

CONCEPTUALIZING ART INTEGRATION THROUGH *CURRERE*

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Art integration toward social justice guides our teaching philosophies and practices. Prior to transitioning into higher education, we were both middle school art teachers where content integration and collaboration with colleagues was part of our daily teaching practice. For Stephanie Danker, art integration was a part of her preservice teacher preparation through *Art Across the Curriculum*, a course she now teaches at Miami University; it changed her perception of what teaching can be, opening up concepts of art education, and forced her to stop seeing education as siloed. It fostered more relevant artmaking and exposed new ways to communicate through art. Darden Bradshaw, on the other hand, found herself falling into art integration as a new middle school teacher. Her preservice teacher preparation program had no formal training for art integration; yet her experience as an artist meant easily seeing the connections between and among content areas in K-12 settings. Art integration opened up spaces for students to come to their learning in meaningful ways while shifting the typical experience of an entire class of students producing artworks that all looked the same.

Beyond the walls of our classrooms, art integration prompted new experiences with collaboration as we found ourselves working closely with folks from other disciplines and areas of study. It was exciting and enriching and required a tremendous amount of listening, negotiation, and open-mindedness. These skills were not addressed in the teacher preparation programs from which we graduated. New to higher education, we individually built art integration partnerships within our local communities. We also sought out research collaborations with colleagues from other universities based on their approaches and writings about art integration. Now, six years later, our discourse has led us down various paths. In the last year and a half, one of those paths has been *currere*. We have relished *currere* personally. Professionally, it has led us to awareness of moments of tension impacting our teaching practices in which we have privileged community partner voices over those of our students. That tension, and our attempts to resolve it, are the basis of this paper. Through our reflective practice, we have identified three concepts in which we use *currere* in relationship to art integration: how *currere* intersects with conceptions of education, *currere* as a means of moving toward reciprocity in community, and how moments of unlearning can deepen pedagogical practice.

***CURRERE* INTERSECTING WITH CONCEPTS OF EDUCATION: ART INTEGRATION IN PLACE**

One of the aspects of *currere* that draws us to it is the manner in which it allows us to reflect upon the curriculum from which we arise (Pinar, 1975). In the act of examining our own teaching practice, the underlying philosophical, ideological, and cultural beliefs we associate, either implicitly or explicitly, with teaching and education, and the way those beliefs manifest in our actions and words as teachers of future teachers, we come to more fully understand the “experience of our lives” (Pinar & Grummet, 1976, p. 18). With understanding have arisen moments of disquiet.

We recognized a common trap within the field of education: the desire to define concepts and ideas so rigidly that other ideas are excluded. In fact, in 2019 while conducting a survey of Ohio teacher preparation programs to discover how art integration was being included in higher education curricula, we found ourselves falling into that trap. As we analyzed the data collected, we saw that *art integration* was not a universally held concept. How do diverse interpretations of the words “art” and “integration” inform the way future art teachers are educated? Do we need to share definitions for such education to be effective? As we started paying closer attention to how we, Stephanie and Darden, were thinking, communicating, and verbalizing what *art integration* looked like in our worlds and what we meant by using those terms individually and collectively, we found ourselves recognizing that how one perceives art integration is context driven. Therefore, this desire to counteract defining and labeling the work we were doing, and to understand how we arrived at our understanding(s) of art integration led us to individual *currere* investigations addressing the question, “How did I come to know art integration?”

Newly drawn to the *currere* process in 2020, we attended the *Currere Exchange* in summer 2021. We were excited to use this method to further investigate our question. Our *currere* processes and the methods we employed to answer the question were very different. In fact, we found ourselves, much like the folks we had surveyed the year before, moving further away from any semblance of commonality. At first, we were deterred. Engaging in deeper conversations and reflecting on some of what we had heard from *Currere Exchange* presenters, we sought to re-present, to share with each other and clarify our beliefs about what art integration is and can be. This led to an acknowledgement that art integration does not fit into a box or universal definition; art integration can, and should, be a multiplicity.

