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Shaped by the People: Conversations on Participatory Education

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EDITED BY HARRELL FLETCHER AND MOLLY SHERMAN

Shaped by
the People

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Introduction

Harrell Fletcher
& Molly Sherman

HARRELL: It sounded like you had a good idea for how to start this with the *We Make the Road by Walking* connection.

MOLLY: Yeah, I've been thinking about *We Make the Road by Walking*, which is a book by Myles Horton and Paulo Freire about participatory education, and I've been thinking about how it was the starting point for us to make this book.[1] We've mirrored its conversational structure, it has been influential to our practices, and the book has been referenced by some contributors to this publication. I thought we could begin by talking about why we focused on that book in particular in the lead-up to this project.

HARRELL: Right. I think that finding that book, *We Make the Road by Walking*, was the first time that I learned about Highlander Folk School and Myles Horton. I got the book because I was interested in Paulo Freire. I remember going and just looking to see what books were available besides *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and I saw that book, pulled it down, and was, like, "This looks interesting."[2] But I didn't know what to make of it really. I bought the book and it was kind of kicking around for a while before I read it. But once I started to understand the content and structure, it was exciting to learn about what Myles Horton had done with Highlander, and it gave me some insights into Paulo Freire that were different from what I knew previously.

But the thing that was almost more exciting to me than the content, the story, and the history that they were explaining, was the fact that they were making the book through a conversation. That it was a public conversation was intriguing to me, too. Sitting down and writing a book by yourself is sort of daunting. The idea that this book was done as a collaboration suddenly felt like, "Oh, here's this work that uses a participatory approach like I'm really interested in using in my art, but it's in book form." It was like some of the things they were talking about were being put into practice by the construction of the book itself. I've used similar methods since then of having conversations for constructing texts myself.

MOLLY: Yeah. I had a similar experience when I found the book, but I read it before reading *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. That came second for me. I was an undergrad at the time and was searching for experimental and collaborative approaches to learning. So I remember going to the education section of the school library and just picking the book off the shelf. I started reading it that day and it felt like an amazing, synchronistic find.

And, like you, I remember being drawn to this idea of speaking a book, as Myles Horton and Paulo Freire called it. The idea that the making of a book, the form of a book, was not only collaborative but also performative in a sense and semipublic in this case was really exciting. I remember being equally interested in what they were talking about. It was the first time I came across the term *participatory education* and reading about the idea of people being personally involved in shaping the content and structure of their learning experience was definitely an aha moment that has stuck with me.

HARRELL: You also have this interesting story of finding out that you had been to Highlander as a child.

MOLLY: Right.

HARRELL: Your parents had their own connection to the book and to Highlander as well.

MOLLY: Yeah, I remember calling them when I finished reading it, and I was like, "I just found this amazing book!" And they said, "Well, you know, you've been to Highlander, right?" And they were like, "Do you remember going to Tennessee? Do you remember playing on a tire swing while you were there?" And they said, "That was at Highlander." Then, from there I learned that they had been quite invested in learning about alternative, nonformal, participatory modes of education and I ended up kind of inheriting their collection of books, including *We Make the Road by Walking* and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. I was

about six years old when we took that trip and I'm pretty sure I thought we were just on a family road trip, but my parents were also doing research related to their interests and work in education in rural Minnesota where I grew up.

HARRELL: Wow. Yeah. What was interesting to me learning about Highlander and growing up on the West Coast, I somehow had sort of absorbed this idea that most of the significant things that had happened in alternative education had happened on the West Coast or the East Coast. I was definitely interested in alternative education and had read a lot of books about that. My mom was a teacher. So to learn about that happening in the southern United States and also in Brazil was part of broadening my understanding about the way that we make assumptions that can be incorrect about all sorts of things, but in this case, around where radical activity was occurring, I guess. The other thing that was also eye-opening to me was the idea—because I had focused a lot on kids' education—of this being about adult education that was also not in a formal school setting. That was really exciting to think about.

MOLLY: Yeah. That really opened me up to thinking about education outside of a standard schooling model, too, and about bringing forms of education into other contexts and ways of working. I read the book way before I was ever teaching, and it influenced how I was thinking about participation and collaboration as an artist and designer.

HARRELL: Right, right. Another aspect that was exciting to me was when Myles Horton talked about how he had these earlier experiences as a labor organizer. Even though he valued labor organizing, he saw a difference in that it had specific goals and once those goals were met, you were done. For instance, you changed your labor contract conditions or whatever. Then it's, "OK, on to the next challenge. We're done here." But with education there isn't always a specific goal. Instead, it can

continue, meander, and go on tangents endlessly without ever really arriving anywhere.

Reading that helped me understand my own role as an artist in relationship to activism. I've been around lots of political activists and have been involved in activism to some extent myself. But art, which sometimes people want to merge with activism, has a different role like the organizing that Horton was talking about. Activism in its normal way of functioning has very specific goals that when accomplished mean that you move on to the next challenge. Art, for me, feels like it doesn't work that way. Instead, it is about ongoing investigations with no particular conclusions and can instead meander like education. I see the value of classic activism, but in my own practice I found myself much more oriented toward what I felt like Horton and Highlander were talking about: ongoing education as opposed to explicit organizing.

They had been involved in the civil rights movement, which had activist components, but it seemed like their work on civil rights was more about education. Addressing segregation and having equality were goals, I'm sure, but their approach was a little bit different, even though it intersected with marches and protests and more traditional activism. People would go to Highlander, go through education processes that they then took and applied to their activism.

MOLLY: That's how I understood it, too. I think he said something about how with organizing you are working toward achieving a goal and with education you might not solve that goal but at least a lot of people are educated through the process.[3] Something else I remember Horton and Freire talking about is the idea of having more of an educational framework at Highlander rather than a formula or methodology that they followed, which felt so different from most of my experiences in education. And I think it's similar to this idea of education as an ongoing experience that is shaped by the people participating in it rather than something that has a predetermined end point.

HARRELL: Yeah. Another thing that has been interesting is to meet people who are doing projects that have participatory educational components—not like a school that's set up to be educational, necessarily, but integrating elements of that approach into some other organization. We've run across these people, and it's interesting at this moment to stop and evaluate what this interest in participatory education is and how it's being applied to projects. In reading the conversations, it's exciting to see how participatory education approaches manifest in different people's lives and work.

MOLLY: Right. I think it's been interesting because in a lot of ways, thinking about this book, I've been focused on a history of participatory education…right? But these new conversations ask how do those ideas play out in projects that are happening in this moment. And how have those ideas grown into different contexts and modes of working?

HARRELL: Yeah. Right. Because we work with students, in positions where you want to explain this approach to people, I feel like it is going to be great when the book is done, because we can give it to students and say, "Here are some examples. Here are these ideas. Here are these people talking about participatory education." I'm hoping that it will be useful for other people.

MOLLY: Yeah, me, too. I've been excited about that as well. I feel like I really need this book in a class I am teaching right now, you know? I feel like I've wanted a resource like this to exist for quite some time.

HARRELL: Right. So we're making a book to fulfill our own desire to have something that doesn't exist at the moment—or at least not quite in this form. I like that it's functioning in a utilitarian way for us personally, and then we're trying to share that with a broader audience, too.

MOLLY: Exactly.

HARRELL: Which I think is a way that a lot of social practice projects work, too. Where you as the artist have an interest in something—farming or walking or a particular history or something like that—and then, through the social practice project, you get to learn about and experience that subject and through the structure, share it with other people, too, if they're interested in taking part. I think this book is in some ways doing that. We get the book we want, and we hope that other people will find it interesting as well.

MOLLY: Yeah. And that makes me think again about this idea of speaking a book because, similar to social practice, it's set up as a structure to learn and engage with others. I know that Paulo Freire used this format for a lot of publications. One of them that I just read recently was a conversation between him and Ira Shor called *A Pedagogy for Liberation*, and they talk about how speaking a book reflects the role of dialogue in participatory education and how, much like teaching and learning, it is "full of unpredictable moments."[4] I like that making this book was a form of active learning. And it also became a way for us to invite a lot of other people to be part of a dialogue and to learn from one another and to open up the conversation to include more voices.

HARRELL: Right. So what we did was we asked five people including ourselves to find someone else, or in the case of Amanda Leigh Evans, a group, to talk to on this topic of participatory education—someone who would have something interesting to say about it. Then we gave them the structure of doing it as a conversation. We then took the conversations, transcribed them, allowed them to edit the texts, and are putting the conversations together in the form of this book.

The first two sections are the ones that you and I did. Mine is with Lisa Jarrett, whom I work with on two projects here

in Portland, Oregon—one at a grade school and the other at a middle school. We talked about participatory education experiences in our childhoods, and how we're applying those approaches to what we're doing in the projects at the schools here in Portland.

MOLLY: I talked to Rosten Woo. I met Rosten many years ago when I led a project with high school students through the Center for Urban Pedagogy in New York, a nonprofit he cofounded. He has since moved to Los Angeles and has continued his practice there and has been working for several years on projects in Skid Row. In our conversation, we talked about the idea of learning in public, learning with and alongside students, and shifting hierarchy structures. We also talked about the role of education in the projects that he's working on now and the role of longevity in this type of work.

HARRELL: It was nice to learn more about what he's been doing in LA, especially because he's been working with John Malpede and the Los Angeles Poverty Department. John is an old friend of mine and a big influence on my work, so I was really thrilled to hear about what they're doing together and also with Henriëtte.

MOLLY: Yeah, it sounds really amazing.

HARRELL: Then, the next section is with Spencer Byrne-Seres and Anna Craycroft. They knew each other because Anna had worked on a project that was based on the Reggio Emilia–style teaching that happened here in Portland at the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art. Spencer was a preparator at the time and worked on helping construct the project and organize it with Anna. So they had that connection. She had also visited Columbia River Correctional Institution, which is a minimum security prison here in Portland where the Art and Social Practice MFA program has been doing projects for the past

three years. She came out and visited at a pretty early stage, so she was able to learn from Spencer about what has happened since then and how things are organized as part of a participatory educational project inside of a prison.

MOLLY: Yeah, one of the things they talked about is institutional power structures and what it means to push against and work within those dynamics.

HARRELL: Right. Because, it's one thing when you're in a public school setting, where there's a compulsoriness to the students being there and participating. Then there's a whole other level of that when you're inside of a prison. What is the power structure when you introduce a project or class into either of those kinds of environments? Really at any place where somebody is participating, partly because they want to once they're there, but are they being compelled to be in that place? They might not choose to participate if they weren't already in that institution. It just brings a bunch of interesting dynamics and issues to a project as opposed to doing it on the outside when everyone's participating willingly.

MOLLY: Yeah. And then the next conversation is between Amanda Leigh Evans and the Living School of Art, which is a residential artist collective she founded that is housed in an apartment complex.

HARRELL: The project takes place at a low-income housing complex where the owner was interested in having an artist-in-residency program. So Amanda was hired as the artist-in-residence. She's been doing it now for several years. She lives there and works mostly with the kids who live there, but also their parents and other residents of the building, doing lots of different kinds of projects. In the conversation, she primarily talks to kids, and to another artist-in-residence who is part of the programming there.

MOLLY: Yeah, it was really great to hear the kids' take on education and their ideas for how it could change.

HARRELL: Right. Then the last conversation is between Sarah Workneh and Dawn Philip. Sarah is a codirector at Skowhegan, which is an artist residency in rural Maine, and she brought in Dawn, who is a therapist, to work with the residents there. I think that's a really interesting circumstance. Artist residencies are intended to be places where you go for retreat. But I've been to Skowhegan myself in the past, and there are, I think, at least forty residents, visiting people, and administration. All of those people living in a summer camp situation mean that social dynamics can get quite intense.

When I was there, I don't recall there being an official social worker or therapist, or anybody doing any kind of work like that. Sarah's brought that to the organization, and they're dealing specifically with issues around power dynamics and ethnicity and oppression in various ways. It's pretty amazing to think of that occurring in a place that has a long tradition of just being super free form, but potentially having lots of social dynamic problems, too. They are adding a whole new dimension to what is going on in that place.

MOLLY: Yeah, it's fascinating to think about how they're really shifting the organization by creating frameworks for people to work through conflict, and they talk about how they are doing that through group work and education.

HARRELL: It's interesting, too, thinking about there being a consciousness around education and then also introducing a therapeutic approach. As we were saying earlier, it's just really nice as a reader to go through and read this and to feel like it's exciting to have these activities formalized in the conversations and through this book. I'm really looking forward to sharing it with my students and other people. Then it'll be easier for them to figure out how to apply these approaches to their own work

or to have greater awareness that this could be something that they would even want to do. It potentially is applicable for a lot of different kinds of people.

MOLLY: Right. Yeah, it's a good framework to think through the considerations and challenges and possibilities of these approaches. It gives a glimpse into ten people or groups who are working with these ideas, but really there are so many more examples out there. I feel like the conversations could keep going. We could keep talking to people. It's exciting to see how people's approaches differ, but then when the conversations are read together, themes definitely begin to emerge.

HARRELL: Yeah. That makes me think about the Web version of this—making this publication available to people through the Web.… It makes me wonder, would it be interesting to include some kind of section where people could add their own conversations? You could go there, download the book, read the conversations, and then also potentially it could function as a facilitator to get people to have their own conversations with people they think are doing interesting work with participatory education and then somehow upload a transcript of those conversations that could be accessed on the website.

MOLLY: Yeah, that's a nice idea.

HARRELL: Just a thought.

1. Myles Horton and Paulo Freire, *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

2. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: International Publishing Group, 2005).

3. Horton and Freire, *We Make the Road by Walking*, 119.

4. Ira Schor and Paulo Freire, *A Pedagogy for Liberation: Dialogues on Transforming Education* (Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, 1987), 3.

Harrell Fletcher & Lisa Jarrett

Let's Start with Kindergarten

HARRELL: OK. We are talking specifically about participatory education here. There are other related terms—experiential education, experimental education, place-based, all these different terms—but let's focus on participatory education. So let's just say that the structure in that case is set up so that it's not just a single person (the teacher, the instructor, the professor) downloading information into the students that they then receive as receptacles and regurgitate that information back to prove they've received it through a test or a paper, or whatever it happens to be.

LISA: Even in art classes the idea that there's an assignment for your drawing class or painting class or sculpture class, you finish it. Everyone critiques it. There's a sort of standard to that. You could say that it's somewhat more participatory than a normal lecture-based academic class. On the other hand, it has its own sort of built-in limitations where you're still following that format you described. It's not like the student has a lot of agency.

HARRELL: We're trying to look at alternatives to that. Also, we are not saying that this approach is always bad. I think it has its place, of course. My sense is just that the balance of education is set up with not enough participatory parts from kindergarten all the way through graduate school. There's too much of this status quo that I was describing, and not enough of the participatory.

So when you think about your own experiences with participatory education, as I'm very loosely defining it, did you have significant experiences as a student, and what were the beginnings of your own attempts at doing that as the person in charge—teacher, instructor, or whatever?

LISA: My experiences are kind of bookended when I think about my own education. I attended a Montessori school when I was young that had a lot of participatory components. It would be

hard for me to articulate what was happening as participatory at that age, or if it was different, because I had nothing to compare it to and I was so young.

Then the only other time that I could really think about participatory education functioning within my formal education was in graduate school. But I don't think that it would have been defined as a participatory strategy. It just so happened that graduate seminars were more conversational. But participation was never the tone of the class as a whole.

HARRELL: You don't recall any kind of experience in between preschool and graduate school that felt like a participatory style learning? For instance, I'll just give you an example of something that happened to me when I was in fourth grade. I went to a regular public school and it was very regimented, and all of that, but my fourth grade teacher, Ms. Gilder, said she was fed up with the system or something. She was like, "OK, kids. This year, we're not going to do the normal thing, and we're doing a play instead." Then, it was somehow decided we would put on a production of *The Wizard of Oz*. I feel like we had some choice in this, that we picked the play. The rest of the school year was devoted to building props, costumes, learning lines, rehearsing. Then, eventually, we performed the play for the whole school. Then we went and performed it for preschools around town and would bring the props and everything. That was all we did for fourth grade. It was like, "Whoa, this is a totally different experience."

LISA: You had the best fourth grade.

HARRELL: Yeah. But I got the sense that she was really going out on a limb, taking a big risk, test scores be damned. But, yeah, it was kind of before there was such a big emphasis on that from a national point of view, or whatever, way before No Child Left Behind. Anyway, that was an example to me where suddenly everything changed and we had all this…we were as a class participating in a project, in this case.

LISA: The equivalent or parallel experience in my education, was in my sixth grade class. I had just moved to Pittsford, New York. So I was the new kid, and we had this teacher, Mr. Kenzer. I remember his name, because he had us do this project all year as part of his sixth grade class. It was called Mr. Kenzer's Corn.

HARRELL: Corn?

LISA: Or popcorn, or something like that. As a class, we had this business where we would make and sell popcorn. I had never experienced anything quite like that, but it made me like my school and my teacher. I was like, "OK, this is kind of fun and unusual." I think his whole idea was trying to get us to understand the economic systems in some strange way, like you produce something, you sell something, you get this. Of course, we all loved it because we were making and eating popcorn at school. It stands out as one of the only times something like that happened. It was not part of the curriculum. It was something we did all year and it was really great. Kind of an interesting guy, Mr. Kenzer.

The only other situations that I would even remotely describe as participatory, and maybe they were really more experiential than participatory, were in middle school. I'm thinking about home economics and shop.

HARRELL: Yeah. I had those, too.

LISA: Those classes felt participatory in the sense that there wasn't this huge gap between thinking and doing. Maybe that kind of expands how we're thinking about participatory in this conversation.

HARRELL: Right. I had forgotten about taking the same kind of classes you mentioned. I took both a metal shop and a woodshop and home economics. And I took a second

woodshop. The idea in that one was that we would make something to sell. It was like a little business.

LISA: Was it like running a small business as a class?

HARRELL: Sort of like the popcorn thing. The woodshop guy, a classic woodshop kind of guy, he gave the class the right to vote on what we were going to make. There were like three options in what we could make.

LISA: Once you voted with everybody, then the class made the things you voted on?

HARRELL: Yes, everyone had to make the thing we voted to build. Then the class became like a little production studio to make those objects. But the problem was that, out of the three things, there was one thing, and I can't remember now what it was, that I thought was really good, but everybody else wanted to make a clock with a mirror with this sort of splatter gold paint on the mirror. This is the early '80s. Aesthetically, I hated it. The hands of the clockworks were plastic, and I was just like, "This is so bad. This is so horrible. We cannot make this thing." I made all these arguments to try to get the class to vote for the other thing, and I got completely outvoted. One of the first times, but not the last time that this happened to me throughout my life and is still happening teaching in grad school.

LISA: That's why I'm laughing.

HARRELL: I was so upset. I was like, "I refuse to work on this thing. It's so tacky and awful." So the woodshop teacher said, "Fine, you can just stack wood for the entire semester instead."

LISA: You just went off and made your own project?

HARRELL: I happily made these orderly piles of scrap wood, while the other kids worked on this thing that I opted out of. It's kind of interesting to think that he gave me that option. I didn't get a bad grade for it. He kind of agreed with me that he liked the other thing better, too. So I think he was sympathetic, but it was also interesting.

LISA: He didn't punish you for not conforming.

