

THE  
BORDER  
CROSSER'S

POCKETBOOK

BY BRITNEY COPPICK

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# THE BORDER CROSSER'S POCKETBOOK

A GUIDE TO ENGAGED PEDAGOGY IN AFTER SCHOOL  
ARTS

**A THESIS**

PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE  
DEGREE MASTER OF ARTS (MA) ART + DESIGN EDUCATION  
IN THE  
DEPARTMENT OF TEACHING + LEARNING IN ART + DESIGN  
OF THE  
RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN

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FIGURE 1.1

## DEDICATION//DEDICACIÓN

I dedicate this work to the children at Finca del Niño  
who were with me during my first days as an art teacher  
who, by welcoming me into their lives, showed me the joys and  
challenges of building community through difference  
who have touched my heart in ways words cannot do justice

//

este proyecto lo dedico a los niños de la Finca del Niño  
que estuvieron conmigo durante mis primeros días como una  
profesora de arte  
quienes, al acogerme en sus vidas, me mostraron las alegrías y  
los desafíos de construir comunidad a través de la diferencia  
que han tocado mi corazón de maneras que las palabras no  
pueden hacer justicia

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to every human who has made this thesis  
possible

To Courtnie Wolfgang and Shana Cinquemani, for  
advising me in this work and for being passionate  
educators and outstanding examples

To my friends and family, for cheering me on and  
being a sounding board for ideas and frustrations  
alike

To my cohort, for doing this year alongside me

To Nancy Friese, Christina Alderman, Lindsay French,  
Sue McGuire, Lauren Allen, and Crystal Thomas, for  
teaching me and supporting me in so many ways

To the humans who work in Providence coffee shops,  
for keeping me caffeinated



ABSTRACT

The questions that sparked this research were developed after spending time working internationally and locally with youth in after school arts programs. These inquiries aim to critically examine the way after school arts programs are run in relation to the culturally and racially diverse communities they serve, discuss how these methods engage with the field of arts education as a whole, and ultimately provide practical approaches, strategies, and tools that educators can implement in these programs. Written from the perspective of a white, female educator who works in racially diverse learning spaces, this project is aimed at enabling educators in similar circumstances to overcome the barriers presented by racial and cultural differences in the after school arts classroom.

# BORDERS



an introduction

an art classroom... *technically*  
but a storage room for years  
I wasn't a teacher  
I wish I knew better  
could I do enough?  
putting borders between  
borders everywhere  
my students and I  
reaching across  
to take and give  
to teach and learn  
getting scraped up in the process  
how can I tear barriers down?

**diary of a new art teacher**

by Britney Coppick

Around a large wooden table sit six latinx middle school aged students, and two white women – a teacher and myself. The instructor struggles to demonstrate how to roll clay into a coil and spiral it into a small pot. Over her directions, three boys loudly sing “Tití Me Preguntó” by Bad Bunny. Another boy ignores the lesson and sculpts another iteration of his trademark creation, the Cat-Panda. The student to my left tries to listen to the next step as he rolls clay between his palm and the table amidst the chaos. And the only female student in the class raises her hand to go to the bathroom for the second time that day. I don’t blame her.

“Maybe Bad Bunny isn’t the most appropriate music we can sing right now,” I say, “Can we focus on the lesson? And then maybe we can turn on some music.”

“Wait, are you Spanish?” asks the student to my left, unsure how I knew the lyrics to a song of a Puerto Rican rapper. Looking down at my pale, freckled arms, I laughed a little to myself, “No, but I do speak Spanish.”

After class, as she and I moved about the room wiping up globs of wet clay, the instructor expressed some of her frustrations. With a fine arts degree in ceramics, she knew how to work with clay, but she didn't know how to keep the attention of the class. She didn't want them to feel forced into an assignment, but she noticed the chaos making other students uncomfortable. Was she too lenient on the first day of class? She felt like she wasn't respected. At the very least, they were testing her limits, trying to push the boundaries as far as she would let them. She wondered if it would help to start learning Spanish. She felt surrounded by obstacles.

This is the classroom dynamic I experienced when I first began volunteering in community after school arts programs. The organizations were well meaning, but the programs weren't always well executed. Classes were taught by professional artists, but they were not experienced educators. There was little professional development to give instructors the tools they needed to manage a classroom of pre-teens who had been cooped up all day. Resources were available, but did not always show up on time. Language barriers stood between staff and parents. Mission statements sought to bring better arts education to underserved, inner city communities, but I began to wonder if the programs were effectively providing for the communities they served.

I was experiencing this uncertainty, but not for the first time. In the summer of 2020, I moved to a children's home in Honduras called Finca del Niño to work as a volunteer. There, I was assigned to coordinate an after school program for middle schoolers. Each child was matched with an adult who could teach them a skill they were interested in learning. This is how I first began teaching art. I worked one-on-one with a handful of young people in the program, painting, creating murals, drawing *autos*, and wood-burning. This is also where I first began to experience problems with after school arts programs.

Like the ceramics instructor, a lot of what I perceived were obstacles. One obstacle for me as a teacher was that our art resources were meager. All I had was what I'd brought of my own art supplies and a few canvases and paints previous volunteers had left behind. The school on our grounds did have an art classroom ...technically, but it had been used as a storage room for years. I remember scouring the room for leftover art supplies only to pull open drawers that had been completely eaten through by termites. At the bottom of the cabinet were the remnants of pencils and paper pads left behind, a few dried out markers, and broken crayons. The other glaring problem for me as a teacher was that I wasn't a teacher. I knew how to create different kinds of art, but I had no experience teaching it. I was often left wondering if I could do enough, wishing I knew better how to give my students the skills they so badly wanted. I wasn't always confident navigating through the language barrier, addressing behavior, or planning lessons. There were borders between me and my students. They stood tall and daunting, topped with barbed wire.

I began seeing borders everywhere. Between what I wanted to say and what I knew how to. Between my background and the experiences of my students. Between the kids who lived at the children's home who had lost their families but gained an education and the kids outside who would likely quit school by sixth grade to help support their parents and siblings. Between the resources we needed and the resources we were donated. Between the United States and Mexico, a border that so many of my students wanted to cross. They heard news of caravans leaving for the United States from San Pedro Sula after hurricanes Eta and Iota devastated homes and towns all around us in 2020 and said, "I'm going to go there one day too," longing to close the gap between their reality and what they imagined was on the other side.

**I felt like my students and I were always reaching across from opposite sides of a border to take and give of what little we had, to teach and learn the best we knew how to and getting scraped up in the process.**

I began to wonder what the purpose of supplemental arts education was. Who were the communities that they served and what were their needs? How are these needs being met? What role does benevolence play in cases of ineffectiveness? How might these programs be implemented better? Among these questions is where I found the starting point for my research.

Upon further reflection of these inquiries, I began to recognize the importance of the educator's agency in these spaces. Often in after school programs, the primary educators hired are not teachers, but professional artists. By the educators themselves, this is often viewed as a deficit. They do not consider themselves to be teachers or educators, feeling that they lack the experience or know-how. This belief adds to barriers already present in these classrooms. New questions in my research began to arise. What training or resources do teaching artists need in order to feel more confident in their roles as educators? How can professional development help build more fruitful learning spaces? What barriers are already in the classroom? What pedagogies or approaches can help educators navigate the borders put in place by race, culture, and ethnicity?

This research aims to explore these curiosities by critically examining the way arts programs are run in relation to the culturally and racially diverse communities they serve, discussing how these methods engage with the field of arts education as a whole, and ultimately providing a number of practical approaches, strategies, and tools that educators can implement in these programs. Written from the perspective of a white, female educator in diverse learning spaces, this project is aimed at enabling educators in similar circumstances to overcome the barriers presented by racial and cultural differences in the after school arts classroom.

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# QUESTIONS

an inquiry

In most organizations, we are trained to ask, “What’s wrong?” and “How can we fix it?” This is a demoralizing process, and a typical one. Instead, learn to ask two very different questions: “What’s possible here?” and “Who cares?”

When we ask “Who cares?” we invite in others who are also passionate about an issue. And when we ask ‘What’s possible?’ it opens us up to unprecedented creativity.

**from *Turning to One Another***

(Wheatley, 2009)

In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks (1994) speaks about her struggles when she first began working in multicultural and multiethnic classroom settings and relates her experience to that of many first-time teachers saying, “it is difficult for many educators in the United States to conceptualize how the classroom will look when they are confronted with the demographics which indicate that “whiteness” may cease to be the norm ethnicity in classroom settings on all levels. Hence, educators are poorly prepared when we actually confront diversity” (p. 41). Ill-preparedness is something I have personally felt and personally witnessed in my own teaching experiences. Taking this commonly-held sentiment among educators, and especially among teaching artists, the goal of this research is to provide practical and useful information that can be employed by educators in after school arts programs. While mostly dealing with organizations that serve primarily Black and Latinx communities, this work seeks to serve as a framework of tools for educators in many culturally diverse after school arts spaces. The following are my primary and secondary research questions.

# HOW CAN EDUCATORS ESTABLISH A PEDAGOGY OF BORDER CROSSING IN RACIALLY AND CULTURALLY DIVERSE YOUTH ARTS PROGRAMS?

WHAT BARRIERS, ASSUMPTIONS AND  
REALITIES HAVE HISTORICALLY INFORMED  
THE AFTER SCHOOL ART CLASSROOM?

WHAT STRATEGIES HAVE BEEN PREVIOUSLY  
IMPLEMENTED IN THE FIELD THAT WERE  
SUCCESSFUL IN CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS?

WHAT TOOLS, PRACTICES, AND CONCEPTS  
FORM A PEDAGOGY OF BORDER CROSSING?

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# STRUCTURE

methodology, scope, format

## Methodology

The primary methods for this research take a qualitative, auto-ethnographic approach. The evidence is drawn from my personal experiences working in afterschool arts programs and put in dialogue with relevant literature. This project critically analyzes the strengths and weaknesses witnessed in these programs. Where there are gaps, borders, and struggles, this project seeks to provide tools, practices, and resources for a pedagogy of border crossing backed by respected literature, research, and theory. This qualitative perspective is rooted in grounded theory, which Sullivan (2004) argues is a theory that “gave credence to the teacher as a plausible source of knowledge and the praxis of the classroom and the community as a viable basis for theory... [and] was seen to account more closely for the authenticity of art learning and teaching” (p. 795). Additionally, this project will draw from the transformative and emancipatory paradigm of research as defined by Chilisa (2011), which seeks “to destroy myths and empower people to change society radically” (p. 5).

