

11-22-2022

Why Arts Education, At All?: An A/r/tographic Inquiry


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Recommended Citation

Devarajan, Darshana; Brewer, Brittany M.; Creps, Karenanna Boyle; and Hadeer, Reyila (2022) "Why Arts Education, At All?: An A/r/tographic Inquiry," *Northwest Journal of Teacher Education*: Vol. 17 : Iss. 3 , Article 19.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15760/nwjte.2022.17.3.19>

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Why Arts Education, At All?: An A/r/tographic Inquiry

Abstract

In the wake of curricular epistemicide, the authors draw your attention towards the theoretical and practical constraints created around arts education. As a/r/tographers (artists, researchers, and teachers), we argue that our ways of knowing and creating in the space of curriculum and instruction are dynamic ways to think about and through curricular epistemicide. In foregrounding our own experiences of "(un)becoming through the cracks", when we are faced with restrictive ways of knowing in a Department of Teacher Education, we put forth a question through our arts-based practices of knowing: why arts education, at all?

Keywords

Arts Education, Curricular Epistemicide, Arts Based Educational Research, Poetic Inquiry, A/r/tography, Elementary Education, Secondary Education

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Introduction

In the wake of curricular epistemicide, we draw your attention towards the theoretical and practical constraints built around arts education. As a/r/tographers (Gouzouasis, 2018; Irwin, LeBlanc, Ryu, & Belliveau, 2018; Irwin & Springgay, 2008) whose work honors our identities as artists, researchers, and teachers, we often find ourselves seeking spaces of meaning within our scholarly journeys. Through our explorations, we continue to land on arts-based research as a methodological pathway to knowing anew. In this paper, we argue that our ways of knowing and creating in the space of curriculum and instruction are also dynamic ways to think about and through curricular epistemicide, or the “killing, silencing, annihilation, or devaluing of a way of knowing” (Patin et al., 2020). In foregrounding our own experiences of “(un)becoming through the cracks” (Hadeer, below), when we are faced with restrictive ways of knowing in a Department of Teacher Education, we put forth a question through our arts-based practices of knowing: Why arts education, at all?

The arts can be seen as arenas for creative freedom, but they also seem to have become a way to forward the capitalistic agendas of K-12 schools and universities (Eisner, 2000; Phùng & Fendler, 2015). Western epistemologies have often molded arts education to fit into policies and standards that define the ways in which education must be *provided* and *consumed* (Fendler, 2012; Phùng & Fendler, 2015). Additionally, Eisner (2000) notes most of the policies around arts education were formulated by people outside the field, thus critiquing the uniformity and predictability of such education which goes against the deeper aims of the broader field of the arts (p. 4). In this paper, we collectively argue against such conformity, uniformity, predictability, and share our a/r/tographic reflections on the roles of arts education in PK-12 and college education.

Each section of this paper underlines a curricular epistemicide in arts education through poetic inquiry. We leverage an array of forms, followed by individual artist statements on the self-search behind this inquiry. In foregrounding these personal narratives alongside our poetic inquiry, we challenge dominant ways of knowing and creating research through arts-based practices. Simultaneously, we question if arts education can provide a space for freedom of expression for students that cultivates student individuality and risk-taking (Eisner, 2000), reflecting on various potentials of arts education as a whole. Following the methodology section below, we present our individual arguments against the curricular epistemicide of various aspects of arts education: an exploration of the barriers of arts education standards in preservice elementary educator training through found poetry; an investigation of the values embedded in the language of an arts integration course syllabus for undergraduate elementary education majors through blackout poetry; a reflection on the implications of arts education course requirements that only exist for elementary, not secondary, education undergraduates in the same department of teacher education through a the poetic form of an English Ode; and a poetic engagement with photo elicitation (Faulkner, 2018) on the aesthetics of education grounded in notions of truth, justice, and U.S.-based democratic principles within the context of undergraduate arts integration courses.

