a deep appreciation for the beauty and power of art in shaping lives and learning experiences. As Greene (1986) argues, aesthetic encounters

provide openings to reimagine education — our study suggests this reimagining can be powered by teachers reflecting critically on our own transformative experiences in the classroom. As we move forward, we carry the wisdom gained from this course, committed to being advocates for the transformative impact of aesthetics in education. We hope we have inspired others who desire to do the same in exploring and delight in their own aesthetic experiences as part of their own teaching and learning.

References

Attwood, A. I. (2020). Contextualizing aesthetics as social engagement for teacher education. *Journal of Sustainable Social Change*, 12(1), 3. https://doi.org/10.5590/JOSC.2020.12.1.03

Berriz, B.R., Wager, A.C. & Poey, V.M. Introduction-Bienvenidos. In B.R.Berriz, A.C. Wager, & V. M. Poey (Eds.) *Art as a way of talking for emergent bilingual youth* (pp. 1-24). Routledge.

Bhattacharya, K. (2013). Voices, silences, and telling secrets: The role of qualitative methods in arts-based research. *International Review of Qualitative Research,* 6(4), 604-627. https://doi.org/10.1525/irqr.2013.6.4.604

Bhattacharya, K. (2020). Understanding entangled relationships between un/interrogated privileges: Tracing research pathways with contemplative art-making, duoethnography, and Pecha Kucha. *Cultural Studies↔ Critical Methodologies,* 20(1), 75-85. https://doi.org/10.1177/15327086198849

Boal, A. (2000). *Theater of the oppressed*. Pluto.

Brown, C., Knight, L., Battersby, C., & Roche, J. (2023). Moving together: Intra- and intergenerational dance performing citizenship. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 23(3). http://doi.org/10.26209/ijea24n3

Button Poetry. (2016, November 7). *Khamal Iwuanyanwu, Sarina Morales, and Vanessa Tahay – standing in between* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vkc_jfBUImk&t=8s&ab_channel=ButtonPoetry

Catalano, T. & Morales, A. (2022). Dancing across difference: Arts and community-based interventions as intercultural education. *Intercultural Education.* https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2021.2016214

Catalano, T., Ganesan, U., Barbici-Wagner, A., Leonard, A., Wessels, S., Reeves, J. (2021). Dance as Dialog: A metaphor analysis of arts and community-based learning with preservice teachers and a local refugee community. *Teaching and Teacher Education.* https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103369

Catalano,T. (2016). *Talking about global migration: Implications for language teaching.* Multilingual Matters.

Clandinin, D.J. & Connelly, F.M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*, Jossey.

Dewey, J. (1934/1972) *Art as experience.* G.P. Putnam's sons.

Dewhurst, M. (2013). Narrowing in on the answers: Dissecting social justice art education. In M. Stone Hanley, G.W. Noblit, G.L. Shepard, & T. Barone (Eds.), *Culturally relevant arts education for social justice,* (pp. 143-153), Routledge.

España, C., & Herrera, L. Y. (2020). *En Communidad: Lessons for centering the voices and experiences of bilingual Latinx students*. Heinemann.

Frawley, T. J. (2013). Aesthetic education: Its place in teacher training. *Art Education, 66*(3), 22-28. https://doi.org/10.1080/00043125.2013.11519220

Gouzouasis, P., Irwin, R. L., Miles, E., & Gordon, A. (2013). Commitments to a community of artistic inquiry: Becoming pedagogical through a/r/tography in teacher education. *International Journal of Education & the Arts, 14*(1). Retrieved from http://www.ijea.org/v14n1/

Greene, M. (1986). The spaces of aesthetic education. *Journal of Aesthetic Education,* 20(4), 56- 62. https://doi.org/10.2307/3332600

Hanley, M. S. Hanley, M. S., Sheppard, G. L., Noblit, G. W., & Barone, T. (Eds.). (2013). *Cultural relevant arts education for social justice: A way out of no way*. Routledge.

Hwang, S. Y. (2019). Seeking rhythmic attunement: Teaching to dance; dancing to teach. *Curriculum Inquiry,* 49(5), 507-525. https://doi.org/10.1080/03626784.2019.1685858

Leclercq, J. M. (2003). Facets of interculturality in education (Vol. 2). Council of Europe.

Lim, B. (2005). Aesthetic experience in a dynamic cycle: Implications for early childhood teachers and teacher educators. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education,* 25(4), 367-373. https://doi.org/10.1080/10901020500369811

Macintyre Latta, M. (2013). *Curricular conversations: Play is the (missing) thing*. Routledge.

Macintyre Latta, M. & Chan, E. (2011). *Teaching the arts to engage English language learners.* Routlege.

Meehan, M.B., & Nora, J. Seen from within: Photography, culture, and community in a dual-language school. In B.R.Berriz, A.C. Wager, & V. M. Poey (Eds.) *Art as a way of talking for emergent bilingual youth* (pp. 103-129). Routledge.

Milner, H. R., Cunningham, H. B., Delale-O'Connor, L., & Kestenberg, E. G. (2019). *These kids are out of control: Why we must reimagine "classroom management" for equity*. Corwin.

Moroye, C. M., & Uhrmacher, P. B. (2009). Aesthetic themes of education. *Curriculum and Teaching Dialogue*, 11(1-2), 85-101.

https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Chapter-12%3A-Aesthetic-Themes-of-Education-Moroye-Uhrmacher/73eb92de6ae854385a67fbf2b62846af1d50bb12

Noddings, N. (2005). *The challenge to care in schools* (2nd ed.). Teachers College Press.

