

COLLABORATIVE PROCESS IN ARTS EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The need for arts education, particularly for children, is quite strong throughout the world. While my experience and study has been largely focused in the United States, I will also attempt to touch upon impacts in other nations, particularly in Japan and Indonesia. At least in America there are studies that prove an implementation of arts education in communities and school systems has a positive affect on peoples' ability to be creative, solve problems, be tolerant of different cultures, and build community. Arts education helps not only artists but people from all walks of life, as everyone can benefit from the skill of problem-solving, for example. There are several learning styles that can be implemented, with varying methods old and new from Vygotsky to Friere that assist in understanding how to provide a fair education for as many different people with as many different learning styles as possible, so that many people can be reached. It is to say, art is not just for artists, but again, for everyone. There are several tools developed for building an effective curriculum in arts education, such as play theory, group exercises, individual exercises, critique and forum. As there are learning theories, there is a strong research history involving developmental psychology implemented with arts education that makes for a positive education developmentally for children. Lastly, the subject of collaboration within arts education as well as the arts community will be touched upon for the cause of building bonds of community.

Keywords : arts process, collaborative, arts education, children, arts community

Within the arts the concept of collaboration is a highly sought after and regarded process for creating large multidisciplinary artistic productions. For three weeks in the month of July of 2014 I taught for Community Arts Partnership Summer Arts program (CAPSA) and had a hands on experience leading ensembles and workshops for the music department, most of which involved aspects of collaborative thought, work, production, and performance. The collaborative process seemed to be highly affected by cultural backgrounds (multiculturalism and diversity), cognitive presentation (play derived and adversity), and teacher and student personality traits (conflict of individuality).

We must address the effect of cultural background from the perspective of community and expectation. The children I worked with faced these aspects everyday and through the process of collaboration experienced their results in reality. We will start with an analysis from a psychoanalytic view.

Freud explains that there are two urges within human beings, one where the individual strives for personal happiness, and the second, where individuals strive for union with others. This becomes a struggle in daily life. The development of the person and community are in mutual dispute creating a hostile opposition. (Freud, 1961) In Freudian theory there are three aspects to every individual: the ego (individual), super-ego (individual's community), and the id (the individual's primal urge). When analyzing the dynamic between the opposition between the individual and the community, Freud explains that cultural development follows the influence of the communities evolving super-ego. (Freud, 1961) Unfortunately, several expectations are the byproduct of this layering of super-egos. Both the individual and community super-egos set up ideal demands of a strict nature, and a 'fear of conscience' exists in regards to disobedience of these demands. (Freud, 1961) These effects were apparent while teaching, observing the various students in what they wanted or didn't want to do, what was apparent they felt they should be doing, and what the program required of not only just the students, but the teachers as well who are equally subject to these paradigms.

In the severity of the demands and prohibitions of the super-ego, it lacks a concern for the ego because it ignores the resistances against the subservience to its demands. Two reproaches are in the instinctual strength of the id, and the real external environmental difficulties. We are very often obliged to oppose the super-ego, and often for therapeutic purposes, in an endeavor to lower its demands. The cultural super-ego could face adversity because of the ethical demands it winds up making as well, seeing as the cultural super-ego is not troubled enough by the mental constitution of its subjects. There is no assessment by the cultural super-ego to find if its demands are unreasonable and even possible to be obeyed. It is assumed that a man has unlimited mastery over his id, and that his ego is psychologically capable of all that is required of it. (Freud, 1961) In this we find the basis for opposition and revolt stemming from conflict of interest. The students have a dilemma where they may not want to do or may not understand the result in mind, which was apparent with particular students. Students may also be under pressure privately, from their personal teachers and/or parents, who add additional community super-egos overbearing a student. Likewise, as a teacher, I found myself susceptible to the same humanity, at times torn between directives and morale. As a community I believe we all found solace in the successful end result in the culmination concert, where all students seemed to arrive at a rewarding place after their journeys. As a teacher, it became apparent that part of the responsibility is to provide balance between

all these thriving personas, including one's own, and cultivate a productive community.