Methodologies: A/r/tography and Poetic Inquiry

Poetry can be straightforward or twisting, refined or rough, full of jargon or simple, yes not, either–or, both/and, all of the above, and none of the above; this makes defining

poetry and poetic inquiry challenging. However, researchers, students, and practitioners use poetry in their work because of its slipperiness and ambiguity, its precision and distinctiveness. (Faulkner, 2018, p. 208)

In this paper, we engage with poetic inquiry as an arts-based research methodology to explore four curricular epistemicides currently in practice in the field of arts education. Each of us serves as a course instructor for a suite of arts integration courses for preservice elementary teachers in a department of teacher education at a large midwestern research university. Our combined perspectives as a/r/tographers (Gouzouasis, 2018; Irwin et al., 2018; Irwin & Springgay, 2008) informs this work:

A/r/tographical work is a specific category of [arts-based research] practices within research. A/r/t is a metaphor for artist-researcher-teacher. In a/r/tography these three roles are integrated creating a *third space* (Pinar, 2004, p. 9). These practitioners occupy “in-between” space (Pinar, 2004, p. 9). A/r/tography merges “knowing, doing, and making” (Pinar, 2004, p. 9). (Leavy, 2015, p. 4, emphasis in original)

The reader is able to see the interplay of identities in each poetic inquiry text and artist statement, which allows for the emergence of perspectives on curricular epistemicide that would be more difficult to decipher without this crucial intrapersonal dialogue. Through an a/r/tographic lens, we examine curricular arts education epistemicides that collide with our aesthetic understandings, our values, and our priorities as teacher educators. We have found four poetic forms (found poetry, blackout poetry, English Ode, and a poetic photo elicitation) that best express our arguments to trouble arts education discourse about standards, policies, theoretical constraints, and systemic resistances against the limitless potential of arts education to humanize students’, preservice teachers’, and educators’ sensemaking of their lives, educations, and the world around them.

Our work is centered in the current sociopolitical context of PK-12 arts curriculum epistemicide (Au et al., 2016; Shahjahan, 2005) to explore what arts education is, what value it holds/could hold for PK-12 students and teachers, and how it is/could be enacted. Darshana’s found poetry lifts text out of the pages of arts education books, washing away words that obscure the meanings she derives from them. Brittany’s blackout poetry makes invisible the syllabus text that does not resonate with her values as a trauma-informed arts educator. Through an extended English Ode, Karenanna grapples with the dissonances that exist between arts integration course requirements for elementary education majors and the lack thereof for secondary education majors in the same teacher education program. Finally, Reyila’s poetic and meditative engagement with photo elicitation (Faulkner, 2018) engages with the discourse of theories underlying our arts integration courses to reflect on arts education and its interconnections with truth, justice, U.S.-based democratic principles, and the beauty she seeks within the aesthetics of existence.

Additionally, the individual poetic inquiries are in dialogue with each other, influenced by the composition of Davis’ (2020) artistic reflection on Black Hip-Hop feminist art and Beymer and Jarvie’s (2020) theory of poetic resonance in education research to reveal a critical reflection on *why arts education, at all?* We encourage readers to “feel *with*, rather than *about*” (Faulkner, 2018, p. 226, emphasis in original) the epistemicides we examine in the poetic dialogue along with us.

Curriculum Epistemicide: Barriers of Standardization in Arts Education

Darshana Devarajan

Visual Metaphor

[If] art education [had a] visual metaphor,
[It is] a quilt in the bedroom--
[Layered as] a host of different points of view,
[Woven] to encourage multiple interpretations
And comfortable and necessary; familiar and supportive.

[Or maybe] it is a teapot on the stove,
[Whistling at the] narrow, restrictive, or reductionist,
[And brewing] non-linear and holistic engagement
With personal interests and choices

[Or it could be] a mural in the barrio
Difficult to label or clearly identify
Probing [our] human imagination,
[To re]-think what is valuable [in our] own culture.

Of Difference

Arts education
Can make a difference
[Of] value and significance,
Cultivating support--
Awakening [us] to the continuing challenge
Of our country and civilization
[Offering] openness, freedom, and perseverance
Strengthening [our] emotions:
To speak powerfully
On the meaning
Of life.