ART INTEGRATION

In fact, the act of trying to not categorize, define, and limit art integration for the purpose of conveying a definition to others created spaces for us to entertain questions about which prior conceptions or unexamined/under-examined ideas about art education and art integration our students, emerging art teachers, might hold as they arrive in our classes. Elliot Eisner (2004) in *The Arts and the Creation of Mind* encourages educators to consider the beliefs that underlie teaching. He argues, we teach as we have been taught unless we make a conscious choice to do otherwise. And educators often repeat and re-teach or reinscribe that which we have been taught. In the same way that much of western U.S. culture is steeped in heteronormative, cis-gendered, able-bodied conceptions of whiteness, so too are concepts and beliefs about art education. What we teach and what it means to be a teacher are mired in the experience of being learners in American classrooms, institutions founded in and through which White supremacy has been suffused (Kraehe & Acuff, 2021).

Art integration theory and practice take many forms within education and art education. Integrating art can support and deepen a learners’ understanding (Brioulette, 2019; Marshall & Donahue, 2014), empower school leaders and build student knowledge (Diaz & McKenna, 2017) while serving as a “third space” for learning (Donahue & Stuart, 2010; Marshall 2005, 2019). Others see art integration as a method for teaching creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration (Goldberg, 2012) or connecting different bodies of knowledge and disciplinary realms of study (Krug & Cohen Evron, 2000; Parsons, 2004) dismantling silos in education. More importantly, for us, the boundaries

of art education expand with art integration; educators and learners can consider their positions in the world and become activists in working toward change. Looking at, creating, responding, and reflecting through artmaking enlarges understanding—we find our way in the confusing world in which we live. These are among the reasons we are drawn to art integration. In addition to being drawn to art integration, we have found that the process of integrating the local into educational activities, bringing together teachers, students, and community, makes learning dynamic for all stakeholders (Smith & Sobel, 2010).

RECOGNIZING CONTENT OF PLACE: CONTEXT IN COMMUNITY

Through a place-based approach, art education becomes a tool to explore the places people live, thinking globally while creating and discussing art in a more local context (Danker, 2018; Lai & Ball, 2002). Place-based art education provides opportunities for multidisciplinary educators (formal and informal) to come together to create powerful experiences for students and community members through bringing self and community into dialogue with place (Blandy & Hoffman, 1993; Inwood, 2008). It should be noted that, though we are entering place-based work through the lens of art education, the inherent multidisciplinary nature of the approach can be initiated from other disciplines.

Schools in general, and our institutions in particular, are connected to specific geographic and cultural places. They are enmeshed in cycles of reinscribing and reinforcing ideas and beliefs about education, racism, whiteness, and privilege. These institutions, like all institutions, exist in communities and places that are rife with challenges. So, then, we ask ourselves: are we contributing to these historically problematic conceptions in the way we prepare preservice teachers? Are we taking action toward dismantling the system or becoming overwhelmed by the magnitude of the challenge and mired in white guilt? Rather than ignore the question, we advocate an art integration through which, in exploring the issues right around us that directly impact our students, our communities, and ourselves, art becomes a tool to foster transformation and serve as the foundation for identifying the question(s) to address together, collaboratively, and in conjunction with other disciplinary experts and community partners.

ESTABLISHING COMMUNITY: EXAMPLES OF UNLEARNING

Working in community can lead to (awareness of) power dynamics and misconceptions that exist among stakeholders. We each approach community partnerships differently. Primarily these distinctions stem from gaps we have identified in our curricula and context of our communities. Partnerships have also been formed around serendipitous moments and curiosities that have been aroused. Below each of us discuss one place-based art integration partnership or model directly connected to our teaching. We tease out moments of unlearning that connect to the work.

Stephanie has been collaborating with educators at the Myaamia Center¹ (Miami University) since 2017 to co-create and implement art-integrated curriculum in the local community with her preservice art education students about aspects of Myaamia culture that Myaamia educators identify (Bergmark & Danker, 2022; Danker, 2020). As of December 2021, close to 1000 elementary school students in Oxford and Cincinnati, Ohio, have been taught the two-part lessons. The following moment captures one of the first interactions, prior to creating their partnership involving preservice students.

Stephanie Danker: During my research leave in spring 2017, I recognized a gap in our preservice preparation program for art education in teaching about art of

cultures that are not one's own. I strived to make connections with the Myaamia Center. I called a meeting with several Myaamia Center educators and leaders to propose my idea of hosting a Native American artist symposium in coordination with the Myaamiaki Conference.² The Director of Education respectfully told me, "you cannot determine who our artists are, that comes from within our community." Tears started streaming down my face in the middle of the meeting. I was so embarrassed. I had been so excited about my potential role in organizing. I could not believe I had been so naive to think that I could come in as an outsider and coordinate a cultural event for a community, without established relationships. It was a moment of unlearning that has transformed me as a collaborator, community partner and educator. I continue to process it.

