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Field Notes From Studio 9

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Social Practice Queens

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Chloë Bass and Jeff Kasper

SPQ Studio

In addition to their individual studios on the Queens College campus, SPQ students share a collaborative studio space within the Queen Museum's artist studio program. The SPQ Studio (better known as Studio 9) serves as a public headquarters for students' ongoing projects. Studio 9 gives students a space for collaborative brainstorming and organizing of their projects, as well as access to work with the museum on special commissions, exhibiting or participating in its public programs. The studio has also served as a space to host guests of SPQ for talks and workshops. The museum's studio program encourages all participating artists, including SPQ students, to hold "open studios" during the museum's major exhibition openings and other major events, giving studio artists the opportunity to draw audiences and exposure for their ongoing work.

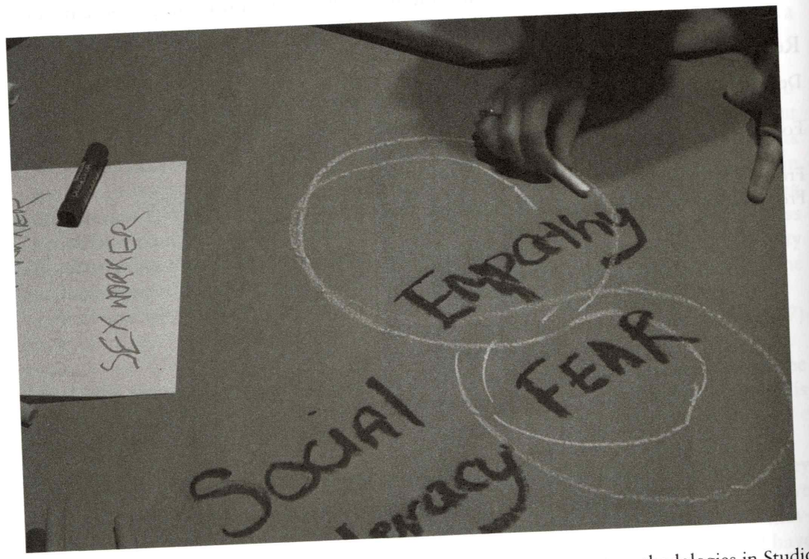

Figure 14.1 Social Practice Queens students map community engagement methodologies in Studio 9 at Queens Museum. Winter 2016. Corona, New York.

Photograph by Jeff Kasper, courtesy of Social Practice Queens.

Regional Profile

The SPQ studio is located within the Queens Museum in Flushing Meadows Corona Park, in the neighborhood of Corona, Queens, in New York City. Queens, where over 3.1 million residents (approximately 46% foreign-born) speak an unparalleled 167 languages, is singularly complex in its demographics and environmental history. Queens has a lively mix of both formal and informal economic and cultural activity, and is exemplary of the dynamics of transnational communities. It is also a place to understand the tensions between urban cores and their peripheries, and the cultural and resource differences between these interrelated yet often dissimilar sites.

The Queens neighborhood of Corona is a bustling immigrant hub famed for its international character. It is a vibrant multi-ethnic community with an active civic life. Due to its thriving immigrant-run small businesses, the Corona economy is growing faster than the overall economy of New York City. Yet Corona faces several critical challenges. These include a housing shortage and rising rents (both for businesses and residents), an overburdened transportation system, street congestion, and lack of recreational facilities and accessible public spaces.

In Fall 2013, the Queens Museum underwent a major renovation, doubling the museum's size and resulting in the creation of a new north wing dedicated to artist studios, making the museum one of the only US museums to house a working studio program. In designating permanent real estate to the long-term development of new work on-site, as well as to creating a community of artists, the Queens Museum Studio Program aimed to support artists' creative processes and professional development. This new expansion housed eight to ten artists-in-residence per year and included a shared studio space, "Studio 9," used by Queens-based social practice artists. What started as an open-ended social practice residency became a space given to graduate students concentrating on socially engaged art at the then-new Social Practice Queens (SPQ) program launched at Queens College, CUNY. SPQ was co-founded by Queens College faculty members Gregory Sholette and Maureen Connor[1] in collaboration with Queens Museum staff: former director Tom Finkelpearl, Prerana Reddy, Larissa Harris, and José Serrano-McClain. The program's goal is to incubate the next generation of multicultural activist-artists in the borough.