Learning Anew

[Through] expertise and participation,
The arts education frameworks [and] standards,
[Pave the way] to educate America: A nation at risk
[Establishing how]
The arts are inseparable from the very meaning of “education”.
[Reminding us constantly]
That the humanities’ impact cannot be denied,

[Through its questioning]
Of the [meaning] of human existence and purpose.
[Challenging] our imagination,
The arts transform disciplines and perceptions
To envision [something anew] for our society.

Darshana's Artist Statement:

When I was in high school in India, the only curriculum I knew of was the textbook, which was prescribed for each grade level and subject area. I believed that how my teachers taught the content to us was a pedagogical choice they made on their own. Beginning the unit on the Indian Freedom Struggle, my history teacher asked us to close our textbooks and listen as she walked us through popular historical movements in vivid detail—painting characters with wrath and fury, on the one hand, and peace and non-violence, on the other. We all sat there, captivated by a history that our country lived and breathed. I thought if there were any teacher I would like to emulate, it would be her. I would ask my students to put their textbooks away, tell them tales of fascinating times, and hold their attention with a stern, yet warm, attitude.

After a year of creating and teaching my own curriculum at an alternative school in India, I moved to the U.S. for my Ph.D. in Education. In my first doctoral class, someone mentioned the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Like many other international students in my class, I did not know what they were. Too shy to ask as the youngest one in the cohort (and thinking, ‘I should know this! I am *here* in *their* country—I need to learn *their* language’), I scrolled endlessly through the CCSS website and realized that if my former history teacher had standards to cover in each class (or if she cared about them), she wouldn’t have asked us to put our textbooks away. Moreover, if the administration of the school where I worked were focused on increasing profit margins, I would not have been able to create my own curriculum and teach students English, but more importantly, understand the joys of unscripted learning.

Having dabbled in the performing, visual, and musical arts since I was three, I have been drawn to return to the field of arts education during my doctoral studies. However, while teaching a college course in arts integration for preservice elementary educators, I realized how we bound our students (future teachers) to education standards while teaching them lesson-planning. For me, the visual and performing arts have always been an escape. When I struggled mentally, emotionally, physically, I turned to the arts, and more specifically, arts classes. Both my painting and sitar teachers told my mother how I sat quietly in a corner and did my work. Even now, as I take a university-level ceramics class, I sit in a corner and build things by myself. The arts allow me to think, explore, and stay quiet. I was not expected to speak, share my opinion, or respond. I was just expected to be, live, and make. I find solace in the arts. So, when I looked at these books—*What Every Young American Should Know and Be Able to Do in the Arts: National Standards for Arts Education* (Mahlmann et. al, 1994) and *Learning in and through Art: A Guide to Discipline Based Arts Education* (Dobbs, 1998) that prescribed standard after standard, it was difficult for me to grapple with the restrictions that the U.S. has legislated around arts education—how they are legitimized for the purposes of schooling. Although the books were from a different age, the echoes of these standards can be seen in the Michigan Merit Curriculum (Michigan Department of Education, n.d.). As I flipped through these books, I noticed that the *language* surrounding the arts is not restrictive—the language that describes the arts flows out of shape, becoming vague and abstract. So, I sat down with the books (Mahlmann

et. al., 1994; Dobbs, 1998) for days on end and highlighted phrases that described the arts (metaphors, vivid descriptions, and imagery). I collected them in a Word document—no page numbers, no APA. Then, I reassembled them. I pieced them, wove them, made them poems. I let the language around arts education breathe through juxtaposition and enjambment and metaphor and verse. From the books, I broke the arts free of standards to establish a sense of chaos and calm—to allow us to think of the arts beyond boundaries, beyond numbers, and beyond our colonial sensibilities surrounding education.