Darden's five-year partnership with a Dayton Public middle school came about through the former principal's hope that, by connecting 8th graders with the University of Dayton, students might envision themselves as a future part of that higher education community. Her new, recent integration work around Paul Laurence Dunbar stemmed from an interest sparked by a colleagues' research, as well as too many moments encountering people who had considerable knowledge of the Wright Brothers but not even a passing awareness of their contemporary Dunbar. Dunbar was among the first African American authors to gain national recognition, son of Dayton, and the first African American to graduate in Dayton schools.

Darden Bradshaw: My family and I moved to Dayton in fall 2013. We were excited to visit historic sites and local places that connected to history—including many tied to engineer Charles F. Kettering, who invented the cash register and the electric starter, as well as the Wright Brothers, whose bicycle shop was founded here. I had been to Kitty Hawk, NC, and was surprised to learn that NC's claim to being the home of flight was hotly contested in the Dayton region. About the same time, a colleague mentioned her research focus on Paul Laurence Dunbar. I was unfamiliar with him and his work. And, for a variety of reasons, I mostly remained that way for the next six years. I knew his name and that he had been a local African American author. However, as my time in Dayton grew, more and more I encountered others—middle school students, university students, colleagues, and people from the Dayton area—who, like me, knew more than a little about the Wright Brothers, but had little to no knowledge of Dunbar. Was our lack of awareness informed by systemic racism? As I delved into learning more about the life, works, and history of Paul Laurence Dunbar, I found myself fascinated by him and chagrined to realize how overlooked he has been, primarily in education. I came to the conclusion that yes—racism—both institutional racism and my own internalized privilege of White people (which is a direct result of racism) were at play.

We all operate with and engage in the world through mental models. Evident in the examples above, these may be outdated, ineffective, or just incorrect leading to moments of dissonance. The concept of unlearning, often seen in contrast to notions of learning, invites us to choose an alternative paradigm and see the previous models we used as one possibility, but not the only way. Unlearning shifts knowledge acquisition from a linear, often transactional model to a more rhizomatic approach (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) in which a fluid network of understandings, questions, and reflections form an

interconnected web. For some theorists, unlearning is giving up knowledge of behaviors without judging the knowledge of behaviors being unlearned (Hislop, et al, 2014). Jayarathne and Schuwirth (2021) conceptualize unlearning as “a metacognitive process” in which someone knowingly sets aside or relinquishes knowledge, beliefs, or behaviors and, importantly, “consciously chooses not to continue using them” (p. 106).

We espouse MacDonald’s (2002) concept of transformative unlearning. In this cognitive process we reflect upon and recognize that the old mental model is no longer relevant or effective. Having given it up, one then works to find or create a new model that better achieves one’s goals or aligns with one’s values and beliefs and then, most importantly, continually works to ingrain the new model through practice. This cognitive process is not forgetting (Jayarathne & Schuwirth, 2021). Instead, it is a deliberate, conscious process—an intentional act that must be repeated. This is particularly important as humans have a tendency to fall back on old patterns because we have habituated them, regardless of our intention.

When one recognizes that they have had a moment of unlearning, it can be important to be gentle with oneself. We are always (un)learning. We seek out the history behind our behaviors and actions that led to the moments of naivete and (un)learning. This is another way that *currere* can be helpful. We continue to recognize the way our individual history and experiences impact the choices we make. We have found it beneficial to stay with the discomfort and not back away. Emerging teachers, who lack experience, may not be prepared for a moment of (un)learning if they do not have a support system of peers and mentors in place.

SUSTAINING COMMUNITY

In moments of unlearning there are various nuances and challenges in sustaining community partnerships. We are constantly making choices based on how a program unfolds; each iteration is unique. As facilitators and liaisons, engaged in art integration, we make choices for our students and community partners, including in what we are willing to invest. There are inherent tensions we must negotiate to ensure reciprocity while bridging our curriculum, the community partnership, and learning outcomes for students. These include goals set by the community partners, the learning experiences, and the boundaries inherent in the academic semester. The partners rely on us for facilitating an outcome that effectively meets their schedules, objectives, and/or needs. Under our guidance, students often deliver the content and implement the experience in the community (e.g., teaching fourth and sixth graders about Myaamia culture and imagery). This means sometimes students do not have a choice in the structure or organization of the partnership with community members in place-based art integration work. This could be because a specific partnership has been built over years and with particular people, often including a formalized Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with an organization. At times this structure can result in questions and uncertainty from students. Is the tension associated with unlearning because they are not used to the ambiguity and evolving nature of placed-based art integration in community?