## Format

While this research follows the traditional methods of a thesis project (inquiry, literature review, etc.), it also includes a zine as a major component that will serve as a mini pedagogical guide for teaching artists in the after school arts classroom. This pocketbook acts as a product of my findings and outlines important practical themes to be used as pedagogical tools. This resource is in zine form and is accessible in Appendix D of this project for interested educators to easily utilize.

The reasons for including these usable guides draw from a need for professional development for educators in after school, non-profit spaces. The Wallace Foundation, a nonprofit that promotes equity in education, states that “training and coaching are particularly important [in after school education] because quality improvement isn’t possible without skilled after school workers” and further argues that “professional development is one of the areas in which a coordinating entity can be most helpful to providers, whose employees tend to be low-paid part-timers with varying degrees of experience” (Browne, 2015, p. 15). Without training on classroom management, teaching strategies, pedagogy, etc. it is difficult for educators to provide useful or enriching educational experiences. When talking about after school programs for the arts, where professional artists with little to no teaching experience are the ones providing the classes, professional development is imperative. Yet, it is in this area that these nonprofits are too often lacking. For this reason, my hope is to employ this project in a practical manner and use it to provide resources to the educators who need it most. 18

## Scope + Limitations

While this research seeks to provide resources for border crossing in after school spaces, it is not able to create a comprehensive guide to all effective resources nor will it address every border present in the classroom space. Below, I have outlined the scope of points this project will address, as well as some of its limitations.

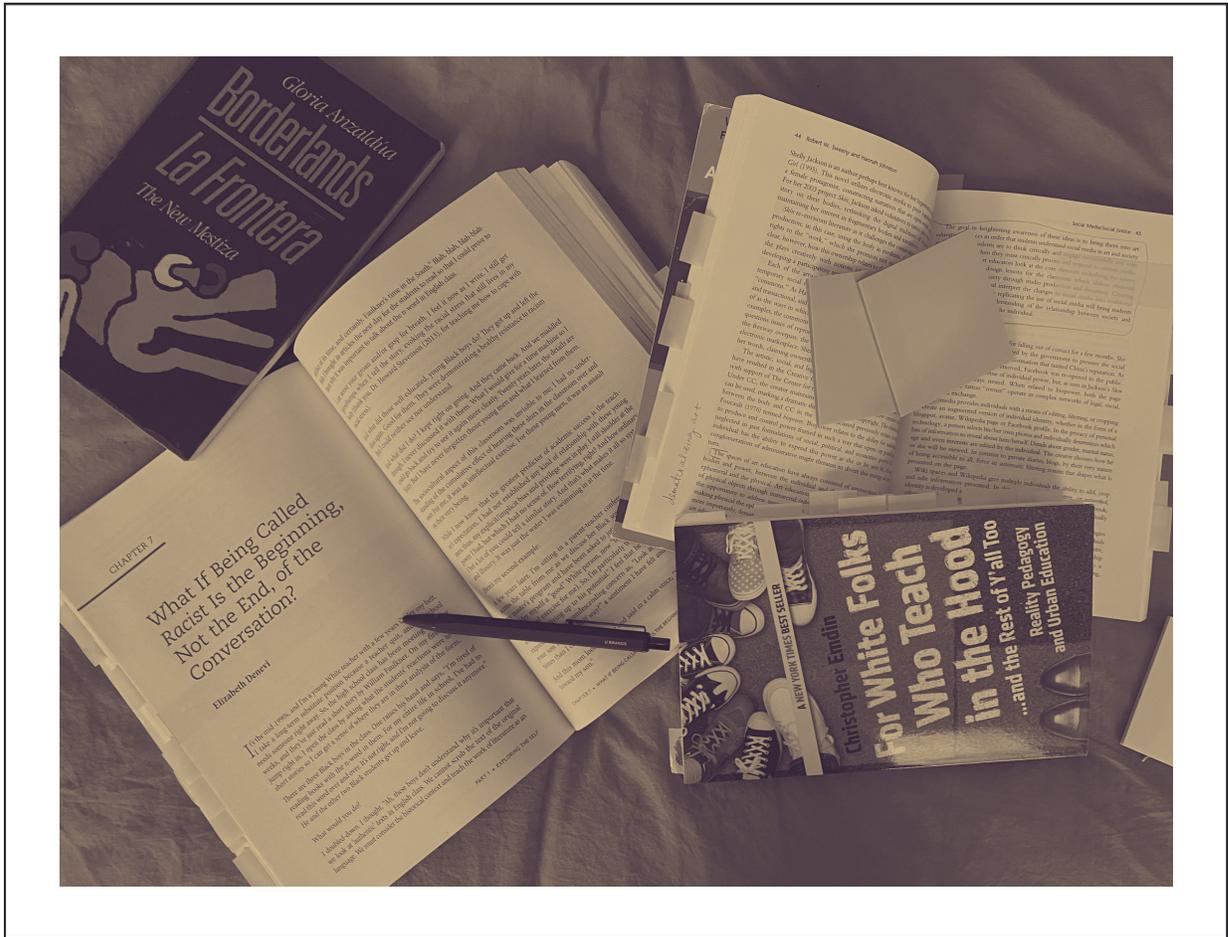
### **This project addresses the following:**

- Classroom borders within the context of non-profit, after school arts programs: The context for these borders will draw largely from my own experiences working in out-of-school programs such as Project Open Door (POD), Mini-Makers, Providence iCityArts! For Youth (PCFY), and RISD Museum Children and Family Programs
- Racial, Cultural, and Ethnic differences in the classroom
- Aspects of pedagogy that teaching artists have agency over

### **This project does not address the following:**

- All barriers present in the classroom space: For example it does not address barriers presented by disability, socio-economic status, etc.
- Aspects of the pedagogy that teaching artists do not have agency over: While educators often can critically examine organizational structures of programs, available resources, or the classroom itself, these pedagogical tools are not essential to pedagogical border crossing nor are they always under the direction of the classroom educator. Therefore, they are not included as part of the scope of this research.
- Other educational contexts: While many of the ideas and strategies presented may be applicable in other classroom spaces, this research does not directly address educational spaces such as K-12 public schools, universities, summer camps, etc.

# DIALOGUE



a literature review

FIGURE 2.1

In the following dialogues, I have gathered thoughts and ideas about social justice arts education and theories of border crossing from various authors in the field of education. These authors include bell hooks and Christopher Emdin among others, each of whom have direct experience working with youth of color in the classroom space. This work also draws from studies that contextualize the state of the classroom today in the United States in relation to race. Additionally, this review of literature includes insights from authors like Gloria Anzaldua and Paul Born, who do not speak directly to education, but help us understand border-identities and effective dialogues. Finally, the reader will find various references to *Art and Social Justice Education*, which puts these theories and ideas into practice in the art classroom space. Works that talk about race in the classroom are easy to access, but it is a little harder to find research like *Art and Social Justice Education* that specifically addresses race in the art classroom. Two other texts of this sort that are not referenced in this thesis are *The Palgrave Handbook of Race and the Arts in Education* (2018) and *Race and Art Education* (2021). My hope is that this project will add to that conversation that these texts present, looking at ways in which arts learning can be used as a tool for border crossing and navigating race in education.

### **Social Justice and Democratic Education**

A pedagogy of border-crossing is built largely on the theoretical frameworks of social justice and democratic education. These theories work together to respond to the changing needs of the modern era and recognize the pitfalls of traditional Western education. Social justice theory seeks “equal participation of all groups, meeting the needs of all students by providing equal distribution of resources, and facilitating a physically and psychologically safe and secure environment for all students” (Young et al., 2019, 2). Democratic education theory asserts that equal participation requires a student-centered approach to learning to replace the traditional teacher-centered and authoritarian approach (Altun, 2022). The processes of learning and transferring knowledge are shared within the classroom – students bring their own experiences to the classroom and educators value them. These theories suggest that educators must identify and understand inequalities in the classroom such as race, economic status, or gender in the classroom and act as advocates for equity in the learning spaces they facilitate (Young et al., 2019, 3). Furthermore, social justice and democratic education call for recognition of the whole student in their humanity. As opposed to traditional education where “the student is viewed only as an object to which knowledge is transferred” a democratic and justice concerned model, places the student “in the center [where their] cognitive, psychological, social, and moral development is evaluated as a whole” (Altun, 2022, 331).

## The Reality of Race in the Classroom

In the field of education, the teaching workforce is heavily saturated with white educators and white women especially. According to results from the *National Teacher and Principal Survey*, White teachers make up 80.3% of teachers in the United States with 76.6% of all educators being women (Lewis & Taie, 2022). The racial and ethnic diversity of students in schools across the nation, however, is not reflective of the teaching workforce. The National Center for Education Statistics showed the following results in their report of *Race and Ethnicity of Public School Teachers and Their Students* (Spiegelman, 2020):

- Agreement between the race and ethnicity of teachers and the majority race of the student population of schools was most pronounced for White teachers. In schools where the majority of students were White, over 90 percent of teachers were White.
- At schools in which a majority of students were Black, about one third (36 percent) of teachers were Black. This was higher than the percentage of Black teachers at schools with other student body racial and ethnic compositions.
- Similarly, at schools in which a majority of students were Hispanic, 33 percent of teachers were also Hispanic. This was higher than the percentage of Hispanic teachers at other types of schools.
- At schools in which a majority of students were American Indian/ Alaska Native or Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander, 29 percent of teachers were American Indian/ Alaska Native and 19 percent were Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, respectively. These teachers worked in schools in which a majority of students shared their race at a higher rate than other types of schools.
- The majority of teachers were White in schools where a majority of students were Hispanic (54 percent), Black (54 percent), Asian (60 percent), or American Indian/Alaska Native (61 percent). That is, a larger percentage of teachers were White than of the same race/ethnicity as the majority of students.