HARRELL: Right. But he also gave the class a democratic opportunity to choose what they're going to do. Then everybody participated, but you had to go along with the group. I hadn't thought about it very much, but it's certainly interesting. There was an aesthetic component, a democratic component, and a participatory component. Mostly, at the time I found it frustrating, but now as I look back on it, I realize that it offered me a lot to consider in that one class experience. It wasn't really about the class at all, actually. It was all of the dynamics surrounding it. I don't know how much consciousness the teacher had about that, the woodshop guy. Anyway, that was a tangent there, but it's maybe related.

LISA: I don't think it's unrelated, it's making me think about some of the work that we're doing now with our undergraduate students in the KSMoCA class at Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. School. Most of the learning that happens for the college students in the elementary school environment is not about the class at all.

HARRELL: Let's just jump right in there. Why don't you explain for the folks at home what KSMoCA is and maybe also what Tubman is, while we're at it?

LISA: OK. KSMoCA, or the King School Museum of Contemporary Art, is a project that you and I founded four or five years ago, depending on who you talk to, and how

well our memories are working at that moment. It's a participatory social practice project where we've created a situation where we have a living, functioning contemporary art museum inside, and alongside, a living and functioning public school. Right now, it's K–5. When we started KSMoCA, it was a K–8, or pre-K through 8, actually. The school also includes a Mandarin immersion program, among other things.

KSMoCA is really an opportunity for us to connect underserved and underrepresented children to the art world by linking up the resources we have access to. It is truly a participatory museum that exposes students to a full spectrum of contemporary art. Student participants make art but they also participate in writing wall labels, attending workshops and lectures, working as docents, introducing artists, connecting with our library of art books, helping install exhibitions, participating in creative research centers, and connecting with local artists through our one-on-one mentorship program. We bring in artists of regional, national, and international renown—artists you would typically encounter in major museums and galleries.

You and I, of course, also teach full-time at Portland State University in the School of Art and Design. We're using the institutional resources that we have as artists and professors and connecting those resources and networks to the students at Dr. MLK Jr. School and Harriet Tubman Middle School. We're interested in teaching children about contemporary artists and art making, but that's not our primary goal. It's about access and exposure. I think we are more interested in seeing what happens when available resources are shared across institutions.

I want to go back to the idea you brought up earlier when we were talking about your shop class experience. You said it wasn't so much about the direct project happening in the room. Instead, the focus was the learning that came out of it. I can see how much that has deeply informed your work both in founding the Art and Social Practice MFA program at PSU and in your artistic practice more broadly. There are some really interesting parallels here.

For KSMoCA, you and I are artists and we think about the project as our artwork. Those are the skill sets that we bring. It's the field of study that we've both been educated in. So we have a lot of knowledge there, and a lot of ways of thinking through things as artists. But art is not necessarily the central point. It could absolutely be applied to different kinds of learning and, hopefully, that will translate to our many partners at KSMoCA. Especially the kids. Did I do a good job describing KSMoCA?

HARRELL: That's good. Right. A question is why would you want to do that? What's the motivation there?

LISA: I think, for me, a lot of things were happening in tandem as we were developing this. When I came to Portland in 2013, my practice didn't include what you would call social practice at all. And someone asked me about this so-called addition to my practice recently. Well, I've always worked with children. I've worked with museums and I've worked with trying to make my classroom a different kind of classroom experience as an educator. But until fairly recently I wasn't claiming it as my art practice. Because of your program and your work and thinking about social practice I started to consider my work more broadly. What if I frame this as my art practice? It's a really simple repositioning. The only thing changing is the way I'm talking about it, right? What I'm doing isn't necessarily changing. Also, on a much more personal level, the site appealed to me first and foremost. The site, the location, and the demographic of the students in the community.

HARRELL: Which is?

LISA: We're in northeast Portland, Oregon, just off of Alberta, Alberta and Seventh, in what is a historically black neighborhood in Portland. Here it's ongoing and rapid gentrification all the time. I also live in this neighborhood. You live in this neighborhood. I did not grow up going to schools that were

predominantly students of color or black kids. That was really striking to me, to be able to spend time in a place where I look like everybody else, and everybody else there looks like me. That's just the way it is here, that's normal.

HARRELL: Normal?

LISA: When I go to Dr. MLK Jr. School, I feel a part of the community. When I go to PSU where I work, I sort of exist there in the ways that I've always existed within higher education: isolated and tokenized.

HARRELL: Yeah. Right. It is interesting going over there. That's something that I've mentioned before, is we go over during the week, and Martin Luther King Jr. School is primarily black. We go over on Sunday for a farmers market, which happens to happen at the same school in the parking lot, and it's almost entirely white. You kind of get a sense of the demographic and gentrification dynamics, in that, just that very simple going to the same place on different days and seeing what's happening, and who's there.

LISA: Yes. These two disparate realms that are really, largely supposed to reflect the community, right? The school and the local farmers market, and the difference between those spaces, it's surprising. I think most people don't see both sides. You and I happen to because we work in the school, and then we also go to that farmers market, because we live here. So, yeah, I think about that all the time. I'm personally invested in the site, specifically, of this school. I don't know if I would have felt so excited about a different kind of school setting.

HARRELL: Doing the project in a different school?

LISA: Yeah. I think I would have done it, but I think that there are some very personal sorts of things that this is making me think

about. For example, our approach to the programming within KSMoCA. One of the things that we do that is really visible to outside audiences are our rotating exhibitions. We have three of those that happen a year to coincide with our academic terms at PSU. We have an artist come in and host a workshop and make work collaboratively alongside our students and also display work that they've made either specifically for the space—which a number of artists have done—or they show work that already exists in their collection in our display cases in the main KSMoCA hallway. But our curatorial practice around thinking about and selecting those artists is necessarily relevant to the project and who the students are at this specific school.

We're always looking for artists that somehow reflect what the art world potentially could be, if it wasn't always obsessed with the exoticized/fetishized bodies that institutions periodically use to represent how diverse their programs are. You know what I mean. Situations where, because this one time, they had a show by this one person of color, etc. I can think of so many instances professionally where that direct conversation actually comes up around institutional programming, and that's the response I get. I hear this so often: "We did this 'diverse' thing/person/curator/show once before." And I'm always like, "It's interesting that answer is valid to you. What do you think would happen if you did it regularly?"

With KSMoCA and the Tubman Curatorial project, we're thinking about that actively and all the time. We ask: Who are the people that we're inviting in? How relatable are they to our students? Personally, that matters to me because I think about how illegible my own historical and cultural experiences were over the course of my entire education. I went to art school, and then I did my MFA at the University of Montana in Missoula. I've taken art classes my whole life. My formal education is around art practice, and it still has these gaping, glaring holes. It's pretty fascinating and sad for me to think about that.

HARRELL: The holes?

LISA: The holes in what you learn and what you don't learn in terms of contemporary art. Also who you learn—and who you don't learn—about in contemporary art. Eventually, I started to see the holes. I decided that what I was required to learn in higher education institutions was not feeding me or teaching me what I actually need to know to thrive.

HARRELL: That kind of feeds into what we are trying to do by introducing diverse contemporary art at an earlier age.

LISA: Absolutely, the kinds of artists and participatory programs that you get to experience at KSMoCA offer a different overall picture of who artists and arts professionals are and who can become one. It shifts how you understand the art world. If you only take the art world as we are taught about it in formal education settings like colleges, universities, and textbooks, you end up believing that there are only a small group of successful museum artists and that these individuals who are producing these objects, somehow, magically do it alone. None of which is true, by the way, but that is the way that it's presented and how you're taught. It's a myth, very narrow and elite.

HARRELL: The perception.

LISA: The misperception and misrepresentations. If arts education remains limited in that way, the picture that emerges from what I described above is not one that reflects me or anybody like me, right? At KSMoCA, everybody is like me. So that's leaving a lot of people out. Any learning about artists that was happening during my education was consistent with that myth I described earlier. If I wanted to learn something more relevant to me as a student and as a human being—whether about the identity of my body or cultural history, any of these things—I was going out to find those things by myself. I was finding community and doing participatory education on my own without a word for it. I wouldn't have survived graduate school without it.

The same thing happens to our college students when they come to class at KSMoCA. You and I also co-teach a KSMoCA class during the academic year where undergraduate students enroll and help facilitate our programs. They also work as one-on-one mentors with the elementary students at the school. They get to meet the artists that are coming in as part of this class, too. These are some really great artists that, by and large, they would most likely not have access to, unless they reach a level within their professional careers where they would be exhibiting alongside these people.

So the participatory learning experience is layered. We're working with our students, the elementary school students, but we're also working directly with our undergraduate students. Then our graduate students have also had great opportunities to build independent projects or facilitate projects in the context of the program. That is an unusual set of circumstances to have happening all under one physical roof. And I like it.

HARRELL: That's part of the motivation for doing it. It's funny because it seems like a lot of that stuff that you're describing wasn't clear at the beginning of the project. It wasn't necessarily part of the motivation, but it developed along the way. It is good that all of that has developed, but we didn't quite plan it like that. We didn't really know what the plan was.

LISA: That's the best part.

HARRELL: The development?

LISA: Yes.

HARRELL: Right. Now, what are those different sets of people that you just delineated? What ways do they get to experience participatory education in the project, in that context? You listed grade school kids, undergraduate students, graduate students. I guess there's also community members that come

in for various things. There are the artists themselves, who, in a way, get a little bit of that, because it's such a different context for them to be working in, as opposed to a regular museum that they might normally be working in. There are also teachers and admin folks. Those are the different delineations of groups that are all kind of merging together on this project. In thinking about these different groups, what is their participatory experience? How are they being educated through that participation? What's desirable about doing it?

LISA: That's a really big question. I'm trying to pause to think about how to answer it concisely or directly, and maybe I should throw out the desire to do so. I want to back up just a little bit. One of the things I really like about participatory education, in general, is that it gives you room to let learning happen in the places that you didn't plan for it to happen.

I think that's one of the things that has been true about our project development, too. We didn't set out with a grand spreadsheet and then start trying to execute it. It's been responsive, and it can breathe a little bit, and it can be really hard sometimes. There are a lot of human relationships that are part of this, too.

For our young student participants, there are some formal structures around public education that help us. Children are taught to listen when a grownup is talking. And that really helps when you have an artist come in that is not accustomed to being with children all the time, so they can facilitate a workshop. The artist also has this moment of learning that, "Oh, you can't control everything." The kids have a whole energy and desire. Once they understand, they start doing and applying and saying things differently than you expected, but much to your surprise, it's usually better.

Learning for our undergraduate students is also so different from a typical undergraduate class, and maybe this is why you're talking about this. In terms of participatory learning, we've started to set them up at the beginning by

saying, "This is not like a class. You are part of an artist project. You are now a collaborator, in some sense. Please put this on your CVs. We're your references," things like that. Even when you say it's not a class, you recognize that these college students still have the expectations that it is. A lot of the discussions that we'll have along the way have revealed that to me, anyway. They really struggle to understand this as an art practice for us. As many times as we say it just really directly, they have been educated in a way that limits the way that they understand contemporary art and education, and all of the ways in which it manifests. That's interesting learning. I often say, "Usually at the end of the term, you'll understand, but you have to have a particular kind of patience."

HARRELL: Right. They're struggling but they're also struggling with expectations around what a college art class is supposed to be.

LISA: Absolutely.

HARRELL: But that's just where they're at in their lives. So they have to unlearn those things, relearn some new ideas, and then start to apply them or appreciate it, all in one term, which isn't so easy.

LISA: Yes.

HARRELL: Some things we really celebrate and acknowledge about it being a functional school at the same time that we're trying to make a functional museum. Other things have been problems. So we struggle back and forth between those things a bit. A quick reference point that we've used in the past is thinking about PS1 as an example of a museum, a contemporary art museum, in a public school in Queens, in New York. And I really love PS1. It's a beautiful space to show work. But there are no students there. There's no administration. There's no

PTA. There are none of those things. There are no kids running through the hallway touching things, because PS1 is in a school building, but the school is no longer functioning.

LISA: No kids spilling food.

HARRELL: Right. On the one hand, we have the infrastructure of a small-scale version of a PS1. On the other hand, we have both the downside and benefit of it being a functional school. The downside sometimes is that you have to protect everything, so it's not destroyed. Flyers and things go up on your walls all the time, and you struggle with facilities, people from Portland Public Schools preventing you from painting a wall white or something like that.

LISA: Right.

HARRELL: Then the benefit is that you have a built-in set of really interesting collaborators, audience, participants through the students and the teachers, and the administration, and the community that's connected to it. We don't have to import an audience. It's just built in. That was the big concept, that these students, they already go to school, but rarely if ever go to museums or experience art. We'll just bring it right to them and make it part of their daily experience in their school.

LISA: I think the conceptual part is important in terms of the motivation for us as artists. It's not to preserve the museum as it exists and import it untouched. Right? But, by virtue of the importation or the contact, that both things would be changed. I think those are larger ideas that you and I are thinking about in our separate practices, albeit in different ways. But they're really relevant ideas.

I think this is part of the value of participatory education. It has the advantage of not adhering to a predetermined curriculum per se. You're leaving room for adjusting yourself

and saying, "I used to think this, and I used to *really* think this. And now I think something new." It's a dynamic circumstance. I do not think of museums as dynamic places.

HARRELL: They're usually trying to not be very dynamic. The major dynamism is that the shows change every three months, or something like that. But other than that, not a lot else, maybe a "Family Fun Day" once a month.

LISA: What else do you want to talk about?

HARRELL: Let's just picture an actual particular kid participant at KSMoCA. Let's just say Michael. What was, from your perspective, his experience within the project and as someone having a participatory education? We worked with Michael for several years and now he has gone on to middle school. We can think about younger kids like Jamal and Moe also, but maybe it's good to just start with Michael because, in a way, Michael has helped us figure out how to work with Jamal and Moe, since he was around when we first started to develop KSMoCA. I think we started working with him when he was in the third grade.

LISA: That sounds right.

HARRELL: Now, he's gone to a different school. But Michael had multiple experiences with us. He participated as a student in classes that did workshops with artists. He participated in the art fair, in a big way.

LISA: He also did an early version of one-on-one mentoring with Chris Johanson. After Michael worked with Chris we expanded that program substantially.

HARRELL: He piloted a lot of stuff with us and it was really through his own enthusiasm, because I remember going and picking up kids from his class. I remember going to his class

and him raising his hand, desperately trying to get a one-on-one mentor. I was like, "Who is this kid? Why is he so enthusiastic?" He told me, "I participated in one of the other activities with my class. I want to do more with you guys." I was like, "OK, we need to find a one-on-one for this kid."

LISA: Yes.

HARRELL: Then he got involved in various other ways. Anyway, from your perspective, how did the experience work for Michael? Just as a case study of one of the hundreds of kids that we have worked with.

LISA: When I think about what the experience has been for Michael, it really shows what we mean by participatory education in the context of our work. With Michael, we've really had so many opportunities to respond to what he's expressed a desire to do. Over time, the agency and desires of the children change, what they want and what they think is on the table with what we want, and what we think. Part of what we're always doing is trying to make sure that we're navigating that correctly, respectfully, and to check ourselves when we're not. So often we ask ourselves, "Wouldn't it be more interesting if we could engage the students more in this way?" With Michael, he's been really vocal about how he wants to participate, and we have been able to make those things happen. And, of course, we don't make children participate in this—that should be clear.

HARRELL: We're working in an institution that operates on mandatory participation, but we're trying to make a nonmandatory participation project within that institution. Throughout all of it, we're trying to do that thing that my woodshop teacher did, where he's like, "You don't want to do it? OK. You don't get penalized. You just might have to go stack wood, instead."

LISA: You could just do something else.

HARRELL: Right.

LISA: Let me go back to Michael, though, because working with him is when I really started to understand how the project functions and my role took on new meaning for me. Initially, I might have had all of these ideas about what Michael liked and what he didn't like. But after three or four years of working with him, and having him tell me, "Well, KSMoCA has taught me this." Or, if he's giving an interview where I'm not the person asking the questions, he will say something like, "I used to think this. Now, through my direct experiences working with Samantha Wall and Chris Johansen, I think something new." What he's modeling there is how his participatory experiences allowed him to think his own thing.

HARRELL: What about working with kids that are younger than Michael, like Jamal and Moe?

LISA: So, I think working with the younger kids, it's actually a much more serious, a much bigger question, because a lot of people also wonder, "Well, why is KSMoCA at an elementary school? What about high school?" I have my generic answer, which is that the impact is more generative when it starts early. There are studies out there to support that, and things of that nature.

More specifically, my experiential learning has taught me that almost every adult that I interact with refers back to these early learning moments as highly influential. There are very few times where the big pivotal learning thing happened when they were seventeen or twenty-five. Although, major things do happen in your late teens and twenties. It's like you and your fourth grade teacher's *Wizard of Oz* class.

I can tell when you're sharing that particular story that it's truly with you. You want other people to have that excited moment with you, and some people kind of do, I think. With the younger students, I think we have a longer chance to really

build a relationship with them. Potentially, the impact is deeper. It's sort of like an intensive versus something you do all the time. They're both impactful, but they're impactful in different ways.

HARRELL: Right. Then, what is Tubman? What is the Tubman project and what's that all about?

LISA: The Harriet Tubman Center for Expanded Curatorial Practice is an offshoot of KSMoCA and, right now, we're thinking about it as a satellite. It's in the very beginning developmental stages, but we're interested in working more intimately with a smaller group of students on bigger projects that connect them more with a broader public, where there's a deeper level of professionalism around that engagement. We're trying to teach—through real-time activities and projects—what the practice of curation is. I think what we're getting to is what it can be, and trying to get some flexibility around that idea in the same way that social practice helps us question how we define art as something that exists in the world at all.

HARRELL: It's worked the other way around at KSMoCA where we brought international people in. At Tubman, at least the way it's starting to look, it seems like it will be less about the school as the site and more about the organization we have created doing projects outside of the school, both locally and potentially nationally or internationally.

LISA: Which I'm really interested in and this is why I love the project's name. The Harriet Tubman Center for Expanded Curatorial Practice locates us in a site that is both attached to the neighborhood's history but also to a monumental historical figure and national civil rights histories. It is almost the opposite of KSMoCA in some ways, which is very much embedded physically in the community, but like KSMoCA the Tubman project is also scalable or replicable. It's something that people or other artists could play with or that we are interested in

scaling ourselves. Conceptually speaking, that has also been important to our work.

HARRELL: We also are moving through the educational strata and developing along with that. Then, eventually, we'll wind up at college, which is where we came from, and the same students that we worked with at KSMoCA and Tubman, and potentially in the future out of high school, may wind up being our college students, which was kind of our hope of how to create a more diverse and knowledgeable and capable and interesting set of college students. To address the lack of diversity and knowledge in college-level classes we thought, "Let's start with kindergarten."

LISA: There are very few projects out in the world that work with youth and work with youth over what we hope will be the amount of time we're able to engage with these ideas. There are few. Right? I'm thinking Rick Lowe isn't working exclusively with children, but communities and families are directly impacted. Darren O'Donnell has worked with a generation of youth and continues to think about how he can pass the organization in which they have participated and helped develop on to them. That's interesting.

HARRELL: Kids of Survival [K.O.S.] and Tim Rollins.