We found ourselves discussing these student experiences. Some anxieties stem from fears of not living up to expectations or, in one specific case, making a cultural mistake in front of the Myaamia Center educators. For others, tensions arise from the unpredictable and evolving nature of the collaborative process. As collaborators and research partners, we, Darden and Stephanie, are constantly engaging in critical reflective practice together. In fact, we work together weekly; this continuity leads to deep discourse. In one of those conversations, we realized we could alleviate some of the discomfort students feel

created by the ambiguity of unlearning moments and support them if we create more structured reflection prompts when engaging with community partners. We identified this as lacking in our teaching practices. It could be key to assisting preservice students with identifying specific growth and articulating richer knowledge acquisition. More structured reflection prompts could assist us in assessing student reflections on content and depth while measuring the quality of reflective practice in order to push students to articulate in deeper language (Lee, 2005). In talking with each other, we realized that up to that point, the prompts assigned were broad and, at times, vague. This could be out of a preference for more open-ended responses or feeling constricted by workload pressures that prevent devoting the necessary time or emotional energy to providing thoughtful feedback. Our experience is that there is an intense amount of work involved in assisting preservice students to become more critical reflective practitioners, not only in required time and mental effort, but emotional effort. We want to be educators who engage deeply with and create spaces for our students to normalize weaving in rich, critical reflection as teachers, to question what and how they are learning, and to question us.

This discussion around structured prompts led us to interrogate our pedagogical complicity, and the ways in which we fall back on comfortable practices, often mired in our early conceptions of education and teaching. Art integration invites collaboration, is designed to make meaning of our world, and espouses unhinging boundaries associated with teacher-student expectations. Yet, there are times when it has been easier as teacher preparators to tell students how we want them to do what we want them to do. This can sometimes come from internalized conceptions of power and assumptions about positionality, on both sides. We were dismayed to realize we are not always thinking about reciprocity with our students in the same ways that we think of power as it relates to reciprocity in community engagement (see Kliwer et al., 2010). As reciprocity is “key to developing rapport and trust, valuing diversity and inclusion, and building connections across communities of difference to further understanding and/or meaningful change” (Lawton et al., 2019, p. 11), we had been more intentional in relation to our community partners.

One negative effect of such focus on reciprocity with external community partnership exposes our assumptions (and potentially that of the university, students, and our community partners) that students will follow along. We were cognizant of our power as educators, particularly as organizer of the curriculum, as scheduler of events, and assessor of learning. But we were blind to how, in our roles as liaison between our preservice students and community partners, we were not aligning our values with our actions. Community partners have power as a voice of the community. In terms of these place-based art integration collaborations, what power are we giving to students? This demonstrates that there are actions we unknowingly take as educators, likely because of how we were taught and unexamined positionalities, that re-inscribe power, whiteness, and privilege. Ultimately, our choices and critical reflections have an impact. We do not want to privilege the long-term sustainability of a community partnership over what students gain from our courses.

This awareness of the ways in which power is often at play in education led us to revise how we coordinate and structure the place-based art integration engagements including from the vantage point of the content we are tasked with teaching, knowing where the students are and what pedagogical skills they have acquired, as well as needs of community partners, for the students to accurately represent their culture or art content of the culture. In this revision, the entire experience can be less overwhelming and problematic; being more intentional in structuring curriculum supports preservice

teachers better while also hearing the voice of community partners. We are transparent as we model this. Students may not yet have the experience and knowledge to make all the choices connected to the art integration work, but if we are *really* interested in fostering art integration toward social justice, we need to further examine the way we share and discuss established partnerships, inviting increased student involvement in the design process of art integration (where possible) and being vulnerable in sharing the missteps that we have taken. Students come to our classrooms with different experiences and levels of openness for art integration. In trying to meet students where they are and inviting them to see the pedagogical power in art integration, we must acknowledge that learning and experiences may look different. We can encourage them to take their learning to the edge of their comfort zones. One way to do this can be sharing moments of unlearning and inviting students to engage in their own *currere* process. “Learners must be empowered first, before critical self-reflection can take place, and, conversely, empowerment then increases critical self-reflection” (Lawton et al., 2019, p. 2). Discussing our own moments of unlearning around our current art integration work could model and invite students to be more reflective, leading to transformation.