This disparity in racial agreement between students and teachers reveals race and ethnicity as an important part of the teaching and learning experience. Speaking about her experience when she first began working in racially diverse classrooms, bell hooks (1994) says:

WHEN I FIRST ENTERED THE MULTICULTURAL,  
MULTIETHNIC CLASSROOM SETTING I WAS  
UNPREPARED. I DID NOT KNOW HOW TO COPE  
EFFECTIVELY WITH SO MUCH “DIFFERENCE.”  
DESPITE PROGRESSIVE POLITICS, AND MY DEEP  
ENGAGEMENT WITH THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT,  
I HAD NEVER BEFORE BEEN COMPELLED TO  
WORK WITHIN A TRULY DIVERSE SETTING AND I  
LACKED THE NECESSARY SKILLS. THIS IS THE  
CASE WITH MOST EDUCATORS. IT IS DIFFICULT  
FOR MANY EDUCATORS IN THE UNITED STATES  
TO CONCEPTUALIZE HOW THE CLASSROOM  
WILL LOOK WHEN THEY ARE CONFRONTED  
WITH THE DEMOGRAPHICS WHICH INDICATE  
THAT “WHITENESS” MAY CEASE TO BE THE  
NORM ETHNICITY IN CLASSROOM SETTINGS ON  
ALL LEVELS. HENCE, EDUCATORS ARE POORLY  
PREPARED WHEN WE ACTUALLY CONFRONT  
DIVERSITY.

(hooks, 1994, p. 41)

Here, hooks begins to reveal the challenges and barriers that can arise within the multicultural classroom. She suggests the significance of race and a need for specific skills in navigating racial differences. It is especially important for white educators who work in spaces where the majority of students are Black, Brown, and/or Indigenous. However, even with ample research to reveal racial disagreement between teachers and students, professional development and educator training programs that directly address race in the classroom are not standard and have only recently become a focus in teacher preparation. That said, lead educators in these programs may not be prepared to teach in equitable and socially just ways. In a study presented by *Teacher Education Quarterly*, “a White teacher with 9 years of experience and 4 years of mentoring Student Teachers, admitted early in this study, ‘I’ve never really thought about social justice in the classroom’ (Guenther & Wexler, 2021). The reality is that race in the classroom is not always a consideration when it comes to how we as educators teach. With evidence that suggests how students learn and engage in classrooms is affected by their backgrounds and experiences (including race), I believe it should be. Closing gaps between mentors and learners or students and educators that are caused by race requires educators to learn skills and take steps to understand the experiences and perspectives of their students and allow those realities to influence their teaching. This research aims to offer educators a guide toward this type of pedagogy – one that I think of as border crossing.

### **Border Identity and Classroom as Border Space**

So, what is border crossing anyway? In order to understand what it means to be a border crosser in education, it is important to first understand the border identity and how the classroom acts as a border space. In describing her own experience as a *Chicana* – a Mexican-American woman living in the United States, Gloria Anzaldua (1991) says:

The coming together of two self consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes un choque, a cultural collision. Within us and within la cultura chicana, commonly held beliefs of the white culture attack commonly held beliefs of the Mexican culture, and both attack commonly held beliefs of the indigenous culture. Subconsciously, we see an attack on ourselves and our beliefs as a threat and we attempt to block with a counterstance. (p. 78)

In *Critical Aesthetic Pedagogy*, Yolanda Medina (2012) describes a different but similar experience of clashing within her own identity:

AS I TRIED TO UNDERSTAND THE CONSTRUCTION OF MY IDENTITY, I REALIZED THAT IT IS RIFE WITH PARADOXES AND TUGS-OF-WAR THAT HAVE PREVENTED ME FROM COMPARTMENTALIZING LONG ENOUGH TO DEFINE WHO I AM. I AM A DOMINICAN AND A NEW YORKER; A REBEL AND A HYPER-ACHIEVER; A LATINA WITH A SOUTHERN PAST; A BAD STUDENT BUT A CARING TEACHER; A DANCER AND A TEACHER EDUCATOR; A SALSERA AND A FEMINIST. THESE CHARACTERISTICS ARE OFTEN CONTRADICTORY, YET NONE OF THEM COULD HAVE DEVELOPED WITHOUT THE INFLUENCE OF THE OTHERS. I AM A MIXTURE OF ALL OF THEM, THOUGH AT TIMES I CHOOSE TO EXPRESS MORE OF ONE THAN THE OTHERS.

(Medina, 2012, pp. 5-6)

Both of these women describe the border identity – an existence between, a sharing and at times, a clashing of more than one culture, location, or trait in their identity. People from all backgrounds may experience this at some point in their lives. And the reality is that many students and teachers in the United States recognize these divided identities not only in themselves, but in learning environments. When it comes to race, many students have to adjust to learning in a culture different from their own; they are expected to adjust to white systems of education. Teachers on the other hand are often transplanted into schools and programs where they encounter students of different racial and cultural backgrounds, but with little expectation to adjust their teaching accordingly.

### **This is what makes the classroom into a border space.**

Race in the classroom can create borders between educators and students; students and each other; and effective teaching and learning. What educators in these spaces need and what this research aims to provide is guidance on how to identify, prepare for, and engage with the borders present in the classroom.

### **Border Identity and Classroom as Border Space**

As an educator, engaging in community dialogue is essential to creating understanding and crossing borders within the art-making space. Classrooms in the United States today are full of student diversity – varying backgrounds, upbringings, faiths, classes, races, genders, and so on – and often also full of educators like me – white women. When I walk into a room full of students an involuntary process happens; students make assumptions about me and I about them. It's not always intentional, but initial impressions began to form almost immediately. This happens regardless of how students identify – whether they look and think like me or not – but assumptions of even greater disparities are made when I am the outsider in a room of students that are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). Inevitably, borders are built between me and my students by our initial perceptions of each other. The question I am, and educators like me are, then faced with is how to cross this border.

In her book *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks (1994) notes that “it is fashionable these days, when ‘difference’ is a hot topic in progressive circles, to talk about... ‘border crossing’” (p. 129). Educators, administrators, and policymakers throw around this phrase, without considering what it means in action. As educators we know we should make efforts to move across boundaries in our classrooms, but we are sometimes left wondering how to initiate this sort of change. hooks goes on to suggest that engaging in “dialogue is one of the simplest ways we can begin as teachers... to cross boundaries, the barriers that may or may not be erected by race, gender, class, professional standing, and a host of other differences” (p. 129).

If dialogue is the first step to transgressing borders within the classroom, it is important to understand what it looks like in practice. In his book, *Community Conversations*, Paul Born (2012) critically addresses typical conceptions about the building blocks of conversation.

Dialogue and listening. One should always follow the other, and in turn, create a good conversation. This is what I had been taught. But what if the objective of listening was more than having a good conversation? What if there was a conversation that went beyond talking? What if the objective of listening and dialogue was to change our communities for the better? What if there were many opposing views about what a better community might be? How would we listen? (p. 19)

Born suggests that an effective dialogue is more than just talking; It is an agent of change. It is this kind of dialogue that hooks is suggesting can be employed in classrooms as a border deconstruction. When educators aim to listen rather than hear, to understand rather than perceive, and to engage rather than impart, a flow of learning begins. It's not a wrecking ball of border deconstruction. It's more like a chisel. But with time and effort, communing and conversing can help push past surface level assumptions that stand in the way of learning.

When it comes to racial borders in the classroom, I believe that there are some important topics that need to be addressed through this sort of engaged dialogue that hooks and Born present. While not comprehensive, three themes that educators can begin with are space, self-reflection, representation – all of which promote student empowerment in the racially diverse classroom. While each of these are multifaceted and unique, they are also engaged with and connected to one another. They work together to create an engaged dialogue or what I consider to be a pedagogy for border crossing.

One example of this actionary mode of dialoguing is given in *Art and Social Justice Education: Culture as Commons* when white, art educator Delany Gersten Susie (2012) was led on a neighborhood tour by a group of her African-American, 8th grade students. In preparation for a school pageant that would eventually feature student murals of what they considered to be important landmarks in their community, Susie had her students guide her through the local streets allowing her to more deeply understand how they see their place in the community.

The informal nature of the outing allowed genuine learning for both me and my students. [...] We all learned how to cross invisible boundaries around us. Students who had never traveled far from home discovered new places and I became more familiar with the community in which I teach. [...] Walking their streets, my students saw me as a real person, and I began to see them as whole people within the context of their community. (p. 162)

Reflecting on her experience, Susie exemplifies the effectiveness of an embodied dialogue. Before the community tour, Susie felt like an outsider among her students and within their community, but in an act of full-bodied listening, she was able to step over the border and into their community. Effective conversations go beyond talking, beyond the classroom even. Engaged dialogue is listening with the mind, but also with the feet or the hands or the paint brush or the ballot or the lesson plan. As students and educators alike actively engage with one another, they start to traverse into the unknown. This pedagogical approach creates what Christopher Emdin (2016) might call a space beyond the classroom – one that “considers the ties the student has to the outside world (neighborhood/community), reaching beyond the classroom (place) to a shared community experience” (p. 54).

The unknown and the process of unknowing is the duty of teachers and learners in the socially engaged and democratic classroom. Unknowing requires dialogue and understanding between teacher and student, but in order to come to this type of understanding, the teacher or learner must first engage in dialogue, reflection, and understanding with oneself. “It has been said that the first rule of multiculturalism is understanding one’s own culture ... Whiteness is just as much a part of the racial hierarchy – and every racial problem – as any other racial group in the United States” (Moore et al., 2018). While I believe both teachers and learners should engage in self-reflective practices, I especially want to emphasize the white educator’s role in this as an authoritative figure in the classroom. To understand oneself is to see clearly one’s position in history, one’s position in power, and one’s prejudices in relation to their environment and the people around them. In the example above, we see that in order for dialogue to happen, the educator first had to recognize her alienness. She was not a member of her students’ community. She was an outsider who came into their space as an authoritative figure, but she did not belong to or understand the community she entered into. Through self-reflection she was able to understand this and engage in a productive dialogue where she learned from her students.