In exploring further aspects of community, we must analyze the culture that develops. Put any group of people together and naturally sub-groups will emerge. There is the anomaly that Hooks points out in reference to colored people that I found applicable to how I observed students who segregate themselves in general terms of race, interests, and skill level. Through this self-segregation, students did limit, to a degree, their interactivity with other students and teachers, how much they challenged themselves, how much available information they made themselves susceptible to, and their overall sense of community. Hooks says that people of color cannot avoid facing adversity when they segregate themselves, or self-segregate, in order to protect themselves. In order to function well in American society they must be able to function within the diverse settings. In this society there is a white racist assault in particular, Hooks points out, and people need to know how to operate within this whiteness maintaining intelligence and sanity, and that if these skills are not built, it ultimately results in individuals of other races unable to meet the challenge a world that is at the same time diverse yet not yet fully anti-racist. To meet this challenge is to equip oneself to challenge the fault of this contradiction in order to change this racism. Hooks continues to say that we all have the opportunity to learn in the context of diversity in racially integrated settings, and "...to be critically conscious of difference without allowing differences to keep us apart." (Hooks, 2003) Though what Hook says is specific to visible race, I found these terms important also to interests, gender, area of study, sociability, and skill level.

Though a certain level of segregation is natural, it is important to encourage children outside of comfort areas, perhaps into positions of scaffolding, and especially in areas of community and culture to extend diversity. Maxine Greene speaks extensively on the topics of multiculturalism and diversity. She believes multiculturalism is another way to imagine imagining. "It is becoming a friend of someone else's mind, with the wonderful power to return to that person a sense of wholeness." Imagination, she says, can create wholes by integrating severed parts back together in the right order. (Greene, 1995, pg. 38) So where Freudian theory separates us and creates disjunctions, Greene proposes an aesthetic out of the opposite possibility. We can link imagination to the making of community by linking imagination to our sense of possibility and our abilities in responding to fellow human beings. In this, she proposes, we can encourage young people to have ability and agency to project a future built on a joint effort interpreted from their experiences. Greene quotes G.B. Madison to say, "it is through imagination, the realm of pure possibility that we freely make ourselves to be who or what we are, that we creatively and imaginatively become who we are, while in the process preserving the freedom and possibility to be yet otherwise than what we have become and merely are." (Greene, 1995, pg. 38)

The question becomes how to implement action and discourse to enact a change and influence the inherent separation complexes that Freud outlines. With

the point being to build on community, Greene suggests we change our language to emphasize process words, such as: creating, making, saying, weaving, etc. Community, she argues, ought to be a space permeated by imaginative awareness akin to enabling participants to imagine alternative possibilities for themselves and their communities—that the process for community cannot simply be enacted through rational construction or decree. Ramifications must arise to address what contributes to the pursuit of shared good(s), in that ways of unity, striving towards a communal world, and attaining mutuality. (Greene, 1995, pg. 39)

Even within confines of an ethnicity, or even to extend awareness to other ethnicities, diversity is an important tool to utilize for communal growth. Lin said, “The public viewing of ethnic traditional arts encourages young members to appreciate their ethnic community. Participation and recognition from the mainstream society motivates the immigrants to perform their differences.” (Lin, 2000, pg. 195) Through recognition of difference we can begin to see similarity, and through similarity we build community.

Psychoanalytically and culturally we have seen how active the foundational groundwork is for collaboration between humans in general, but this dynamic is active cognitively as well.

The dialogue between a child and an adult both parties may refer to the same object but think about it in fundamentally different ways. Typically, a child’s basic structure will be situational where the work is tied to the concrete and an adult will have structure that is conceptual. (Vygotsky, 1962, pg. 142) This rings true for most of my teaching experience, yet it brings up the issue of roles when a teacher encounters students that are jaded with experiences. This kind of situation can be challenging in order to balance roles and expectation in a healthy way. Vygotsky quotes Piaget to say “In the course of mutual cooperation between individuals, the rules of such cooperation provide thought with some sort of discipline, the latter being the foundation of reasoning in both its aspects, practical and theoretical. Egocentrism, coercion, and cooperation are, thus, the three axes between which the developing thought of a child is in continuous oscillation.” (Vygotsky, 1962, pg45) So it is apparent that the child is in a cognitive flux in which a receptive state to learn must be found.

