

**Art Can Empower Children and  
Lead Them to  
Think Seriously About Significant  
Critical Issues**

*Jialu Gao*

**Art Can Empower Children and Lead Them to Think About of  
Significant Critical Issues**

**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**

**By**  
*Jialu Gao*

**Rhode Island School of Design  
2021**

**Approved by  
Advisor  
Dr. Paul A. Sproll, Professor, Head  
Department of Teaching + Learning in Art + Design**

---

**Reader  
Dr. Shana Cinquemani  
Department of Teaching + Learning in Art + Design**

---

Jialu Gao Copyright © 2021

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my supporting family and my life partner Lefan  
Cheng

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>DEDICATION</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>CHAPTER III MODELS OF EMPOWERED ART EDUCATION</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Chapter IV FINAL REFLECTIONS</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>43</b>

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I wish to acknowledge to the support of amazing mentors Dr. Paul Sproll, and Dr. Shana Cinquemani in RISD's Department of Teaching + Learning in Art + Design and all people who have supported me in the Master of Arts in Art + Design Education program

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis is an investigation of how students can benefit through art and how visual arts educators can engage students in thinking about critical issues that are happening within contemporary society. Raising people's awareness of the value of art, and especially urging to practice art better in schools' curriculums are the starting point. This thesis includes looking at selective literatures from Elliot Eisner, Charles Fowler, Mika Munakata and other educators and authors. The author also examines select contemporary practices in art education that occur in different settings, for example, in school, in gallery, in museum, and in community. The author argues that art is integral to the school curriculum and has the power to make impact and bring about change. This thesis identifies children as the next generation and society's future. And through this thesis the author declares the importance within education of all subjects in children's education and these importantly must include Art.

# ***Chapter One***

## ***Introduction***

### **Research statement**

There are a lot of problems in our society, for example, social equity, gender equity, racial problems and so on. I believe that art, especially art education has such a power that can act as vehicle to help people engage with community, civic, and social issues. It is said that using visual art form to convey ideas, feelings or personal meanings is a very effective and creative way. Most importantly, art can also let children be able to express themselves and help them develop as individuals. As my journey exploring art along the way, my interest in art education has grown in a tremendous way. This thesis is about how to empower the students through art and lead both students and art educators into thinking of bigger critical issues that are happening today in society and around the world. Rising people's awareness of the value of art, and especially urging to practice art better in schools' curriculums are the thesis' goals. I believe that art has such a power in making a change or creating an impact. Children and youth are the next generation and the future. We make an emphasis on education, not only on the common subjects that are recognized as important, but also on art education.

### **Methodology**

Writing this thesis involved a lot of different methodologies that made this paper come to real. I would be more than willing to share about what kinds of methodologies I used in my paper, and how I organized the materials using different methodologies I discovered. This would be very helpful for the readers to understand and follow the structure and the content of this thesis.

One of the most commonly used methodologies in doing a research would be probably browsing online websites and try to find useful resources that might help with



supporting the ideas and statement. However, I preferred doing a literature ‘scan’ in a more credible source of information, which is the databases that were recommended by my dear professor, Dr. Paul Sproll. He recommended me to two databases that helped my research in a tremendous way. They are ERIC database and RISD’s Library online Fleet Search. Most of my sources came from these two. I also used Google Scholar which is a database that I found out when I chatted with my friends about ways of doing research. My friends have been very supportive and encouraging in my life. I am grateful for them as well.

After confirmed the places I would be using to find resources, I started my research by typing key words into the search bar, and simply by clicking ‘search’ button, a list of journals and articles related to the key words popped up. It’s time to enjoy the literature! Thanks to the development of the internet, doing research is longer limited to paper-backed books, but also there are tons of electronic books that are available online. Most of the schools nowadays have their own online libraries which offer students access to books. It is a convenient and an efficient study method which I have been benefited throughout the years. Another thing I would like to mention is that more and more people nowadays are paying attention to the concept of ‘Go Green’, which focuses on environmentally-friendly lifestyles, eco-friendly and sustainability. For example, my health insurance card is in electronic version and it works well. Doing research online not only is a ‘Go Green’ lifestyle, but is also doing a little contribution to the environment since this method of study works pretty well for me.

The next step I took after I had already collected a good amount of literature materials for my thesis is to organize those sources. Actually, along the way I was ‘scanning’ and reading the journals and books in databases, I already started doing citations records for each of the article I was going to use as references at the same time. In this way, I am more able to keep track on where I found those materials. After I had done this process and formed my citation page draft, I went forward to classify

the sources into different catalogs. For example, some sources are about the value of art education, some are about art education leads to critical thinking. Therefore, I would create subtitles for those catalogs and group the sources together that fall into those catalogs separately. This helped a lot because having sources organized would enable myself to navigate them easier. When I want to use a specific source, I am able to find it right away.

Having gone through systematic art education, I always remind myself that art should reflect an artist's very true thoughts and points of view towards the world. I would introduce my personal background first so it will be clear what has led me to this point. Having obtained a bachelor's degree in fine arts, I used to see myself as an artist. Art has always been a pleasure as well as a necessity for me. I started painting at the age of six. Barely using references in my paintings, most of my ideas and inspiration come from my imagination and sub-consciousness. They are the product of intuition and spontaneity.

Coming from eastern culture and studying and fascinated by western culture, I am always trying to combine the two and create a unique style of contemporary art and also contribute my part to the art world. In my paintings, there are a lot of symbols and character-like elements. They are not real 'calligraphy' or any of the language we speak. They are symbols I created. Calligraphy in Eastern culture is seen as a visual art related to writing. Contemporary calligraphic practice can be defined as the art of giving form to signs in an expressive, harmonious, and skillful manner. Therefore, I created my own abstract character-like symbols as unique elements in my art, which enabled me to discover my 'language' in the art world. Most of the characters in my works are different and not repetitive. I use them as important components of my paintings. Sometimes, they are 'translations' of poems, sometimes, they have no meaning. They are natural parts of my works which formed my style.

I get inspired, encouraged, and motivated. My paintings are about shapes and forms, colors and patterns. I love making things abstract. This is the charm of making

art, because I am the creator of the world on a two-dimensional canvas in front of me. I feel the excitement towards the uncertainty that is going to appear on my canvas. When people look at my works, they always say they could feel the paintings have a lot of meanings behind them, besides the vibrant, lively, passionate colors that they see. The figures in my paintings are reflections of me, myself. I feel tranquility when I paint. I see the process of making art as a way of having a conversation with myself. The beauty of art sometimes comes with the unknown and unpredictable. I have been continually 'pushing myself out of the envelope', changing, growing, and experimenting. I enjoy making art.