Another key element to engaged dialogue is representation. Anzaldua (1991) speaks up on the need to be seen saying, “I am visible—see this Indian face—yet I am invisible. I both blind them with my beak nose and am their blind spot. But I exist, we exist. They’d like to think that I have melted in the pot. But I haven’t, we haven’t.” Historically, racially diverse students have been expected to blend and adjust to societal (often Western and White) learning standards. This research, in accompaniment with similar literature in the field argues for a different approach to racial diverse students. Emdin (2016) suggests that this type of approach should focus on a role reversal that “positions the student as the expert in his or her own teaching and learning” in order to make “the local experiences of the student visible” and create an environment of co-construction between teacher and student in the classroom (p. 27).

Educators can do this in a number of ways such as considering cultural norms such as language and slang, utilizing students’ non-academic interests like music and popular media, offering space for students to express their relationship and feelings about the lessons presented, or designing curriculums that reflect student interest and learning style rather than expecting the student to adjust. Each of these things contribute to a need for a shift in representation in the classroom.

Each of these methods of teaching are part of what makes a pedagogy of border crossing, which above all seeks to empower the students it serves. When educators take time to consider their students’ voices and experience, reflect on their own position and bias, and critically examine the classroom space, they yield their role as educator and allow it to be shared with the students. The following chapters of this research will expand on each of these ideas to offer a pedagogical guide to supporting young people in the after school arts space.

# SELF REFLECTION



chapter one

FIGURE 3.1

Before educators can dive into classroom activities and build rapport with students of color, they need to take a moment (or long while) for introspection. Some say “the first rule of multiculturalism is understanding one’s own culture ... Whiteness is just as much a part of the racial hierarchy - and every racial problem - as any other racial group in the United States” (Moore et al., 2018, p. 14). In order for teachers to understand the backgrounds of their racially diverse students, they must first understand their own race, culture, position in society and the privileges or unconscious biases that may be underneath. Gloria Anzaldua (1991) beautifully calls white society into this kind of reflection, speaking on behalf of her Chicano community:

We need to say to white society: We need you to accept the fact that Chicanos are different, to acknowledge your rejection and negation of us. We need you to own the fact that you looked upon us as less than human, that you stole our lands, our personhood, our self-respect. We need you to make public restitution: to say that, to compensate for your own sense of defectiveness, you strive for power over us, you erase our history and our experience because it makes you feel guilty—you’d rather forget your brutish acts. To say you’ve split yourself from minority groups, that you disown us, that your dual consciousness splits off parts of yourself, transferring the ‘negative’ parts onto us. (Where there is persecution of minorities, there is repression of shadow.) To say that you are afraid of us, that to put distance between us, you wear the mask of contempt. Admit that Mexico is your double, that she exists in the shadow of this country, that we are irrevocably tied to her. Gringo, accept the doppelganger in your psyche. By taking back your collective shadow the intercultural split will heal. And finally, tell us what you need from us. (p. 85)

Her cry for reflection and admission earnestly makes known the wounds her community (and communities like hers) has felt at the hands of white society. She points to many hurts that educators have historically been guilty of: erasing history; seeing difference as deficit; fearing people of color. And she reveals that through introspection, and then dialogue, these wounds can begin to heal.

Gathered from Black and Latino educators as well as academic professionals who teach through a social justice lens, the following findings suggest ways in which arts educators can aptly reflect on their race, bias, position, and privilege. In addition, I include some of my own reflections as a new educator in the field.

## Social Justice and Democratic Education

Debby Irving (2018) writes:

If I could redo one part of my life, I would have become more culturally aware and competent before entering the classroom. Without either quality, I stepped into the role of educator with the only cultural training I'd had, the one centered on white, patriarchal cultural norms and social roles ... My own ignorance about my culture both obfuscated my capacity to look for value in other cultures and allowed me to impose mine. (p. 22).

The question of whether or not White teachers can effectively teach BIPOC and neoindigenous students is always difficult. However, it becomes even harder to answer “if white teachers do not recognize their privilege, societal positionality, and the systemic prejudices that are omnipresent in all institutions” (Moore et al., 2018). Failure to do this work leaves White teachers with unrecognized power in the classroom. Unfortunately, this unearned authority is stolen from the students, and especially the classroom’s underrepresented youth. Through personal self-reflection and transformation, the classroom power dynamic can shift. Brett Cook (2012) begins this process by asking questions like: “How can I be the person that listens deeply to everyone? How can I be more flexible and invested in what other people are interested in? How can I present in class the best work that I can in the same assignments that I expect of my students? How can I be that patient, enthusiastic, mindful, generous and disciplined practitioner?” (Cook, 2012, p. 93). While these questions are a good starting point, in order to address race, I believe educators need to dig deeper. Who do we mean when we say ‘everyone’? Does listening look different if we are hearing from varied cultural and racial backgrounds? Who do we seek opinions from most in the classroom? Are we favoring some students over others? Why do we hear (or choose to hear) those individuals more clearly? Who do we have a hard time engaging with? What feelings do we have towards students we find ‘difficult’? How often do we seek to understand these students’ perspectives? Do I design my lessons with my students in mind? Whose goals am I trying to reach with the planning implementation of my curriculum? This (incomplete) litany of reflections point more directly to the conscious and unconscious biases educators hold in relation to race in learning environments.

It is imperative that all educators and especially White educators who work with urban youth to contemplate and recognize how their culture preferences and biases influence their behavior toward students of color. John Marshall (2018) asserts that for this transformation to take place, teachers must be willing to learn, to position themselves as the student saying “Such a transformation morphs the white educator into a symbiotic relationship of cultural knowledge educating” between student and teacher (p. 62).

In *For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood*, Emdin (2016) honestly characterizes the biases present in the classroom as he describes his experiences as a new educator. He begins by talking about the first weeks of school in which the new teachers made a game of sorts out of sorting the good kids and the bad kids in conversation with other teachers outside of class. He admits that, though unrealized at the time, these categorizations were ingrained. Soon every interaction with the student was a reaffirmation of the initial prescribed assumption made by the educator (Edmin, 2016). This is the danger of indulging in negative assumptions in regards to students. When we assign labels on the first day of class we are making assumptions based on race, gender, or another attribute out of bias. This game of categorization is the antithesis of understanding our students. It jumps to conclusions without asking questions or seeing the human. It disregards the whole of the child sitting before us, dismissing their hopes, interests, dislikes, cultural roots, struggles, successes, and experiences.

Later, Emdin goes on to affirm the need for self-reflection among educators saying:

THE WORK FOR TEACHERS BECOMES DEVELOPING THE SELF-REFLECTION NECESSARY TO DECONSTRUCT THE WAYS THAT MEDIA MESSAGES, OTHER TEACHERS' NEGATIVE (OFTEN EXAGGERATED) STORIES, AND THEIR OWN NEED TO BE THE HERO AFFECTS HOW THEY SEE AND TEACH STUDENTS... WITHOUT TEACHERS RECOGNIZING THE BIASES THEY HOLD AND HOW THESE BIASES IMPACT THE WAYS THEY SEE AND TEACH STUDENTS, THERE IS NO STARTING POINT TO CHANGING THE DISMAL STATISTICS RELATED TO THE ACADEMIC UNDERPERFORMANCE OF URBAN YOUTH.

(Emdin, 2016, p. 43)

## Overcoming Barriers

So, how do we as teachers effectively move through practices of self-reflection in relation to race? The reality is that there are many barriers we need to overcome. *The Guide for White Women Who Teach Black Boys (The Guide)* (2018) suggests that white women teachers can learn to remove barriers that prevent them from connecting with students of color. Some of those barriers include: lack of friends, peers, and teachers in the BIPOC community; attitudes and stereotypes that they've acquired consciously and unconsciously; lack of awareness of their own Whiteness and the privileges that accompany it; believing that understand racism because they have experienced sexism as a woman; assumptions about what "good" student behavior looks like; belief in colorblindness; fear of people of color; lack of preparation in understanding cultural and racial practices; deficit perspectives; and belief that the teacher is the expert in the classroom and not the student (Moore et al., 2018, pp. 35-36).

Furthermore, *The Guide* puts forth the following critical points of learning for white women teachers in the racially diverse classroom (Moore et al., 2018, pp. 77-78):

- **Difference vs. Deficit:** The main obstacle here is that many teachers equate difference with deficit. This drives into the wound that Anzaldua described as being seen as less than because of the color of one's skin.
- **Diversity vs. multiculturalism:** While these words are often mistakenly used interchangeably, the first is merely quantitative while the second speaks to ways of living. Learning the difference between the two is essential to understanding and articulating the racial and cultural realities in the classroom.
- **Equality vs. Equity:** Teachers who advocate for equality, rather than equity fail to consider that not all students come to the classroom with the same experiences and opportunities. Equity aims to learn and listen to the diverse range of needs in the classroom, thus meeting each students' individual needs.
- **Safety vs. Comfort:** In this learning point, teachers must learn and be willing to be uncomfortable when it comes to conversations about race instead of deeming these interactions unsafe. The reality is discomfort around race conversations does not mean you are being attacked or that you are a racist. On the contrary, discomfort is a sign that you are engaging in the kind of reflections and conversations that lead to growth.
- **Intent vs. Impact:** Finally, teachers must learn that most times impact is more important than one's intentions. There are always times when even the best intentions hurt our students. Getting defensive ignores the negative impacts felt on the part of the student. Teachers must confront the effects of their mistakes, take ownership of them, and make changes. (pp. 77-78)

Reflecting on these barriers and critical points of learning can help educators to truly understand their positionality. We can begin to see how we ourselves exist in the spaces we exist in. I say begin, because this process is ongoing, one of constant learning and reevaluating. However, once we are able to admit that our differences can cause biases, we can learn to overcome them. We can start to see the intricate beauty of ourselves and others, our different colors and flavors can work to help the other shine brighter and taste sweeter.

### **Yo Soy Gringa**

When I began my art education journey in Honduras, I was truly confronted with race and cultural difference for the first time. What was unique about my situation is that I was immediately thrown into the communities and ways of life my students experienced because I was living and working in the center that housed and schooled them. In a matter of hours I had left the comfortable and familiar environment I knew in the United States and entered into a new home and a culture that was not my own. I had to relearn even the most basic tasks: most of my meals were cooked over a fire that I had to learn to build, my clothes were washed by hand and hung on a line to dry, the toilet often had to be flushed using a bucket of water, the used toilet paper had to be discarded burned weekly instead of flushed. I wrote down so many of the things I had to learn and grow accustomed to like how many hand-squeezed limes it took to make limeade for a fiesta or that my students got extremely offended when I declined the food they offered me as I picked them up for class. I spent over a month learning and absorbing the way of life in rural Honduras and getting to know the youth at the center before I began running the after school program.