LISA: Yes, K.O.S., too. One thing I'm thinking about that's different about the work we're doing is that we are working in the school alongside a public school system in the United States, instead of being either in the home community, exclusively, or I'm thinking about Amanda's project here in Portland, too. Amanda Leigh Evans, another alumni of the PSU Art and Social Practice MFA program, has a project called the Living School of Art, which is in Cherry Blossom Estates just east of us. But that's very much in a residential sort of home space. I can't think of a model to look at that is working with the same combinations

of institutions that we're trying to navigate. We're trying to figure out how to build that model.

HARRELL: There is Big Rock Candy Mountain, which was started by Helen Reed and Hannah Jickling, graduates of the PSU Art and Social Practice MFA Program. They've been doing great work in a public school in Vancouver over many years. I think what we want to do with this project is to create visible precedents so that other artists can consider this a viable approach to their practices.

LISA: Absolutely. That's one great example.

HARRELL: Because the potential for these alternatives is so great for contemporary artists or MFA students who are oftentimes feeling a lack of places to show their work, because they're only thinking about galleries and art centers and museums, and it's hard to get in the door to show your work in those places. Most artists don't do ever get to do that. They just never get the opportunity at all. But there are so many grade schools and middle schools and high schools in every community across the entire country that are just sitting there, ready to be turned into galleries and museums and art centers.

LISA: Also, shifting some values for emerging artists around what "success" looks like as an artist is important to me. Because it does tend to persist, this dominant Western narrative that an artist lives and works in a certain way, and that your success as an artist is only measurable or measured if you are successful within a particular system. That's just not true for so many communities in every way.

HARRELL: Right. OK. Just to bring it back around, what do you see as the value of a participatory education experience as opposed to more standard, I guess, nonparticipatory education experiences?

LISA: I think the value is the way that learning happens in participatory models. Not the what but the how. To me, that's one of the major values of participatory learning. It's also much closer to how we exist as human beings—through interaction, through learning to be flexible, not always having to be right, and understanding that things can change rapidly. Most importantly the thing that you thought you were learning is, in fact, different from the thing that you walked away with. Learning how to communicate with people instead of competing with people, which is what the traditional education system is supporting, whether it wants to admit it or not, right? In standardized testing, for example, if your score beats my score, then you are somehow better than me. I think that's a really terrible thing to learn. To me, that's what's interesting about participatory learning and education. It says that how you learn something is just as important as what you are learning, and it gives you the tools to learn far beyond individual subjects. How about for you?

HARRELL: Right. I think, in thinking back to those early experiences that I had, with doing the play in fourth grade, or a debate in fifth grade…

LISA: Or the shop.

HARRELL: Yes and teaching a drawing class to my peers in kindergarten. But there were only a handful of those experiences along with a supportive family and some family friends that were interested in art that led me to the life of being an artist. I didn't grow up in a town that had a museum, so if it wasn't for those experiences, I probably would not have become an artist, would not have had the life that I have. That sort of determined the direction of my life, really, and the experiences I've had, the way that I've been able to live, and all of that.

LISA: All that.

HARRELL: So my hope is that through these kinds of experiences that the kids are having, this exposure and opportunity to interact with people, college students, artists, curators, all of these things, and being taken seriously, just having all of these experiences that I see as part of their participatory educational experience that we're offering, that it will create opportunity for them to think about options that they may not have been aware of, and ones that maybe we're not aware of, that into the future they might want to pursue as part of their careers and their lives, and their interests that they're going to do, and that it enriches and expands their life experiences.

LISA: Yes.

HARRELL: Through the kids' involvement in the art world that it will be improved, too. It makes everything better, for the people that don't normally have access to the art world there are benefits to the access to the art world. And to the art world, there are the benefits of having a more inclusive set of people participating.

LISA: So, using participatory education for this conversation has definitely sparked some things that may not have come up if we had been using different terms, like experiential learning or various other terms that came out in the introduction. I think the thing I'm left thinking about the most in terms of participatory education is that it's not just about the verbal, but I also think about it in terms of the nonverbal and sensory experiences that come along with it.

The participation is more than just the situations that we've described, we're engaging a broader set of circumstances and senses, or doing our best to, as much as possible. It occurs to me that that's often the kind of learning that happens at home. When you think about kids—in the United States, children generally start public school around five—all of the learning that happens before a child turns five is essential. Language,

movement, motor skills, things like that. We will use phrases like, "Oh, kids are such sponges." I think that the thing about participatory education is that it's how we're inclined to learn, anyway. It's been interesting to think about our projects from that perspective.

HARRELL: Right, like learning to speak, which is something that just happens through exposure. It can be improved upon, of course. You can hone it. But that largely happens just through exposure and experience. I think that's one way of thinking about participatory education. Parents are speaking, and kids are being exposed to it, and then they learn to speak, too. Whatever it is that you're exposed to will work like that, especially for kids, but for anybody. If you're in a school where you spend most of your hours only exposed to math and reading, and whatever qualifies, history, or something, and those are the things, and they're all leaning toward test results, then that's what you're going to learn, or resent learning, or whatever.

LISA: Exactly.

HARRELL: I think there could be a version of KSMoCA that's a geology museum or a science museum in a school.

LISA: I just said that in an interview yesterday.

HARRELL: That would be great, too. It's just not our area of knowledge. We're doing what we can. It'd be nice even if there was…maybe there could be multiple museums in one school, and professors and interested people from the community sort of offering their knowledge and experiences within that context to kids who are all learning. Whatever it is that they're being exposed to, that's what they'll learn about.

LISA: All the things.

HARRELL: We didn't really do it by design, because it happened somewhat randomly—we got connected to the school, but it's a school that's in our neighborhood, and it's a school that feels like the right one to be spending our time and resources on. It's all worked out well, I guess, without a lot of advanced planning or strategizing on our part, though maybe our whole lives so far have led us to this project at this time.

LISA: I think that's accurate.

Learning from Everybody All the Time

Molly Sherman & Rosten Woo

MOLLY: Let's begin by laying the groundwork for your foundation as it relates to pedagogy and the work you're doing now. When did you first learn about participatory forms of education?

ROSTEN: It's probably hard to imagine any form of education that doesn't have people participating in it, but I think that when we say participatory education, we're talking about something where the ostensible student has more control over what happens in the interaction than a standard model where you're imagining a call-and-response, you ask questions and they get answered. And I guess there's the idea of education as knowledge transfer versus education as creating a situation.

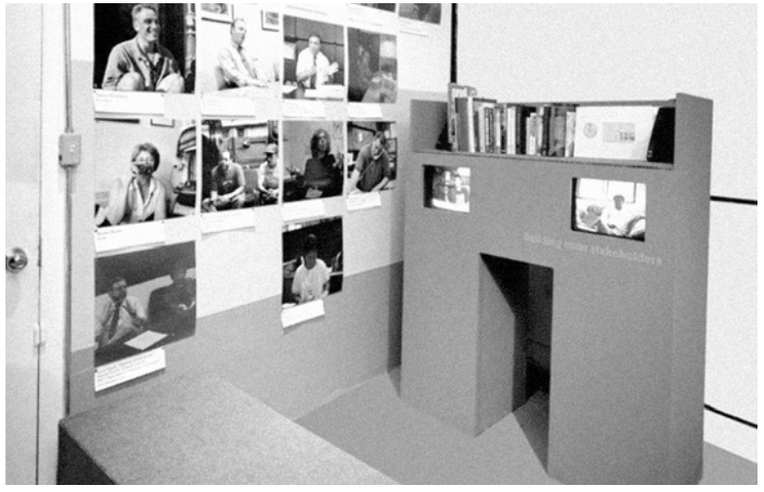
MOLLY: Right, yeah.

ROSTEN: My earliest memories of education have to do with going to a Montessori school. I think the idea that education could be a bunch of random, self-directed activities is something that I was introduced to at the earliest possible age. I certainly didn't know of educators like Myles Horton or any of the Freedom School stuff until well into my time at the Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP). That was something that, after I discovered it, I was, like, "Oh, this is what I was trying to do."

I think it was really through the early years of CUP, and figuring out what seemed interesting and effective to do with students, that I started to realize that in some ways running a classroom where you would get to learn from your students was actually more interesting than trying to teach content to them. Before we really got off the ground with having it be something that paid any bills, a lot of us at CUP would teach in this program called BCUE, the Brooklyn Center for the Urban Environment. They were an architecture education organization that folded shortly after CUP started. And early on I realized, "I'm not actually that interested in teaching a bunch of middle schoolers what a cornice is, but maybe there is a way to get people to notice whatever is interesting to them about the

built environment and make a map of whatever they're finding noteworthy." Changing that orientation made the class a lot more interesting as a teacher and also seemed like it got the students more excited. I think that was one of the early clues for me about what participatory education might be.

There was a lot going on in those early years. The other thing is that we were making these movies about the social context of building. And one of the early exhibitions that we did was called *Building Codes*. So we were making these fairly crude videos for installation, and it occurred to us that we learned so much by doing these interviews for the videos, maybe we could bring that method across into the work we were doing with young people.



One of the people involved with CUP at that time was the documentary filmmaker Andrea Meller, so she had the background to teach young people how to work on film, how to make transcripts, how to log footage, and so on. And so we worked with students to make a film about the politics of garbage in the city. This was around 2001 or 2002 and the city had just closed Fresh Kills landfill. That was definitely an aha moment for me of, "By making this movie, we learned so much

about all these different aspects of garbage and infrastructure." But we did it in a way that was painless and fun and weird and didn't necessarily have a clear curriculum. We were just trying to find out, alongside the students, what's going on with the garbage.

We lined up some interesting people to talk to us and we found that this was working on many different levels. We're getting interviews that would be hard to get otherwise because people feel like they want to do something for the kids, the kids are having fun working with technology, and it was a golden era where we had technology that students wouldn't otherwise have access to. Now it's, like, "Making a movie, I could do that on my phone. Why do I have to take a class about this?" But there was a moment where that was super exciting, and we were also getting that to be this vehicle to explore all these really complicated politics.

All those things ended up feeling like a self-supporting machine where each part of it was helped by the other. If you can balance all the pieces, then you're actually doing five things at a time but those five things all help you think about something in a deeper way, so the end product ended up being more interesting than a movie that we made on our own. The students got to learn more than they would have if we tried to teach them a curriculum about garbage. They also learned a lot of other skills ranging from how to ask hard questions of elected officials to how to operate a video camera. And then people

were excited to be interviewed and then those people wanted to come to the opening and everything gelled. I think we had some good instincts, but it was also very lucky that our first project like that was a total success and that gave us all energy to keep on trying that approach. There were definitely harder, rockier projects that came later.

Another moment for me was that while we were making *Garbage Problems*, we were also making this digital map about the history of public housing. We had students around the studio all the time. One of them, Leo Paulino, saw the map and he was like, "Oh, is that about public housing?" He's like, "The only problem with public housing is there's not enough of it." And I think that small comment really reoriented that project—which had been sort of an attempt to make a digital continuation of these maps of public housing and racial segregation that Peter Marcuse had produced on clear acetate. It was just a small moment of realizing that we had maybe seen something really wrong. It was a very basic and profound thing, like, Oh, I'm actually really learning something from my student. Having this person here with a perspective is actually making me question the whole premise of another project that we're doing and

maybe we need to rethink and learn more about this thing. And I think that decentering of the educator as the person who has the answers is very critical to the kind of education that I'm interested in.

MOLLY: Yeah, it's also often the case that the educator shares knowledge that was produced outside of the classroom. What you are describing shifts the balance so that students are part of a collaborative process of producing knowledge and experiences with the educator or whoever is in a facilitator role. It sounds like you figured a lot of this out as you were going along, but I'm curious, was there a learning or unlearning process that you had to go through in order to be open to shifting that hierarchy structure? What prepared you to be able to shift the balance in that way?

ROSTEN: That's a good question. Part of it was just we were genuinely ignorant about how any of it worked, we were just kids, literally twenty-one-year-olds, when we started CUP and we were doing projects with high school students. I feel like it was very natural that we were trying to learn ourselves and we didn't feel like we had the answers. Since we were already doing a bunch of projects where our research method was essentially going out and asking as many people as we could about how something works, it felt very natural to extend that in both directions and just do the same thing when working with students. We really clung to a few truisms—one: that the best way to learn something is to teach it, and two: that if you try to explain public policy to a high school or a middle school student, that's actually the best way to explain it to an older person. It wasn't just that we should be learning from the students, but I think there was a sense of we're learning from everybody all the time.

MOLLY: It seems relevant that you were approaching the work as nonexperts yourselves.

ROSTEN: Yeah, yeah.

MOLLY: I feel like I started to have more interesting experiences with learning once I began collaborating with fellow students, but I don't remember there being a breakdown of student/teacher roles, at least not until much later on in grad school.

ROSTEN: The way we saw it, it was actually less condescending to be like, "No, that looks bad, make it look like this," and to get in there and be hands-on with the artwork and try to treat the students as collaborators whom we valued and thought, "OK, you're going to bring energy to this that I could never come up with, but we are going to try to give it a shape that we think looks good, too. We're going to be hands-on and tweaking things and critiquing what you bring." Which is really different from the way that a lot of arts education programs operate, where the philosophy is that they give you skills and then you make whatever you want. We were like, "No, we're collaborating on this. I'm an artist on this, too."

MOLLY: Was it always the idea that CUP would have a collaborative, educational focus?

ROSTEN: It's hard to say that there was a single idea of what CUP would be. It really evolved out of a lot of different interests and directions and many things we were doing we were only able to name way after the fact. Something like "project-based learning," I think that was something we learned years into it, like, "Oh, I guess that describes this thing we're doing." I think the same is true for popular education. All of those things—social movements, connecting to civic education, people like Ella Baker—were learned about after the fact. To realize that it was a path that has been fought before but not by me.

CUP took a long time for it to become what it was. The first thing that mentioned the name CUP was just a satiric zine about cities. The earliest CUP projects were exhibitions about development politics that were clearly not geared toward children. But, at the same time there was a running arts education program in Tier II shelters that was organized through Storefront for Art and Architecture and Damon Rich from CUP was helping to lead that. And it was like, "Well, let's fold that in." So we had some little buildings that were made by kids in those shelters that were part of an early exhibition. But there wasn't necessarily a clear sense of "here's how it all fits together." I don't know if that really became clear to anybody until years into it. There were some other arts organizations like Group Material and REPOhistory who were in the process of shutting down and when they closed their bank accounts they gave the balance to us and 16 Beaver. They were mentors to us, and they gave us some advice that we needed to make CUP into an organization or else it'll just be a collective that eventually implodes. So there was a long period where we were actively trying to codify what we did: "Let's figure out what the structure of this thing is and what we do and what we don't do." It was a bunch of people who liked working together and I think there was enough shared sensibility that there was something there, I just wasn't totally sure what it was. And it wasn't like, "Our mission is to work with high school students to make documentary films," or something like that.

MOLLY: I got to know CUP around 2007 or 2008. And at that point, I was reading a lot about nonformal education, somewhat in reaction to my own experiences with learning but also out of an interest in collaborative and educational ways of working with people. And looking back on it, I think working with CUP was one of my earlier experiences of that type of work. I worked with you all to lead a zine making workshop at the Academy of Urban Planning, a high school in Brooklyn, and it was a formative experience for me in terms of participating in an approach to education that met students where they were and related to their daily lives. It also used design as a vehicle to investigate their neighborhoods and where they went to school. I'm wondering how you see these processes working together?

ROSTEN: Certainly CUP was the formative experience of my life. It all seemed like the compass was kind of set in those ten years of creating this thing that I certainly didn't know what we were making at the time. It's like CUP was a meta version of making an individual project where it's kind of exciting to not know what form it will be or what its meaning is. That becomes this really important metaphor for project-based learning, which I guess I later learned to call it. Making something is really different from trying to recite back facts or pass a test. I think it's because making something has so many facets to it and you can be great at one part of it and still have a lot to learn about another part of it. It allows you to work with different kinds of people who have different skills. You just sort of show up and are like, "OK, well, this kid is a really great MC and that's what they're interested in, so we'll just work with that." Whether they're adults or young people, you allow them to bring their weird obsessions and their talents into this project and then it becomes this thing that no one could have anticipated, and it gave us a vehicle for investigating all this stuff.

If there's something that we were all interested in, and probably in some ways most of us who founded CUP would now disavow this, but I think we all were interested in cities.

We were interested in how a place is shaped by people and shapes people. That's something we brought to a structuring preoccupation before we ever got into a classroom, but it just so happens that the place that you live is a good common ground for anybody to jump into a project. An example I got from Ella Baker, like ten years after the fact, but I think it's exactly what we were doing, was like, a great way to start talking about the federal government is to ask, "Where does this road that is in front of your house come from?" It's funny to me how much that was exactly what we did at CUP, but her starting point was literally trying to enfranchise people and ours was trying to investigate infrastructure—but they tie together so cleanly.

You start with something that's super concrete and you ask, "Why is it here? Who put it there?" And then you can pull that one thread and get to so many things. In one of the first interviews we did for a project, Martha Rosler was talking about the idea of looking below the concrete and seeing the layers of the city there and how much you could learn about the world just by digging in this one spot. I think that was a quote that we'd return to a lot. You know, if you start with whatever's right in front of you, which is always a place, you can use that to get anywhere. People who live in a place are experts in that place inherently. They're just always going to know things about it that someone with planning degrees isn't going to know. It's foolish to approach someone and pretend to be an expert in where they live. Everyone is bringing a lot of knowledge into it.

So place becomes a very natural way to build a common framework for starting an investigation and because there is that faith that everything is in everything, you can take any sort of detail in life and if you pull on that string, start to figure out "How does it work? Where does it come from?" you can get anywhere.

At one point I was reading some Joan Didion book and there's a quote in it about imagining a civics class that taught people how things actually got done instead of trying to teach them from a Model UN or a model government or teaching people this nonsense idea of how a bill becomes a law. What if there were a civics class that tried to teach people how things actually were instead of how they ought to be or people imagine that they are? I've never actually been able to find that quote again, but that was something that I brought into CUP at one point and everyone was, like, yeah, that's what we're doing—real civics, not just model government, but let's find out how, right next to your school, how is this vacant lot going to get developed? Who is involved in that? What's really going on? Instead of trying to teach a curriculum based on a model of how city government works, you just look out the window and ask who has power in this situation? Start from there and build out your social portrait of that world.

In my time at CUP, it was sort of a mantra to lean into a young person's disillusionment. You know, they take so many civics classes or go to assemblies about garbage or recycling, they sort of already assume the point of a class on garbage is that "I should recycle" and it's some sort of weird moral "education" about being a better citizen. We always had to try to immediately defuse that and let them know that they don't have to arrive there. They don't have to think that activism is a good idea. You can be completely cynical about how power works and that's a legitimate position. Let's work with that. If you think nothing ever changes let's diagram why nothing ever changes. I think that was important to us—not in a rude or dismissive way, but it was a flag that we planted that when we do our projects,

we're not going to be like other young people's civic education organizations and try to encourage them to be good citizens.

MOLLY: Right. So how do these ideas translate to the work you are doing now? And where do you see your current work falling in relationship to participatory education?