NEXT PEDAGOGICAL STEPS

We want students to reflect on how they are coming to know the content, processing their unlearning moments, and discuss how they are coming to know new approaches to teaching and understanding art integration within a community. This is a tall order. Given the many moving parts to this work, we posit the following process for embedding a mini-*currere* within our courses.

First, we want to be transparent and discuss aspects of our *currere* journeys. While our experiences are different from theirs, they may provide a model or starting point for them. If we have seen the *currere* process help us come to greater clarity, then how might that same process foster students’ distinct voices? Second, our approach is both informed by our content, classroom and place-based art integration partnerships, and philosophical alignment with our values as educators. Before we can even ask them to begin, we want to build safe spaces for this vulnerable work. This is particularly important as many of the social justice topics we address are big or sensitive. Pinar suggests that *currere* offers potential for change in public education precisely because it encourages reflection on educational experiences that connect academic content, subjective knowledge of teacher and learner, with society and historical contexts (Pinar, 2004, 21). While learning new content and new theories, students may also be questioning their belief and value systems. We do not see our role as one of telling them what to believe or value but to provide ways to process their awareness and recognition of those thoughts, beliefs, and values.

Third, in our own experience, we found that moments of unlearning can be hard to digest. *Currere* reminds us that we are at the intersection of ourselves (Williams, 2021). When one recognizes that they have had a moment of unlearning, it can be important to be gentle with oneself. We can encourage students to be open to the process and invite them to share, with one another, the new tools they discover for articulation and processing emotions.

Having individually experienced the richness of what happens when we bring all of these disparate components together, we want to invite our students to take these risks, moving beyond making the grade to making ourselves. To do so we guide students through their own mini-*currere*. Using written and visual prompts, students weave aspects of their regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical lived experiences

(Pinar, 1975). For example, following initial pre-assessments, but prior to digging deeply into new content knowledge or working with community partners, we invite students to mine their past experiences around a topic tied to the content (regressive).³ Setting this aside, students then read and engage with the new content and learn directly from community partners. Students answer the questions: What is not yet the case? What is not yet present by envisioning the future potential of integrating this content or working with specific community partners (progressive)? At this point, their beliefs, ideas, and values may be destabilized. It is within the third part, where *currere* asks us to be the most vulnerable, that students take action. This may be teaching their lessons to middle schoolers or engaging with the community partners as they practice delivering culturally responsive lessons (analytical). After teaching, students are asked to reflect on what this all means to them as future teachers. How do their new knowledge and experiences contribute to who they are today? (synthetical). An art integration approach invites students to address these prompts in both written and visual forms.

While *currere* is still a very new addition to our teaching practice, we have thus far found that, in the same way *currere* helped us gain insight into the ways our power was playing out in our own classrooms, implementing *currere* with students as they engage in learning about place-based art integration also fosters spaces for students to examine and become aware of the complexities of their learning. They find themselves accepting their educational journey and potentially challenging concepts of what they wish to do in their future classrooms. This new knowledge informs future iterations of our partnerships, teaching, and research. And, in reading our students' *currere* journeys, we have come to know them at a deeper level, and they come to better know themselves.

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Endnotes

¹The Myaamia Center at Miami University exists as the research arm for the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma and its citizens and is dedicated to educational initiatives aimed at the preservation of language and culture.

²The Myaamia Center hosts the Myaamiaki Conference at Miami University biennially where Myaamia Center staff, Myaamia students, and invited scholars present research and other topics related to the Miami Tribe.

³Regressive prompts for Darden's students include the following: Comment upon the inclusion or exclusion of BIPOC artists and art in your K-12 art classroom experiences.

What do you need to know about race, racism, and whiteness before you would feel comfortable teaching these issues? Progressive prompts invite students to explore what it may feel like for a student who identifies as BIPOC to see themselves included in their art curriculum. This includes asking why art education has historically focused so heavily on art made by white men? Synthetical prompts include: How might this experience of considering moments of unlearning change what you hope to bring to your own classroom and curricula? In what ways will you overcome systemic educational barriers and integrate BIPOC art and artists into art class?