This was a time of deep reflection for me. I thought about what motivated me to work in Central America as a volunteer. To be honest, I had gone with a sense that I could offer some kind of help to these children, but I quickly realized that I was misguided in that thinking. The reality was that in this new place, I was the one in need. I was helpless, having to unlearn all of the comforts I was used to like speaking English and cooling off in the AC. I was unsure, wondering if I was coming off the wrong way or making incorrect assumptions. I was White - in a community of loud laughing and frank Honduran women, men, children. What I discovered during this time is that when you push yourself far out past the limits of what you know, you have no choice but to become the learner.



FIGURE 3.2

One of the first projects I did with the arts program was to paint a mural. At the volunteer house we had a little room that was emptied out to make room for reflection, meditation, or prayer. I hated the room for a long time. There were no chairs. There was a lot of gecko poop on the floor and there were too many stark white walls. The volunteer house was named St. Therese, known as the Little Flower, and so the students and I dreamt up a wildflower themed mural to cover one of the large white walls. To be honest, I had a lot of trouble giving up my vision for how it would look to students that I'd only seen paint once before. At the beginning of the project, I would comb over the flowers and 'tidy up' with my brush how I saw fit. As the project progressed, more students and even some of the other volunteers got involved, each with different skill levels. Eventually, I started to see how it could all come together, even with so much difference and variation. I let go of trying to edit it back to my original vision, and let it be what it was, let it be who we were, each flower in our own unique styles. And it was all the more beautiful because of it.

Looking back, I can see how both my transition into Honduras and this project acted as a mirror of the bias I held towards my students and the expectations I had for them. I wanted their work to fit into my single minded idea of what beauty was. I had made assumptions about what they would and wouldn't be good at because of their experience (or lack thereof) with art. When I arrived thinking that I could help them because I was from a place that had things they did not, I categorized them as flowers that needed fixing, that needed to be tidied up. However, as I let go of these assumptions and positioned myself as the learner, I was able to see the beauty of difference and celebrate it. And the relationships I developed with my students were far better because of it.

# SPACE

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chapter two

FIGURE 3.3

Once we as educators have reflected on our own race and positionality, we can then begin to examine the spaces in and around the classroom. Space is a multidimensional topic when it comes to education. There are the spaces we as educators inhabit: the neighborhood we live in (whether it is the same or different than the one we teach in), the school we teach in, our classroom to name a few. Then there are the spaces our students come from: their neighborhoods and communities, social groups and homes. These examples are all physical, but spaces that affect learning may also be social or emotional - what may be referred to as psychic (Emdin, 2016). The place where all of these differing backgrounds and understandings of place in the world all converge in the classroom, or in this case the art room. These borders can present racial collisions, conflicts, and misperceptions, unless navigated effectively. Crossing over in order to create an intentional classroom environment requires both extracurricular introspection and collaborative traversing through arts making practices.

### **Educator Backgrounds**

After school arts programs are often staffed with teaching artists who are not native to the organizations' neighborhood. For example, in Project Open Door + Schools (POD) - a program at Rhode Island School of Design that sends graduate student teaching artists to partnering high schools - I work with students who live in a nearby suburb of Providence, Pawtucket. When I first started there, I was not only unfamiliar with that community, but I had just moved to New England a few months before. I grew up largely in Texas where fajitas are never in short supply and winter days are rarely under 65 degrees Fahrenheit. The first day of the program I showed up nervously to class, hoping desperately that they'd give this young White girl a chance. Aside from a couple White students, all of my high schoolers were Black or Latinx. The first couple of weeks, it was hard not to feel like an outsider. Delany Gersten Susie (2012) describes a similar feeling:

When I pull into the parking lot of my school I sometimes feel like I am in a spaceship flying in from another planet. The students watch as this alien who is also their art teacher gathers her bags and walks to the school building. I am a white woman, and my students are all African-American, and like so many new teachers in urban public schools, I am not from their neighborhood. I expected to cross a cultural divide when I started this job. As a white woman working in an all-black school and community, I expected that I might feel like an outsider. (p. 160)

It is important to acknowledge these feelings as an educator and examine them. Recognizing that we come from different spaces, both physically and psychologically can help us to be proactive in understanding our students.

Awareness, however, is only the first step. Effective border crossing only happens when educators are not removed from the communities they work in, but do the active work of learning about and engaging with them. While we can read about youth of color and learn from specialists who write about urban education, these theorists are often physically and psychologically disconnected from the spaces they discuss (Emdin, 2016). As arts educators who are concerned with social justice and removing barriers, we must actively seek to understand the spaces our students inhabit.

## Student Communities

Paul Born (2012) poses a thought provoking question: “Could we engage in another person’s meaning for a while?” (p. 26). This is a practice that can help frame our mindsets as educators and border crossers. We are not asking, what might it be like to walk in someone else’s shoes, but instead what would it be like to experience their understanding of their own purpose and positionality as human beings. Emdin (2016) suggests that “to be in touch with the community, one has to enter into the physical places where the students live, and work to be invited into the emotion-laden spaces the youth inhabit” (p. 21). He says that these spaces are emotionally charged and form both inside and outside of school buildings. In fact, they go beyond geography and reach into the feelings that accompany particular places. (Emdin, 2016). When the classroom meets these complex backgrounds that arrive with our students, they can either add to them negatively or offer a space of safety.

While “some teachers understand that students come from places beyond the classroom and can acknowledge that these places have an effect on students and the spaces they occupy”, many educators have trouble seeing “beyond their immediate location (the school)” and others still “are taught to ignore psychic space altogether, and therefore cannot fathom what it must be like for students to whom the classroom is a breeding ground for traumatic experiences” (Emdin, 2016, p. 23). It is a great detriment for educators not to acknowledge the whole student experience both inside and outside the classroom. But how do we as educators engage in another person’s meaning?

Learning the spaces of our students is an act of engaged dialogue in which the student is an expert and the teacher is the learner. Susie offers one example of this that I have previously mentioned. She learns the community of her students by going on a tour of the neighborhood with her 8th grade class as a guide (Susie, 2012). Emdin takes a different approach when he invites a White teacher who is having trouble engaging his students to a Black church. He says:

The reason that this teacher led me to church (besides driving me to pray that he either retired early or learned how to teach) was that this was the only place where he would get some insight into the realities of his students. Most importantly, it was a place where he could see a wider range of emotions from urban people of color than anything he had seen before... I hoped that a visit to a black church would show him how to create context, elicit responses from students, engage them, help them to make connections, and keep them attentive. (p. 50)

In addition to this example, Emdin also invited a barber and a rapper, as expert speakers when leading teacher preparation programs (Emdin, 2016). While these professionals did not see themselves as educators, they had well-rounded insights into conversing, calling and receiving responses, and building relationships with neoindigenous\* youth. Each of these examples all emphasize the importance of the teacher learner relationship and position it as one that is not static. Tearing down the barriers erected by the various spaces we and our students come from, often means trading places and becoming the student ourselves.

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\*Emdin defines urban youth of color as “neoindigenous”, drawing a parallel of the oppression and displacement they often face to that of indigenous communities.

THE SPACE IN MANY SCHOOL CLASSROOMS IS CLAUSTROPHOBIC. THE ROWS ARE STRAIGHT AND NARROW; THE PLACES IN WHICH ONE IS ALLOWED TO WALK ARE CLEARLY DEMARCATED. THERE IS NO METAPHORICAL ROOM TO MANEUVER, NOT ENOUGH SPACE TO MOVE EXPRESSIVELY. THERE IS ONE RIGHT DIRECTION IN WHICH TO LOOK. TYPICALLY THERE IS NO TIME OR PLACE FOR STUDENTS TO LOOK AROUND AND EXPLORE QUESTIONS ABOUT THINGS THEY REALLY CARE ABOUT. THE SPACE OF CONVENTIONAL CURRICULUM IS MONO-DIMENSIONAL. IT'S A WORLD THAT IS TOO FLAT FOR THE KIDS (AND TEACHERS) TO REALLY INHABIT. VITAL LIFE HAPPENS OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL, OR-IF IN SCHOOL- IN THE HALLWAYS, WASHROOMS, PLAYGROUNDS, AND CAFETERIAS.

(Gude, 2012, p. 78)

## Intentional Classroom Space

Olivia Gude (2012) describes the reality of the classroom space in many urban settings across the United States. While after school arts spaces may have more freedom and mobility when it comes to space, many students' understanding and expectation of a classroom is guided by this perception. And in truth, nonprofits arts programs do not always have a space of their own and are held in urban school settings. In my experiences working with out of school arts, I have seen spaces similar to the ones Gude paints a picture of: cramped aisles and overcrowded rooms, rows facing straight ahead leaving little room for collaboration. Add to this the converging of race and culture, of teachers from the suburbs and urban youth, and a need for intentionality becomes very apparent.

To build an intentional classroom space is to build an identity safe space. "Creating an identity safe classroom is like making a tapestry. Every aspect of classroom life must be designed thoughtfully to create acceptance and belonging" (Moore et al., 2018, p. 119). Identity safe spaces are caring environments that champion child-centered teaching, cultivate diversity, and emphasize classroom relationships (Moore et al., 2018). Since we have established the classroom as a border space, a place of racial diversity and difference, we must understand that in order for a sense of unity to exist, there must first be safety. With thought and intention, identity safe spaces can be built. In these spaces students are encouraged to be themselves, to draw from their personal experiences, racial identities, and cultural backgrounds. Differences are not just acknowledged, but celebrated. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1967) presents an iteration of this space which he calls the Beloved Community saying:

This is the great new problem of mankind. We have inherited a large house, a great "world house" in which we have to live together—Black and White, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Moslem and Hindu—a family unduly separated in ideas, culture and interest, who, because we can never again live apart, must learn somehow to live with each other in peace. (p.167)

In alignment with his vision, bell hooks (1996) eloquently paints a picture of unity building as border crossing.