ROSTEN: Well, it's a good question because I don't work with young people as often, or I don't work with them in the context of a classroom. That's not necessarily because I've decided that's not a good way to work, I think it's just because other things have moved to the forefront of what I've wanted to explore.

But I still feel like education, and the idea that you can use the making of something as a vehicle for a bunch of people to do a lot of collaborative learning, is really fundamental to everything I do now. I've been doing projects in Skid Row in Los Angeles for about five or six years. And they're not necessarily positioned as "here's an education project." But learning in public is a really critical piece of the work. I really am a strong believer in trying wherever possible to make your process public. I feel like the more places that you can create a porousness where people can see what's going on, maybe destabilize your process, or have a different set of questions, the better. So with something like *The Back 9* project that I produced with the Los Angeles Poverty Department (LAPD), which was about zoning and the politics of development in Skid Row, we did a bunch of warm-up talks and open discussions with LAPD's company of actors and artists and their community of people who are also in Skid Row. LAPD is a community theater that's been in Skid Row for thirty years and through their mailing list a lot of different kinds of people would come to those sessions. So we would have some random housing expert or historian come to talk and it could be someone whom I would be interested in talking to myself, but there's also thirty other people there to talk to them.

I think the decision to do something like that is very much related to the way we ran the education program at CUP where students are in the mix while we're doing these interviews and are changing the dynamic of how someone addresses a question. You have a different sense of what's being asked when you're trying to talk to people about government, and you're talking to children. Students have preoccupations and questions that are in some ways more direct and more interesting than the questions that I might ask. It's like I have the notion that I need to phrase it in the most sophisticated way in order to come off as an intelligent person, but a young person can just ask a much blunter question and it still lands. If you're in high school and you're just like, "Why haven't you done it yet?" that creates an interesting moment in the conversation.

So in a similar way when you bring someone who's a housing professional to give a talk about building affordable housing and a third of the people there are either homeless or living in shelters, that's just a really different conversation and the way of talking about what housing is and the urgency of it is also really different. It's more interesting for us, it's more interesting for them, it just changes everything about it.

MOLLY: Yeah, so it's like, how can I learn more about a situation? How can I do that by involving people who are closest to it or know it in a deeper way than I do? And then how can it become a moment of shared learning?

ROSTEN: Yeah. And I think the place where I like to go, that is maybe one level more convoluted than even just that, is can I meet with people who might know a lot about this, but can I also meet with them with a bunch of people who are not me, who have different questions? So it's not only a broadening perspective of expertise but also broadened sets of non-expertise. What does someone who lives in Skid Row want to know about the history of cooperative housing? That's totally different from someone who's a college-educated designer. So that's

become very fundamental for me to the point where I think of participatory education…I don't want to say selfishly, exactly, but where it's, like, "I want to bring those people there just because I know it'll make it more interesting for me." It's not necessarily done as some sort of, "Oh, well, this will be good for the community to have this be a public meeting." It's like, "No. This will definitely be more interesting for everyone involved."

MOLLY: Yeah, it engages other people's knowledge and experiences and expertise. It's participatory education but outside of a school context. I often think about the people who are engaged in the work in a collaborative way as an immediate audience. Those who come across the work once a project is shared in the form of an exhibition or a book, they form a secondary audience. And then, how can that exhibition or book be a space for further inquiry or participation?

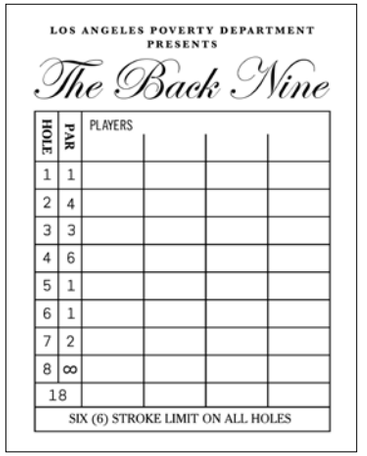
ROSTEN: Right, yeah, and I would say that's another aspect to this thing for me because a lot of the stuff that I've produced…it would probably be more straightforward to call them teaching tools than artworks, if that makes sense.

MOLLY: Yeah.

ROSTEN: And that's certainly a lot more the spirit in which I try to think about what I'm making. It's like, I want to make an exhibition, but I'm mostly interested in what kinds of interactions could this space afford people? I'm really interested in those kinds of mechanisms where it's, like, can visual culture or literally just spatial organization help people see a problem or a situation in a different way? And I like to create objects that are in that space of, again, this is a false dichotomy, but they're really explicitly participatory. It's, like, here's a thing that you can't just read and come away with the content. You have to use it for something or do something in order for that content to work and it comes with a specific context that you're supposed to use it in.

The golf course about Skid Row was this nine-hole golf course and each hole had a different story about zoning. And it was partly just a random lark that there is a green floor in the exhibition space. So, John Malpede from LAPD was like, "Oh, it should be a golf course." That became a funny idea of that'll be where the developers do their back deals, on the golf course, and that became the organizing theme. But then it was like, oh, actual mini golf courses are interesting spaces because you spend so much time waiting around for everyone to play through the hole. So you actually have five minutes where people are just standing there so they'll read anything. And then five minutes of them interacting. So you have this nice structure where by playing through, it'll take you probably forty-five minutes and you'll spend way longer reading dense content than you would if we had just made this into something where you go up to the wall and read the didactic. So it made an interesting pacing and then we would program it and try to bring different community groups to play there together and then have conversations afterward. It was a space that was designed for conversation, not just capital *C* conversation like in a big circle, but literally just conversation between players, between friends, or people you were there with.

MOLLY: Can you talk about how that project began?


LOS ANGELES POVERTY DEPARTMENT
PRESENTS

The Back Nine

HOLE	PAR	PLAYERS			
1	1				
2	4				
3	3				
4	6				
5	1				
6	1				
7	2				
8	8				
18					

SIX (6) STROKE LIMIT ON ALL HOLES


RULES & REGULATIONS

- Parties playing together limited to four (4) players. Each player takes one stroke at a time.
- Initial stroke on each hole must be played from tee mat.
- If player's ball is hit by another ball, new position may be taken unless ball has been hit into goal. . . in which case you must take old position and shoot.
- If ball leaves green, replace at spot it went out and take a one stroke penalty.
- You may move the ball 4 inches from any obstruction at no penalty.
- Please leave green immediately after the last put is made.

PLEASE RETURN YOUR PENCIL

FOR UPDATES ON SKID ROW AND THE DOWNTOWN PLAN, WRITE DOWN YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION BELOW AND LEAVE CARD WITH ATTENDANT:

INSTALLATION PRODUCED BY ROSTEN WOO WITH FABRICATION BY LEEBUILD • ADDITIONAL DESIGN AND PRODUCTION BY TIFFANIE TRAN • ADDITIONAL PRODUCTION AND ELECTRONICS: RJ SAMSI • ADDITIONAL RESEARCH AND ADVICE: JIAE AJAD, ANDREA GIBBONS • MURAL EXPERTISE: DIMITRI KADIEV • THANK YOU: JEFF CAIN, KRISTY CLARK, JESSICA CORLEY, BRYAN ECK AND TAL HARRI OF LADCP, JIA GU & MATERIALS AND APPLICATIONS AND KNOWHOWSHOP, TOM KRACAUER, STEVEN SIMON, LAMP AND LAPD. **#BACK9**

ROSTEN: I had been working basically as a graphic designer on a community advocacy plan run by an architect named Theresa Hwang who is working in Skid Row because Skid Row is going to be rezoned at some point. Everyone knew it. It was sort of like, "Let's get out ahead of that and have a community idea of what we would want to see." Which is a fairly radical proposition in a way that people in Skid Row would themselves be able to have ideas about what should happen to Skid Row. I think it's one thing to have community participation, but I think people are very dismissive of Skid Row as a community. They're like, "Oh, it's just a bunch of social problems collected together and it's transient and just…why would you do that?"

But that's based on a whole bunch of misunderstandings of what Skid Row is and how it works. People see it mostly as a place that has homeless people but also a bunch of housed people are there, too. You just don't see them because they're inside of the buildings. There actually is a long-term constituency of housed people who are in low-income housing but have a real stake in the long-term viability of that place. There's also a bunch of people who are there, hopefully not for a super long time, but they're there for something specific, like they're getting resources. There's a reason for Skid Row to exist. So there's a bunch of perspectives that, I think, only became

clear to me once I started doing this project. I actually was coming to this with a bunch of preconceptions about what Skid Row was and this totally changed my mind as well.

They had been talking for a couple of years about what they wanted to see, so they let me try to design something to display the ideas. We made a document that we delivered to city planning and I think at the time they had no real interest in it. And then John and Henriëtte from LAPD had this idea to make this play about development. Typically, the topics they take on are much broader or about global politics, like Iran-Contra or something like that. It's not always about their backyard but because it's this indirect kind of threat they thought it's time to do something that's just about that. They asked me if I would want to be listed on the grant they were writing to the Mike Kelley Foundation to make this golf course. I was, like, sure, and then we got the grant and it was, like, OK, I guess we're doing it.

Something that was very educational to me in that situation was that it got a lot of press, people were just like a golf course in Skid Row, I want to write an article about that. So it had this weird media hook and then a radio show did a whole thing about the issues of zoning in Skid Row, and then suddenly city planning was very stressed about whether or not they'd done good outreach in Skid Row.

It was kind of this amazing thing for me to see how culture comes around in a very literal way of, "OK, we've already done all this planning work and made this thing but it took this theatrical cultural work to create this political pressure back on the city," and it was a nice education for me, seeing how effective that really could be. Like, oh, suddenly city planning is really interested in what we have to say about Skid Row and they're setting up all these meetings and all these things that they said are not possible in the first meeting are now suddenly possible. The new plan for Skid Row is on the one hand definitely not enough, but on the other hand way better than we ever imagined would be possible when we were starting out.

MOLLY: Wow.

ROSTEN: I don't know if that has to do with participatory education but in terms of the trajectory of the process it was sort of interesting to see culture playing these different roles in changing people's minds or changing people's sense of urgency around something.

MOLLY: Yeah, it definitely sounds connected to the participatory educational approach. And so based on what we've been talking about, what else do you want to see in education?

ROSTEN: It's a little nuts and bolts but there's just not a lot of resources for young people and it's really clear it goes a long way. There was this amazing organization that I think is a really beautiful thing that deserves a lot more attention. It was called Communications Arts Academy. It was an artist workshop and youth education studio that was operating in Watts in the 1970s and all these amazing assemblage artists of the time were involved in it and it was like everything that social practice or whatever says that it wanted or could be, but it was actually working as this totally amazing community organization. Basically in the late '70s all the funding dried up because no one cared about Watts anymore and then it closed. But it left just an amazing mark on two generations of artists.

The continuity of funding in education is just something that's super undervalued. Something like CUP, if it had closed after five or ten years, we would have done some cool things, but I think that it's just so obvious to me how much the value of something like that accumulates over time. It's, like, the number of people who know it and want to work with it is just so much greater than it was every, you know, year on year. You just imagine how much something like a stable kind of arts center in a community could do to produce a whole different kind of relationship or set of understandings of what is possible for somebody. Basically if you go on the Wikipedia page of any

rapper it's like they got their start at a community art after-school program. People talk about youth education or youth arts as sort of a separate field entirely from fine arts or popular art and it's, like, where do you think those people come from, you know? It's not just about doing something good for kids or keeping them off the street or something like that. It's actually what will end up producing the actual culture that we inhabit.

That's sort of my hobbyhorse here in LA, like, can we get more funding that's more consistent that can really build a real program that's not just a one-off project but has longevity? Something like LAPD, it means so much more because it's been there for thirty years. An artist going in and working with people from Skid Row for two years is like who fucking cares? But if you're committing to that for three decades it really means something. That really is something.

MOLLY: Yeah, I feel like there really is a lot of value and depth in developing programs in conversation with communities over long periods of time. But, like you said, so often it really does come back to finding funding structures that support longevity—or creating them.

ROSTEN: Yeah, and obviously, a perennial complaint is that funders go from trendy thing to trendy thing and don't necessarily see things through. Even something like this creative placemaking funding that's around now, you get the sense that people want to do a strategic project to document or make a snapshot of a creative place. It's sort of, like, well, I don't know, what meaningful creative placemaking could happen? Putting aside the fact that it's kind of a bankrupt notion in general, but it seems like to me the time frame which you could be worrying or thinking about placemaking, that's a thirty-year timeline. That would change a lot if that was what people were trying to think of. How do you build enough resources that there could be something really stable in this community? It's really hard to keep those things going. It's a lot of work and it's something

that a person could totally do for five years but it's, like, for fifteen years? Twenty years? How do you build in some sort of sense of the resources needed to make it…

MOLLY: Sustainable?

ROSTEN: Yeah.

MOLLY: Yeah, for sure.

ROSTEN: I'm curious if your idea of what participatory education is is different from what I've been talking about? Are there things that are included or not included in it that were in your mind as you were developing this project?

MOLLY: I think there are a lot of similarities and I'm definitely still working through it. But for me, the idea of participatory education relates to power and power sharing and finding ways to shift our understanding and values around student/teacher, nonexpert/expert roles. It goes back to what we were talking about in terms of breaking down the assumed hierarchy structures for a more collaborative approach. I think participatory education is inherently a bit messy, which I actually find really energizing, like with most forms of collaboration where you end up places that you wouldn't reach on your own.

I also think there's value in people being personally involved with the subject matter at hand. It's about using the world to learn, not just focusing on what happens inside the classroom, but actually engaging with people and issues outside of that immediate educational structure to learn together and in relationship to what's going on around us.

ROSTEN: Yeah, one of the things we always tried to do at CUP, and it wasn't always possible, but it seemed like it generated really good results was to just literally have the class happen somewhere else, you know? It's always seemed like if you

could just get to some other spot, people just felt way freer to engage their actual curiosity instead of trying to either imagine or resist this pretend curiosity you're encouraged to have in official school.

MOLLY: Right, in official school, we can be so tied to all of the ways we're expected to learn and interact with each other and it can be really hard to break out of that.

ROSTEN: Yeah, I think a book that I used to be really into that I maybe didn't even really understand, but I thought it seemed cool, was that Jacques Rancière book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*.[1] It was this funny thing where in that book all the teacher does is be like a taskmaster, you know? And I think as I've done more education, I've thought actually that doesn't seem very effective, just being like, "I'm not giving you any resources, but I'm just going to tell you to do something and force you to do it." I feel like I've never gotten really good results when I've ever tried to channel that idea working with high school students. But it's always been more just the idea of we're making something, we're doing something together, and it's not even under the banner of education. My goal in all of this was if we can get people to be working on something where they kind of forget that they're even doing a project for credit or for any reason besides this is fun in the moment, that's always where we wanted to be and where we would try to get students to be. I mean, so when I'm thinking now of, "What is participatory education," you sort of know that it's participatory when people are able to access a state where you're not even trying to get someone to do something anymore. Someone's just doing this because they want to be doing it.

1. Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1991).

Spencer Byrne-Seres & Anna Craycroft

Could I Just Leave and This Thing Would Keep Happening?

SPENCER: One of the things I was thinking about as a starting place was to ask if there were any formative experiences that led to your interest in participatory education?

ANNA: When I was a student, I loved the challenge of power that teachers posed. I loved the pretense that there was somebody who supposedly had the knowledge and was instructing the class. I saw it as my job to try to counter it and to find a way around it, to make my own path or even to change the system. But when I became a teacher I didn't want to be in that position of power.

I was in my early twenties and I was teaching art in public schools, working with kids in middle school and grade school. I still felt like a kid myself then and very close to the students in age so the whole power thing just seems absurd. Later, when I started teaching college, I was even closer in age to most of my students and was again conflicted about the power dynamic. I was really uncomfortable with the authority. At the same time I had this memory of really loving that power dynamic as a student.

So now being the teacher I was really conflicted about whether to dismantle or sustain this pretense of power. Twenty years into it I still struggle with my contradictory experiences as a teacher and student. I wonder whether there might be some value to having an inherent power dynamic since my earliest experience of wanting to be in a co-creative space actually begins by thriving in a dynamic that wasn't like that. Though I would say that my student experiences were with teachers who allowed for pushback, even if they were technically the authority figures in the room. So that's my formative experience. What was yours?

SPENCER: I have these two funny counterpoints that I've been thinking about. I went to a pretty normal public elementary school, but at the school my mom ran an after-school program as well as a summer camp at our house. I would go to class

all day and have your very standard state-regimented education where you do math, you do science, you do reading. And then after school I would go to this sort of day care program. I don't know if my mom was thinking about any specific pedagogy, but the program she created really reflected students' interests. The kids that she was taking care of would do art assignments and had all these tools and things available.

And since it wasn't part of school, there was no expectation of having the sort of results where you learn X, Y, or Z. Whereas in all my regular classes everyone was stressed out about the TerraNova tests. We were constantly having to prepare for these standardized tests and the teachers hated it. So the things that I remember were these moments after school where we were just creating, inventing, and making up games. It was a place where we had all the tools to do that without any sort of criteria, or a person telling you it's right or wrong at the end of the day.

I feel like we do get so used to that power hierarchy that you're talking about, because we're in it from kindergarten onward. When you get to college and all of a sudden you're asked to figure things out on your own or you're given this agency, you kind of flounder at first. And I think this is true of art classes more than the sciences or math or things like that, but all of a sudden, expertise and knowledge become much easier to question. And when that happens, then it's much easier to create a classroom that's more open and inquisitive.

One particular place where this comes up a lot is within an ongoing artist project at Columbia River Correctional Institution (CRCI), a minimum security prison in Portland, Oregon. The project began when Harrell Fletcher and a group of students including Anke Schüttler, Anupam Singh, Salty Xi Jie Ng, myself, and others were invited to teach an art class at the prison. However, we didn't call it a class, we called it an artist residency, which immediately shifted the role of everyone. We asked prisoners to think of themselves as artists-in-residence at the prison, and we provided the structure and support for them to make work. In that situation even if some of the meetings

looked like a class, the meetings were often just conversations or discussions or feedback.

My experience creating an art program in prison is that certain hierarchies are even more pronounced. So whatever power a professor might have could be multiplied tenfold by someone teaching inside a prison because they have all of the agency in the situation. They can come and go as they want, their word counts more than someone who is a prisoner there. They have this kind of state-sanctioned higher authority that is terrible.

ANNA: It's an interesting question: if you're leading that workshop do you become a representative of the state authority? It was something I wondered when I was a public school teacher. And also when I teach in different colleges and universities, how much am I personally representing the given power structures just by being in that position?

SPENCER: Yeah, definitely.

ANNA: When I taught in public school, the first struggle I had upon walking into a new classroom was to figure out what the kids were going to call me. Because they were little kids and it was a public school, they were taught that you call the teacher by their last name, right? You say Ms. whatever. And I wanted them to call me by my first name, so it was less formal. But it was so hard to get the kids to do that. Most often they would call me Miss Art, which was funny, especially along the lines of what you said about art class having less authority. But yeah, it's a struggle, because you sort of walk into a position that's already set up, and can you even push against that? Like, what part of that can you use and what part can you push against?

SPENCER: Well, I think even the context in general is loaded. If you call it a classroom and you call it a school, the expectation is that there is a teacher who's going to teach you stuff, you know?