Curriculum Epistemicide: Syllabi and the Invisibility of our Students

Brittany M. Brewer

Introduction to Arts in the Classroom

EXCERPT ONE:

Participation:

attend class

participate fully
You are expected to be

Creating and engaging with the arts
thinking, doing, and learning
new ways of interacting with and experiencing the world.
fully explore
arts learning

Attendance

You impact
each class

EXCERPT TWO::

Arts Expression [REDACTED] and Reflection

[REDACTED] create a work of art [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] based on your [REDACTED] preferences.
[REDACTED] explore [REDACTED] collaborating [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] *sharing, responding, and reflecting* [REDACTED]

EXCERPT THREE:

Grades:

[REDACTED] this course is cumulative [REDACTED] Each assignment [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] contributes to [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] you [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]

EXCERPT FOUR:

"I" (incomplete):
[REDACTED] w
[REDACTED] i
[REDACTED] t h o
[REDACTED] y o u
[REDACTED] u

EXCERPT FIVE:

Course/Instructor Feedback [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] questions
[REDACTED] are encouraged
[REDACTED] concerns [REDACTED] are welcome
[REDACTED]

EXCERPT SIX:

Disrupt [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] teach and learn
[REDACTED] based on mutual trust
[REDACTED] to [REDACTED] disrupt
[REDACTED] adverse
[REDACTED] action [REDACTED]

EXCERPT SEVEN:

Mandatory [REDACTED]

commit to fostering a culture of caring and respect
and service
make a difference

protect
others.

EXCERPT EIGHT:

Resource Center

Request accommodations
you
will be honored

Brittany's Artist Statement:

The first time I encountered a course syllabus was during my first semester of college. I remember being excited—what could a syllabus be for if not to better understand my professor, the textures and tones of their course, and their classroom environment? However, broadly speaking, I found most of my syllabi to be useless; it didn't feel like I was their primary audience. The syllabi I received barely differed from course to course and largely focused on required departmental and university policies. As I read syllabus after syllabus, I wondered, *Does anyone read, let alone retain, any of this? This feels like a contract that professors are asking us to enter into with them that implies, "If you cross any number of lines, I can kick you out of class and/or fail you."* Where are their commitments to me? These syllabi did not tell me what my professors valued, how they approached teaching, or about their classroom community. These syllabi did not tell me how my professors might react if I were struggling, beyond how they were required to handle specific challenges noted by the university. These syllabi did not tell me if my professors would take the time to know my name, my face, and my interests. Semesters progressed, syllabus packets came and went, and if the schedule of readings were not included in a course syllabus, I often did not return to it after the first day of class.

Now I am a doctoral student in a teacher education program and consistently teach two courses a semester as a part of my graduate assistantship. When students are considering enrolling in a course and reach out to inquire about more information, they ask for the course syllabus or they decide to try out the class on "syllabus day," the first day of class, to see if the class feels like a fit for them. When I first started teaching an undergraduate arts-in-education course for preservice elementary teachers, I was given a course syllabus that included many of the parts and pieces that were immaterial to me as an undergraduate. Syllabi make up their own genre within the system of higher education, and within this canon, students are not seen as

individuals with wants, needs, and dreams but instead are seen as a list of potential failures. This document, like the many I have read before it, was over ten pages in length and without a course schedule. I wondered, *If we believe that there is no such thing as neutrality and objectivity (Agostinone-Wilson, 2005), if we believe that our identities and perspectives are inseparable from our teacher selves (Andrews et al., 2019), then where are we in our syllabi? Where is our commitment to our students' humanities? How might I begin to disrupt this canon, this intentional erasure of our students as fellow humans, artists, and collaborators in learning? How can I make my values and my heart, my commitment to my students, visible within this institutional document?*

It was this line of questioning that drove me to return to the syllabus and engage in poetic inquiry of the course syllabus through blackout poetry. I printed out the syllabus in full, snatched several black Sharpies, and set to work striking, line-by-line, those same pieces and parts that left me unaffected as a student, where I felt unseen or talked past. As I moved through this process, it became more and more clear that syllabi are neither neutral nor objective. It needs to be our responsibility as educators to elevate humanity in classroom documents.