Like all beloved communities we affirm our differences. It is this generous spirit of affirmation that gives us the courage to challenge one another, to work through misunderstandings, especially those that have to do with race and racism. In a beloved community solidarity and trust are grounded in profound commitment to a shared vision. Those of us who are always anti-racist long for a world in which everyone can form a beloved community where borders can be crossed and cultural hybridity celebrated. Anyone can begin to make such a community by truly seeking to live in an anti-racist world. (p. 272)

Ultimately, the goal of building these spaces that cherish difference and respect the whole person in students is to create a sense of belonging and connection. We want students to comfortably be in the classroom space and be able to say “ I belong in the academic community, I can succeed at this, my ability and competence grow with effort, and this work has value for me” (Moore et al., 2018, p. 113). In understanding the spaces we inhabit and the spaces our students reside in, we begin to connect with communities, each unique and complex. From this gained understanding, “teachers can find methods to use what they learn from these communities in creating a curriculum that engages students. This may sound simplistic, yet it is not. It is at the heart of respect for [students]” and meeting the needs of BIPOC and neoindivigenous students (Moore et al., 2018, p. 37-38).

### Space and the Arts

In my work with after school and weekend art programs, I have begun to explore what it looks like to use art to understand this concept of space. Before embarking on these discoveries, I also spent some time gathering stories of educators and artists who play with space and the understanding of it in their work. Below you will find some examples of this.

The first was a clothing line presented by ToroLab called *Torrovestimenta*, which “enabled the wearer to engage in the shifting identities and roles necessary for trans-border commuting” (Quinn et al., 2012, p. 16). In these embodied sculptures, the clothing demonstrates specific geopolitical conditions and their impacts on the varying individuals who cross national borders. “For example, a pair of pants comes equipped with mutable pockets that hold passports and a laser visa if the wearer is Mexican, or credit cards and IDs if the wearer is American” (Quinn et al., 2012, p. 16). This example displays how art can both engage with and transgress the border space, even offering commentary on the often heavy political issues associated with it.

In another example, Doug Blandy (2012) imagines an exhibition in partnership with the Northgate Peace and Forgiveness Garden – a garden dedicated in memory of Montez Bailey who was shot dead in Northgate Park in 2009 (Blandy, 2012). Throughout his process of ideation for the exhibit he makes careful considerations about space and the community in which it will exist. He says:

I can imagine an exhibit that would include historical and contemporary photographs and snapshots of the neighborhood, news reports of the shootings, testimonials about the impact of the shootings on family and community members, documentation about how the community came together to plan and implement the garden, and documentation around the everyday life of the garden. Ideally such an exhibit would occur in the neighborhood of the garden and be paired with public programming that would further amplify the neighborhood, the socio-cultural context in which this neighborhood exists and the garden. (p. 33)

This attention to detail and genuine care for the community involved is similar to the care and attention teaching artists and art educators must have in the classroom. He understands the significance of the landmark he is working with and its deep rooted connection in the neighborhood. Thus, he weaves the community into the thread of his ideation. When we enter into a space, whether that be with lesson plans or in memoriam exhibits, we have an opportunity to empower the communities we work with. Putting our students' unique needs at the forefront of our minds is what allows us to fully enter in.

In a third example, Bert Stabler (2012) says "The apathy and animosity I face in my students on a daily basis may be in some part a reaction to my teaching style, but I would attribute it more to my role in their lives—both as a teacher and as a white male authority figure" (Stabler, 2012, 164). He adjusts to these attitudes by granting students autonomy and agency in projects such as a mosaic sculpture on economic justice, a cardboard robot symbolizing a link between prisons and schools, and inflatable animals made from plastic bags and newspaper assemblages. Each of these projects take place outside the school walls – at protests, in parks, and around the neighborhood. To this note Stabler says, "moving outside the boundaries of school... allows the school to feel more like a neighborhood institution and less an outpost of occupation" (Quinn et al., 2012, 167). In a similar vein, Anne Thulson (2012) says "we practice crossing borders at this K-8, expeditionary learning public school. Community members come into our building and we go outside of it to learn" (Quinn et al., 2012, 172).

Growing up, I can remember having the strongest connections to the teachers I saw outside of school, the ones who taught my sister's piano lessons, who were parents of close friends, who went to my church or ate at the same restaurants my family did. The educators who stand out even more so were the ones who attended my dance team performances and my senior art show years after I was in their class. At the university level, I felt most connected to the community when local artists or professionals would come in to give guest lectures, share their work, or talk about their practice or when we would go as a class to studios, exhibitions, and offices. The educators that blurred the line between the classroom and the community space, reinforced my sense of belonging to the neighborhoods I lived in and helped me to see them as a part of it as well.



FIGURE 3.4

## My Experience Investigating Space in Arts Learning

Learning from these examples of the connection between art and space, I began to plan arts learning for my students with these concepts in mind. Both activities were explored with early childhood learners ages four to seven in a program called Mini Makerz. The first was a map-making workshop. I designed this activity out of want for understanding how young children interpret their environment. We read a story about neighborhoods and welcoming communities and then I led the students in an imagination exercise. We closed our eyes and pictured our neighborhoods, our homes, and the spaces we spend our time in. After we used drawing materials to create maps of one of these spaces and modeling clay to embellish our pieces. Students drew maps of McDonalds and maps of their neighborhoods including their dad pumping gas. Another drew their best friend's kitchen complete with a small cat sculpture hiding under the table. Several of the young artists, however, had buried treasure hidden somewhere on their map (which I don't think was truly reflective of their communities). Perhaps it was the broadness of the prompt or the close connection between maps and hidden jewels, but this activity displayed that these kids were a little less concerned with what their neighborhood meant to them and instead excited to engage with their imaginative side.

In an effort to dig deeper and learn more about who my students are and how they identify with the spaces around them. I designed a second activity. In this activity, we read two story books - one about telling your story and the another that followed seven children from around the world sharing their different ways of living. In response, each student was to create their own storybook of mixed media paintings using watercolor and oil pastel. Each page would display a different quality true to how the student lives (what their house looks like, who they live with, what school they go to, the food they eat, where their family is from, what pets they have). This activity offered a little more direction, while allowing the students to tell their unique stories about how they exist in space in lots of different ways. The students had almost unlimited options about what they could paint which for these young children was key to keeping them engaged in discovery.

Through this activity, I was able to learn more about and connect with my students. One seven-year-old drew their pets, buildings from the Philippines where her extended family lives, and beautiful little portraits of her parents. Another student shared what different rooms in her home looked like and her love for cake. It was clear that the students felt proud to have created a small book of their own - one that was about them and therefore, meant something special to them. For me as an educator, I gained insights into who and what was important to them and where they were from in a way that was both delightful and engaging.

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The lesson plans for each of these activities are included as Appendices A and B at the end of this book.

# LISTENING



chapter three

FIGURE 3.5

The final border crossing practice I want to discuss is listening. In his work, Paul Born (2012) uses the term 'listening!' adding an exclamation as a reminder of the full bodied response that effective dialogue requires. Practicing listening in this way can help educators learn to care for their racially diverse students. There are multiple modes of listening when it comes to border crossing including responding to biases in curriculum, centering students in the lesson plans, learning and providing for the individual needs or learning styles of students, practicing social justice arts making, and turning over your position as teacher when necessary. Through dialogue and conversation educators can listen for the barriers present and respond in ways that tear them down.

### **Students at the Heart of Teaching**

Centering students in the curriculum is one way that educators can care for different races and faces in their classroom. This happens first by understanding the individual needs of each student. Joseph Derrick Nelson (2018) suggests that in order to fruitfully learn, students need to feel respected by their teachers. In this case Nelson defines respect for students of color as the following: to be cared for and seen; to value their perspectives and opinions, talents and gifts, interests and passions; to develop learning relationships with educators that go above and beyond; to have their distinct learning needs met; to be personally advocated for; and to recognize that they are indeed still children (Nelson, 2018). Essentially, educators can respect their students by seeing and responding to the whole person.

Vanessa López-Sparaco (2012) offers testament to this need for seeing the human in students when she describes her experience growing up in schools Art and Social Justice Education.

The first word that both my mother and I spoke in English was acorn. I was 6 years old; she was 38 years old. I grew up having to read and write for most of my elders who did not understand the language or the pace and structure of American culture, life, and its various systems. I made it through school, when so many others around me failed, because luck upheld my smarts. I had a few teachers who pitied me and even fewer that understood me. I needed an education that valued the strength within my struggle... I needed my experience to be valued. (p. 180).

Drawing from what he calls Pentecostal Pedagogy as mentioned previously, Emdin (2016) adds to this idea describing the link between emotion, relationships, and learning. He notes that there are times in the classroom when students need to take class to a different emotional place, a prime example of when a teacher can act as a preacher. When educators not only allow emotion, but celebrate it, they acknowledge that some students need to connect on an emotional level with the topic or the teacher in order to effectively learn (Emdin, 2016).

When I was volunteering in Honduras, I ran into issues of respect during tutoring with one of the fourth grade students I worked with when I first started out. He wanted nothing to do with me. Each day he and his brother would meet me in the library to go over homework. We'd jump right in practicing fractions and times tables, but this student would just roll his eyes and put his head down. I tried every fun game and bribe I could think of to no avail. Most days I'd walk home after dropping the boys off from tutoring with tears of frustration in my eyes. I couldn't understand what I was doing wrong or why he didn't seem to like me and I was out of ideas. Finally, after a meeting with his house mom, the school principal, the student, and me, I got to the root of the problem. After expressing to the student that I was only trying to help him learn he said, "Why do you care if I learn? You don't care about me. You don't even know me." What I discovered was that this student desired a relationship with me that went beyond the classroom space. In fact, he needed to feel some kind of connection with me, to know that I cared about who he was as a person (not just as a student) before he could really learn from me. Once I took the time to listen to his needs and made an effort to spend time with and get to know him outside of our tutoring sessions, he became one of my best learners.

Centering students in curriculum however, doesn't end with seeing them as human beings. We can also respond to their cultural and racial needs in the ways we plan lessons. It is important to understand that border crossing pedagogies and curriculums are not a one size fits all method. All students learn in different ways and their learning styles are often influenced by their racial backgrounds. In *the Guide for White Women Who Teach Black Boys*, Nelson (2018) describes one example of this, providing evidence from teachers and lesson plans which suggests successful engagement towards learning for Black boys involves: creating products, gaming, motor activity, role play or performance, open inquiry, teamwork, personal realization, novelty, drama, and surprise (Nelson, 2018). These examples are a great place to start when designing curriculums for racially diverse students. However, one of the most effective ways to respond is to get to know each of your students and learn (by asking) what works best for them.