SPQ and Studio 9 emerged alongside the museum's ongoing efforts to serve its constituents more fully, which included hiring full-time community organizers and the instigation of off-site programs in adjacent public spaces, such as nearby Corona Plaza.[2] The plaza, a seemingly abandoned triangular patch of broken concrete below the elevated tracks of the MTA 7 Train, revealed itself to be one of those curious in-between spaces that locals imaginatively repurposed to serve their unmet needs. Despite a shortage of city dollars dedicated to the site, Corona Plaza served a surrounding low-income, pan-Latino neighborhood that included many undocumented immigrants. It became a spontaneous meeting place, a playground, or a marketplace. The challenge of repurposing Corona Plaza in order to gain needed municipal maintenance and cultural programming funds, without disturbing the myriad ways residents were already transforming this space into an informal commons, became a major effort of SPQ's early projects.

The beginnings of Studio 9 culminated around a series of museum programs, and Queens College course and service work, known as "Corona Studio." The project operated as a socially engaged residency that prototyped ways that independent artists, Queens residents, and Queens College graduate students could co-create workshops and public art projects as neighbors. In 2012 and 2013, Queens College staged "Corona Studio: Transforming Corona Plaza," an experimental team-taught seminar led by Professors Gregory Sholette and Maureen Connor from the art department, together with Professor Tarry Hum from

the urban studies department. This cross-disciplinary class combined the history and theory of social practice art with aspects of urban research and design. Art students collaborated with social science students to uncover the needs of various stakeholders in the Queens community of Corona and to apply their findings within the community conversation surrounding a planned redesign of Corona Plaza. Corona Plaza became a living laboratory for researching, debating, and re-imagining knotty issues of class, culture, ethnicity, and social autonomy particular to the fractured city infrastructure of deregulated urban environments. The workshop generated neighborhood stakeholder profiles, followed by the design and modeling of multiple design proposals and programming ideas for enhancing public experience in and around the plaza. Following the seminar, the Queens Museum played a key role in the city-sponsored restoration of the plaza, incorporating some visual and architectural elements from the designs created during the class.[3]

In a conversation with the authors, Barrie Cline (SPQ Alumna 2013 and founder of The Workers Art Coalition (WAC)), described how working in Corona Plaza afforded him the ability to act with (not act *on*) the community in ways an off-site studio alone could never match. The benefit of working in a locale that nearby residents already had a connection with, and were offered space within to craft public art deeply responding to their stated needs and desired spatial uses, was the foundation of the subsequent forming of her workers' art practice. In an email exchange with Jeff Kasper in August 2017, Cline described how the Corona Plaza project "gave the work a layered building over time[,] the kind of integrity that often might be lacking in social practice work done from afar." Following the Corona Plaza project, Studio 9 offered Cline and her collaborators a headquarters to regroup. In her words, "It allowed the Workers Art Coalition access to a

Figure 14.2 Table sculpture at Queens Museum. Spring 2016. Corona, NY.
Photograph by Zaid Islam, courtesy of Social Practice Queens.

space to hold small classes with tradespeople/students in which we accessed the museum itself, (the Panorama, the watershed model, current exhibits) as part of the curriculum" (B. Cline, personal communication, August, 2017). This turned the Queens Museum into a teaching museum. Cline continued, "Studio 9 also created a hub for the ways our individual SPQ projects could intersect with each other, and gave us crucial leveraging power. It was great to feel in some way part of the museum when attracting community members to projects. Sol Aramendi and I conceived and built *The Wage Theft Counter* there, and that project was later exhibited at the Queens Museum as well as at BRIC. I see Studio 9 as a crucial organizing, germinating space that benefits from the association with the museum in multiple and overlapping ways." As Barrie Cline's story demonstrates, the Corona Plaza project set the tone for SPQ's student-led community engagements and the ongoing use of Studio 9: an experimental workspace where a school and a museum could meet the public.

Dialogue

Given that Studio 9 is consistently a space for conversation, we (Chloë Bass, SPQ Faculty; and Jeff Kasper, SPQ Alumnus 2017 and current program administrator) chose to formulate our own contributions to this essay dialogically. What follows is part historic record, part critical questioning, and part ongoing modeling of Studio 9's behaviors and intentions.

Chloë Bass: What is your first memory of Studio 9? You've actually been there and involved with the space for longer than I have.

Jeff Kasper: The first thing I remember was getting involved with SPQ projects at Studio 9 related to the "Corona Studio" program. Studio 9 and Social Practice Queens comes from what I imagine was an imperative to have the museum serve the communities of Queens and the artists who seek to get engaged with those communities.