Before returning to school to pursue my PhD, I worked full-time as the Associate Director of Education for an arts education nonprofit and witnessed firsthand the power that third spaces, a theory attributed to literary and post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha (1996), can evoke. In this case, these spaces were materialized through the coming together of students from across the greater Philadelphia area, beyond the power dynamics of their systems of schooling, to collaborate on arts-based inquiries that they named interest in. Now, I wonder, *can I have an impact as an arts educator working within a specific system of schooling, a neoliberal university, or will that system squelch my approach or confine it to the current canon of syllabi within the greater circumstances of curriculum epistemicide? As a white woman, as a queer bi femme, as an artist, as a teacher invested in trauma-informed pedagogies, how would students know this course was open to them, to engaging their identities, to engaging their hopes and dreams? I want to curate a syllabus that shares my heart with my students, that speaks my intention to support them in their own inquiries, and that acknowledges the specific identities, power, and perspectives I hold. In describing teacher educators' work with pre-service teachers, Andrews et al. (2019) write "Our truth-telling provides opportunities for students to understand, interrogate, and dismantle dominant narratives about their schooling" (p. 15).*

Searching, striking, and skimming was meditative. I did encounter glimpses of myself, several white specks smattered across the syllabus sheets otherwise saturated with Sharpie, as well as glimpses of my values, which were working diligently to not be compressed by the weight of the many blacked-out lines surrounding them. After completing my blackout poem, I did not discover my ideal syllabus; I am not sure if my ideal syllabus can live within the genre as it currently exists. However, participating in this artistic process provided me with the opportunity to process my thoughts regarding syllabi, identity, and systems of schooling; to reflect on my identity as a teacher educator; and to talk back to the text (Coffey, 2015) itself. In this paper, I offer excerpts of the blackout poem I created from our arts education syllabus as an invitation to you all, my fellow teachers and researchers, to inquire into your syllabi and your research documents and to consider if there are spaces where you might choose to make your heart and humanity visible.

Curriculum Epistemicide: Resistance to Arts Integration in Secondary Teacher Preparation

Karenanna Boyle Creps

Why Arts Integration, at All?

The arts can add such vibrance to our lives
They traverse the bounds of the personal
public ephemeral and are archives
of love of pain of life so visceral
with words without words with heart resonance
Find what you didn't know you were seeking
the pulse the heat of life mysterious
They allow us to feel our dissonance
Our humanity is in arts' keeping
The arts enliven life experience

At first blush, integration sounds easy
Take one arts standard – any one will do
But take time to understand it fully
Then add a standard familiar to you
This practice is neither simple nor swift
Even for teachers well-schooled in the field
Careful consideration of each part
Fully learning content a heavy lift
Teaching two subjects – quite the weight to wield
Learn in teacher prep to practice this art:

Let's build community, connect anew
Let's humanize this new group of learners
then dive into content (much we can do!):
Dance music visual arts theatre
Students go from consumers to doers
Architects of arts-informed lesson plans
Arts infusion to open doors once shut
Work with arts specialists in the future
Teaching with the arts flowing from their hands
supported by faculty guides they trust

Arts educators and artists adapt
Survivors used to cold ambivalence
Creating opportunities our craft
Educating students our impetus
We listen learn imagine and rework
reshape reimagine education

support teachers new to our media
See? Isn't this great? Learning as artwork!
Yet shadows of implicit dissuasion
No arts course needed to teach teenagers?

This human heritage belongs to all
Which law tells us that teens cannot engage
with serious play, with creative thought
Only the Quirks will shine upon a stage?
Think of what students could find within it--
a well-integrated curriculum--
Arts teachers supporting the confluence
of arts learning with other school subjects
Full curricular collaboration!
But time/funds run scarce for many students

Our secondary preservice teachers
progress through their program without any
knowledge of arts integration research
that this approach can impact so many:
through differentiated instruction,
humanizing details they learn in books,
finding echoes of themselves in content,
embodying narrative disruption,
singing songs built on keen, logical looks,
insightful, critical, learned comments...