Play theory is a concept and a cognitive solution to learning that was introduced to me by Dr. Victoria Stevens. Dewey says of play, that art play theory is akin to the dream theory of art, but that it goes further to actualizing the aesthetic experience by adhering to the necessity of action and doing something. When children are at play they are engaged in acts that give outward manifestation to their imagination. Idea and act become completely fused in the act of play, and activities are increasingly regulated by the end goal attained as experience matures. Dewey says, “Purpose becomes a thread that runs through a succession of acts; it converts them into true series, a course of activity having a definite inception and steady movement toward a goal.” Play becomes a game

with so-called rules as the need for order is recognized. There is a natural and gradual transition where play involves ordering activities into an ultimate goal as well as ordering the materials required to get there, and this is the key note to learning, where one learns from past experience and those give meaning to what is done. In its event, play is immediate, but now the content thereof “consists of a meditation of present materials by ideas drawn from its past experience.” A transformation is brought about by this transition, turning play into work, which is dangerous only when work is identified with toil and labor. (Dewey, 1934) There now becomes a danger of relation to “busy-work,” which we all have come to despise. When any activity is directed by accomplishment of a definite material result, that activity becomes work. It is labor if the activities are onerous which were undergone as means to secure the result. (Dewey, 1934) Through collaboration, a situation is designed for play to be implemented naturally, by engaging students with a production goal, other students, active doing, and creative control.

The dangerous misunderstanding people have about play theory is that is chaotic playtime since it lacks an overt form of lecture. Hudler brings up the concepts of “hectic zen” or “strategic ambiguity” and intentionally using ideas of chaos in the classroom as teaching agents in welcoming play. (Hudler, 2013) This is closely related to the concept of improvisation, from which not only students learn from in terms of play and using and learning creativity, but would also behoove teachers to learn in terms of being adaptable to different learning styles and situations. Dewey argues that the spontaneity of art is not spontaneity of opposition to anything, but rather it indicates a complete absorption into an organized development. The key advantage to this absorption is it is characteristic of aesthetic experience that is perfect for all experience. “The ideal is realized in the activity of the scientific inquirer and the professional man when the desires and urgencies of the self are completely engaged in what is objectively done.” He points out, as we saw with Freud earlier, that between the world and the individual lays a rooted antagonism, through which the individual lives and grows, and only through escape can the individual achieve freedom. No work of art would ever be produced if play didn’t interact against the resistance that actual conditions offer, and if play were actually just play and spontaneous. (Dewey, 1934). It is argued that play is a waste of time, yet it is an act always engaging adversity, promoting creative solution building and thought. Art exists to say something, and if adversity didn’t have a part in its generation, nothing would need to be said. Ramifications could be taken further, as Piaget analyzed that taking into account that play, or game theory, is applicable to affect, perception, and economic development—essentially that there is a role of strategies in behavior, that even economic structures become closely linked to affective cognition of the subject through game theory. (Piaget, 1968).

The cognitive importance and implications of collaboration are apparent, where there is a correlation to keeping the element of play active. In my personal experience in CAPSA, the progress of my collaboration project became stifled when elements of play were missing. It became apparent most in the instructors when too much was asked of them for production. Instructors became hostile to a certain degree in their interactions with each other even, and stress levels ran high, in part because the element of play was missing for a time. Another reason for adverse effects was due to having many different instructors taking action and giving direction at the same time, and miscommunicating with each other about expected goals and exercises for the class. I found how each teacher interacts and teaches is affected by their personality, the degree to which each student is receptive is affected by the same, and the interaction thereof could yield varying results. It became apparent that within our collaboration, that individuality and personality played a large part in the pace and direction of the process.

Play theory has a goal of being pedagogy to build autonomy. In pedagogy of autonomy, the focus should be on experiences that respect freedom and stimulate both decision building, and accountability. (Friere, 1998, pg. 98) Through this, the goal is to make individuals with their own opinion and ability to solve problems. Sometimes individuals as individuals will have differing opinions and clash with each other. Opinion and style are individual traits, which are freedoms, and when one's implementation of himself or herself, as teacher or student, is expressed there can be a balancing act that is required to enact between authority and these freedoms. By authority, I refer to several things, including the authority of what a student needs to learn versus what they want to do, as well as what or how a teacher is told to teach versus how and what they feel should teach. Friere says of his view of freedom and authority, "...what I have sought after is to live the tension, the contradiction, between authority and freedom so as to maintain respect for both. To separate them is to provoke the infraction of one or the other." (Friere, 1998, pg.99) With students, it is important for teachers to not be too authoritative and not have there be too much freedom. This might seem like it goes against the theory of play, but again, play theory is not freedom without purpose, but there is a distinct goal in mind, one of which is to build autonomy. What I found interesting while running very free exercises was that many students needed increased direction in order to start the exercise. Some of these students were visibly disinterested and doubtful of the teachers because of the lack of direction. Other students visibly despised or ignored direction and responded better to more freedom. The important job of the teacher with either sample is to balance these forces and differences, while implementing decision-making, autonomy, and responsibility by utilizing responsibility in a way that is natural, such as through play.