CB: My feeling is that the Queens Museum is always something of a community center, and Studio 9 kind of escapes that format. I wonder why we wound up that way. Given the people involved, who have a lot of the same interests as the museum, and the skills that we bring to the table, it would have made a lot of sense if Studio 9 became a kind of arts education classroom. But instead it feels different—more like a lab. A small, dirty lab next to a bathroom.

I feel that the room is full of secrets. I go in there and I can hear the echoes of things that people giggled about in the past, and I want to be part of those jokes. Or I look at the materials that are always left on the shelves—so many Dunkin Donuts coffee stirrers, and an interesting assortment of international candies that people rarely eat. I'm reminded that this space really isn't my space, it's a space where I'm a visitor. To me, the stuff in the room isn't anyone's in particular, but it will always belong to whoever is in SPQ. We inherit that room and its contents. In my own studio, even when I'm taking part in a temporary residency program, I feel that I'm starting fresh when I move in. In Studio 9, I never have the impression that starting fresh is possible, and I like that. If we're talking about engagement, Studio 9 is the place where I can most easily get engaged with the idea of us as a group.

JK: In some sense Studio 9 is a retreat from the commonalities in what we think of when we think of socially engaged art. Studio 9 is a laboratory to play around with projects

before they are truly "public," but also offers us time to really think about what we mean when we say "social practice." It is a retreat from practice in some way.

CB: Do we need to be freed from social practice? The way we've started to talk about it within SPQ—as a series of skills that come from a lot of different places, including pedagogy, politics, psychology, community organizing, journalism, etc., which are then applied to art. It seems like many things are possible. I'm curious about what still feels binding, and why, and how that teaches us about what we haven't been able to do yet.

JK: I think we need to be freed from the way we talk about how an artist can be a "socially engaged artist." Now that there is more emphasis on social practice as a discipline (even though I would agree it is more like a set of skills within art practice) there seems to be an anxiety, and I will speak personally here, to perform social practice in a way that is akin to models of the past. For example, some artists are engaged with a defined "community" of people or a place (for example, unionized workers or the neighborhood of Corona), while others deal with the limits of engaging with people more broadly (for example, how we relate interpersonally). The anxiety of being a social practice artist is that you need to have a defined community or context in which you operate creatively. However, I think that limits the way young artists could conceptualize a public practice. My graduate cohort, which includes artists born in NYC and those from countries throughout the world, felt some tension around the conflation of social practice art and community arts as it was expressed in the institutional memory of our graduate program and associated projects. This resulted in a desire to build a retreat where we could think about the meta-categories, multiple approaches, and various possibilities of art as social engagement.

This is to say, one of the reason SPQ created Studio 9 was to really ask ourselves *what is social practice*? This supplemented or maybe even problematized what we learned in our more formal graduate classes at the college or during the more traditional artist talks.

CB: Do you think Studio 9, contextualized within a larger artist studio program, helps to deal with the traditional separation (false, I think) between "social practice art" and "studio art"? Our program accepts that social practice MFA students need studio spaces as much as anyone else (painting, ceramics, and so on.), but I don't think we've ever really written down *why* that's important except as articulating it as "fair."

JK: In terms of the question about "social practice" vs "studio practice," I think a few issues arise. First is that there is an imperative by arts organizations and schools to support social practice as an emergent form. This is great, but it partly comes from the possibility of an economic reality that supposes that artists won't need a studio, and that the cost of studios could be used for other things, or dropped altogether. This places more risk and burden on artists. It's partly survival, partly a scheme, partly the ebb and flow of the way artists are working at this point of time. What this does is neglect the fact that artists who work in public contexts still need spaces to develop their work, both independently and collaboratively. It also neglects the fact that even social practice artists make objects. It predetermines that if you're a socially engaged artist, your medium can only be social relations and cannot contain any material manifestations. At the end of the day, social practice artists still need studios if that space is relevant to their practice on a person-by-person basis. Artists still need space to experiment in addition to the public and private contexts in which they operate. We all know the studio is a space to think.