Let the youngest students benefit from
training for future *primary* teachers.
What? Are youthful minds too soft to become
knowledge's sincere and stern gatekeepers?
Is arts integration too silly and vapid
for elder fertile minds? Icing on the
cake alone? The arts reserved for "different"
older students, the weird ones with rapid
passions, only learning onstage fondness
for school or else they resist, indurate?

What do the arts teach youth (beyond content
standards, of course)? Creativity and
problem solving. "The arts won't pay the rent"
reason those judging by "parents' demands"?
"College and career ready" yes but what
about the colors of their days the tone
of their hearts the dance of their dreams? Discern
value beyond grindstones exit the rut

of test scores, ratings. How do you make known
the light by which some knowledge can be learned?

Every future elementary teacher
whose studies take them through our prep program
has a single semester that features
one course on arts integration to land
their teaching imaginations in new
ways of thinking, of growing students' minds
interdisciplinary connections
infinite ideas much more than a few
quick tips and tricks to cover class free time
Teachers should all see these intersections

What does it say you think about children
if their teachers have (a little) training
in arts subjects with other disciplines?
What does it say you think about our teens
when their teachers aren't taught these connections
between creative and critical thought
across the siloed halls of academe
of high school subjects' pristine perfection?
For how many is the school you have wrought
a place where student success might have been?

Karenanna's Artist Statement:

This poetic inquiry is not arguing for the inherent value of arts education, nor for compulsory and comprehensive arts education across all grade levels. It is not an argument to teach preservice secondary educators to be arts educators, but to introduce them to the possibilities of arts integration. It is a fervent call to secondary teacher educators to reconsider the segregation of secondary teacher preparation curricula into subject-area-specific silos, silos that favor ways of knowing often already favored in each discipline. We've known that instructional differentiation allows more learners to succeed in learning content (e.g., Garderen & Whittaker, 2006; Park & Oliver, 2009; Tomlinson & Strickland, 2005), and we know that arts-integrated education is replete with opportunities for instructional differentiation (e.g., Cannon Wilson, 2016; Cornett, 1999; Lilliedahl, 2017). So, why are preservice secondary teachers trained to focus primarily on subject-area-specific content and pedagogies that may alienate students who simply learn better through non-subject-area-specific modalities?

My response to this question is an English Ode, a poetic form I turned to in a past poetic inquiry, though leveraged differently (Creps, 2019). This time, I hint at the certainty of my elementary and secondary teacher educator colleagues through the ababcdecde rhyme structure and decasyllabic verse of the English Ode, but my ideas about arts integration flow from one thought to the next as freely as I think these practices could be taken up across K-12 teacher education. Through poetic inquiry, I can be as frank and passionate, as frustrated and hopeful, and as naive and experienced as the artist, arts education scholar, and arts educator that I am.

This poem is as much an invitation to learn about arts integration as it is a plea for greater communication about the values, assumptions, biases, and lived experience underlying each secondary subject area specialist teacher educator's work in the field.

Curriculum Epistemicide: Restrictions of Western Theory for Certain Bodies' Lived Experiences

Reyila Hadeer



1. *(Un)becoming through the cracks* [Photography].
Source. Hadeer, R. (2020, East Lansing)

(Un)becoming through the cracks

This is me,
here and now,
in front of you.
But all they want to do
is to keep asking me who I am absolutely
And where I belong exactly
to torture a confession
out of me.



2. *(Un)becoming through the cracks* [Photography].
Source. Hadeer, R. (2020, East Lansing)



3. *(Un)becoming through the cracks* [Photography].
Source. Hadeer, R. (2020, East Lansing)



4. *(Un)becoming through the cracks* [Photography].
Source. Hadeer, R. (2020, East Lansing)

Reyila's Artist's Statement:

Since I started my doctoral program, I have always been drawn to the wildflowers escaping from the fence, weeds growing in the cracks on the sidewalk, and my shadow yearning for a different unimageable space. I often found my smartphone album filled with the images from the forgotten corners. Echoing Vellanki (2021), I believe that the role of photography should not merely be a tool for the data collection under colonial framework, it is also deeply related to the “artistic, scientific, and everyday histories and practices within which it is already embroiled.” (Vellanki, 2021, p. 135) What if I give legitimate attention to my photographs that have emerged from my pure aesthetic intuition? What can I discover about self and the world? What possibilities will emerge? Building on the method of photo elicitation (Faulkner, 2018), I created a concept called *poetic photo elicitation* to describe my poetic meditation on the medium of photography.