I see myself not only as an artist, but also as a beneficiary of art. As my journey exploring art along the way, my interest in art education has grown in a tremendous way. A voice rose in my mind: 'I want more people to benefit from art, but how should I start and what specific area I am interested in?' The answer to this appeared after I went on a charity trip. Sometimes, it is easy to navigate what our interests are, but really find out what specific area we want to dive into is hard and needs investigations and researches. It can be still not enough information for us to decide our future investigation direction. Therefore, doing a case study to testify our interests of study is always very helpful. I was lucky enough to have an opportunity to do a case study last summer. This case study enabled me to find out and re-confirm my interest in art education. Until now, I am very clear that the specific area I want to focus on is art education.

The organization I chose to do my case study is a charity organization in China. I went to this place with a group of people from my church and brought my small art lesson plan that I prepared to the children. I have had four solo art exhibitions and one group art exhibition. Before coming to graduate school, I see myself as an artist. However, I always ask myself, 'What is my ultimate goal as an artist?' I have not found the answers until I participated the social welfare activities. I never anticipated this kind of experience being a volunteer teacher in the social welfare activities. It gave me

ideas about artistic direction and further enlighten my artistic pathway in future. I worked as a volunteer teacher at Xianyang Herald Children's Home and was mainly in charge of teaching the children how to draw a picture. The home, sponsored by Herald foundation, USA, is mainly for the adoption of 6 to 12 years old children who come from the disabled and poor families.

In the first lesson, the wistful eyes of these children at arts moved me profoundly. In order to light their enthusiasm to draw a picture, I taught them how to draw in T-shirt. But in the beginning, they were very shy and were not willing to draw a picture without enough confidence. Realizing the problem, I immediately changed my teaching plan, encouraged them and tried my best to inspire their imagination and interest. For example, I told them that the leaves were not necessarily green. In your mind, they could be red, purple and yellow. At the same time, I also stepped off the stage and walked around students in order to answer their questions timely. With my careful guide and continuous encouragement, they gradually finished the task with the personalized T-shirt. My dedication and efforts to teach their children has been paid off. Nine children obtained different level awards among 1200 participates in the final phase of Van Gogh Art Competition.

The volunteer experience has made me realize that every child may become an artist as long as their potential can be explored and inspired. At the same time, Arts integrating with education have a great power to add their confidence and increase their sense of happiness. What's more important, I have found my future mission to promote the arts with education. Nevertheless, in the experience, I have realized that my accumulated knowledge and skills about art and education is not enough to fulfill my plan for my future. I explored my interest and to really be aware of what I lack of in art education, for example, my knowledge in art education, teaching skills, and how to empower students through art in a bigger way. There are so many things I need to learn. Therefore, after serious consideration, I made up my mind to continue my education journey in art education program at the Rhode Island School of Design.

Doing this case study really helped me to think through and break through from my comfort zone. I keep this case study an on-going project for myself. I go back to Xianyang Herald Children's Home each year to develop more insights towards my art education research. In lights of my future plan, I am thinking to pursue a position as art educator in a school or art educational institutions. In the long run, I wish to found an art school with the cutting-edge art education concepts and methods in order to promote the arts and further make more and more people benefit from the arts.

Art is an indispensable part in my life. Some people say that art is dispensable and small. Although art is not so indispensable for many people compared to learning other fields of study, it has had a very large contribution to education. However, the good news is that the situation of art education is getting better. But whether in the United States or China, art classes are still courses that is not taken seriously enough. Based on my many years of studying at home and abroad, I found that children do not have enough opportunities to learn art. It is our duty to think about how to maximize the benefits of children in the limited access to art.

Looking into the world, the situation of art education has not received the same attention as other subjects in schools. The reason may be as some people have said, when human material civilization has developed to a certain level, then people will pursue art. However, we are actually already living in an era where material civilization is extremely advanced. Art is not as abstract and out of reach as we imagined. It can exist in every detail of our lives. It is not only the artworks that hang in the Louvre and other famous art museums or the hands of art collectors that are worthy of appreciation. Those are just one of the broad categories in the art world. In schools, aren't the clay sculptures, colored pencil drawings, origami, etc. made by the children art? Picasso once said, 'Every child is an artist, but the important thing is whether they will still be an artist when they grow up.' I agree with half, because I believe that not every child needs to be an artist. Not every child who is exposed to art can only become an artist. I agree with half, because not every child needs to be an

artist. Not every child who is exposed to art can only become an artist. Through schools, art education institutions, and art educators like us, children are able to have the opportunity being exposed to art, which will be beneficial to them throughout their lives. Whether we help children form their own aesthetics or enable them to have a little grasp of color, they will have a profound impact on children. Art education, like education in any other discipline, is doing something meaningful and mission-worthy. For those children who are exposed to some extent of art education, we have the opportunity to help them discover their talents in art, and they will then have the opportunity to have more choices in their future career development. They can become architects, designers, art educators and so on in the future. The development of human society is not solely relying on one or several skills or fields of study, but on the contrary, it is based on the diversity of human talents. Therefore, as art educators, our task is to provide children with a soil where they can grow happily according to their wishes through their unique talents.

So why did I choose to become an art teacher? I have known I love art since I was little. I have held several solo and group exhibitions and participated in many art activities. But as my experience increased, my thoughts towards life increased. When the time I was applying for a graduate school, I went to the Jiaosheng Home of Xianyang, Xi'an, where I discovered my love for children. I began to ask myself: 'In addition to being an artist and enjoying painting, what can I contribute to this society? What kind of life do I want to live?' The answer is, 'I want to be an influential person, I want to become an art educator.' When I realized that I could combine my passion for art with my love for children, the answer was obvious. Children are the future; they are the next generation. I want to contribute to this society and do my part to bring value to others.

The reason why I chose to become an art teacher and an art educator is not only because of my love for art and art education, but also because of I have a sense of

responsibility, mission and satisfaction in cultivating the next generation. I have been lucky to be exposed to art since I was 3 years old and have benefited from art my whole life. Therefore, I also hope that more children can be just like me, more or less have the opportunity to learn art and create art. I am willing to contribute my piece of strength. I am grateful for all that I have and all that art has given to me. I am honored to aspire to become an art educator and an art teacher. With a grateful heart, I will continue learning, growing, moving forward, and living a meaningful and valuable life.

## ***Chapter Two***

### ***Literature Review***

It is important, in my view before examining the major thesis topic, to pay a special attention to the importance of art in education. It is vital that to understand the significance of the role that art plays in education because it is the cornerstone of the ideas and topics that will be discussed later. Society is more based on a fast pace model, and I would argue that it has built our education systems on the model of fast food. Some people are anxious, dysphoric, busying with things and occupied by those things. Their inner voices tell them for instance to Be efficient, and that Time is money...' As a result, people become insensible and apathetic with things and have lost the ability of pursuing the ultimate meaning of life. This is a major problem society is facing today, and one can especially see this in people's attitude and opinions towards art in education.