As someone who completed an MFA in social practice, I would say that my peers and I don't really place too much of a distinction between studio and social practice. If anything, now I value my studio practice even more as a space to work on and think about how I might engage with people.[4]

CB: Yes. If we agree that social practice is the list of techniques gleaned from all over, and social practice art is when you apply those techniques to art, then the art part is fundamental. And if we believe that artists need space in the way you articulate, the studio is always going to be a part of social practice art. But there's also a very different feeling between, say, the way I use a private studio, even if it's a space that I only have temporarily, and the way I used a shared shop, like the Center for Book Arts. Where on this axis does Studio 9 fall? Is it a shared shop? What are the working processes of that shop? Do people play music, leave the door open, put the tools away in the right place? What is the first thing that we're working towards in that shop? Do people work together on that goal, or independently? I have a sense of how to answer some of these questions from my faculty perspective, but I'm curious about the way you see it.

JK: In its ideal form, Studio 9 is a place where we can engage with each other, as well as with the larger public within the confines of the museum. It is also a workshop that we all share. It has been a photo studio, a place where we invite curators to talk about current projects, a place to hang sketches or giant mind maps, a place to stage future exhibits, a place to organize different members of the communities we're part of, and other things. But fundamentally it is a space of conversation. This is a place beyond our individual studios, beyond our classroom, beyond the street where some of us engage with the public. Although it has a door that locks and we have keys, it's a public space in the sense that no one member of SPQ claims ownership over it. Sometimes we even offer it to our partner organizations, or to other artists or the museum staff to work in. Its meant to be alive: sloppy, smelly, and hopefully welcoming.

CB: I really appreciate that as faculty, I don't have a key to Studio 9. It prevents me from feeling like it's my responsibility to make Studio 9 a meaningful place. Any meaning I add to the space becomes more of an active choice and less of a job. I want to rely on students to be in control of what I can do there, and what access I have. Because if no student with a key shows up to let me in, that means the space isn't meant to be used in the way I'm trying to use it. I never want to make it the same kind of space as a classroom. Studio 9, to me, is a conversational space that, for whatever reason or series of reasons, we didn't feel that we had during coursework, or even at the school itself. It required leaving the campus, and your own individual studios, for these conversations to happen in ways that felt necessary.

I think the "art" of Studio 9 right now is the art of talking in a way that centers our own SPQ community. I think our community is really important. I always want to begin my approach to any social practice work with the question, "which society are we working with?" So while I'm not necessarily interested in the academy as a site of social inquiry, I am actually very interested in this group of people I've *received* via the academy: that is to say, the students of SPQ. Studio 9 seems to exist as a way of interrogating the nature of that community, within the larger community we share, which is the Queens Museum, within the larger community they share, which is Corona.

And yet, even without feeling a sense of ownership, one of the things that happened over the course of the Spring 2017 semester was what I now consider to be a kind of

takeover: Studio 9 moved from the exchange model,[5] which was initiated and run by students, to the symposium model,[6] which was heavily controlled by faculty, and primarily by me. I'm not sure this was necessarily a good thing, although I can recall the reasons why it happened. How do you think that changed the nature of the space and what is possible there in the future? Did I accidentally set the wrong format as precedent, even if the events themselves were pretty good?

JK: I think that there is an expectation from students entering a program in social practice art that they are going to encounter a wealth of information, passed down from professors and professionals about their field, and when they graduate, they'll know: a) what social practice art is; and b) how to be a socially engaged artist after they leave school. This is largely the language that prospective students are sold from schools who offer all sorts of educational programs, in the arts and beyond. It's marketing. What the symposium model did was alleviate some of the pressure on students to have to self-organize in order to learn the types of things that they expect from the program. Negotiating amongst your peers is generally a great skill, but students are also seeking some structure, some answers, even if only to then refute, grapple with, and challenge them. That's how we insert ourselves into the discourse. I don't think the exchange model was able to give students all the context to question social practice in the way that the symposium model did. Hearing from actual artists and activists and discussing the discipline from these vantage points helped us to situate ourselves. The exchange model was fruitful in that it brought students together to grapple with their concept of art as social engagement and to generously teach each other, but it was largely devoid of any outside context that professors and mentors are meant to offer in a traditional academic context.

My short answer is no, you did not set a wrong precedent, I just think we are not done with reconciling the benefits of both approaches. Given that this artistic area of interest deals so much with artists operating in social and collaborative contexts, either approach only supports part of the education of a "whole" social practice artist.