The program at CRCI is unlike the other classes that are available at the prison because we've gone to so many lengths to position people who are participants in it as artists, and to say that what they are doing is what the program is about. And then we get to that question of what do we label ourselves; our labels are funny because I think about myself as an administrator as much as an artist. In the class I use the term *facilitator*.

I have a specific role at the prison, because I am able to come in and go out. I'm able to interact with the public. I'm able to update the website, I'm able to do all these things that someone on the inside can't do. Unfortunately, because of the structure of prison, that's the role that I have to occupy. And so then how you hold that or how you make that into something that people can get on board with has a lot to do with trust.

We are often facing pushback from the artists in the program. People wonder about our commitment and wonder who the project is for, who it's about, who is seeing it. Sometimes people say they have a sense of feeling like a part of an experiment or a subject. Right? A subject for study. And I think this speaks to many of the interactions and many of the programs that happen inside of prisons in the United States.

ANNA: Right, right. So even if you're like, this isn't a "class," your presence still invokes the history of how those relationships have been structured in prisons.

SPENCER: Yeah. And going back to the idea of, "are you then just endorsing the system?" I definitely think that there is a debate between engagement versus retreat in any radical politics. By engaging with this system, are you just endorsing it and becoming a part of it versus trying to start something new? Teaching in any university or creating an art program inside of a prison are major forms of engagement. But I think they are really important as a way to shift what that thing is. Otherwise there is no challenge to the status quo.

Detail from a clay workshop led by artist Amanda Leigh Evans at CRCI.

Co-facilitator Anke Schüttler leads a workshop on photography for *Answers Without Words*, an international photography exchange based at CRCI.

ANNA: What do you think is the particular value in trying to create a co-creative space within an existing power structure? As opposed to trying to start from the ground up outside an existing system? Is one condition more promising than the other?

I'm hesitant to frame these questions in relationship to prisons because prisons perpetrate and perpetuate some of the worst evils in our society. And I would not argue for maintaining the existing power structures of prisons. However, if we continue to look at this question more broadly: of whether there's something about staying within existing power relationships and acknowledging that that's part of the process…to admitting that we're never going to be able to fully escape them. I am thinking also now about *C'mon Language*, the exhibition I was working on when you and I first met. Because in that project I was trying to create something from the ground up.

SPENCER: Right.

ANNA: In *C'mon Language*, I started with a desire to hand over a certain amount of authority or authorship to the various people who participated—whether invited guests or regular attendees—but I always had a sense that there was something amiss in its formlessness in part due to how art institutions—white cube, etc.—are designed to disappear into the background of the exhibition. So my question for you regarding CRCI is whether there is something in working at this prison that is effective precisely because you cannot deny what's going on?

For example, when you call the structure a "residency" in the context of the prison. There's something that's so biting about that word in the context of a prison. A friend of mine put the residency in a particular light for me, which I always think of when residencies are discussed and seems relevant here. He is an artist in his seventies now. And he has great pride in never having been to an artist residency because he sees it as a sign of being super bourgeois. The irresponsibility of privilege. You go to this bucolic environment to feel freedom

from all your responsibilities or whatever. And since prison is the opposite of this, there is something upending in that contrast.

SPENCER: Right? Yeah.

ANNA: Imagining a *totally* co-creative space in a prison. You can't really ever have that.

SPENCER: Definitely. I'm constantly wondering if I believe that an institution can change. Do I believe that through engagement or through putting all this effort in to shift the expectations of a classroom, is it possible for that to have an effect or to change something? Is it possible to create something new? And is it like you mentioned with *C'mon Language*, you're essentially inventing a new form or a new structure—

ANNA: Aspirationally, aspirationally.

SPENCER: Right, and you then have to start all over, you have nothing to work off of, right? Not that it's in a vacuum, but you realize you need a floor and walls and chairs and all of these things that we don't even think about as being part of a classroom environment. All of a sudden you're having to construct a building along with all the relationships and the different things that go into the day to day.

And going back to what you were saying how as a kid, you were really interested in that power dynamic as something to push back against. I definitely think that having something to define in contrast to what you're doing is incredibly useful. To be able to identify a status quo situation or to identify something that you don't agree with and then to offer something that's different from that—there's great power in that.

And that's what I constantly do when I'm explaining the work at the prison is to talk about what's normally happening and then how this thing is the opposite of that or how it's shifting the normal expectations for what's possible.

ANNA: I guess *C'mon Language* kind of grew out of a craving for a blank slate. I was in crisis with my work—one that recurs, and has also been consistently generative for me in some form or another actually. It went something like: "I don't know what or who I am as an artist. What is my artwork? What's an original voice anyway? Don't we develop who we are and what we have to say and how we say it by way of a collective agreement—whether we acknowledge it or not—that we're made by many, not by one, not in solitude?"

I wanted to bring people together so I could understand how something is formed—specifically, an artwork or an artistic language. But maybe even how I could be formed as a person, thinker, maker, communicator. It was an aspiration to make something new from a collective effort, born of an interest in the input of others.

The collectivity of *C'mon Language* was designed after the early child pedagogy of Reggio Emilia—specifically following their structure of allowing the children to lead the focus and activities of the class.

In relation to your question about whether the institution can change and our conversation about who is leading the lesson or activity…I am thinking of the day I visited CRCI. It was the first time I'd been inside a prison and directly confronting some of the conditions inside. I recall a person who worked at the prison introducing us all explaining how the prisoners had elected to be there, or that there was a selection made according to some special rights or seniority. I don't recall exactly. Also something about them not being allowed to have pencils. It was a whole array of information and conditions that was new to me, a lot to make sense of.

SPENCER: Yeah.

ANNA: I thought about the number of doors we went through affecting the way that I felt in my body or witnessing the postures of the men and how they were in relationship to their

bodies in this space. All these details firsthand. My mind was just blown open. So for me as a visitor and in that way a contributor for that one day it was just such an incredible learning experience. I can only imagine that if I'd been able to return that learning would've continued to expand and deepen.

SPENCER: That's been my experience and something that has given me a constant sense of appreciation. The fact that I've been continually learning and there's always something new and some new component within this system and this experience that I'm learning about just by going in there.

The way I perceive the role of the class is to offer a space that's not about prison per se. It's not that we could ever escape it because of the context. To come to a space where we're not talking about rehabilitation, we're not talking about criminal justice. We're just talking about art. And I've learned that everyone's experience of prison is different. And thinking about what a participatory model for learning can offer, I think one important thing is complexity. I see a lot of value in the fact that when everyone all of a sudden has a voice in the process or in the class in some way, you begin to hear that there are multiple perspectives on every idea.

ANNA: I imagine to some degree you had to design what these workshops were going to be like even before you started consulting with the prisoners. Right? So once you've done that, then you can start the conversation with the prisoners, then you can open it up where it's no longer about the prison. But initially it must've been very much about the prison for you and the people that you are organizing with, no?

SPENCER: Yeah. I mean, there's learning about all the red tape and bureaucracy, what is and isn't possible or what is stated is not possible and what's actually not possible. I think we're at a unique institution in that we have a lot of support from

C'mon Language, 2013, Portland Institute for Contemporary Art. Anna Craycroft and Sammy Loper lead visitors and a Reggio Emilia kindergarten class in Ohad Meromi's *Flat Dance* workshop.

C'mon Language, 2013, Portland Institute for Contemporary Art. Lucy Raven leads visitors and a Reggio Emilia kindergarten class in a workshop on *Shape Notes*.

the Department of Corrections for what we're doing. We have advocates who have been willing to say yes and put their necks out there for something that security might otherwise say no to: like, there's no way you could bring steel sculpture tools in here.

ANNA: So how many people are participating, and how often?

SPENCER: Right now it's two times a week. We go in on Mondays for our regular meeting and on Saturdays we have a casual studio time, which is more about giving space for people to use art materials. We have lockers in there now. We have materials and things like that so people can use pens and paints, acrylics and watercolor and things like that. And we usually have between twelve and eighteen people that show up.

ANNA: Is it the same people every week?

SPENCER: It's the same people every week, but people come in and out because everyone at this particular prison is within four years of release. And most people have less than a year by the time they get involved in our class.

ANNA: One question I have is about the practical side. The only people that are participating are the inmates, right? There aren't, like, guards or people that work there who are also taking part in these workshops and classes and things. Right?

SPENCER: No. Yeah.

ANNA: And so how does it happen that it feels like the prisoners are co-creating or leading or shaping the form of what happens week to week? Because it's an investment thing, right? You want people to feel like the energy that they're putting in is worth their time. People will be invested in the things that they care about. Right?

SPENCER: Yeah.

ANNA: So I imagine that a goal is to have their voices be heard and not just listened to but responded to. How do you make space for them to talk? You talked about being a kind of liaison between the powers that be, like whether there are going to be lockers in the room. When you're actually in the room, what do you do?

SPENCER: There have been a lot of different ways that that has happened over the years. There are so many different kinds of evolutions and changes to what the program is. And then there's just all of the other ways that the artist residency has manifested: artists have pages on the website where they can post work, they have bios.

I think the other thing I've been thinking about the past year in terms of sustainability, is how to get everyone invested in what's happening as a group. I feel like in a lot of socially engaged projects, there's an artist who has the idea and is then the one pushing and really carrying the weight of making and believing in the project. And so to get away from that, I've really been trying to think about how to make sure that everyone's on board so people put a lot of energy into it so that it sustains itself. And it's not just about one person trying to hold all that.

Another thing that has happened are participant-led workshops: somebody who has an interest in street art, for example, giving a lecture about wheat pasting and then demonstrating or talking about how to wheat paste.

And that actually led to an exhibition that was curated from the inside by artists in the program where we were able to bring panels inside and do a whole workshop on wheat paste with blanks and different things they've been making over the course of a month. We then brought the panels out and built a wall inside of a gallery to create an exhibition about street art produced from inside.

ANNA: So the exhibition was outside of the prison.

SPENCER: Yeah. We are able to use this model of the residency to say, "You're the artist. This is your work that's going up." And if it's not that, then we're often operating as a collective or some loose type of collaborative group. But it is always challenging to create a truly collaborative atmosphere. I've had experiences where we'll have a conversation as a group and kind of ideate and think of something, create some sort of idea for a project.

And then it sounds great. Everyone's on board and excited about it and we come back a week later and everyone's like, "We don't want to do that. We don't know how we got to that idea, but it doesn't feel right." And it can be frustrating for us because it makes it hard to know how people are really feeling. And so I've become incredibly aware of the presence that I have in the room as something that shifts what people respond to or talk about or try.

So now anytime that we have one of these types of ideation sessions where we're thinking about a new project or something, we have a rule that it doesn't get decided on in that moment. And I ask that people discuss and reflect on it outside of that meeting when I'm not there.

ANNA: Right.

SPENCER: To give time for people to decide whether or not it really feels like something that everyone wants to do.

ANNA: And that's something that they are doing individually?

SPENCER: Yeah.

ANNA: The thing that you're saying about giving space for private reflection in regard to collective conversation…in a way you are creating a period where the activity is happening not in the room but in memory. The conversation continues to live

in the individuals outside of the actual space. They take it with them, chewing on it or planting it or whatever metaphor you want to use. But there is the potential for the conversation to take a new form and chemically change.

Usually when I'm reading about practices where there's an effort to allow the students to lead, the discussion is around creating some kind of collective consensus by allowing all of these individual voices to speak and harmonize. But here you are acknowledging the inevitability of influence and the impossibility of actually being able to pinpoint where it happens. So if you just make space then that pressure is taken away for a second, which adds a whole other realm…that's not in the room, that's not in the social context. This seems like it would invite a whole other set of personal reflections in.

One of the things that I'm thinking about is how much is about each individual and how much is about the collective effort? How much of this is about a private enterprise and how much is for the public exposure? That came up earlier in a question you mentioned: is this going to be seen?

Who's seeing this? Who am I doing this for? Am I doing this for myself or am I some kind of experiment or something for a PhD student or whatever? Or maybe I'm coming to this art class, but really I just want a sketchbook so I can make art, as a personal private exercise, right?

SPENCER: Yeah.

ANNA: And this question of the individual versus the collective voice is interesting in this context since these men who are participating are all about to go back out into the world—the non-prison world—really soon. And so there's the reflection of the self in this broader social context. There are just all these layers of trying to bridge that space—when it's necessary, when it isn't.

Today I was listening to a podcast where they were talking about this technique used in children's television that they

called the "pause." In shows in the 1990s, instead of just being like, how do you spell dog? And then without missing a beat—D.O.G.—instead they would go "how do you spell dog" (long pause).

SPENCER: I remember that.

ANNA: Yeah. So that pause was apparently like this revolution in educational programming. In this model, somebody has the information, whether it's a set opinion or an agenda or whatever, whether they are the social practice artist or the teacher or whoever it is. And then there are the people who don't have the information or didn't come with an agenda for the group, the students or attendants or participants or whatever. There is a hierarchy. But then what happens when you create a pause? You suggest the possibility that that voice or that leader isn't there. It just seems exponential because not only does it give more room for the students to hear their own voices, but it also takes the lesson outside of a classroom or whatever the space is where the lesson is happening.

SPENCER: Yeah. And in the one instance that I was mentioning earlier where people were unhappy with the result of a particular conversation, the next conversation was "We came up with this other idea and we want to do this thing and here are all the reasons we want to do that. And we had a meeting where we discussed it and decided this." And that was so exciting.

Ultimately you begin to wonder, "Could I just leave and this thing would keep happening?" To have that potential eventually is kind of amazing.

ANNA: I think also, though, one of the things I really like about the pause is that it does make room for the people that just take the sketchbook home to their private space. I understand that's a point of frustration when you're trying to make this project something that continues to generate. But on the other hand,

it too often seems that the implied goal is only about bringing people together, right?

Matriculating people in society, or making people contributors to a collective effort or, doing something communally and sure, yes, that's beautiful. But then what about honoring times when people just need to take things for themselves, and savor or process or cultivate that knowledge by themselves. Maybe the takeaway for that person at that moment—not for their entire lives but just at that moment—is to create a rich experience of their own elsewhere. You know?

SPENCER: Definitely.

ANNA: I mean, I just like that it makes room for that, not that that's, like, the ultimate goal, either. That privacy and the individual are just as valuable as the collective and the co-creative and that these two things are mutually generative.

SPENCER: Well, I think about the pressure of consensus, too, and this idea that to get to consensus, you're having to modify the shape. People are having to bend and compromise, which is incredibly challenging to happen and potentially doesn't really exist. And to be OK with the fact that, yeah, people have to be able to take away what they need. And be able to contribute to it at a level that's valuable and meaningful for them in whatever way they need that to be.

ANNA: It's reminding me of what I was struggling with in the beginning of our conversation, which I am still perplexed by—how much I thrived within a power dynamic. I'm reflecting on how that allows for a certain amount of anonymity or privacy or something. There is something about those power dynamics, as prescriptive as they are, if you can find or are allowed to find your own way through them and not be completely beaten down by them then there's a kind of space or allowance for human nature—or maybe even important stage of growth—

that is sometimes lost when there is a requirement to agree with the group.

One of my struggles with understanding the Reggio Emilia Emergent Curriculum—which maybe was why I tried to put it into practice through the *C'mon Language* exhibition—what was always told to me is that "we don't have a curriculum in the class." Somehow this group of four- or five- or six-year-olds goes out to the play yard or sits around in a circle in the classroom and magically over the course of X period of time, a day, a week, a month, it becomes really clear that the students are all interested in the same thing. But the only way I can imagine this happening would look more like one day something attracts enough students that it becomes a collective decision, more about popularity and coercion than collectivity.

I don't think the teachers are totally fabricating it; I don't mean to imply that. But there's part of me that's like, "Yeah… OK, maybe, but what about the few kids who didn't agree? What about them?" If the requirement is for everyone to decide on the same thing, did you help the kids who don't have another way of finding their own interests? Did you make room for them to find that? Is it just another form of pressure? It's not top down, it's more horizontal.

SPENCER: How does that allow people to find their own interests?

ANNA: Or to be equal contributors. If the idea is that everyone has knowledge to share, everyone has experiences to share, everyone has a perspective to share, then there's just another manifestation of influence, of hierarchical leadership.

SPENCER: Right?

ANNA: Sure, there's a teacher at the front of the classroom; they are not invisible, but somebody put the teacher there and that's an invisible force. So there's something about this

pause idea that you seem to be implementing that's, like, oh wow. Maybe that pause or that expanding beyond the class and taking it outside breaks it…maybe it sort of undoes that force.

SPENCER: It definitely gives folks the ability to chew on these ideas in another space that's outside all of those pressures. Like you were saying, the longer you hold onto an idea, it chemically changes, it physically changes. It can be based on the light in the room or what sounds are around.

To give that space to do that and to talk about it to just one person or three people or five people or having the whole room present is all part of processing something. I guess that's why they tell you to sleep on it before you make a big decision.

ANNA: [*laughs*]

Not Really Blood Family, but Family

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Amanda Leigh Evans & The Living School of Art

AMANDA: So, as you know, the Living School of Art was invited to be part of a book about participatory education, which is why I asked you to join this conversation today. Throughout the work we've done together over the past three years, I've appreciated what you have to say about art, education, and learning. Our conversation is going to be recorded and then will be transcribed for the book. At any point while we're talking, if you decide you want a break, or you want to go somewhere else, or erase something you said, that's OK. If you want to just listen but not talk, that's OK, too. Also, feel free to grab more snacks, and if you need to go to the bathroom, just get up and go ahead. OK?

FIORI: What are we going to talk about?

AMANDA: Where should we start? This whole conversation is about the Living School of Art and participatory education. Do you have any ideas on what that might mean?

ADONAY: Wait, how do you say that word?

AMANDA: Par-ti-ci-pa-tory.

ADONAY: Par-tispic…[*laughter*]

BLANCA: It's even hard for me.

AMANDA: It's hard to say. What does it mean? In participatory education, the people who are learning are part of deciding how they want to learn and what they want to learn. I say person learning instead of student because I'm not in school anymore, but I'm still learning things all the time, so I will probably always be a learner. When you are at school, who decides what you're going to learn and how you're going to learn it?

FIORI: The teacher.

DAILA: The school board. The district entities.

AMANDA: Do you or your families participate in decisions on what you learn at school or how the school functions?

GROUP: No.

AMANDA: OK, so that would be more like the opposite of participatory education. Participatory means that we would get to be part of deciding what we want to learn or how we want to learn it. It could also mean deciding we want to try something new, even if we're not sure it would work.

DAILA: In a typical education system, where you go to public school, they already give you standards when you arrive. There are main subjects you have to learn and there is testing. You have to have education on math, science, and English all taught in a specific way. But then there's secondary subjects that you could learn that aren't as important to the school as they are to you. Like music, or art, and a lot of other stuff. So participatory education might give us more of an outlook to those secondary subjects. It gives us more of an advantage on different subjects that would not be taught.

AMANDA: That's a good point. Did you mention subjects that have been given lesser importance or even subjects that aren't included in school at all because you value them? If you had the power to choose what you were going to learn in school, what would you include?

FIORI: Camping. I would make camping part of school. We would just talk about what you would do when you go into nature, and then we would go camping. I would also have a lot of math.

AMANDA: A lot of math? You wish you did more math at school?