Sir. Ken Robinson, a British author, speaker and international advisor on education in the arts to government, non-profits, education and arts bodies stated that 'education needs revolution, not evolution'. In a TED Talk titled Bring on the Learning Revolution Robinson (2020) stated, "Human's resources are like natural resources. They are often buried deep instead of on the surface. Our education should be the method to help our students discover their interests rather than making them all the same" Robinson) further suggested that 'teachers should be more like farmers and gardeners. And that educating students should not be a mechanical process, instead, teachers should nourish them and help them realize their interests'. This TED Talk still haunts me especially when Robinson talked about the fact that a good number of people, don't enjoy what they do for work. They simply go through their life getting on with it. They get no great pleasure from what they do. They simply endure it rather than enjoy it and wait for the weekend. However, we need to realize that this is regrettably the situation today in our society. On the other hand, people



who love what they do couldn't imagine doing anything else. Today we are also facing difficulties and challenges in our art education. Some people have stereotype or don't recognize the importance of art in our education. Pfeiler-Wunder (2013) in the article, *Social Class and Art Room Curriculum*, talks about the situation that art education faces in our schools nowadays, stating:

The differences in administrators', teachers', and families' viewpoints of art and goals of the art classroom can be seen as closely related to cultivating particular class values. Parents viewed art as a product and expected a specified purpose, rather than seeing art as a means for expression. The principle felt parents placed a high level of emphasis on academics. Art is appreciated, but not the main focus. (p.157)

It seems like art is always something not necessary when it comes to compare with other subjects. Some people hold the opinion that art is something only the kids come from wealthy family can enjoy and pursuit for career. However, we see so many well-known artists made up their mind and started to use art as a tool of expression when they were still poor and had difficulties with their livings. What happened? They made their voice heard. They made changes in the society and the world. I think this should be the essence of art. I always believe art has a great power in making a change. Art is not only about making a holiday card or drawing a beautiful picture, but also contribute to children's growth and future in an invisible way. Academics are important, but art is important as well. Elliot Eisner, a leading art educator in the world stated 'If Apple is the Language of the Future, then Art Must be the Core'. In Eisner (2002) article, What can education learn from the arts about the practice of education? He discussed about what education might learn from the arts about the practice of education. Eisner stated:

The arts are, in the end, a special form of experience. It is in this sense especially that the arts can serve as a model for education. It is sad that people usually think art classes are not as important as other subjects, the importance of exposing and teaching art to students have not been recognized in a sufficient extent. Eisner proposed that the forms of thinking needed to create artistic work were relevant to all aspects of education. Incorporating methods from the arts into teaching of all subjects would cultivate a richer educational experience (Eisner, 2002).

There are so many benefits that one can gain from art, and we should not simply make a conclusion or statement on whether it is necessary to have art classes in our curriculums. For some subject, it is easier to evaluate whether a student does good at this course by giving tests and looking at grades. However, art is so unique that we cannot just put emphasis on the product but also on the process of making art. The experience that making art brings to a person is very valuable and is usually not easily aware of in a short amount of time. We will discuss the benefits and the power of art in details as we unfold our discussion in this thesis. However, the situation of art that we are facing today is tough and challenging.

Art educators and teachers that care their students wish people will raise their awareness in the importance of art education. However, I understand there is difficulties subjectively and objectively. Some subjects are getting more attention than others, and this is the result of the development of human history. This is the fact. People might even think learning and mastering a foreign language would be more useful than having the ability appreciating art. For art educators, we know that art education is not simply about this. In Fowler(1994) article, *Strong Arts, Strong Schools*, he discussed about arts humanize the curriculum while affirming the interconnectedness of all things, they are a powerful means to improve general education. Schools that overlook the arts are creating a less civilized generation. Moreover, the arts provide a more comprehensive, insightful education because they invite students to explore the emotional, intuitive, and irrational aspects of life that science is hard-pressed to explain. Fowler also discussed how art can bring value to a more cohesive curriculum stating:

With a subject matter as broad as life itself, the arts easily relate to aspects of almost everything else that is taught. But, by the large, the arts are not conveyors of information. Dance and music do not add to our information overload. Their purpose is not to convey data but to supply insight and wisdom— in a word, meaning. Their power is that they can move us. They serve as connectors that give understanding a human dimension. (Fowler, 1994).

The value of art education is undeniable. There are many benefits that art education can bring to school curriculum and education in a bigger realm. For parents and teachers who are not able to dedicate their finance and time to art education but have already realized and admitted the value of art, there must be some ways that can help them find the balance between art education and other subjects' learning. Art integration is a great starting point for them to take time coming to see art has such a power in bringing value to education in general. Art education cultivates students with valuable qualities, such as, collaborative, creative, comprehensive, insightful ability and so on. These qualities work for all subjects' learning. In their future educational journeys or careers, these qualities will surely benefit them in all ways.

There is an article by Munakata, M. & Vaidya, A. (2012) *Encouraging Creativity in Mathematics and Science through Photography*, that I find interesting. The authors discussed how other subjects in school curriculums can learn from art. Munakata stated, 'The students at the university do not consider mathematics and science to be creative based on the results of a survey of a group of students.' Therefore, the author used photography as a means to encourage students to be creative by considering the mathematics and science represented around them in their work and finding the blending of art and science in it. Through the projects, students are asked to consider evidence and representations of science and mathematics in their everyday lives. Then they are asked to use cameras to record it, and explain the science and mathematics involved. The use of photography is involved in the activities. Munakata and Vaidya stated:

The first of the annual Physics and Art exhibition at our university. The event showcased photographs taken by undergraduate students in CSAM. The photos had to be creative and artistically done on a physics-related theme, and the students were asked to identify and elaborate on the science behind the art. The importance of such informal events tied to the classroom cannot be underestimated. They can be extremely beneficial in conveying essential ideas which might be difficult in the traditional classroom due to pressures associated

with grades. All students are able to participate in exploring connections between the sciences and creativity in a novel way (Munakata & Vaidya, 2012)

I think this bringing art into the study of other subjects is very innovative and meaningful. The students are able to go outside the classroom and walk around carrying their cameras exploring. This is a good way to learn which stimulates students' brain comparing to just sit in the classroom listening long lectures. It is hard to keep focus in class when students are exhausted, instead, walking around and taking photos seems much more interesting. Combining this way of learning with listening lectures and reading textbooks will let students have totally different experience and opinions towards a subject. Especially, for younger students, they are at the age of hyperactivity and exploration. Little change we make in our syllabus will make a big step forward in our teaching.

On the other side of incorporating art into the curriculum, there is still something we need to be aware of, which is people's awareness of the value of art is still very limited. A merging topic around incorporating art into other subjects' curriculums has been explored these years and is becoming a trend in today's education. It also has made great achievements in education. We can see that people recognize the value of art more when they see that art can be a tool to 'serve' other 'main subjects' in the curriculum. There was another article I read which is talking about integrating art into math's which raised students' interest in learning math. Students found classes enjoyable through collaborating art practices into other subjects' learning. This is a beneficial and helpful method of learning those subjects. However, if people are asked to make an artwork only, for example, making a painting rather than collaborating, this would not be seen as important or popular among the main cognition towards art in society as collaborating art with other subjects. The reality behind it is still that people don't think art as important. I wish one day, students would say, 'I wish to make art and I really enjoy taking art classes.'