### **Students at the Heart of Teaching**

The teacher must continue to be willing also to be the learner if [students] are to learn. It is in such willingness and continuations that we will then see transformative education. Such a transformation morphs the white educator into a symbiotic relationship of cultural knowledge educating betwixt the [students] and the teacher. (Marshall, 2012, p. 62)

So now we understand as John Marshall (2012) states in the text above, that the teacher must trade places with the student in order for true transformations to happen. The question many educators have is how to navigate these conversations in a classroom in a way that is not only effective but empowering for students.

Christopher Emdin (2016) puts forth cogenerative dialogues (cogens) as a solution to this question. Deliberately modeled after rap cyphers, “cogens are simple conversations between the teacher and their students with the goal of co-creating/generating plans of action for improving the classroom.” Emdin reflects from his experience with cogens that “they allow teachers to more effectively deliver complex subject matter to students from different cultural divides before addressing content” (p. 65). By validating the cultural traditions of BIPOC students in an academic setting, they allow for educators “about their ignorance about their ignorance of youth culture while welcoming it in the context of the cogen” (p. 66). The way Emdin describes cogens is like this: He starts with a small group of students and invites them to have conversations with him outside of class. When they agree voluntarily, he meets them with snacks and questions about how he or they can improve the classroom experience. They come up with a plan of action together and implement it in between conversations. At the next meeting, they reevaluate. The rules of each conversation follows the rules of a rap cypher where only one person holds the microphone at a time (Emdin, 2016). Emdin adds more layers to the process later on, but this is the starting point for his cultural learning in the classroom.

This example shows how teachers can better their listening by considering their students racial, cultural, and individual traditions and preferences every step of the way. It first begins by modeling the conversation after something the students may participate in or be familiar with in their interests outside of the classroom. It respects the students’ time by leaving space for them to opt out. It positions the teacher as the learner, allowing for borders to be crossed. And finally, it empowers the students by allowing their thoughts and ideas to contribute to the planning of the classroom space or the implementation of lessons.

### **Social Justice Arts Making: Projects that Listen**

So we know we can listen to our students’ needs and allow it to influence the way we teach, but can it influence what we teach? The short answer is yes. What we teach can be part of the methods we use to cross borders. In the paragraphs that follow, you will find two examples of Social Justice art education projects.

Steven Ciampaglia (2012) talks about the Pinky Show, an animated YouTube series that discusses pertinent political issues ignored by popular media. Ciampaglia argues that “by using online art projects such as The Pinky Show as a model, art educators can create projects that will bring critical pedagogical discourse within the field into the twenty-first century. This will ensure that socially conscientious art instruction can continue to reach its desired audience of young people” (Ciampaglia, 2012, 106). In this example, the use of the animated series offers students inspiration for political commentary through comics and animation. It allows for students to engage in these topics in ways that respond to their interests as young people. It also enables students to speak up about issues that may be individually important to them.

In another example, Sharif Bey (2012) looks at contemporary artists Michael Ray Charles and Fred Wilson, who “bring issues of identity and social justice to the forefront” of their work, and argues that “if teachers and students focus on the implications of power and privilege when interpreting works of art, students can have meaningful exchanges about the historical roots of inequality” (Bey, 2012, 140). I include this example because the way that we talk about and engage with art or artists is just as important as the projects we prompt students with. Both of these Black artists, one a painter and one an installation artist, deal heavily with issues of race in their work. Bey suggests that talking about these heavy issues can help students to have powerful exchanges with art and connect with ideas and issues that are personal to them.

When I first entered the after school art space, the phrase ‘social justice’ sounded a little daunting. People often think this kind of art needs to be blatantly political or about topics like race and discrimination. While the examples I included and projects of that nature are social justice oriented, not all socially just art has to fit these descriptions. “Rather, as long as the process of making art offers participants a way to construct knowledge, critically analyze an idea, and take action in the world, then they are engaged in the practice of social justice art making” (Quinn et al., 2012, xxi).

### **Approaching Dialogue in My Teaching**

My approach to dialogue when I started working with students after school looked for ways to fit ‘listening!’ into a weekly hour and a half time frame. During my first semester working with teens in POD, I wanted them to know from the start that the class was theirs. We began the first day with introductions and the creation of a Social Contract. This is a practice I learned in my high school Teen Leadership class. The goal of the activity is to create a contract for engagement in the classroom. However, the students are the ones who write the rules for participation, while the educator acts as a facilitator or scribe.

I began by explaining the activity and asking the students some questions: What do you need from me as an educator? How do you want your peers to engage with you and you with them? How can you be successful in this program? How can I help you to be successful? How can your peers help you to be successful? As the class starts to offer up answers like “respect each other” or “be kind” or “don’t be racist,” I would ask them to elaborate. What does respect look like? How can I be kind to you? How can you be kind to each other? How have you seen racism in the classroom? What does it mean to ‘be racist’? How can the I or the class better respect you and your culture? After the discussion, I had the students write down some tenants for engagement on notecards. We went around the room and read them aloud. We consolidated where necessary, combining the ones that were similar, being sure to phrase them in a way that everyone agreed on. Finally, the students wrote their rules for engagement on a poster and we all signed it.

After making the contract, it was clear that the students felt more comfortable. At the beginning of class when they introduced themselves, they were hesitant and quiet, sharing very little information. However, after writing the Social Contract, they had a sense of ownership over the class. We followed the contract writing with a small arts activity in which each student drew something that was representative of them in some way. One drew their astrological sign, another their cat, another their room. One student revealed that the person sitting next to them was their sister by drawing a small cartoon of her face. When we went around the room to share these drawings, the students had let go of their hesitations and were excited to share. The school's art teacher shared with me after class that she saw many students come out of their shells that afternoon, mentioning that one of the students she had never seen speak up in front of the class before.

This experience demonstrated the effectiveness of listening to me as an educator. When I stepped out of my role as teacher and allowed students to take control of their own learning, they were eager to be involved. It allowed me to understand my students' specific needs and hear from the varied races, cultures, and backgrounds of my students

# ONWARD

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an end and a beginning

Throughout this research project, I have explored the question:

### **How can educators establish a pedagogy of border crossing in racially and culturally diverse youth arts programs?**

I have examined the way arts programs are run in relation to the culturally and racially diverse communities they serve, discussed the border crossing methods used historically in the field of art education, and learned about the practical approaches, strategies, and tools that educators can implement in these programs. As a white woman and a female educator who works a lot in diverse learning spaces, I wanted this project to enable educators in similar circumstances to overcome the barriers presented by racial and cultural differences in the after school arts classroom.

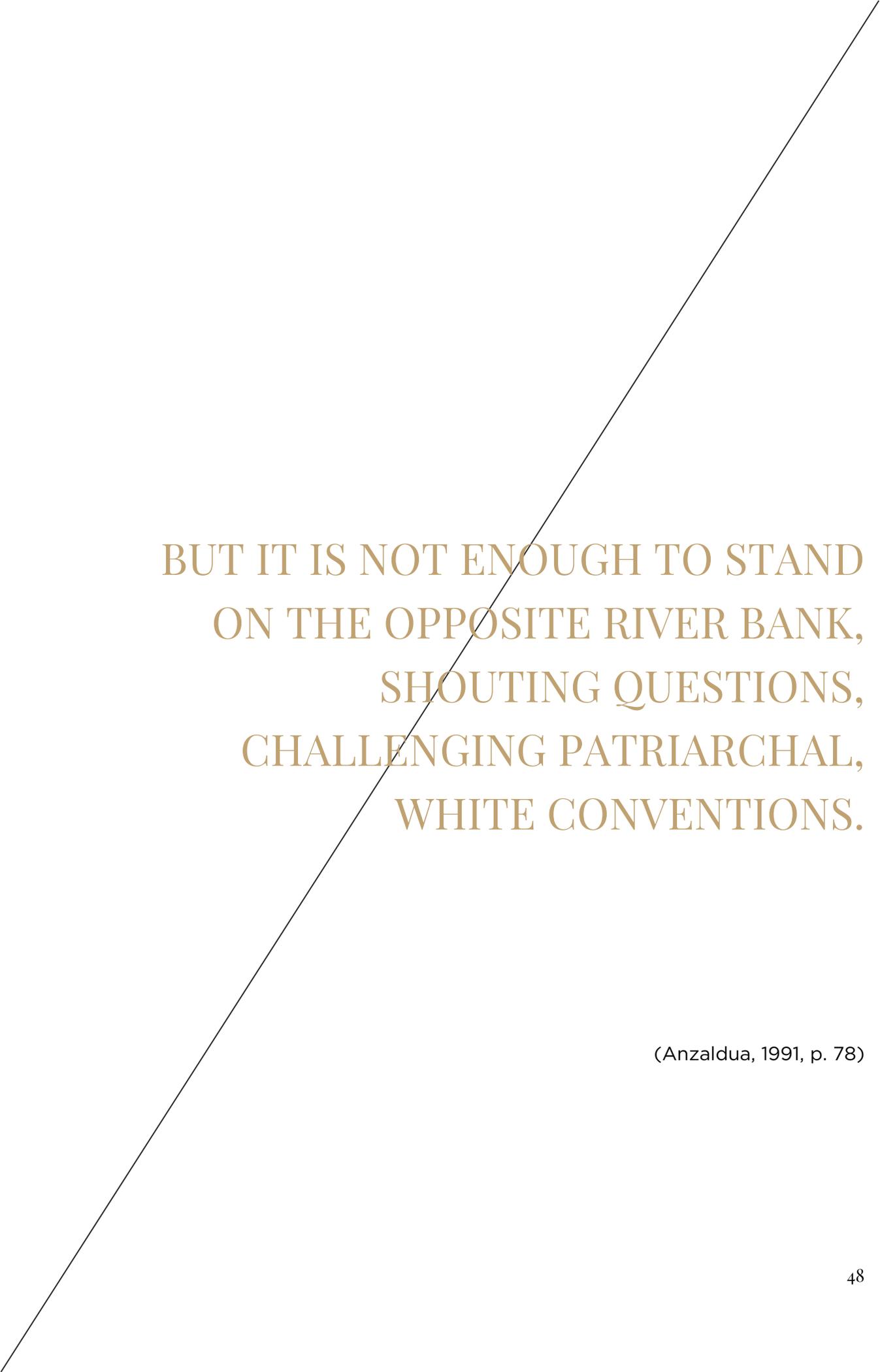
Of the methods and strategies I learned and read about in my research, the ones that resonated most with my personal experiences in the classroom were: self-reflection, space, and listening. These thematic tools offered lenses for me to understand the ways that educators can cross racial and cultural boundaries in the classroom in ways that care for students and are attentive to their unique perspectives. I have come to realize that the stories and perspectives our students offer are essential to their art making and identities as artists. I found that by implementing these tools – reflecting on our own bias and positionality, seeking to understand the space we work in and the spaces our students come from, and actively listening to our students as co-teachers in the classroom – we are able to participate in what bell hooks describes as engaged dialogue (hooks, 1994). When we position students as experts of their own learning and actively seek their experiences, perspectives, and cultural and racial backgrounds to inform our teaching, we engage in effective dialogues of border crossing. These conversations empower students in their identities both as human beings and as young artists.