FIORI: Yes, I like it. And I wish they would give homework. It's boring at home. We just watch TV.

ZAIRA: I feel like school generally just puts facts in your head. But they don't teach us life lessons or things that will be meaningful to us, like how to cook.

DAILA: How to do taxes, how to calculate percentages when you're shopping.

FIORI: How to build stuff on your own, like building a bench or building a little table. Or a tiny house for your dog.

ZAIRA: Yeah, or if you ever want to have a kid of your own, how to teach your kid and raise them well. They don't teach us life skills at school, but those things are really important to learn.

HELAI: They just stuff things in our head, like fractions, which we're probably going to forget soon.

ZAIRA: I feel like most facts I usually forget. But if they teach us more life skills, and we got to try it for ourselves instead of just read it in a book, it helps us out more in life.

HELAI: I would include something so when you take tests, it doesn't matter about the grade percentage. And it just matters that you tried your best and you showed your work.

AMANDA: So instead of having someone who was the best and somebody was the worst, you would give grades differently?

ZAIRA: Yeah. In regular school an A is, "Great. You did good. Keep on doing it." But an F basically just says you've failed, and if you get that message you don't want to try hard the next time.

HELAI: When you see an F, I feel like it just makes you more stressed out. So on the next test you try hard, but you're distracted because you're stressed during the test. You don't really know what to do. I would want students to feel encouraged.

AMANDA: Yeah, in school there are a lot of feelings and experiences, things that can make you feel good and things that could make you feel bad. How would you teach someone life skills in school?

ZAIRA: Well, the kids I guess would be in situations where they were responsible for things, and they would have to figure it out. Or meet somebody who is doing it and watch them. Like I have learned how to take care of a kid because I take care of my brothers.

AMANDA: How would you teach cooking or taxes or things like that?

ZAIRA: The same way—kids would just have to do them. I mean, of course there should be people to help them and show them what to do. You could see why it's important for your life and why you'd use it in the future. Maybe you would have an assignment where you have to cook for your family.

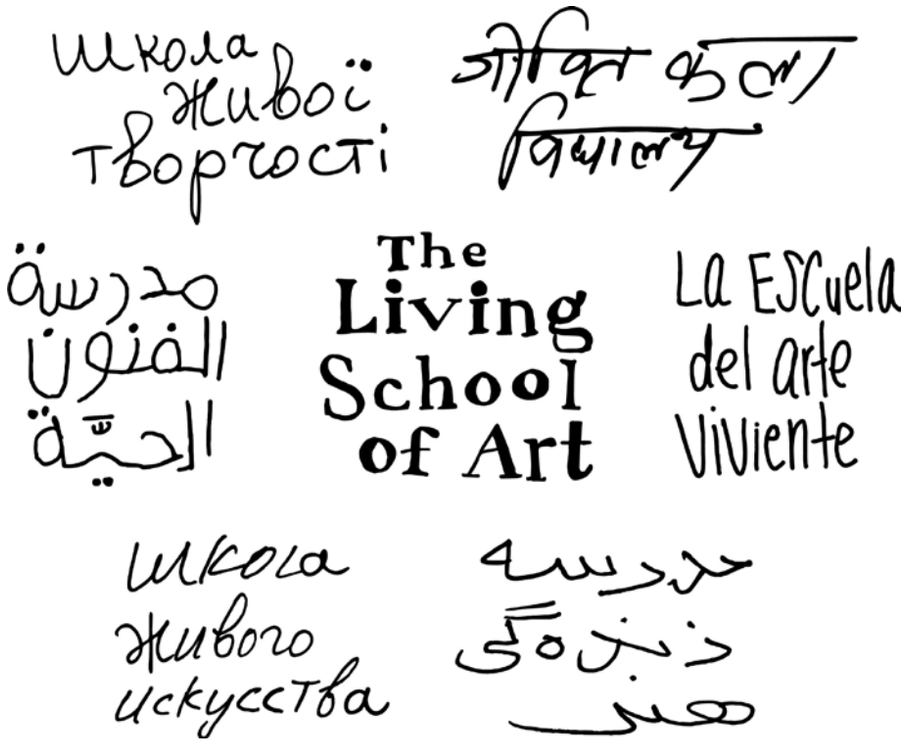
AMANDA: What's our style for learning things at the Living School of Art here in our apartment community?

HELAI: Well, it's different from school because people sometimes just come over. Sometimes artists visit or we talk about them. Or we go to their studio. Or kids go to the art studio here.

ADONAY: That we do art and film. Fun stuff to do.

ZAIRA: There's no right or wrong thing to do with art or with what we do at the Living School of Art. Because we do a lot

Gael recording a self-directed movement film as part of the Living School of Art 2019 winter open studio program.



The Living School of Art logo.

of different things like express our emotions and experiences. You don't really get to do that in school. At school there's just a certain assignment and then you do it. We don't really pick what we want to do. It's just, "Do this."

DAILA: Because the education system hasn't been updated since the peak of factory workers. And it was based on the factory system. It's all proper and all mandatory. But over here it's more fluid. It is a less stressful art practice. We learn more about art and different mediums that you could do with it. But we also learn more about community-based projects and stuff like that.

AMANDA: How do we decide as a group what we're going to do?

ADONAY: You ask us a question and then if everyone agrees or decides on something, then we just do it.

AMANDA: Yeah. That's definitely one method that we use a lot, for sure. Especially in the summer program, right? If nobody wanted to do something, then we just wouldn't do it because what's the point?

HELAI: Well, this year we got a list of artists who wanted to meet us, and we chose which artists we wanted to come, and then we planned stuff for those artists. We liked a lot of them, but there were a couple we didn't like, but we got most of the artists. And then we did stuff with them.

ZAIRA: I feel like we don't have to do anything in particular if we don't want to. We just plan stuff and try it. And it doesn't have to be one thing for the whole year. Like painting, clay, shirts, performance, video, food, and different stuff like that.

AMANDA: Yeah. What happens when you're bored with something here? What changed with the Living School of Art when you got bored with drawing earlier this summer?

BARSHA: We did something different.

ADONAY: We just try something new that we have never done.

BLANCA: Does it ever feel scary to try something new?

ZAIRA: Some people only think they're bad at something. But then they try it out and then it's not as bad. But there's no perfect thing to do necessarily with art. You can just have fun with it. I usually just get scared if I mess up. But if I make a mistake on drawing something or painting something, I usually just add it to my drawing and make it something completely different and it turns out way different from what I planned to do in the beginning.

BLANCA: Has anyone else tried something new and it felt a little bit scary at first?

ADONAY: Planting the flowers over there [*points to medicinal herb garden*].

BLANCA: Yeah? What part of that made you feel scared to try?

ADONAY: I didn't really know what to do. And I didn't know if they were going to tell us how to do it. So I was scared that I was going to do it wrong and that the plant was going to die.

HELAI: Well, I always feel scared of, you know, spiders. Whenever I go in the garden I don't like it because I'm scared of bugs, and spiders, and bees. I'm scared that they're going to come on me.

AMANDA: I've noticed you've had some brave moments in that, though. I remember one time when you tried something new, you held a worm when we were digging in the garden. Do you remember that?

HELAI: Well, yeah. A little, a little, a little. Well, I still like the garden; I just don't like the bugs.

AMANDA: I guess one thing about the Living School of Art that makes it really different from other ways of learning is that we all live here together. So that's a lot of time together and although some of our time is structured, there are many times where we don't have a plan. Sometimes you just come over and we hang out and something happens because we are hanging out together. Like how Myranda came over earlier this summer and she said, "I have this idea for an ocean drawing that I really want to make." And then she just started making it on a giant piece of paper. Then other people wanted to help, and she decided to let some people work on it with her. She worked on it for a few weeks here and there when she had time.

And so the way that we work together is more fluid than school. Although we sometimes have goals and things to accomplish, that's not always the case. Sometimes we make a plan for a specific thing, like the *Make Nachos* performance we did last week, but sometimes it just happens when you feel like it. We are all around each other quite a bit, so we have the opportunity to let things happen when they need to happen. A lot of you wake up, play together before school, ride the bus together, have class together all day at school, and come home and play together until dark. You might spend more time together than some families spend together. And I'm curious to know what you think our relationship is like? If you had to introduce me to somebody, what would you say I am to you? If you're like, "This is Amanda, my…"

HELAI: Friend.

FIORI: Fun and nice. Neighbor? Or art teacher.

ZAIRA: No, I wouldn't call you a teacher. Because I feel like you're different from a teacher.

Make Nachos (after Alison Knowles), 2019, a Fluxus performance directed by youth at the Living School of Art.

HELAI: And you're not a teacher.

ZAIRA: Because you let us do what we want. And most teachers are like, "You have to be on something." That you always have to do things and they're boring.

AMANDA: So I'm not like a teacher because I'm not forcing you to do things?

DAILA: I would say more like a mentor because, I don't know. You guide us.

ZAIRA: Yeah, I wouldn't call you my friend. I would call you more like, what Daila said, a mentor.

BLANCA: When we use the word *community*, what do you think of when you hear that word?

ADONAY: Sit in a group—that's the first thing that came out of my head.

FIORI: A lot of people together.

BLANCA: Does community sometimes feel like family to any of you? I see lots of people nodding their heads. Is community different from family?

DAILA: I feel like it's distant family. They're there. And you might know some of them. But you might not know all of them. And you can know a lot about different things in your community that some people in that same community don't know about you. Like Myranda was tiny when I met her. Helai, tiny. Deewa, even tinier. I've seen a lot of people grow. So it does feel like we are family, but not family at the same time. I feel like it's because this apartment complex community is actually really close to each other.

ZAIRA: Yes, because we've all known each other for a while now. Most of us were little kids or babies when we got here. We've basically grown up together. And we've gotten to see how far we've come. So probably…I don't know. Not really blood family, but family.

AMANDA: I totally agree with that, our community is really special. We get to be close with each other in a way that is like an extended family. We hang out almost every day. Many of your parents are also my friends and I get to spend time with them while you're at school. And everything we do together is made through this close relationship we share. I've really appreciated being part of this family with you.

We've been doing this for going on three years. And Deewa who is sitting here next to me is six. So Deewa, half of your life we've been doing this together.

HELAI: Deewa likes to be in the garden. Because she makes bean videos.

AMANDA: Yeah. Deewa makes good videos.

HELAI: Deewa. Deewa, sing the bean song. The bean song from the bean tent in our garden.

DEEWA: No. I'm going to laugh.

BLANCA: I love the bean song.

AMANDA: Maybe we can sing the bean song at the end?

BLANCA: One of the biggest things I've noticed as I've been staying here this week is that because Amanda lives here, she gets to have a really close friendship or relationship with a lot of you. And it was really different for me to see everyone come by her home at different parts of the day. And that she even

sometimes takes care of you. I think that that's really special. Because it tells me that not only do you all trust Amanda, and her home, and Phil, too, but that your families trust her to watch you and take care of you. And I've never had a relationship with a teacher like that before.

It's funny because I'm also a teacher. I taught at Floyd Light and at Madison High School, but I only got to see my students for a few hours a day when they were at school. Then they would go home, and I never knew what was going on at home. These students might be going through a lot of hard things and I wouldn't know what they were going through.

But sometimes they'd tell me that one of their favorite parts of the day was when they would come see me, and we'd just talk or play games and something. So I feel like all of you have that with Amanda here and with each other. It's even bigger, because you are all neighbors and like you said, kind of a family.

HELAI: That is true because my mom always asks Amanda if she can watch us when she needs to help my dad. And when we're not hanging out doing something, it's kind of boring here. Like we come over and just cook or watch a movie or go to the garden or paint.

BLANCA: Something else that I've noticed is that you teach Amanda a lot of things, too. Do you agree with that? Do you think you all teach her things even if you're not trying to teach her something? I see some heads nodding.

AMANDA: Well, for example, Adonay is always showing me things he's noticing that I never saw before. He's really good at looking at something and noticing a face or a shape in it. Or he'll say, "Oh, that spill looks just like a bird!" And I think, "Yeah, you're right. I never saw that before." But because he teaches me to see it that way, then I get to see it, too. Have you all noticed that? He'll look at a piece of wood and he'll see a…

ADONAY: A monkey face! [*points to a piece of wood*]

AMANDA: Exactly. There is a memory I really cherish from our early time together. I think it was when Myranda and Helai were learning to ride bikes without training wheels. Do you remember that? Helai, Myranda, Sammy, Andres, and a couple other people were learning to ride a bike all in the same week. We were over by the garage, because that used to be our old studio before the new one here next to my apartment, and you used to practice riding bikes in front of the garage. We used the tools in the garage to take the training wheels off of your bikes. And I remember that Myranda figured it out first, how to ride a bike on her own. Then she told the rest of you how she figured it out, and then you watched her, and you figured it out pretty much within that same day. It was like on a random Monday nobody knew how to ride a bike without training wheels and then by Wednesday, everyone was riding bikes as if they always knew how.

That was so amazing to me. I felt honored that I got to watch you figuring those things out for yourselves. And that had nothing to do with art at all, but it was part of our life together. It was just part of being neighbors. Through that experience you taught me about intuition and courage, and about sharing what you know.

Do you think kids have knowledge that other people could learn from? What could kids contribute to our learning community here at the apartments?

ZAIRA: Adults have more responsibilities than us. They have to pay their taxes, their rent, all of that. But us, we just get to enjoy it. I feel like adults, they should also have their free time to do whatever they need to do. And get all the stress away. They should just have more time for themselves and we could help them with that. Also they should try new things that they would think it's more for kids, but it could also be for adults.

AMANDA: Try new things and have more fun? How would you teach an older person to do that?

FIORI: Encourage them to do it. Just tell them it's not going to be scary. Like when you were three years old going down the slide for the first time, your mom tells you it's not scary and you get used to it.

BLANCA: Can I share something that all of you have taught me while I've been here? You probably didn't even know you were teaching me something. It's connected to what Zaira said about youth teaching older people how to just chill out and relax. Right? Watching young people, all of you, reminds me that I just need to stop and play, and that's OK.

A lot of you seem to say what's on your mind, and I admire that. I've noticed that as an adult sometimes I feel something and I'll want to say it, but then I don't say it because I feel that I'm going to hurt someone else's feelings. Or that it's going to sound stupid. Or that it's going to be weird.

Everyone here just says what they want, says what's in their head, and I think that's really brave. It reminds me to do that again. To be playful, and to not be scared of sharing how I'm feeling. Those are two things I've learned since I've been here for almost a week, and I just wanted to say thank you.

FIORI: And did you ask what we learned?

AMANDA: No! Should we ask that question? OK. So what are some things you've learned?

FIORI: Well, I learned how to shape something with clay this summer.

ADONAY: Remember a long time ago when me, and Sammy, and Adrian used to come over to the art studio? We first made different things out of clay. I made a hand. Adrian made a car.

Then we attached them together. Then we made drawings of eagles.

DAILA: This summer I learned how to screen print. That was outside of the field trips and other group stuff.

BARSHA: I learned how to use a drill. I think I learned that when we were building the cardboard fort.

HELAI: I think I learned how to drill when we made the greenhouse. And after I started making garden boxes with you.

AMANDA: And then did you teach anybody else how to do it?

BARSHA: You taught us, Helai.

AMANDA: You taught Barsha and Sital? You know who else you taught? Do you remember this? You taught your dad. You taught your dad how to use it when we were building the community garden boxes here.

BLANCA: That's cool because I often think that adults teach kids things like that. You flipped it, Helai. My dad always taught me how to use tools, so it's inspiring to hear someone as young as you taught their dad how to do that.

HELAI: I don't know how my dad didn't know how to drill. He knows about screws and stuff. But I don't know why he doesn't know how to use a drill, because he works in the screw section at Home Depot.

AMANDA: Helai, that was actually really important that you taught him. Because it's part of his job and now he can talk about it more from experience. And I think that's really amazing. When I learned how to use tools, I learned them from men. And one of the things with the Living School of Art is a lot of

the tools we use, girls and women are using those tools and teaching other people.

HELAI: I also taught Myranda how to use the pottery wheel.

AMANDA: How did you do that?

HELAI: Well, first you taught me. And then I started getting the hang of it. And then Myranda came to the garage and she wanted to make one. She wanted you to teach her, but you said, "Why don't you teach her?" So I did, and we both made stuff.

DAILA: I learned how to paint on my own. The basics of painting. I guess I figured it out because I had a key to the studio, and I would just come mess around with the canvases and the paints alone. Then I made some paintings.

It was winter break and I think I was just bored and I wanted to make art. So I came here. And I used up, I think, all of the canvases while I was here. I came for a few hours at a time. I would say every week leading up to the exhibition at the Children's Museum. Then I had one of the paintings I made in the show.

AMANDA: I remember when you were doing that. You were working so hard. You would just come whenever you wanted, and every time I would peek into the studio there would be even more paintings in there. And then the paintings you were doing inspired Vanessa to make some, too. She learned from you and was inspired by what you were doing.

FIORI: I learned how to make stuff that looks hard to make, but it's actually really easy. Like the shirt we made with a little heart. We made it with the screens, and it was actually kind of easy.

AMANDA: OK, I'm noticing some fidgeting. We're almost done. We've been talking for nearly an hour, and I know that's a long

time. Thank you for how long you have been sitting. I just want to ask you one more question. And I think this is, for me, what ties everything togeth—[*laughter from the group interrupts*].

ZAIRA: I don't know what's so funny.

DAILA: Someone farted [*laughter escalates*].

AMANDA: OK. All right [*laughter continues*]. Can I ask one last question?

DAILA: Yeah. Whoever that was, please don't fart again.

AMANDA: So you all know this but the Living School of Art is not a real school. It's not an organization. It's not like a business or anything like that. We are not a nonprofit. But we are kind of like an artist collective. It's just us making this thing together. If I weren't here or you weren't here, it wouldn't exist. The Living School of Art could not be somewhere else unless all the different parts that make it were there.

And so the two words that are most important in our name are the words *living* and *art*. Part of that is because we all live together. Part of that is because the art we make is alive. Sometimes it's plants. Sometimes it's art about our life in the apartments. Sometimes it's cooking or art for our homes. The living part is our core.

So art and life are happening here all the time. We don't have to go somewhere else to be experiencing art. Art is happening here with us, made by us and with people who visit us. If we were living in a different apartment building, maybe if you wanted to experience art you would have to go to the art museum to experience it. Here, we get to make it whenever we choose to, and we define art broadly to encompass the interests, cultures, families, and life experiences we each bring to the table. Artists who make work that goes in museums also come visit us.

Lupe performing in *Liberando tu Estrés y Regresando a la Calma (Liberating Your Stress and Returning to Calm)*, 2019, a conceptual painting workshop on anxiety and migration led by neighbor and artist Eunice Tapia.

Helai performing her work, *Rainbow Cut Piece*, as part of our retrospective exhibition at the Portland Children's Museum, 2019.

And so I just wanted to hear from you on this last question. Do you feel like anything that we've done together, all of our hanging out, art projects, artists we work with, or places we've gone, has a deeper connection to your life? Are there values that have come into your life through this experience? Something relevant to other parts of your life or your future?

ZAIRA: Yeah. I learned how to make food and to make a lot of different stuff. Because I got to work with Jodie Cavalier. And every time after art we got to make food. We made a bunch of art pieces for our show at the Children's Museum. Sometimes we would share it with other people. And just have a talk about it. And about what's going on in our lives. Cooking is going to be involved a lot in my life when I grow up. I don't like sitting down and being lazy.