Moreover, I wish one day people would treat art as a serious subject just like any other subject in our curriculum. After all, art is a subject that not only has the creative part, but also contains reading, researching and writing. Those abilities that are involved in learning art are the same compare to learning other subjects. For example, when studying about the masterpieces in art history, students need to pay attention to the lectures and sometimes papers are required, quizzes are taken in class, tests are given so that teachers would be able to evaluate whether students have worked hard to absorb the knowledge or not, and then be able to give grades to students. This part of learning in art is just like other courses in our curriculums, for example, a history class. Learning history has its own meaning that is so vital but is usually not tangible. However, schools still take it into serious consideration when making the curriculum. Taking history classes in schools is required even though students may not go on becoming a historian or working in fields that are related to history. History class is treated very properly. How so? If imagine an art class as a world history class, people would treat it seriously. Students then would have to have the same positive learning attitude towards learning art. The voice of saying art classes are not necessary would be less. If it is not so, I could always question them why taking history classes is accepted by the norm, taking art history classes is not? What makes a difference?

The space and the flexibility that art classes provide to students do not mean art classes do not require a positive and right learning attitude. Therefore, art classes should be treated seriously as well. As a matter of fact, art is fun and involves creativity and other elements that are beneficial which stimulate students' overall growth. To me, making art speaks to me more comparing to doing a chemistry experiment or doing a math equation. Art is interesting and also play an important role in developing our brains. It is acknowledged that If you're mostly analytical and logical in your thinking, you are left-brained. If you tend to be more creative or

artistic, you are thought to be right-brained, and learning art is a direct way to develop our right brains which control our ability of creativity, memorization, coordination and so on.

Even though I am not willing to admit that solely let people pay more attention to making art is still difficult. However, no matter what, integrating art into other subjects is always a good starting point to lead people's attention to art and recognize value of art. At the same time, we should still be cautious and vigilant about the nowadays phenomenon that art is always in service in something else and trying to make curriculums better little by little. Restructuring the curriculum and let students have more choices when they want to learn more about art is what we should strive for. More and more people are realizing how art can be a useful tool for research in multiple disciplines, and as a way to communicate ideas in different ways. I hope this integration evolves beyond a trend but to impact larger societal systems. This is will be a long and challenging process but that is our hope to make things better and to empower students to the biggest extent we can do.

What students gained from art is sometimes both explicit and implicit. Learning art are beneficial not only in aesthetic aspects but also in their overall growth. So, changes need to be made. I think the schools should not think art classes are not important, because there are always hidden curriculum taught in the art classroom, which really affect student's choices when they choose where they want to go for colleges or what they want to do as their careers later on. For students who are interested in art, they can choose to be fashion designers, illustrators, photographers, interior designers. So many other occupations are there when they want to turn their interests into more specific areas. They can even become art educators, art professors, and researchers.

Also, I believe that every child is gifted in specific areas. There is a movie I watched recently that really inspired me to think, 'What is it that makes me...Me!'.

The movie is called 'Soul'. It is a movie produced by Disney. One of the characters in the movie whose name is called '22' had a hard time finding her 'spark' for her life and was very frustrated and perplexed. She even lost hope for her life on the earth. However, she found her interest in the end and happily accepted entering the earth and live a meaningful life. She always asked herself, 'What is the spark for my soul?' As a future art educator, I also always ask myself, 'What is the spark for my students?' I think I have the mission and wish I could help the students find their 'sparks' for their souls.

Some students may not be so interested in art, but that is fine. Letting them have the opportunities to be exposed to art and let them be clear about 'okay, this is not my 'spark' is also very important and meaningful. As least, they have gone through the process of figuring out their interests are not in art, and this is the most important core of education, which is to guide them rather than tell them what should be right. When we teach students Math, Physics, Chemistry and other subjects, we have no idea whether they will pursue their careers related to those areas, for example, becoming a scientist. Actually, very few students will become scientists later on and we all know this probability is low comparing to working in other fields of study. Even the probability of working in fields that are related to art is higher in some way. However, it is interesting that schools still choose to see those subjects as vital and put serious emphasis on them. Giving tests is also a method for teachers and schools to evaluate whether the students have absorbed the knowledge or not. For the students, achieving good grades and do well on tests are also proving they are doing well in their studies.

However, it is usually hard for art teachers to say this student's artwork is better than the other student. As a result, there is no single approach to evaluating a student, which is a very unique phenomenon in art teaching. Therefore, art seems to be not as important as other subjects. However, every subject should have the same importance in our curriculums. Art should also get the same amount of attention

compare to other subjects or at least schools should try to give sufficient emphasis on art classes.

I believe human communities depend upon a diversity of talents, not a singular conception of ability. We see art almost everywhere in our daily life. The packaging of a bag of chips has design, the logo on your shirts has design, the computer you use needs product designer to meet human's aesthetic needs and so on. In the article by Süzen (2020), *Art and Aesthetics in Higher Education*, the author explores the aesthetics of art stating:

Aesthetics as a discipline studies the nature, content, value and origin of art. The term 'aesthetics' originates from the Greek words 'aisthanesthai' (to hear, to perceive) and 'aisthesis' (emotion, sense). Art depicts beauty when it reproduces the beauty in nature. In our daily lives, 'aesthetic' is the term for a special research area in philosophy. The word is not only used in the field of philosophy but also in the fields of design and fashion. Similarly, 'aesthetics' is used to describe the sensitivity and style of a work of art. (Süzen, H. N. 2020)

We can certainly benefit from "aesthetics" in the education of art. The author expressed that in the art and aesthetics course in higher education programs, information, skill, attitude and values for aesthetics should be emphasized more strongly. Aesthetic education is arranged to meet the needs of students, enables students to understand the meaning and value of art and carry out ideas about the subject, and provides individuals critical and creative thinking which I will be discussing in the later chapter. When the author asked one of the students, 'What are the aims of aesthetic education?' The student's answer gave me a lot of insights:

I think the word is advancing through the creativity of the aims of aesthetic education. An individual should be creative or learn how they might be able to make creativity tangible. In an abstract way, aesthetic education can teach us about art so we are able to continue developing with an awareness of the impact of how different our ideas about beauty are and about how art can be used to examine works of art in this format. Most importantly, such education could include a teacher or a student of art in your life, and such a development like this will show you that you can forward, transmit and display art, which are amongst the goals of aesthetic education. Art is in our lives, and to gain a sensitivity to the aesthetics of art with the concepts we provide, the individual's self must be assured in a creative way so that they are able to transfer to the other side of aesthetic education (Süzen, 2020).