CB: I think a lot about different models of collaboration. When I was running Arts in Bushwick, as the organization kept growing, we were constantly interrogating what kind of decision-making process we would employ. Given that the organization was non-hierarchical, we couldn't be top-down. But the push—pull between more democratic methods (voting, and then what majority is required to win: a clear 50% or more, or a plurality?), and the consensus model (plus, what constitutes consensus? Is a "no" vote from a single participant enough to take down the idea, or does it have to be a "strong no"?) was an ongoing struggle that was never properly resolved. I'm reminded of that when we consider the benefits of the top-down approach (the symposium where, ultimately, Greg Sholette and I invite a guest and steer the conversation) and the exchange model, which seems more democratic in some ways. I like getting things done, but I also appreciate the amount of time it can take to not get things done, and the value of that time for the sake of itself, and for the sake of group dynamics. I wonder what Studio 9 indicates about what SPQ models, outside of the obvious thing: a partnership with the Queens Museum.

JK: Studio 9 indicates a primary aspect of SPQ, which is that we are not just a social practice concentration in an MFA program in collaboration with a museum, but actually that SPQ is a space where the DIY and grassroots can and do thrive. What

the students, artists, and faculty, and the communities we work with, bring to the table changes the character of the project that is SPQ. SPQ is largely the autonomy that exists in between seemingly formal institutions. It's both frustrating and liberating that anything could be possible and that there is no defined path.

CB: What is your ultimate hope for Studio 9? What would be the best thing that could ever happen there? Is there a point at which we could somehow know that Studio 9 was finished? (I mean that as an optimistic end, i.e. "we've moved past this," rather than as the pessimistic "we just can't.")

JK: I think that I am not sure that Studio 9 could ever really end, not the way that SPQ works now. I would say that the dream is for Studio 9 to be more integrated into the culture of both the graduate art program as a whole and the museum's vast constellation of public, curatorial, and educational programs. Right now it is a fringe space that offers a lot of interesting possibilities, but it escapes the radar of most people. Though I do want to note that even as I write this, I think it is quite fascinating that there can be such a "rogue space" in a museum where a community of people can do what they wish with little to no intervention from the institution itself.

CB: It does seem institutionally beyond the pale either for a museum or for a university to be able to maintain that kind of space. Although I think in general, out of all university spaces, the art department is the pedagogical and physical place most prone to wildness and lack of intervention. It's funny that with all of the different zones available to SPQ, this funny, small room becomes the bridge between two institutions—and that it needs to keep feeling non-institutional in order to do that well.

JK: Studio 9 is a space for our community. This reality is counter to what we expected to get from a shared space in a museum but not counter what we need as a community of artists. The delight at the prospect of sharing this museum space initially came from the fantasy that this would be the place where I and my peers would engage with our Queens neighbors through making art around a range of topics. Basically like a "community-public art workshop." Though this could have been the case, as past generations have used the space as such, this was rarely the case since I have been a member of SPQ. My cohort needed something different.

CB: It's interesting to me that you track the genesis of Studio 9 as the Corona Plaza project, which was very much about engaging with public outdoor space, and with non-arts communities. Now Studio 9 is a super indoors, semi-hidden private environment where we address internal concerns in sometimes wild ways. The outdoors has come inside. It seems like we needed a zone where we could admit that the best ways to serve ourselves would be through more uncertainty and play, or where consequences have an implication for group dynamics rather than for a more formal project with set goals.

JK: The questions that we grapple with now in this Studio 9 post-Corona Studio era are how we deal with artist-led social engagement when we're not necessarily working on a defined project as a collective, or a project that is directly associated with more formal museum programs. In some sense it is the next generation's turn to continue to reimagine Studio 9.

CB: Social practice projects are often contextualized or written about as having a stopping place. In the case of Corona Studio, the story ends with the city investing in Corona Plaza, which is a very happy and productive outcome for artist-generated work. But we want Studio 9 to be a space where there is no end. What happens after investment? What will we always need going forward, and how does what we need change us, and the ways that we work as a group?