I am drawing on Rancière's (1991; 2013) philosophy on the poetic condition of human beings when I use the term “poetic” in “poetic photo-elicitation.” According to Rancière, every human being is a poetic being, but the operation of rhetoric is the absence of the poetic condition. “Rhetoric is speech in revolt against the poetic condition of the speaking being. It speaks in order to silence” (Rancière, 1991, p. 85). Rhetoric operates to prove others are wrong and bring a moment of silence. On the contrary, the poetic condition of human beings is seeking truth through the power of one's own inner intelligence instead of being schooled by an expert while acknowledging one will never achieve the larger and greater truth. In the methodology of “poetic photo-elicitation,” curation of a photo series presentation does not start from a top-down research question, instead, it starts with photos that have already been created in everyday life without any attempt to answer a research question with pre-existing knowledge/assumptions. By radically legitimizing photos emerged in everyday life, “poetic photo-elicitation” meditates on the themes these photos are trying to convey, and how they can help us (un)learn more about the self and surrounding.

In this poetic photo elicitation, I am using wildflowers and weeds growing through the cracks as an imagery to reflect how it feels to navigate across different theories in the so-called

West that do not necessarily fit in one's lived experience. In the Western way of knowing, we tend to use theories to make sense of certain communities and marginalized people, but, much of the time, theory might not be able to capture the whole. Some opinions and people only live in the cracks caused by these theories, and art might become the only way to express one's existence.

Currently, in my doctoral program, I am using arts-based methodologies not because I want to, but because I have to. To survive, I must use arts-based methodologies and think as an artist. I must cross theories, boundaries, and categories. I must become "polydisciplinary" (Loveless, 2019) and dance with various disciplines. For me, the arts are no longer simply a skill set that is framed by a certain history or a group of people. (e.g., Mignolo & Vazquez, 2013; Ranciè, 2013). They have become a personal means of self-exploration and making sense of the world around me. In other words, the arts have become a way of thinking, living and being. I choose to be a living decoloniality. The arts have become my way of seeking personal emancipation when I am facing theoretical constraints in Western academia.

Having experienced how the arts led me to a journey of self-expression and liberation, I am committed to explore and advocate for how the arts and arts education can lead to emancipatory education. In my undergraduate teaching practice, I encourage my students to go inward and explore beauty from inside out. I believe aesthetic revolution can lead to social change in the current context of curriculum epistemicide.

Discussion

As arts educators, we have collectively taught students across the age spectrum, from early childhood to adults. Regardless of their age, our students tend to respond to arts learning opportunities with curiosity and delight. When students engage in arts learning, we see innovation alongside curiosity, teamwork with collaboration, and, dare we say it? Play. Through this kind of play, students are knee-deep in problem-solving, grappling with new concepts, drawing new conclusions, and sharing discoveries with their peers. Arts education offers so much more than one can research or even imagine.

And yet, here we are, participating in a system that limits teachers' preparation for a field of increasingly diverse learners—learners who come from a variety of home cultures and with various learning strengths and needs. Here we are, restricting and consequently denying a population of learners that could benefit from the instructional differentiation inherent to arts integration. Here we are, not fully engaging the arts' potential for instructional differentiation to support students' ways of interacting with, learning from, and describing the world around them (e.g. Arts Education Partnership, 2013; Levin, 2016; Reck & Wald, 2018). We need to break from the creation of artificial boundaries around arts education content and allow arts education to exist unbound, driven by the scope of students' curiosity, creativity, multiple identities, and personal interests.