Süzen further stated that having the knowledge of the concept of aesthetics not only enable us to develop the skills to read art and works of art by employing theories of art in relation to art and aesthetics, but also there is benefits more than the quality of education. Aesthetic and theoretical knowledge increase the level of appreciation for life, not only do they serve as guides to life, but they also create positive changes in one's social life. (Süzen, 2020) A person usually tend to feel more confident when he or she wears a nice outfit. This little increasement in confidence enable him/her to become more willing to social, because they believe people will certainly notice their 'aesthetics'. In the end, I would like to say that the influence that art has bringing to us needs to be properly estimated and recognized in a sufficient way. When students are exposed to visual arts, their aesthetic is being trained which is very beneficial to them. Art also helps children with developing all kinds of skills especially when they work in groups, such as language skills, social skills, decision-making skills, risk-taking and inventiveness skill, and we will discuss this into deeper level in later chapters. Learning art is a life-impacting thing. In my opinion, everyone should be exposed to art. It is a good and vital thing for schools to have art classes in their curriculum

After we have recognized the importance of art in education, and also before I move to an examination of empowering the children through art, we, art educators should start thinking the power of art in addressing the critical issues around us in today's world. We should help the children realize the issues and encourage them to express their thoughts towards them. In Dumitru's (2019), article *Creating Meaning: the Importance of Art, Humanities and Culture for Critical Thinking Development*, the author claims that research shows art is necessary for the development of critical thinking and introduces the concept of "Creating Meaning," which they define as the link between creative thinking and critical thinking and as the first attribute of a critical thinker. The author claims that:

Creativity is not a separate process from critical thinking as well. The art, and

other topics are the promoters of critical thinking, because disciplines in these fields are likely to create environments that foster critical thinking and encourage the production of meaning. These necessarily belong in all curricula of our education. (Dumitru, D. 2019)

Personally, I also recognize how important it is to discover a critical issue through creative thinking and later on, to be able to actually make art works. The process of making an artwork is always inspiring to me. I see each art piece I create as a serious project I dive into. The meaning of making art to me is not only gaining pleasure, but also is to express my thoughts towards the topic I choose to the audience in a thought-provoking way. This is very different than writing an article and let people read it. Art can be three-dimensional and in all kinds of scales, forms and mediums. Addressing a critical issue through an artwork is easier to me. I do a lot of research and preparation before I actually start painting or make a sculpture. As the process of making the art piece starts, my brain continues thinking and thinking, which usually gives me more insights and sparks towards the art piece and the critical issue I want to address. I see it as a process of having conversation with myself and the opportunity for me meditate on the issue I am working on. There are certainly links between creative thinking and critical thinking, and creativity would be the first attribute of a critical thinker. Being creative and making art are fun and enjoyable to me. I get more thoughts and enlightenments through the process of making art works than only reading books and articles. This is an effective and inspiring way to learn and think.

In art education, it is important that teachers realize that we should not tell the students what is right or wrong and put our thoughts in them, instead, we should give appropriate guidance when students need, and also provide more information that might help the students to complete their works. For example, a teacher can say, 'Here are the artists you might interested in looking and will give you more ideas.' I have met teachers that are so helpful and knowledgeable but never let me feel uncomfortable and coercive. They usually first give me respectful and sincere

comments and then give me the choice to look up more materials that related to my projects, which always help me in a tremendous way. I feel I am the artist who is creating my artwork. This cognition gives me the confidence and courage to continue developing my project and at the same time, wishing to present more contents to my professor when we meet again in the following week. I enjoy having conversations with the professor and tend to be more active in his class.

There is something I find very interesting and also important at the same time for learning. There is something related to psychology when it comes to learning and teaching. How a teacher uses his or her words and sentences make differences towards students' mindset. This is almost like a little magic I would say. In the case I mentioned above, I feel that I was being treated respectfully and being encouraged by the teachers. Therefore, as a positive result that come afterwards naturally would be willing to dive into the project more and try to do my best. This is a very healthy and inspiring way of interaction between students and teachers. However, I am not saying teachers should interact with students just like walking on an eggshell. This is not right thing to do either, because students do have the obligation and duty to have right attitude towards their assignments and complete their projects in time. This is very basic things they need to do. However, if there is ways that can be beneficial and effective for teaching and learning, then we can all think about the possibilities, because we know that being a teacher or art educator, our duty is not only meet some kinds of standards by the states or the government, but also, we have the mission to nourish our next generation, make them grow luxuriantly and make impact towards the world we live in.

Another thing is very important is that both the student and the teacher need to be open-minded to each other. In the article by S. P Verducci, *The Arts and Open-Mindedness*, the author discusses open-mindedness as an intellectual virtue. This quality usually brings human closer together and discover the reality and

complexities of things, the author states:

The arts enable the drawing forth and exploration of multiple and subjective interpretations. The arts can therefore be uniquely productive in opening minds by helping one negotiate human perceptual constraints by encouraging the practice of living with uncertainty and ambiguity. (Verducci, p.491)

Sometimes in our sub-consciousness, we tend to keep our opinions and wish others could agree on our points of view, however, others tend to think the same. As a result, this would give obstacles to the conversation and also to the relationship between them. Other than that, being not open-minded would not be helpful when they want to figure out the reality under the surface. Therefore, being open-minded becomes important when it comes to teaching and learning. In art education, we usually include the practice of engagement with visual arts or other forms of art to cultivate open-mindedness in classrooms. Art always don't have only one single answer or approach towards the question or assignment. In this case, the teacher should give guidance or suggestions rather than restrict students. Students should be self-motivated, active, and always pushing themselves out of the comfort zone. My professors always tell me not to be afraid of trying things, and don't be nervous about the result but enjoy the process of making art. Usually the result will come naturally afterwards, and the result can be surprising. This open-mindedness always inspires me along my way of being creative. In my process of making art, I try different approaches. I either plan everything out clearly and then turn the small sketch into the finished painting or just hold the brush and let it 'dance' smoothly on canvas. I work in both ways. Both ways have their own possibilities and charms. Again, the beauty of art sometimes comes with the unknown and unpredictable, and this will lead to being able to dig deeper to the reality of things.

After we have discussed about the relationship between creative thinking and critical thinking, we now need to look a methodology that is effective to students. Here is a case study which is done by an art educator, Samantha Davis, where she discusses how to create a positive racial climate amongst students with different

cultural background and identities. Cultures have also been a big critical issue we always talk about nowadays. The purpose of this case study was to explore the effects of art-making on the racial climate of a multicultural classroom of a group of 11th graders in an academic setting. An emphasis was placed on analyzing the developments of the counternarratives of students engaged in a culturally responsive curriculum. Over an eight-week period, students participated in three art projects focused on identity and racial identity, incorporating narrative-based content and storytelling for her curriculum and lessons The author stated:

An art classroom is a place where art, identity and culture are inextricably linked. Culturally responsive teaching play an important role in how the teacher interacts with students. I think ultimately the students will come to understand they are different, and they accept each other. This is very important. I also find that students will gain experience in the art classroom and grow in an all-rounded way. For example, they are more willing to express themselves which also means that their confidence is built gradually. (Davis, 2016).