Notes

1. After Maureen Connor's retirement, Chloë Bass joined SPQ faculty in January 2016.
2. At the same time Tania Bruguera, in collaboration with Creative Time and the Queens Museum, developed Immigrant Movement International (IMI), which serves as an off-site hub for Latinx immigrant-focused programming that spans beyond art into political organizing and ESOL classes.
3. The area has been described as follows: "A majority-minority neighborhood, 64 percent of the Corona population is foreign-born; a little over ten percent Asian, almost three-quarters Latin America or Caribbean; including Mexican, Ecuadorian, Dominican, and Colombian." See Professor Tarry Hum, Maureen Connor, Gregory Sholette, and Queens Museum staff members Prerana Reddy and José Serrano-McClain, "Transforming Corona Plaza/Corona Studio: A Seminar Developed by Queens Museum, Queens College Art/Social Practice Queens, and the Urban Studies Departments," in Gregory Scholette, Chloë Bass, and Social Practice Queens (eds.), *Art as Social Action: An Introduction to the Principles and Practices of Teaching Social Practice Art* (New York: Allworth Press, 2018). See also Valeria Mogilevich, Mariana Mogilevich, and Queens Museum staff, *Corona Plaza Es Para Todos: Making a Dignified Public Space for Immigrants*: https://queensmuseum.org/in-the-community/corona-plaza-es-para-todos-making-a-dignified-public-space-for-immigrants
4. Further discussion on the tension between studio and social practice can be found in the August 2017 *Artsy* editorial, "What Happens When Social Practice Art Meets The Market," by Margaret Carrigan. Discussing "artists who integrate object-making as part of their socially engaged work," Harold Fletcher, founder of the MFA in Art & Social Practice at Portland State University, is quoted as saying: "The reality is that this sort of practice is proving to be more mutually supportive for both artists and the institutions that show them . . . . A lot of social-practice-style projects end up being supportive of studio-based work, and vice-versa . . . effectively expanding the visibility of the artist and the galleries they work with." Retrieved August 31, 2017, from www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-social-practice-art-meets-market
5. In the 2015–2016 academic year, SPQ MFA students hosted four exchange events dedicated to exploring questions central to social practice art and social engagement. Each exchange focused on a different topic: 1) Ethics and/of social practice; 2) Interpersonal closeness; 3) Is social practice gentrifying community art?; and 4) Play: An open making session. The format of the exchanges moved beyond formal academic structures to include participatory gestures, peer-to-peer discussions, interpretations, arguments, and performance.
6. Symposium guests included Paul Ramirez Jonas, Chemi Rosado-Seijo, Daniel Tucker and the Moore College Social Practice MFA Students, and Larry Bogad.

15 STEAM It Up

Digital Fabrication, Transdisciplinary Zones, and Art Education

Aaron D. Knochel

As a university professor working with pre-service art educators, my experience in the workshop STEAM It Up compelled me to bring this kind of transdisciplinary thinking into my undergraduate methods courses. In parallel to this curricular shift in my teaching, I had become involved in an initiative at my university, then SUNY New Paltz, focused on digital design and fabrication technologies with a particular emphasis on 3D printing (SUNY New Paltz, 2014). The initiative encompassed a new professional degree program, an increased capacity and awareness of 3D printing on campus and in the region, and a speaker series. Both the workshop and my undergraduate curriculum changed in relation to these resources, because I felt that 3D printing presented an interesting array of new capacities that would expand new media potentials for art practice and art education curriculum. In the following paragraphs, I will review some of the core epistemological frameworks that became zones of transdisciplinary curricular work, review the component parts of the project that I conducted with my students, and provide some recommendations for further exploration of digital fabrication in art education. While 3D printing is only one facet of the array of tools made available through computer-aided design and fabrication, it serves as a strategic example of an innovative technology that impacts modes of making in ways that have resonance across many disciplines and may ignite new models of experiential learning.

STEAM: Coming Together through Design Thinking and Making

There has been an increasing emphasis in STEM subject areas because evidence indicates that students are more successful when learning is connected to creating experiential cultural opportunities (National Education Association, 2012). Recently, there has been a call from federal legislatures for "*re*integrating the two [STEM and Art disciplines] in our classrooms" (Bonamici & Schock, 2014, p. 2), but the lack of substantive funding continues to marginalize initiatives in STEAM as a low priority (Hynds, 2014). The National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) reports that incorporating Art into STEM subjects is of benefit to students and teachers in connecting concepts, exploring ideas, and increasing participation (Shapiro, 2010). Indeed, research from The Art of Science Learning, an initiative funded by the National Science Foundation, indicates that student participants benefited from arts-based learning via greater collaboration, increased creative thinking, and longer sustained benefits in school and extracurricular participation (Seifter, 2015). STEAM initiatives may provide a focus on the fundamental importance of making to learning, and often involve work with digital technologies (Kafai, Peppler, & Chapman, 2009), and an attitude of do-it-yourself (DIY) tinkering (Martinez & Stager, 2013). The importance of "thinking through materials" (Guyotte et al., 2014, p. 17) becomes a central foundation for impactful STEAM curriculum.