Although Friere refers to a parent and child dynamic in the following, it is every bit as applicable in a student and teacher dynamic as well. What makes decision making a responsible practice are consequences. A task of parents pedagogically is to have their children recognize that parents, in their participation in the decision

making process is an obligation of guidance and not interference. This is so as long as the parents don't have intentions of actually deciding behalf of the children. In order to help children to analyze possible consequences of a decision that is available to take, the participation of the parents is most favorable. (Friere, 1998, pg. 97) I feel no matter what the outlook of a student over the course of CAPSA, whether he or she leaned towards requiring more authority or more freedom, that in the end they gained more autonomy through learning consequences of decisions. Some I may have leaned towards wanting more freedom at first even switched to asking for more direction, by way of learning a consequence to their decisions. The students who were less adept at improvisation, I found wanted more direction in general.

As for freedom versus authority from the perspective of a teacher and his or her directives, this balancing is also required. Through the direction of one of the ensembles I had the duty to lead in collaboration with the dance ensemble, I found this especially true. I as a teacher had internal conflict with this collaboration because I had a specific prime directive given to me by my superiors that, to an absolute implementation, conflicted with what was being asked for by the dance teachers I was working in collaboration. My freedom as a teacher to make decisions was limited by authority and it was requested I act with more authority, while the collaborating teachings I worked with were asking for more freedom in the approach. This created visible conflict in and outside of the classroom among the collaborating instructors, as well as confused many of the students. Through the observance of my superiors, it was realized that things had become unbalanced, and fortunately, things were dealt with and a compromise was met upon their behalf. It was a learning experience for myself to go through many conflicts with this collaboration, and very telling as to what voice one follows when in such a conflict, as well as how trustworthy instinct can be.

Through this and every conflict I experienced in CAPSA, there seemed to be an at least partial causation in the individual cases by assuming personality types. Specific miscommunication and hostility felt between myself and other teachers or students has a seeded root from assumption. Most of these cases were miscommunications between two individuals' misjudging of each other. Minsky talks of personality traits, and how we as humans can even categorize the infinite possibilities that people are, and restrict and censor the truth. He categorizes possible reasons for this starting with selectivity. What we imagine other peoples minds to be are often mistakably clear, thinking of another person's personality in terms of something we can describe in the first place. That which doesn't fit a description becomes left over and is set aside. Minsky moves on to style, to say that we tend to develop policies that are systematic to a fault, where they can be distinguished externally and characterized as personality traits. We as people do this as an escape, avoiding the effort it takes to make what we see as unimportant decisions. Moving on to predictability, we try to conform to the beliefs of our friends because it is difficult to keep friendships. We find ourselves self-teaching to behave in accord with the same descriptions that we have imaged into traits for people we interact with.

Eventually, these imagined traits take the pedestal of reality, in what Minsky calls self-reliance. We begin to predict what we are prone to do in order to accomplish plans, and this becomes easier as we further simplify ourselves. (Minsky, 1986, pg.53) I found that a lot of oversimplification that we assume and place on each other could be a largely separating factor. When we isolate our persons into either one way or another, and one is labeled “good” or “right” and the other “bad” or “wrong,” there is a basis for conflict. Oversimplification of ourselves sets up a black and white scenario, so some people can either get a community or adversity easily. Another area that is highly impactful to this subject is the area of mental illness. When it comes to individuality, we cannot ignore that within a classroom we will encounter mental illness, developmental problems, and personality disorders, all of which contribute to causation for individuality and sociability conflict. Not only is this possible with the student body and interaction, but student-teacher, and teacher-teacher interactions. All personality disorders are a product of relationship issues developmentally, and all are a product of not being able to place oneself in the depressive, or empathic, position. This yields personality disorders such as Narcissism and Borderline disorder. (Stevens, 2014)

As we can see, multiculturalism and diversity, cognitive production and cerebral challenge, as well as individuality and conflict all contribute to the procedure of collaboration. Through everything I’ve covered, I’d like to point out that most these concepts are applicable in student-student, student-teacher, and teacher-teacher interaction. Despite its challenges, collaboration remains a most fruitful learning tool.

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