After a dedicated effort to infuse cultural responsiveness into Davis's curriculum, she noticed a growing strength in peer-to-peer relationships, a willingness to cooperate during conflict and a growing confidence in the students. Their regard for themselves and education, in general, improved dramatically as a result of these efforts. And Since we are talking teaching culturally responsive curriculum, I have to mention one of the examples I found that will help teachers be clearer about how to combine everything together and allow students to present their ideas in all forms of art. In the article by Hudson, A. (2020), *Learning from a Young Indigenous Artist: What can Hip-Hop Teach Us?* One of the students uses her gift of rapping over beats as a means to transform settler-colonial perceptions of how Indigenous people are perceived. Hudson, A. (2020) said: 'This young artist is making new culture, producing new possibilities for being, and educating us along the way.' At the beginning of the article, I have a strong feeling of really going deep and to think what my "gift" that I can use to bring out my ideas to people. The sentence I quoted above resonate in my mind. It is important to find the "gift" and utilizing it to the best

extent so that as artists and educators, we can let people understand our teaching better. Art educators can also think the effective ways and methods when we teach and using our gifts to achieve our teaching goal. In the article, Bella, as an arts educator, she said: ‘ My appreciation for the culture increased twofold as she discovered how beautifully hip-hop, and education meshed to teach students about the sociopolitical lived experienced of underserved communities.’ Rather than the traditional art education, she chose hip-hop as a way to teach. In the article, Hudson talked another important insight. Hudson argues:

Recognizing the effect of settler colonialism on education and communities is a step toward decolonizing our minds, because, as Veracini(2011) proclaimed, ‘As long as the decolonization of the settler colonial situation remains unresolved, settler colonial present and settler colonial past inevitably resemble each other’ (Hudson, A. 2020)

It is sad that those innocent people lived in the colonized lands needed to suffer the loss of their homeland and identities. They are forced to learn other languages and do works. The settlers want to not only conquer the land, but also people’s will. They want to destroy their last hope and let them surrender from bottom of their heart. To decolonizing, people need to be educated and encouraged to prosper their own cultures, and hip-hop is a way to free their mind. As Bella said in the interview: ‘There’s definitely freedom. It’s like inner freedom and lets you escape in the inner realities of your life.’ Therefore, hip hop is a very effective way of education for Bella, and cultural relevant art education can be very helpful and should be considered when it is necessary. I know critical social issues and cultural issues are big topics that we still have a long way to go to investigate how to make our voices and our students’ voices heard, but as long as we try things out, we can make a step forward.

## ***Chapter Three***

### ***Models of Empowered Art Education***

In the previous chapters I have discussed the importance of art in education, challenges that the field is facing today, what education might learn from the arts, and how the arts can serve as a model for education. In this chapter, I will share some examples of various models of art education that serve as best practices in art and design education. These small case studies offer a glimpse into what excellent art education can look like. At the end of the chapter, I will discuss the qualities that these programs share, and that I believe are especially important to quality art experiences for young people.

#### **Community Arts Programming**

There are many benefits that come from art education beyond the K-12 classroom. This was something that I realized after my own teaching experiences within Project Open Door (POD). There are two examples of community arts programming I would like to highlight here: The Maker Bus Project and Room 13.

The Maker Bus: The Maker Bus is designed to be a mobile makerspace that enables students to use their imagination to design things. Maker education is closely associated with STEM learning, and is an approach to problem-based and project-based learning that relies upon hands-on and collaborative learning experiences as a method for solving authentic problems (Jin, Martin, Stephens, & Carrier, 2020). In the article, the authors said, “Maker centered learning develops that awareness through interactive, open-ended, student-driven, multi-disciplinary experiences that allow for the time and space needed to develop diverse skills, knowledge, and ways of thinking. In maker centered learning environments, students imagine, design, and create projects that align the content of learning with hands-on application” (Jin, Martin, Stephens, & Carrier, 2020). The benefits of maker education are overwhelming. Asking students to engage in designing and thinking includes curiosity, creativity, and

communication. These qualities prepare students for their future career paths, and at the same time empower them to believe they can create things and make social change. Specifically, the Maker Bus is a mobile makerspace and holds creative events as they drive around to different locations (Jin, Martin, Stephens, & Carrier, 2020).

The designers of this project founded this mobile space because not all schools can afford a makerspace or STEM lab. Thus, mobile makerspaces like a MakerBus are a unique way to engage youth and at-risk students (Jin, Martin, Stephens, & Carrier, 2020). The leadership team designed the bus with the goal of empowering students to believe they could create things and make social changes. The coaches drive the MakerBus to local K-12 schools to offer maker events and activities (Jin, Martin, Stephens, & Carrier, 2020). I find the Maker Bus so interesting because rather than creating designs in the classroom, students have the opportunity to design and collaborate in other spaces. Additionally, maker spaces allow students to be fully involved in projects and develop their own ways of thinking. Students do not need to be afraid of failure; instead, they can focus more on the process and meanings of their works. “The physical presence of a MakerBus inspires students to explore what the MakerBus could offer. By the early spring of 2020, the MakerBus served 11,570 K-12 students and planted a seed of the maker mindset in each of their minds” (Jin, Martin, Stephens, & Carrier, 2020).

Room 13: Room 13 is a worldwide student run artist in residence program (Roberts, 2008). In her description of Room 13, Roberts (2008) notes that it is voluntarily attended, funded and managed by students ranging in age from 7 to 11. Through fundraising projects, the students raise their own money, which they use to order and purchase equipment and supplies. Additionally, they pay the salary for an adult Artist-in Residence, whom they hire to work in Room 13. Each year the students elect a management team of students who are in charge of the day-to-day activities of the studio. Room 13 is almost like being in a mini society and finds ways for individuals to contribute to this little community.



Room 13 provides an opportunity for a student-centered art education model. The students are almost self-teaching themselves through the guidance of the artist in residence. They make decisions on their own, grow, and learn. They are given the freedom to choose, are treated as adults, and they get to take the position to lead themselves. These practices allow them to be involved with and motivated by the whole learning process. Their artistic personalities, discipline, and motivation are developed through this program.

Additionally, collaboration is highly valued in Room 13. The school, students, and local artists all work together to make this space possible. Roberts (2008) states that “Room 13 is an ongoing collaborative work of art. It’s about teaching thinking through making art. Although the children consider input from their Artist-in-Residence and consult with experts while making decisions, ultimately the decisions they make are their own” (Roberts, 2008).