One of my favorite trips is probably when we went to the Children's Museum to see our exhibit. We had the power to just go around the museum and just explore it everywhere, even in the workshop. And I liked it because our group, I think we went outside to the tree. And we were all playing hide-and-seek and tag. It was just a break from putting all the art out. The show was worth it at the end, because all of our work paid off.

AMANDA: Yeah, I remember that the Children's Museum just kind of let us do whatever we wanted at the museum and our show. You all led that.

FIORI: And I liked going to the Children's Museum for our show, too. Because I got to see some big sculptures that were made out of clay and the art show that the kids at the apartments made. I really like making things with clay.

DAILA: Well, the Living School of Art doesn't really only teach art. It teaches about a lot of other stuff. Especially plants and stuff. So, yeah, to answer that, I've gotten more knowledge than just art. Even though I know art is at the center.

And I don't know if this counts as the Living School of Art, but I was thinking about when me, Helai, and Johnny went to participate at the KSMoCA Fair last summer. It was a summer program that Amanda and Roz [Crews] led. It was really fun. And I got to meet a lot of artists that are really cool, and it was really my first time doing anything like that. We made an art fair.

AMANDA: OK. Is there anything anybody wants to say at the end?

DEEWA: Beans. Beans.

BLANCA: Beans?

ZAIRA: Beans.

AMANDA: Should we sing Deewa's bean song?

GROUP: Yeah.

AMANDA: Do you want to teach us, Deewa?

DEEWA: Beans in your teeth. Beans in your nose.

GROUP: Beans in your eyes. Beans in your hair. Beans in your fingers. Beans in your eyebrows.

DEEWA: Always remember to eat your beans and you love them.

This conversation took place in Amanda's living room and included a handful of members from the Living School of Art: Adonay Berhane (age 8), Amanda Leigh Evans (age 29), Barsha Subba (age 13), Daila Galicia Zuniga (age 14), Deewa Abdul Wiyal (age 6), Fiori Theresa Berhane (age 10), Helai Abdul Wiyal (age 10), Myranda Alonso-Sierra (age 8), Zaira Salgado (age 11), and summer 2019 visiting artist-in-residence Blanca Villalobos.

Sarah Workneh & Dawn Philip

Rupture

SARAH: I thought we should start with a brief introduction of who we are, how we know each other, and why we are having this conversation. I'll start—I'm a codirector of Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture.

DAWN: I am a psychotherapist and recovering lawyer. I met you when I was doing a clinical fellowship, and Skowhegan was looking for a therapist to be there for the summer.

SARAH: When Harrell Fletcher and Molly Sherman invited me to have a conversation about participatory education, they asked me to select someone to speak with and I immediately knew I wanted to be in dialogue with you. At this point, we have worked together for two summers and if you can have an educational experience that is participatory between just two people, I think we have done it! But maybe we should start at the beginning of why I sought you out and the work we have done together, which in my mind has been very centered around not just participatory practices, but how we look at an institution on a cellular level so that it can facilitate equitable participation across a diverse group of individuals and what the preconditions are to promote that.

There was a moment in recent years when I realized that, in bringing together a large group of people for an extended and isolated period of time, there is an enormous responsibility in facilitating those relationships. It is not enough to just have people adjacent…parallel to each other, that care, generosity, rigor, and learning some different kinds of communication were really important for actual exchange about individual practices or art work, but more important in negotiating a kind of abstract patience and openness in talking about topics like race, gender, class, sexuality, history, colonialism, trauma, labor—what have you—that surrounds the artworks that we make. Part of these questions have also emerged from interrogating how we learn history, how we validate and/or prioritize rightness, and so when changing how we relate to each other and our own capacity

for new information or perspectives…we actually have to release some of the power of existing information, assumptions, histories.

I think you and I have both seen an effort at increasing diversity in institutional spaces, but not a whole lot of acknowledgment of the work that goes along with bringing in a diverse group of people, and not just the expectation that we are all.… That diversity within an institutional space doesn't mean that we all agree, that we all share the same vocabulary, or that we all have the same needs. When any kinds of diversities are united in a space without thinking about all of those surrounding factors—it almost becomes competitive and oftentimes just reinforces difference. Anyway, in that specific moment, I realized that I needed help in doing this. So I went looking for you.

DAWN: It was an interesting moment that you asked me, because I was doing a clinical fellowship at what is known as a PWI, a predominantly white institution, where I was also experiencing the disconnect between the therapy I was doing in the therapy room and the social context in which a lot of my students of color, a lot of my queer students, a lot of my trans students, were operating. So they'd come to therapy and see therapists who, I think, sometimes did not understand their social location, and because of that did not really understand the mental health issues and wellness issues that they were going through.

At the point you reached out to me, I was also thinking about this idea of education, and how people participate in education, what the barriers are to their full participation, and how they learn, both in classrooms and from their colleagues, and how I was learning from my colleagues. So it was an interesting, almost serendipitous, matching.

SARAH: I don't think I've ever asked you this before, but just hearing you talk right now about your students of color

and queer students coming to see you in a therapeutic setting, do you think their desire to speak to you was also partially influenced by…less their particular pathology of mental health, and more their social location that you just mentioned. What's the line between mental health and also just feeling frustrated, alienated, and not included in an institution like that?

DAWN: It's a great question. I think the line is much blurrier than a lot of therapists, especially therapists in a college setting, want to recognize. So I would say there's not a lot of sunlight between one's social location and one's ability to thrive in any institution. Like, what is mental health if not influenced by your various identities, your class background, how you move through the world, right? It doesn't change automatically once you get to college, and once you get into a therapy room. I think that the disconnect between therapy and the political space has been that. I think a lot of therapists who are more politicized, especially now, try to engage in therapy in a really different way. Frankly, it's the only reason that it made sense for me to be at Skowhegan, because you needed that intersection of understanding a participant's social location and where they come from, and how they engage in their art practice. I think that was critical, and I think that's what you were for looking as well.

SARAH: I don't know that I knew that that was specifically what I needed, but it seemed clear once I met you that that conversation was what I was looking for. The way in which we have worked together to implement change was, as you said, like this serendipitous meeting between the two of us, where we could evaluate an aspiration for how we wanted people to interact from a location of safety and equity, but also from a position where conversations weren't closed and trying to identify and offer the tools to be able to do that. Understanding that each person that comes into a specific space has all of this information, and it's not all shared, and how to enable

an institutional setting that would allow for all these different things to coexist and not be adversarial, and actually be engaged with each other. So, in some sense, participatory in the way that we're having this conversation.

DAWN: It's interesting to use the words *participatory* and *adversarial* in the same breath, because to some extent you could argue that to be fully participatory is going to incentivize being adversarial. Being adversarial, being in tension or having conflict, is part of the participation.

A lot of the institutions that I've been a part of speak of a diversity culture, but it can often feel like token diversity—meaning it's diversity if you think like us, if you think like the powers that be, which are largely white male. But it's not diversity of opinion. It's not diversity of perspective. I think that's a really important distinction. I guess the thing that I was really impressed by, and it was clear from the questions you were asking me, you were more interested in equity than diversity. Because I think of those as really different things.

So I'm just curious, what is your understanding of the relationship between what it means to be participatory, or engaged in a participatory practice, and adversarial and conflict? How do you work through that in an ethical way?

SARAH: I agree…participation is not exclusive of conflict. I think conflict and not knowing, and/or being wrong, are all part of an actual, true participation. Being open to participation and its inherent conflicts, being excited by the potential of a new way of understanding conflict defies a more prescriptive occupation of role or idea that is very fixed, where if you're not within that knowledge set you are wrong, and that's when it becomes adversarial. I think we are both interested in understanding how we can occupy the space for entertaining ideas that are different from ours, rather than how do we not. Does that make sense?

When you have an institution that's made up of human beings, it's not enough to just dump them in one space and

assume it's all going to work out fine and be productive, and everybody's going to learn all these things. So, it seems to be part of my responsibility to say, if we're going to bring people together and we're actually going to be able to expect them to listen to each other, they don't have to get along but they have to at least be able to engage with each other's content as humans in a semi-productive way, that as leaders in an educational environment we need to provide a community with some kind of framework or the tools I mentioned earlier by which we're going to try to do this together. How do we actually enact both forgiveness and listening, and allow the space for people to be wrong, and allow for people to say things that we don't necessarily agree with without having to shut it down immediately, rather than hearing it, understanding that it's not necessarily an emergency, and that there is space to engage it?

DAWN: The secular version of the forgiveness would be a thing that we also talk a lot about, which is generosity. We were talking earlier about how each of us practices generosity, and how our educating principles are…mine in the therapy room and yours as a director, are centered around this idea of generosity, and how we relay that. For me in a therapy room…if someone has a certain perspective about a certain interaction, or a certain way of being in the world, feeling bad about a certain situation or blaming someone for something, or calling someone racist or sexist or something, not that that's not true, but I try really hard to allow a deepening of other…how their backgrounds relate to a certain series of events, and also, what could alternative framings be? This is really important for me in my practice. Not because I'm trying to dilute the truth of what they're saying. But because I'm trying to deepen their understanding of their own truth, because it always goes deeper. It always goes deeper than the initial gloss of, like, this is what this person means, and this is what I think that this person means. Does that resonate?

SARAH: I think, as women of color of a certain generation, we have been acculturated toward a dangerous level of tolerance that is maybe a little in conflict with the modes of the people that we work with now…and the funny thing is that neither is enough. I'm sure you've experienced it in therapy, and I'm sure I've experienced it in my job, where the response is like, "It's not my job to teach people, it's not my job to tolerate this." For me, that's the same kind of rigidity that I want to find ways to transgress through participatory education, right? To have a more nuanced and engaged conversation that doesn't necessarily allow the person the space to get away with the racist behavior or a sexist behavior, but a way that actually… it's not constructive to end it just there any more so than it is constructive to just go along with it because that's the way the world is. So when we investigate, as you say, multiple options for someone to understand their experience—where do you go from that? How do you see that as transformative for the person who has maybe experienced a transgression or aggression?

DAWN: Irshad Manji, who is the creator of the Moral Courage Project, wrote a pretty controversial book on Islam and has received death threats for basically advocating for a more universal understanding of human rights. She talks a lot about what she gets from her students, which is kind of the same thing. "It's not my job to educate." What she responds to in this podcast I was listening to was interesting. She was like, "Do you want change? Then it's your job to educate."

SARAH: Yes. Yes, I've had that same conversation.

DAWN: Right? I'm really sympathetic to both. I've definitely been in rooms and conversations where, like, I'm tired. I have said that to people.

SARAH: I guess in some way, the negotiation of all of this stuff is also like the fabric of offering a truly participatory space—

where the conversation has actually not just been about the content of the thing we are learning, but the modes through which we want to learn, what that means for different people, and what we have been trained to go along with in terms of how we learn, and ways to imagine a counterbalance to that. So when someone is like, "It's not my job to teach." Is that a resistance to the expectation or the historic labor of having to explain more than it is a resistance to the actual act of wanting to mutually contribute to what we know about each other?

And maybe part of the work that you and I aim to do is to change the whole context of learning—the space in which the learning is actually happening—to open that up a little. We are more facilitators of educational capacity than we are teachers necessarily, and when I say capacity I mean setting the substructure both within individuals and institutions to offer a more open space for discovery. And your particular way of understanding that substructure as a therapist is something I really value about working with you.

I feel like what we've collaborated on is the creation or the act of creating a new set of conditions through which people can participate, and participate with others, in an educational growth experience. When we think about the work that we've done together versus the work you do at your other job, how do we change those conditions by which people understand how they interact with the substructure of individuals but also the substructure of the institution? And how do we give access to that space as an equal space of reconstruction or maybe reconstitution? You spoke about it earlier—by asking questions about how they can start to not necessarily understand and answer something as concrete, but instead by asking many different kinds of questions.

DAWN: One thing that's unique about my role, which is a unique role at my college but I think an emerging role across a lot of these colleges right now in mental health, is that I do half-time clinician, individual therapy, but I also do a lot of outreach

programming, education stuff around connecting the counseling center, the mental health, to the various marginalized student populations and other populations.

Mental health is not a walled-off thing from everything else. This is all much blurrier and much messier, and as participatory as anything should be. It's much more intertwined, right? Mental health is someone's family, and it is how they understand learning, and it's how they engage in the classroom, and also it's how they engage with their finances, and also it's in how they engage or not engage with conflict, or in relationships, or with their own…so many things.

SARAH: I think why I wanted to have this conversation with you in particular is that I see your work as a different angle on the same questions that I engage in my work, and for me this work has particular implications for artistic production and how our culture engages ways of seeing and what is seen and how.

What are the preconditions that make for an environment by which we can have a…not only tolerance, but an actual interest, in exposing things that are not known and engaging things that are not known and talking about things that are not known, in hopes that that becomes the methodology by which we are capable learners in all aspects, whether that's how we think about art or economics, or how we think about borders, or how we think about science, or anything else, and is that capacity something that also needs to be taught in a school setting?

You know, when you think about how we were taught—we're both in our forties, right? There was a lot of information that was taught to us when we were younger that is seemingly now coming out as not being true, right? But yet we accepted all of this information because the way that information transfer happens is, a story is written by one group of people and is taken as truth, and is disseminated in all of these different institutions, and we learn it, we memorize it, we engage with it to some extent, and it's understood as a universal kind of truth, right?

Now to some extent we learn that there are all these different kinds of understandings, and many different truths. But is there ever a space where that kind of investigation of truth is actually engaged? It seems like the therapeutic process is somewhat—at least in the way that you do it—based on understanding multiple truths?

DAWN: It's like tunneling. I think the kinds of conditions we try to facilitate and I try to do in my therapy that is maybe a precondition to actual participatory forms of education, is not only trying to get someone to understand the unknown, but it's also trying to get someone to understand how they know what they know.

It's like, when you start actually going down the road of, "So you think you know this thing and that's great, I'm not questioning that, but how do you know that? How did you…. What is the path by which you came to that information?" That is everything. I think that process of exploration is the marriage of what you and I do, which is the individual and societal. We both have advocacy backgrounds, and I think it shows…. You, from your macro perspective, are thinking about the individual, and as a therapist, from my individual perspective, I'm always thinking about the societal. I think that's why we work well together, because it's like we are simultaneously asking both those questions, exploring the unknown, which is uncomfortable.

I love how in the book *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change*, [Myles] Horton and [Paulo] Freire go back and forth between this idea of education making people feel restless, and I love that.

Because that's important—that restlessness leads to the discomfort, which leads to the creativity, because restlessness, theoretically or realistically, leads to rupture, and the rupture leads to creativity. Part of that rupture is "Yeah, so how do we know that?" Like, not take it for fact. You can ask it really gently,

as I try to do, which is kind of like…I'll often say, "So, where does that come from? You just said this. Why do you know that? How do you know that?" Then I pause, because people often don't know.

SARAH: From my own perspective, I was never taught how to investigate how I know anything, really. So that seems like an important first question. How *do* I know anything? And who decided what I know.

I think that we have grown up placing a high value and, to some extent, competition around being correct, which doesn't help an educational process. It doesn't actually help an intellectual inquiry process, because it doesn't entertain the space for anything that isn't already something we kind of know. When you're in an environment where there's always a value judgment on whether somebody's statement is correct or incorrect or if that's the mode through which you attack questions and problem-solving, that it's either going to be wrong or it's going to be right, then you're already limiting the scope of the answer. And even worse, you will defend that rightness.

DAWN: Well, right is often aligned with what you think is… what your opinion is, right?

SARAH: I think generally, as a way of operating, I don't know if it comes from an economic, capitalist perspective where there isn't a whole lot of space for a mistake, or to be wrong, or to entertain.… Everything is constructively built on the thing that already exists. I think this is the danger of the way information is passed down through traditional schooling, which is that "OK, we're going to write this book on the history of the United States." We're going to give these topics maybe half a page, and that is going to be seen as how history is written. We're all going to understand that. And it's not really going to get interrogated.

Information is categorized as right, but in reality it's not right, or it's limited, or it's historicized in a particular way, but we've all learned that it's correct. How much time does it take to investigate and interrogate things that have been culturally learned?

I talk about my personal experience a lot—when I was an undergrad I worked in the physics department, and I was really impressed in the physics department by the manner in which people investigated with an openness, so they go forward with a hypothesis. They want an answer to be one way—they are invested in that hypothesis being true. Sometimes it's correct, but sometimes it's incorrect. Do they disvalue the incorrect answer, or do they value the incorrect answer for contributing to some extent to a sort of correctness of the initial assumption, because it's just more information. What happens when we all employ that as a tactic—an investigation without an anticipated outcome.

DAWN: Part of the problem with the polemical discourse that is in a lot of our spheres is, oftentimes the incorrect thing that someone says is directly related to some aspect of your identity that's been threatened, especially in this political environment.

I think the hardest aspect of this work is…how do you have radical empathy, or openness, or a level of…I don't like the word *tolerance*, but a level of engagement. Oftentimes you're sitting with something, and the reason it's hard to sit with is because it's so threatening to your very existence. Sometimes that's political and historical or both.

In some sense, these are all reflections of my own experiences, and these are all frustrations with the information that I have been given as a person, and also what was expected of me societally, and what I had access to or not, right? When you and I talk about setting the conditions within an institution, we're also trying to think about ways in which multiple people can embody or live inside that institution. How do you actually

create a learning environment where instead of people being separated, we can kind of actually have everybody in the same space?

You often are in the position of a translator, and I definitely feel that's true for me, because we're able to take some information and speak to a different group of people in a way that they understand, and then take that information, speak to this other group of people with it, and they understand because you're facile with using different kinds of language that are resonant with these specific groups.

In some ways, our educational structures don't lend themselves to participation because the surrounding structures are exclusive of participation. For example, we know this at the high school level. It's the connection between property taxes funding public education. Huge problem. So there are structural reasons because of decision-making powers being largely homogenous that we have been reading Faulkner and F. Scott Fitzgerald for years and years but not Baldwin, not Audre Lorde, not bell hooks, not third wave feminists until recently. That also speaks to…you talk a lot about it, Sarah, which is kind of, how do we come from these structures and create new structures around learning and knowing?

SARAH: I guess that *is* this exact conversation. You know, when I asked Harrell and Molly to define participatory education for the purposes of this conversation they defined it as an educational "activity" that basically presupposes that the teacher isn't the only person that has information and that students aren't simply the recipients of information. That somehow the students themselves are contributing to learning.

So in thinking about that in terms of your last question, I suppose what I am most interested in is not only changing the hierarchies or moving past a more traditional accounting for roles, but also in holding a space where we start to question what "knowledge" actually is. And feeling as though in order to actually even ask that question we have to entertain the

idea that, in fact, very few things are empirical or concrete, including our own reactions to information.

DAWN: And this is another way in which we overlap. I think therapy has come a long way in not necessarily believing this fiction of a therapist being like a blank slate—objective, like a truth. The more relational way of engaging with therapy, which I think is the better way, is…it's not that I'm objective, because there's no such thing as objectivity. I am aware enough of my own assumptions, and this is why therapists see therapists, or do the work of self-awareness—it's like, knowing that I can't be objective, understanding that I have my own biases and prejudices and assumptions that I make. This is why it's work… and constantly doing that work of, if you say something and I have an immediate reaction to it, that is my signal that that's my work. Why do I have such an immediate reaction to it? How do you do that relational work?