Nolan, C. (Director) (2010). *Inception* [Film]. Legendary Pictures Syncopy Films.

Palala Martinez, H. (2023, June 25). *Mi papa* [Video]. Canva. https://bit.ly/4eXv5za

Phelan, H. & Nunan, M. (2018). To write or not to write? The contested nature and role of writing in arts practice research. *Journal of Research Practice* 14 (2), M3-M3. http://jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/article/view/592/492

Pinar, W. F. (1972/1994). Working from within. In *Autobiography, politics, and sexuality: Essays in curriculum theory*, 1972-1992 (pp.7–11). Peter lang.

Pinar, W. F. (2012). *What is curriculum theory?* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Samson, F. (2005). Drama in aesthetic education: An invitation to imagine the world as if it could be otherwise. *Journal of aesthetic education*, 39(4), 70-81. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3527393

Shcherbakov, I. (2023, July 25). *Privet hi* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=StlsPbeCQb0&ab_channel=IliaShcherbakov

Shih, Y. H. (2020). Teaching principles for aesthetic Education: Cultivating Taiwanese children's aesthetic literacy. *International Journal of Education and Practice*, 8(3), 568-576. https://doi.org/10.18488/journal.61.2020.83.568.576

The New Yorker. (2015, June 22). *Elizabeth Streb's action-hero choreography* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DK4a3lrv3Q0&t=9s&ab_channel=TheNewYorker

About the Authors

Theresa Catalano is Professor of Second Language Education/Applied Linguistics at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in the Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education. Her research focuses on (arts-based) approaches to teacher preparation, intercultural communication, and multimodal critical discourse studies. She teaches courses

related to language education, linguistics, arts-based/aesthetic education and critical discourse analysis and publishes across a wide range of journals such as *Journal of Dance Education, Bilingual Research Journal, TESOL Journal,* and *Social Semiotics.* Her latest book *Critical Discourse Analysis, Critical Discourse Studies and Beyond* (co-authored with Linda Waugh) takes a historical look at the field, its approaches, and its aims.

Inoussa Malgoubri is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Teaching Learning and Teacher Education at the University of Nebraska- Lincoln, USA. He holds a master's degree in applied Linguistics from Université Joseph Ki-Zerbo of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, and a graduate diploma in Comparative Education from Nagasaki University, Japan. He has taught as an ESL instructor and served as a school principal for the Ministry of Education in Burkina Faso. His academic interests include intercultural education, second language acquisition, and language policies. His dissertation examines arts-based approaches to the teaching of English in Burkina Faso.

Jennifer Bockerman is an artist, educator, and current PhD student in the Department of Education and the School of the Arts at the Virginia Commonwealth University where she teaches courses in art education. As a K-12 and university instructor, Jennifer uses contemporary art to provide a context for developing students' critical consciousness to examine and disrupt oppressive systems and envision new paths for the future. She is interested in arts-based practices and contemporary art as story, positionality, embodied knowledge, a means to bear witness, and to activate change. She studies cognition, creativity, and the mind-body connection to support student development in metacognitive and executive functioning skills, accurate self-efficacy, and cycles of self-actualization.

Hector Palala Martinez is completing his PhD in Educational Studies and new technologies in the Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Hector teaches courses related to the integration of technology for future high school teachers as well as bilingual education and in all his classes he promotes justice, dignity and human rights. Previously, he was a professor of education at the Universidad de San Carlos in Guatemala, and before that, an elementary teacher. His research centers on the intersection of bilingual/multilingual education and technology (in particular, Mayan languages), literacy programs in Indigenous languages, pedagogy of tenderness, and artificial intelligence for education.

Mackayla Kelsey is an embodiment researcher, emerging media arts educator, and artist-in-between currently pursuing her PhD in Educational Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where she has co/taught courses in computational media, play and performance, and education and culture. In her teaching, she explores how touch and movement shape

experiences of teaching and learning in computational and speculative education, broadly focusing on the cultivation of haptic pedagogies and sensuous literacies within emerging media arts practices. She further engages postqualitative research methodologies to diffuse her discoveries through new materialism, affect, queer and feminist theories, and others. In her art making, she further encounters touch and movement through the construction of social sculptures, computational interfaces, performance scores, and multimodal textiles.

Leonardo Brandolini is completing a PhD in Educational Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. His work focuses on visual arts, textual analysis and comparative literature. He has taught Spanish at both tertiary and secondary education levels as well as courses for preservice teachers on second language acquisition and multicultural education. He holds a master's degree in applied linguistics to the teaching of Spanish as a foreign language from Nebrija University and a master's degree in Spanish language and literature from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Ilia Shcherbakov holds a specialist degree from Irkutsk State Linguistic University, Russia, and has extensive experience as an English teacher at various language centers. Currently, he is pursuing a Ph.D. in Innovative Learning Technologies in the Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. In addition to his doctoral studies, Ilia teaches Russian in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures. His academic interests are centered around game-based learning and gamification. Recently, he has embarked on developing a game designed to facilitate Russian language learning, aiming to enhance engagement and educational outcomes through innovative technological approaches.

International Journal of Education & the Arts

http://IJEA.org ISSN: 1529-8094