I believe that this model is so important because it shows the way that schools and the community can work together. Through these kinds of purposeful partnerships both schools and the community will grow. Schools should not teach just within the classroom, instead, they should go into the community and work together with people and programs like museums, galleries, and community centers.

### **Exploring with Fingers**

Museums and galleries provide another kind of space for valuable art education experiences to take place. Since I was little, going into galleries has always been something that was exciting for me. I think offering art education experiences for young children in galleries is very important because it is so different from sitting in a classroom to simply absorb knowledge. The “Exploring with Fingers” project took place at the Manchester City Art Gallery in the UK (MacRae, 2007) and was focused on using sense to make sense of art. Students are not only able to use their eyes to observe but also use their other senses. The goal of this project was to “attract

very young children and their families to the gallery... and ask if it is possible to use art education as a tool for thinking about the world, rather than as a vehicle for expressing a pre-existing and unitary self, or for representing a pre-existing and unitary reality” (MacRae, 2007).

Within this project, young children were introduced to a gallery workshop space and played a touching game where a variety of different objects were hidden in a basket which children would feel and describe. After this experience the children were taken on a gallery tour, beginning with the gallery’s “Touch Trail” where a series of contemporary sculptures could be touched in order to highlight the textural qualities of different materials (MacRae, 2007). “When the children were asked to describe objects (‘What does it feel like?’); many seemed more interested in the magic of pulling the object out to reveal what they had just felt. However, as the objects came out of the basket, they got passed around; they were stroked and felt, and children often lifted them up to feel them on their cheeks. Children started to talk with their parents and teachers about the objects. This moment was described by one observer as ‘very rich’, which ‘set the pace’ for parents and teachers being interactive and involved with the children through museum artefacts” (MacRae, 2007).

This example shows how art educators and galleries/museums can work together. After each session, the team reflected and used these discussions to plan for the next experience (MacRae, 2007). “This collaborative and dialogic approach allowed child-educators from a variety of backgrounds (museums, artists, teachers, early years practitioners) to share their different perspectives. This sometimes challenged our taken-for-granted assumptions about the child and about learning” (MacRae, 2007, p. 163). This fully immerse learning experience is effective and innovative. We know that children, especially young children, explore the worlds through sensory experiences. When they are not able to express themselves very well through words, involving those multi-sensory experiences allows them the opportunity to come to know and understand the world around them. This will

inspire their curiosity and joy in the process of learning and exploring. I think this is such a good example of art education, because the root of art education is to use art as a vehicle to enable students to raise their curiosity and push them into thinking towards things so that they could develop as individuals.

### **Essential Qualities**

Each of the examples that I described above have some shared qualities. I believe that these qualities are central to creating valuable art educational experiences for children: teachers' perspective on student artwork, fostering student initiative, the value and importance of materials, and creating collaborative learning experiences. In the remainder of this chapter, I will explore each of these ideas in a bit more detail.

***The Value and Importance of Materials:*** One of the most fundamental aspects of art is the exploration of materials. Eisner (2002) notes that the relationship between student thinking and the materials they use is especially important. Every material brings something special to the creative process and the finished work. In the arts, it is clear that in order for a work to be created we must think within the constraints and affordances of the medium we elect to use. The flute makes certain qualities possible that the bass fiddle will never produce, and vice versa. Painting with watercolor makes certain visual qualities possible that cannot be created with oil paint. The artist's task is to exploit the possibilities of the medium in order to realize their artistic goals. Each material imposes its own distinctive demands and to use it well we have to learn to think within it (Eisner, 2002). Therefore, it is very important to provide youth with the opportunity to work with different materials.

The examples that I shared above certainly involve the exploration of different materials, which allow students to be fully immersed in the creating process. The MakerBus allows students to engage with a wide variety of materials such as laser cutters, wood, tools, 2D/3D printing, robotics, etc. (Jin, Martin, Stephens, & Carrier,

2020). Being exposed to a diverse selection of media allows students to carry out their ideas. In Room 13 the students follow their own interests and both purchase and use materials that are interesting to them. Students have the opportunity to use diverse and professional materials – painting on canvas, photography, filmmaking, and performance art (Roberts, 2008). This allows them to experience the many ways that real artists engage in their professional practice. Finally, within Exploring with Fingers, the young children were given the opportunity to engage with non-art materials in an art context (MacRae, 2007). They touched materials like ice, squishy balls, feathers, fabric, etc. which raised the students' interest in exploring media and "seeing with your fingers" (p. 165). In all of these examples, the students had access to unique materials which provided them with new ways of thinking about artmaking outside of traditional classroom learning.

***Teachers' Perspective on Student Artwork:*** I believe that teachers need to be open to the idea that art does not necessarily need to be pretty. We need to be very careful when we give suggestions and grades to our students about their artwork. One school of thought suggests we judge instruction by the product - the work created by students in art classrooms. The world we live in overwhelmingly tells us that appearance gives art value, that art should be "pretty" beautifying the hallways at school and winning contests (Purtee & Sands, 2018). It is sad that most of the time people judge students by the product, and not by what they succeed and accomplish through the act of creating. I understand the reasons why people value the product. In other subject areas like math, science, and language arts there are more direct ideas about right vs. wrong and assessment. However, I believe that in art this looks very different – it is also about making people think. For example, Marcel Duchamp's art is thought-provoking. Even though he just uses objects to create his pieces, he brought out the idea that art can be anything that makes people think. I totally agree with him. Art should not be limited and judged by one only standard.

Therefore, when it comes to our teaching methods, we need to be open-minded of all artworks that our students complete and encourage them to try out more possibilities. This kind of encouraging and accepting teaching approach can be very beneficial and stimulate their creativity. In the case studies I shared above, students are provided with various opportunities to explore through their artwork. Teachers do not embrace a step-by-step approach that results in a single outcome, but rather guide and encourage the students to engage in various ways. Inherently, this results in teacher-student interactions that are based on an exchange of ideas rather than a single-minded perspective on what the final product should look like.

***Fostering Student Initiative:*** Having self-initiative enables students to be successful in their studies, but also in their overall growth in the future. Education should pay attention to more than grades – the individual needs and growth of students is also important. As children grow, we should let them take the responsibility for their learning and become the mapper of their educational journey. However, it is not easy to teach students how to take initiative. Initiative is not an innate skill. That's why it's so critical for teachers to teach initiative to their students. Stauffer (2019) explores the way she approached helping high school students develop self-initiative. She notes that incorporating group work, encouraging students to discover connections, developing end goals, and allowing students to work independently all help to foster self-initiative. In a choice-based art classroom (Purtee & Sands, 2018) students are offered many opportunities to develop self-initiative. In a full choice classroom, teacher limitations are minimal and students are responsible for making all the important choices about their artwork and the artistic process (Purtee & Sands, 2018). I believe that it is important to have some limitations in a classroom though, because some students may still not be able to make that many decisions. Teachers should always be there to help them, guide them to learn and grow.