SARAH: In the same way that you are talking about a therapist as being seen as holding objective truth, in an educational setting, it applies to teachers as well. So how does one dissolve those more traditional roles of teacher and student? Or, for me, how do I model a certain kind of behavior as part of being a participant in this open education? It's not only how do you do the relational work, but how do you expose other people around you to the capacity for relational work as part of the inquiry? I wonder if that can get enacted and opened up in therapy in a similar way?

DAWN: It has to be a little different. There are a lot of internal processes that you don't share with the client because it's not part of the therapeutic process. You're constantly making these judgments about what should I share, what should I not share, right? So, there's no kind of, I guess for me at least, rubric to that. But there's a lot of literature in therapy about rupture and repair, and what that means. That rupture can create, if it's in

the right conditions, repair, and how that comes from a therapist being transparent but also demonstrating a certain kind of humility. It's hard, right, because you're supposed to be the "knower" in the room, the expert. But this all goes back to the rightness thing, right? This is the modeling you're talking about, Sarah.

SARAH: I feel like it's a very uncomfortable position to put yourself into, but my hope for the people I work with is that they can see people in positions of authority who are willing to not always be like, "I know everything, my rule is my rule, you have to go along with this whether or not you want to go along with it, whether or not you think it's right," and actually see, "Well, I'm interested in talking about many different ways of seeing the problem, but also you have to trust that I'm going to treat this, once I've heard you, with your thought in mind." Right?

I'm also just not willing to say that I'm always correct, either. I guess that goes back to this idea that I don't know everything, and I think it's actually my job not to know everything, and it's actually maybe even the point of being alive, right? So, again, I talk about it a lot. I'm not interested in the world that I was given as a person, so, in order for me to actually enact some change, it's not just to take all of that and just squish it into a new box, right? It's actually to think about all the ways in which the modalities of how that was enacted can get changed. So, it's actually not even the same picture any longer, right? That is also modeling, as the "authority," I am going to cede some of that position so that we can start questioning all of these roles and how knowledge moves between people.

DAWN: Totally, and I can speak for me, but I think it's true for you, too, it's like, I've been harmed by these institutions. I've been burned and have done so much emotional labor that has been really difficult in ways that I think are not always seen.

I think, as women of color in institutions, in predominantly white institutions, it's very exhausting in some ways not to have that be seen. But it's motivating, right? It motivates me to then create conditions both in the therapy room, and every space I'm in, where that doesn't exist.

SARAH: It is exhausting, but mostly it's exhausting in its lack of hopefulness, or it's exhausting in its inertia, in that it doesn't feel like it's changeable. I think that's why you and I work in the environments in which we work, because that is an actual space where all of that exhaustion can then also become hopeful, or promising, or transformed. Then the next interesting question becomes how do you create an environment where the people that are in those institutions actually feel like they are also participating in the construction of that hopefulness, even if they don't necessarily want to do it or feel like…even if they don't necessarily know how to do it. And even further, how do you teach people how to not know how to do something and be OK with it?

DAWN: That's a great question. I don't know.

SARAH: So then I guess if we accept that to some extent, then how does that expand into what we know and don't know and understand and don't understand about each other as people?

DAWN: To what extent can you always speak to each person's stuff? You can't.

SARAH: But maybe we have to start with acknowledging that as a baseline…where there is value to admitting that so that there is space for new information and not just assumptions.

You can't always speak to everybody's individual things within an institution, but you can create an institution that isn't legislatively against acknowledging that everybody has different things, and I guess that that's the thing that seems to be most

important for me in terms of…not only just an educational process, but also creating some sort of actual interest in the world as it's going forward, right? So it's the idea that, OK, there is not just one art historical narrative by which all things are measured.

We're just going to poke the bear of the Whitney Biennial, right, where someone…one of the reviewers said something about…or even *some* of the reviewers were saying things about how this iteration was very diverse, and yet there was no anger or protest included in the show, or it was tepid or whatever. One of the artists in the show, Simone Leigh, posted on Instagram something to the extent of just because you don't actually know the references through which my work is made and what I'm talking about because it relates to something that's outside of your context does not mean it is not political. Just because you can't recognize it doesn't mean it is not there. I am sorry if I am not doing that quote justice, but I feel like that's a really succinct way of talking about a lot of the problems within institutions, and also institutions that consider themselves to be participatory. They only count one kind of participation, one kind of history, one way of understanding the world, and that's where it starts to get in trouble, and that's where all of these structures are just getting replicated further and further, right?

DAWN: This is what we talked about earlier, and replicated in this sterilized universal way, and it's not universal. We talked a lot about specificity. As soon as concepts are assumed as universal, participatory anything doesn't work if you don't have specificity. I hear you speaking to something where it's kind of like…why can't it be the beginning of inquiry, and not just the closing assumption?

SARAH: Yeah. Why don't we just change the entire…yeah. It's like the whole thing has to go out in the garbage before—

DAWN: It's all garbage.

SARAH: And for me, I can see how we have learned about history, or how we have learned about economics, and the ways in which that can become very, very dangerous assumptions by which entire societies, billions of human beings, have to live in the world, right? It's, like, the entire false narrative of blackness or colonialism or whatever.

DAWN: Totally. I remember we were having this reading seminar in a therapeutics seminar I was in recently, and we were reading a very respected psychoanalyst talking about the universal psyche, and talking about colonialism and all this, and the only two women of color in the room, problematized…including me, were just like, "Does anyone have a problem with this psychoanalyst talking about the universal psyche as if there was a universal psyche? Are you joking? What is a universal psyche exactly?"

SARAH: It means this one guy's psyche and all of his friends. You know, I don't think that it's impossible to not…you can still derive meaning from all of these old texts that have existed in the world, but again, you have to engage with them in a different way, and find the things that make sense about them and whatever, and extrapolate from that idea forward. And there is going to be a lot of stuff that gets lost as we open up to different ways of understanding.

To bring it back to the more concrete educational processes, when we think about participatory education being as much led by the group of people in the room as it is by an authority, or an expert, or whatever, again, those things have to change. The terms of those things have to change, and it's not to say that beliefs in things like "a universal psyche" will go away, but then it becomes a question of how it actually gets talked about if somebody in the group wants to read it, but I want to read bell hooks, or I want to read Paulo Freire, or someone like that? How do those things start to become engaged with each other, and what do we learn from those crazy things coming together?

DAWN: And then also problematizing it, right?

SARAH: Yes! So maybe let's shift topics a little.… Or maybe this is a good moment to talk about different kinds of information in a truly participatory setting or a truly aspirational participatory setting, butting up against each other.

DAWN: When you were talking, I was thinking about how participation is so linked, and necessarily so, to listening, but also to privilege.

SARAH: Well, yeah, on a very basic level. Who are the loudest people in the classroom? The people—culturally, structurally, economically, historically—who think they have the right to be.

DAWN: I've been in spaces where the group has been largely homogenous, and the people in that space think it's really participatory. "We've been engaging, and it's been a really productive conversation." But once we introduce some level of equity or diversity, the silencing that happens among the rest of the group is seen as not productive and is seen as conflicted and having introduced tension or whatever. I've been thinking about how ironic that is, that once you introduce an element of richness, thought, especially, and experience, that that is actually somehow often read as nonparticipatory, or perhaps this is where the importance of adversariness comes in… where the richness removes the ease of agreement. But it's just really interesting in these institutions how I've often heard, like, "Oh, group X seems like a close-knit group because they have these open discussions." When often the only reason you have open discussions is because everyone's had largely the same experience and the same identity.

SARAH: You introduced me to "step up, step back" as a frame for engaging in critique—which for lack of a better term,

is instructional, where in a group setting if you are someone who speaks very little, the instruction is to step up and say something, and if you are someone who speaks a lot, you are to step back and let other people take the space, which seems like an important thing to bring to discussions, but also I guess it needs deeper training for a lot of people because we are invested in our inherited roles. Perhaps before we get to that point, we have to really engage the conditions that have created those roles to some extent. It is not just personality based—I mean, sometimes it might be—but it is a whole history of things that add up to make a person.

One thing I have wanted to bring to Skowhegan is a listening orientation that is based on Pauline Oliveros's deep listening. I think in some ways, I am always trying to transcend the operating knowledge or the reactionary knowledge we have by engaging the senses…how we hear, how we see, rather than following some kind of impulse to enact what we know from an immediate position.

DAWN: I think about the community life orientation that we authored together—as an expression of value in both listening but then as a guide to reacting. After listening, the next step becomes what does it mean to talk about how we contribute meaningfully? What does it mean to respect another person's identity and thought process? Because in a lot of these spaces, you haven't really had the impetus or the incentive to…we're not all just here to reinforce the information we already have, right? So you have to really be aware in those moments.

SARAH: I think part of the difficulty in staying in a place of ambiguity when it comes to listening and reacting or listening and not reacting is that as people, we go to our defaults. We understand, "OK, I occupy this space as a student. This person occupies this space as a professor, or this person occupies the space of a peer but one who has more knowledge than me…even if I don't agree on X, Y, and Z things, it is very difficult

for me to really participate by challenging the hierarchies, the authority, and even the relationship between students."

It is hard to take the risk of challenging someone when you feel your spot in a hierarchy is lower than another's. It is hard to feel like you can make a mistake, or on the other side of it, people don't want to put themselves in the situation where they're having to explain something to a group of people who don't understand them, right? These are all very vulnerable positions, but to some extent, if you do not actually engage the vulnerability, everything just stays static.

In particular in the dynamic with teachers and students, which is maybe clearer than a peer-based dynamic, in my experience, people come to me to take issue when someone is enacting a hierarchy as a faculty member…so the complaint is "this person's acting like a teacher in this environment," but I'm going to go to Sarah and then somehow I'm actually just reinforcing the fact that they're the teacher and I'm the student, by going to ask the director to regulate the behavior rather than seeing, "I'm an adult who has the ability to go to this person and correct in this way." Whether they can hear it or not, this is part of the project of losing those kind of default roles.

DAWN: I love that example, and the question is, how do you empower that person to do that work, because oftentimes it's relational, and oftentimes the teacher is positioning themselves to be the expert, right? By the language they use that is really intellectualized. That is really a very specific thing. I can think about how many participants I have seen that have been like, "I feel stupid every time this faculty member talks because I didn't go to art school, or I don't know that language." They feel super distanced, and not only distanced, they feel inferior, so they don't feel like they have the right to challenge that. So how do you change that dynamic?

SARAH: I think part of it is that we talked about just because one person knows something that we don't know doesn't mean

that I'm actually inferior. It just means that they have knowledge I don't, and I have knowledge that they don't. So what are the ways in which you actually start to have that conversation, right? What are the commonalities of this object A and object B, rather than what are the differences?

DAWN: But how—

SARAH: I guess, in the modeling, I try to convey that if they can come to me as a director, they can also go to the faculty member. And the teachers are the same as the students in some senses, where you have to have that conversation with them at the beginning, letting everybody know that we are all going to make mistakes. The teachers can be a little more entrenched, but they are the same. I guess the way that I do it is empowering them to take an active role in changing that dynamic—that's an important way of upending the system but also I have to let them know that I'm not just sending them to the wolves by themselves, right? That this is a conversation that doesn't just end with that one interaction. This is a process. If this doesn't work, then we have a different conversation, or what are the way…I imagine it's kind of like what you do with therapy. It's like, "OK, so what are we talking about? What do you want to happen? How do you envision this interaction rolling out? What do you want? What's the resolution that you want? Do you want them to stop talking about these things, or do you want to have them understand where you're coming from more?"

DAWN: True. One of my favorite questions in therapy around this is, "What's coming up for you when he says that, or she says that, or they say that?" Do you know what I mean? It's a really interesting answer sometimes. It's often not the answer that you would expect or they would expect, right, because they stop and they're like, "Huh, I don't know. I just know that whatever story I told myself about that thing that they said, I can say that

to you, but I couldn't answer what's coming up." Sometimes they connect, and sometimes they don't, right?

SARAH: I think part of the challenge in all of these environments is delaying the reaction. Because the reaction then becomes the problem. It becomes the concrete information in an interaction, so I guess the challenge is then, how do you get them to start to entertain different ideas about the same thing? I am not sure that makes sense.

DAWN: I think part of what we're talking about is undoing the power that they give teachers or educators, or in this case, faculty, because…they're…in their careers, they're known. They're in it in a certain way, they're given a certain credibility. That is often intimidating, right? So when you have a twenty-three-year-old participating who's like, "Oh my God, I'm so overwhelmed, why am I here?" I think some of the work that you do and that I do in different ways on an individual therapy basis is what…we have this treatment in therapy called demystification, and it's like, demystifying all of their understandings or myths that they think of when they are in an educational environment, what they think a faculty member represents, right?

So what does it actually mean to you? What does it mean for someone to have arrived at a certain point in their career? Do you think that they haven't also gone through challenges?

SARAH: I think a lot of the problems are perception. When you have systems that are inherently hierarchical, there's a perception of an impenetrability that exists, or a nontransparency, to use one of the words that we were using earlier. That is probably partially true in certain respects, but also much more flexible than I think people think. I don't know if that's just in the particular environment in which I have worked, but I feel like in my experience to some extent with my faculty, and when I was in school, it wasn't that way, either. But this is part of the

privilege and the access to understand that those things are malleable to some extent, right?

It's not always the teacher's job to make that malleable, and in fact, you know, I think part of the thing of working with young people is, you want them to be a little angry. That's their job. They should be pissed off, and they should be learning how to not just learn the information, but to actually test the information across educational content, and also societal content. That is their job, and some of that part, I feel, gets lost or suppressed, especially in larger institutions.

DAWN: The hard part is that an institution has to place value and effort in conceding that these are complex negotiations. Things are not just solvable with a single universal response, and the singular response again is the thing that gets us into trouble.

SARAH: And here is the participation problem again but in a larger context. And in this moment, in particular, there is a large disconnect between the institutions we have inherited and the institutions we have the opportunity to construct now, when people…students…have said enough is enough. Somehow, these two systems are not getting integrated, and somehow they're not being discussed or analyzed in a way. It's like we're still trying to apply the old rules to the new system, partially because the old rules don't want to make way for the new system because they have to protect themselves.

On the other hand, the exciting thing about education in this moment, education in the way that you do it, education in the way that I feel like I do it, is that we can actually take the time to look at what needs to change and propose a different option, because in the old way, everything's still on the defensive. So I think the thing that you and I both try to promote is not just that "Enough is enough—" I'm not just going to go along with either the demand that this gets corrected or punished, and I'm not going to react out of my own anger and sense of injustice

in this particular moment, because I need to actually protect that space and belief that there is a larger project of not having a single answer and that there are a lot of larger structural things that can be undone by allowing for that space in particular. And to bring it back to artmaking, in particular, this is the promise and the power of creative practice.

DAWN: This starts to get very abstract within our conversational imperative today.

SARAH: I know! I don't know if we answered any questions about participatory education exactly. We probably asked more questions than we answered, but I also think that this in some ways is just the beginning for us to put language to some of the things we are doing. We make the road by walking is a really good notion.…

HARRELL FLETCHER received his MFA from California College of the Arts. He studied organic farming at the University of California at Santa Cruz and went on to work on a variety of small community-supported agriculture farms, which impacted his work as an artist. Fletcher has produced a variety of socially engaged collaborative and interdisciplinary projects since the early 1990s. His work has been shown at SFMOMA, the de Young Museum, the Berkeley Art Museum, the Wattis Institute, and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, in the San Francisco Bay Area; the Drawing Center, Socrates Sculpture Park, the Sculpture Center, the Wrong Gallery, Apex Art, and Smackmellon, in New York; DiverseWorks and Aurora Picture show in Houston; PICA in Portland, Oregon; the Seattle Art Museum in Seattle; Signal in Malmo, Sweden; Domain de Kerguehennec in France; Tate Modern in London; and the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, Australia. He was a participant in the 2004 Whitney Biennial. Fletcher is currently the Ausplund Tooze Family Portland Professor in Art and Social Practice at Portland State University in Portland, Oregon.

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He teaches art and design at the California Institute of the Arts, Pomona College, and ArtCenter College of Design and has lectured internationally at such institutions as the Netherlands Architecture Institute, Brown University, the University of Chicago, MIT, Princeton, the Maryland Institute College of Art, the California College of the Arts, and the Art Institute of Chicago. He has served on the boards of the Los Angeles Forum, Place in History, and Groundswell Community Mural Project.

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ANNA CRAYCROFT is an artist and professor living in New York. She has had solo exhibitions at the New Museum, New York; Portland Institute for Contemporary Art in Portland, Oregon; the Ben Maltz Gallery at Otis in Los Angeles; the Blanton Museum of Art in Austin, Texas; Tracy Williams Ltd. in New York; Le Case del Arte in Milan, Italy. She has had two-person exhibitions at REDCAT Gallery in Los Angeles, Sandroni Rey in Los Angeles, and the Fundació Joan Miró in Barcelona. Notable group exhibitions include *The Artist's Museum* at the ICA Boston, *Champs-Élysées* at Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France, and PS1's *Greater New York*. She has also received commissions for public sculpture from Art in General in New York, Socrates Sculpture Park in Queens, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council in New York, and from Den Haag Sculptuur, in The Hague, Netherlands.

AMANDA LEIGH EVANS is a socially engaged artist, educator, and craftsperson raised in the Inland Empire, California, and in rural Nevada County, California.

Evans is the founder and director of the Living School of Art, an artist collective exploring living, ancestral, and domestic creative practices, which she and her neighbors co-facilitate in their apartment complex in east Portland, Oregon. She also manages programs at the King School Museum of Contemporary Art (KSMoCA), a contemporary art museum run by kids in a Pre-K–5 public school. She also teaches social practice, foundations, and professional practices at Portland State University.

Evans has been a member of the Socially Engaged Craft Collective, the Los Angeles Urban Rangers, and Play the LA River. She has presented work and publications at MOCA, the Portland Art Museum, the Museum of Contemporary Craft, and the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego. She is the recipient of Artplace America, the Arlene Schnitzer Visual Art Prize, Metro's Community Placemaking Grant, and the Precipice Fund.

Evans holds an MFA in Art and Social Practice from Portland State University and a postbaccalaureate in ceramics from Cal State Long Beach. She lives and works in Portland, Oregon.

THE LIVING SCHOOL OF ART is an artist collective and living art project coled by neighbors at Cherry Blossom Estates, a 120-unit affordable housing apartment complex in east Portland, Oregon. Founded in 2016 by neighbors with artist Amanda Leigh Evans, the program includes rotating exhibitions in eight laundry rooms, an artist residency program, visiting artist workshops, a collectively led women's art group, a youth art program, and a community garden. The Living School of Art centers a collective art practice that honors the cultures, families, ancestral traditions, and life experiences that we bring to our shared home. The apartment complex is an expanded art studio site for rigorous, intergenerational creative work. Neighbors of all ages direct activities as both students and teachers. The art we live and share includes cooking, maintenance, healing, domestic crafts, gardening, dancing, artmaking, and storytelling.

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