Naturally, with this research, new questions and curiosities have emerged. Some of these are as follows: I wonder about the differences in border crossing curriculums for sustained classroom relationships versus one-time and short term arts workshops; I am curious about arts learning projects that can engage students with their communities directly; and I think about what kinds of professional development programs are out there (if any) that are aimed specifically at art education and helping art educators to do this kind of work.

So, we are at the end of this project, but for me, this research is only the beginning. I have spent the last year deeply reflecting on the the questions of this research, reflecting on who I am in relation to my students and who I want to be as an educator, and learning from incredible educators and student advocates in the field about the hard work that is required to build the kind of classroom I dream of. Toward the beginning of this thesis, I positioned the classroom as a border space using Gloria Anzaldua's (1991) description of their own border identity as follows:

The coming together of two self consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes un choque, a cultural collision. Within us and within la cultura chicana, commonly held beliefs of the white culture attack commonly held beliefs of the Mexican culture, and both attack commonly held beliefs of the indigenous culture. Subconsciously, we see an attack on ourselves and our beliefs as a threat and we attempt to block with a counterstance. (p. 78)

When including this before, I omitted the final line. Now, however, it resonates with how I feel as a move forward. She says:



BUT IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO STAND  
ON THE OPPOSITE RIVER BANK,  
SHOUTING QUESTIONS,  
CHALLENGING PATRIARCHAL,  
WHITE CONVENTIONS.

(Anzaldua, 1991, p. 78)

This project has asked questions, challenged conventions, and sparked many conversations, but it is only the start. It is now time for me to step forward, to wade into the rapidly moving waters and across the river, to close the gaps between me and my students, to mend the wounds we received from reaching through barbed-wire fence lines for years, and to put into practice the things that I have learned through this research.

I want to close with the following lines from a children's book by Jacqueline Woodson entitled *The Day You Begin*. I read this with the children one Sunday afternoon in Mini Makerz and these lines speak to the heart of what I want to do with this work and how I want my students to see themselves in my classroom.

THERE WILL BE TIMES WHEN YOU WALK INTO A ROOM  
AND NO ONE THERE IS QUITE LIKE YOU UNTIL THE DAY YOU BEGIN  
TO SHARE YOUR STORIES...

THIS IS THE DAY YOU BEGIN

TO FIND THE PLACES INSIDE  
YOUR LAUGHTER AND YOUR LUNCHES,  
YOUR BOOKS, YOUR TRAVEL AND YOUR STORIES,

WHERE EVERY NEW FRIEND HAS SOMETHING  
A LITTLE LIKE YOU – AND SOMETHING ELSE  
SO FABULOUSLY NOT QUITE LIKE YOU  
AT ALL.

(Woodson, 2018)

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# APPENDICES

# MAP-MAKING WORKSHOP

**Objective** | Students will explore their understanding of their own environment.

## **Part One** | Storytime

**Arrival** -- Map coloring sheets available

**Book** -- *All Are Neighbors* by Alexandra Penfold and Suzanne Kaufman

## **Part Two** | Map-Making Artists

Look at artistic maps from artists like Kate McLean and Gareth Wood.

## **Part Three** | Exploration Through Art

**Activity** -- Students will create their own maps of a place they know. Ask students to think of a place they know and would like to tell the group about. Students can close their eyes and imagine while the instructor guides them through a series of questions. After the students have imagined the place, instruct them to use the materials provided to make some kind of map of the place. Provide further reflective questions if needed. Students will be encouraged to explore different kinds of maps, make multiple maps, and note that maps are never objective and don't have to be perfect, can't include everything. When students start to finish their drawings they can use modeling clay.

**Imagine** -- Imagine a place that you love. Where are you? Outside or Inside? Building? Street? Park? What does the place look like? What do you see? What does it smell, taste, or sound like? Do you hear anything? Is it loud or quiet? Does it smell nice or stinky? What kinds of things are around you? Are there people? Is there furniture? Buildings? Animals? Plants? Cars? What do you like about this place? How does it make you feel? Why do you enjoy being there? Why is it important to you?

## **Materials**

- Crayons and markers
- Colored pencils
- Paper
- Modeling clay

# STORY WORKSHOP

**Objective** | Students will practice sharing stories about themselves.

## **Part One** | Storytime

**Arrival** -- Portrait coloring sheets available

**Book** -- *The Day You Begin* by Jacqueline Woodson and *This is How We Do It* by Matt Lamothe

**Conversation** -- Questions after the book: Who is in your family? What kind of food do you eat at your house? Does your family have any special celebrations or traditions? Where does your family go together?

## **Part Two** | Watercolor paintings

**Activity** -- Students will explore their identity and stories through watercolor and oil pastels. The students will first draw with oil pastels and then use watercolor as a secondary material. Each student will create at least 4 paintings: 1) their family; 2) a food their family eats together; 3) a special tradition or celebration they have in their house; 4) a portrait of themselves. Each student will also create a cover from two coloring sheets ('The day \_\_\_ begins' and 'The End').

### **Other optional pages**

- Color your favorite outfit
- Draw your house
- Draw a picture of a birthday party you had
- Draw a memory you really like
- Draw something you like to do outside
- Draw something you like to do inside
- Draw a sport you like to play
- Draw you and your friends
- Draw your pets

## **Part Three** | Tying it all together ...literally

**Activity** -- Once dry, students will use yarn to tie the pages of their story together. (If not dry, students will take yarn home and do this step at home.) Students will take turns sharing their stories and paintings with everyone.

### **Materials**

- Crayons and markers
- Watercolor paper
- Holepunchers
- Yarn
- Watercolor paints
- Paint brushes
- Water/cups for cleaning brushes
- Oil pastels

# BUILDING A SOCIAL CONTRACT

## Step 1

The educator will explain the idea of a social contract to the class, asking for their help in establishing rules and guidelines for behavior and expectations in class.

## Step 2

Students will be asked to answer the following four questions. This can be done as a whole class or in smaller groups. The students should be encouraged to define words and provide explanation when necessary.

- **How do you want to be treated by the teacher?**
- **How do you want to be treated by each other?**
- **How do you think the teacher wants to be treated?**
- **How do you want to treat each other when a conflict occurs?**

## Step 3

Ask the students to narrow down each of their lists to their top five answers to each question.

## Step 4

During this step, the educator will act as a scribe. The students or groups will share their top five answers for each question. If the class agrees, the teacher will add each response to a poster-sized paper. To consolidate duplicated responses, the scribe will add a check mark next to each repeated response.

## Step 7

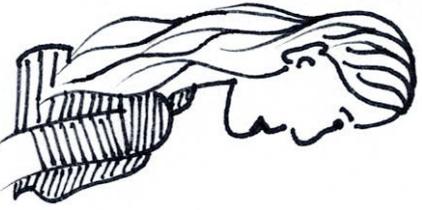
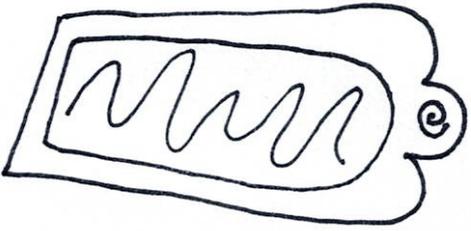
Once the contract has been created, all students should be asked to sign it as their commitment to it.

## APPENDIX D

HOW DO I  
CROSS  
BORDERS  
IN MY  
CLASSROOM  
FULL OF  
DIFFERENCE?

RISD TLAD 2023  
THE  
SMALLER  
BORDER  
CROSSER'S  
POCKETBOOK  
BRITNEY COPPICK

LOOK IN THE MIRROR

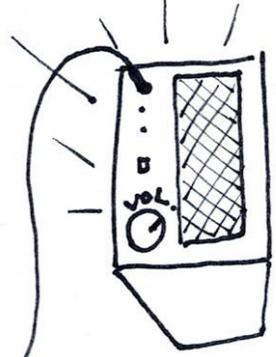



STEP ONE

HOLD THE MIC UP  
TO THE VOICES OF  
YOUR STUDENTS



AND  
TURN  
THE VOLUME  
ALL THE WAY UP!




ASK YOURSELF...

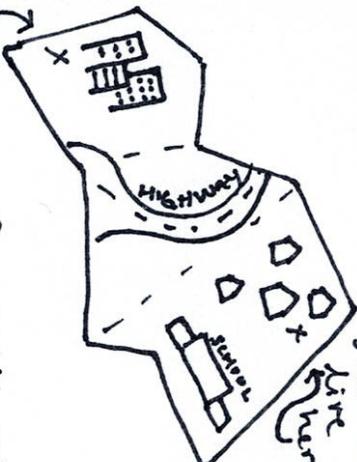
- What color is my skin?
- What privileges do I have?
- What biases do I have?
- What expectations do I have?

STEP THREE



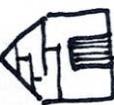
STEP TWO

your students live here



GET TO KNOW THE SPACES your students occupy

THESE SPACES ARE...

- MENTAL 
- PHYSICAL 
- EMOTIONAL 
- SOCIAL 