The content area standards for every subject area have often been questioned and debated. Darshana argues that the standardization of arts education (dance, music, theatre, and the visual arts), as a siloed subject, often neglects the arts' value beyond traditional learning and assessment practices. The purpose of arts education within classrooms becomes the support it provides to "formal" learning and growth. Questioning the current approaches to arts education, Darshana wonders why the arts cannot be devoid of its schooling purpose? Why restrict the purposes of arts education when it brews out of our pot of meaning?

Syllabi are curated in such a way that they read as tonally neutral. In Brittany's experience, they have often been devoid of the instructors' values and specific points of view. In contrast, the arts disciplines are often admired for their ability to engage the whole person, to shift power dynamics, and to foster collaboration (Halverson, 2021). Additionally, participating in artmaking requires vulnerability. As it stood, our syllabus did not reflect the philosophical values of the arts and the arts in education. In creating essential questions for her revised syllabus, Brittany asks, "How might the arts allow us to dream for more (for our students, our schools, our society) in education spaces?" Without acknowledgements of power, without vulnerability, without humanity, teachers cannot enter into collaboration with students. Brittany contends that we, as teachers and teacher educators, need to take a stance. We need to offer softness, compassion, and love alongside other required resources. We need to name our fallibility and our humanness in order to truly join our students as collaborators on a journey to dream for more.

The field of secondary teacher education appears to privilege subject-area-specific pedagogies to support a narrower range of knowledges and forms of expression bound up in specific school subject areas, rather than expanding to include artistic ways of knowing that could exist across the curriculum. Karenanna argues that this epistemicide begins in secondary teacher preparation, which (at least implicitly) teaches preservice teachers that secondary school subjects should be just as siloed as they are in postsecondary settings. Why eradicate the possibility of making more content more accessible for more students? Why increase the likelihood that learners will have difficulty connecting with subject area content? She cannot help but wonder.

Finally, Reyila argues that colonial ways of knowledge production operate in such a way that students and scholars are only allowed to be "critical" in existing frameworks and that the idea of "play" becomes merely a class activity working towards a larger colonial agenda. From a philosophical and existential point of view, she asks, *how might the arts allow us to play at a deeper level and help students (un)learn for the purpose of personal emancipation?* In Western ways of knowledge production where thinking and rhetoric become a dominant epistemology, shifting our attention to the poetic condition of human beings (Rancière, 1991; 2013) might open up new possibilities in the field of curriculum. When we have faith in the poetic condition of human beings, we might be able to center the education of beauty within a Western educational system, which is presented as a system founded upon the principles of truth and justice. Reyila believes that beauty is not separated from truth and justice, but that they are closely related to each other, interact with each other, and influence each other. The exploration of beauty might be able to lead to emancipatory education, which challenges curricular epistemicide.

Conclusion

The various forms of curricular epistemicide we tackle in our individual poetic inquiries focus on silencings within the larger field of arts education. Standardization, course syllabi, relegation of arts integration coursework to elementary teacher preparation, and the philosophical constraints of Western education contexts allow us to investigate, critique, and respond to the ways of knowing that are privileged across education contexts. Furthermore, poetic inquiry can map out these contests to expand the scope and reach of educational research. Each of us leverages these alternative ways of knowing through our reflections on third spaces, spaces beyond the walls of the classroom, and our own lived experiences.

Ultimately, through these arts-based inquiries and reflective artist statements, we argue that arts education needs to be freed from epistemic restrictions to aspire towards its potential. In Darshana's reflections, we notice how the slipperiness of language might free arts education of stringent standardization. Through Brittany's piece, we are compelled to reimagine the design and role of course syllabi in concert with humanizing teaching practices. Karenanna brings our attention toward the need for arts integration practices throughout PK-12 schooling by arguing that the arts are not simply child's play. And Reyila invites us to rethink the top-down discourse of arts education in order to make space for self and self-exploration. The dialogue created across our artmakings in this paper reveals advocacy for arts education to occupy a space of creative freedom—where students, teachers, and teacher educators have the invitation and opportunity to explore, to build, to grow, to reflect, and to play.

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