The idea of student initiative plays a crucial role in art education. Art teachers often have limited amounts of time for a class. Therefore, being able to encourage students to take initiative and make full use of their class time is crucial. Additionally, it also cultivates the habit of concentrating on the experience of artmaking. The examples I shared above help to foster student initiative in different ways. For example, the touching game in Exploring with Fingers encouraged students to move around and explore the materials they were interested in, fostering self-motivation and concentration skills. Additionally, in Room 13, the students create artwork based on their own ideas, not lessons that come from the teacher (artist in residence). To get the most out of this kind of classroom the students need to embrace self-initiative and be willing to engaged in artmaking experiences they come up with on their own.

***Creating Collaborative Learning Experiences:*** Group work is a great way to encourage critical thinking and promote teamwork in small groups of students. The experience of working in groups can give students a new perspective on what motivates themselves and others (Stauffer, 2019). The examples I shared above provide insights about the benefits of including collaborative learning experiences in art education. In Room 13, Roberts (2008) argues that the whole experience is an ongoing collaborative work of art. The author states:

The types of collaboration that I witnessed in Room 13 occurred on both the level of ideas and in the material execution of artwork or tasks, and in both complementary and integrative modes. With regard to collaboration on works of art, the majority of children that I interviewed felt that working with others was valuable in improving the quality of the work. For many students, Room 13 provides the only context within the school in which collaboration can occur. (Roberts, 2008, p. 23)

Room 13 is such a wonderful example of what meaningful collaboration can look like in the art classroom. Students show an active interest in collaborating with each other, and clearly benefit from this experience. Additionally, students also benefit from collaboration within the Maker Bus. One of the goals of the project itself was to “develop resilience, grit, focus, and perseverance, reaching the 4Cs,

communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity” (Jin, Martin, Stephens, & Carrier, 2020, p. 131-2). The authors argue that maker education helps encourage students to collaborate when solving problems and embrace a diversity of perspectives. There was a great deal of collaboration that occurred within the design of the bus itself, and also in the way in which the Maker Bus project collaborated with schools and classrooms.

## ***Chapter Four***

### ***Final Reflections***

My goal throughout this thesis was to provide a clear picture about the theories and ideas that are crucial to Art Education in today's world. However, it is important to note that these are starting points for me. The experience of engaging in research about these ideas allowed me the time to really think about the issues and challenges that art education is facing today. One of the ideas that has stuck with me throughout this experience was the fact that many people do not acknowledge the value of art education broadly and the way that it can benefit people in so many different ways. This is even true for people who don't plan on pursuing art as their career – they can also benefit so much from experiencing art education and art appreciation. Art Education is also important because it allows people to see the value that art can have, and perhaps change people's mind about art education as a whole. Our thinking and cognition are the roots that influence our actions. Therefore, changes need be made from bottom-up gradually.

There are many important elements that go into creating an exceptional art educational experience for youth, some of which I discussed in Chapter Three for instance such as collaboration and fostering self-initiative. However, it is also important that classrooms, museums, and community organizations value art in and of itself. Whether or not a student embraces art as their career, it is the responsibility of art teachers to provide an equitable learning environment. We should not ignore any subject's integration in the curriculum. Encouraging students to develop themselves in a well-rounded way is necessary for the good and growth of the world. Art can help develop those qualities that impact a person's whole life, such as creativity, imagination, the ability to collaborate with others, engage in critical thinking, visualize their ideas, and so much more. Personally, I was one of those students that was not very good at addressing civic, social and critical issues through



language alone. Instead, I found myself being able to express myself much more freely and clearly when using visual methods, for example, making an artwork, a sculpture or an installation. All students should have the opportunity to find ways to communicate their ideas and perspectives that work for them and allow them to feel successful. In Chapter Three I discussed some of the ideas and elements that contribute to creating exceptional art educational experience for youth today – the role of teachers, the value of collaboration, the power of materials, and the benefits to fostering self-initiative in students. The importance of the educator is crucial. The words (encouraging or not) they use can strongly influence a students' mindset. When these words come from a positive place, they can give students confidence to explore ideas and possibilities to approach problems and express themselves. This kind of interaction helps to foster intuitive learning, which is beneficial both in and out of the classroom. In any area of life, having the ability to self-manage and motivate is always beneficial. Additionally, teachers also have the power to encourage collaboration and exploration. Their teaching approaches can encourage students to use different materials, give students small group tasks which enable them to work collaboratively, and integrate the local community (museums, galleries, etc.) into the classroom. In order to realize these pedagogical strategies, teachers need support from schools. Therefore, parents and administrators in schools should be open-minded with art teachers' ideas and give them room to grow and experiment.

In the end, the final thought I want to share is that I see myself as a beneficiary of art education. I have exposed to art since I was six years old, and now I am an art educator. Early in life I was shy, timid, and not confident - until I started to show talent in art. As I have mentioned earlier in this thesis, *the 'spark'* for my life is Art. I have always been grateful for what art has brought me and the way that it has led me to where I am right now. The reason I decided to pursue a degree in art education was because I realized how much I had benefited from art. My inner voice

was telling me I should pass down the key to the art world to more people so that I could help others grow in the same way that I did. Though it might sound very abstract and emotional, it is the truth in my heart. Art expands my thinking and enriches my life. Art has the power to make change, and impact and influence the world. There are no limits and rules to art and as such, it is more accessible and valuable than people realize. I think the only challenge that people really face is their own uncertainty about their relationship with art itself. They do not really give themselves a chance to experience the benefits that can come from artistic exploration and learning. I believe that when people are allowed and encouraged to open their minds and come to know art in a deeper way, they will find both benefits and pleasure. I believe that it is our job as artists, educators, and leaders to help society see the value of art education.

## ***Bibliography***

- Davis, S. (2016). Exploring the Effects of Art-Making on the Racial Climate of a Multicultural Classroom. Online Submission.
- Dumitru, D. (2019). Creating Meaning. The Importance of Arts, Humanities and Culture for Critical Thinking Development, 44, 870–879.
- Eisner, E. W. (2002). What can education learn from the arts about the practice of education? *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, 18(1), 4-16.
- Fowler, C. (1994). Strong Arts, Strong Schools. *Educational Leadership*, 52(3), p.4-9.
- Hudson, A. (2020). Learning from a Young Indigenous Artist: What can Hip-hop Teach Us? *Art Education*, p.18-22
- Martin, L. Stephens, S., & Carrier, A. M.Y. (2020). Drive Student Success: Designing a Maker Bus to Bring Standard-Based Making and Technology Activities into K-12 Schools. *International Journal of Designs for Learning*, 11(2), 130-141.
- McArdle and G. Boldt (Eds.) Young Children, Pedagogy, and the Arts: Ways of Seeing.
- MacRae, C. (2007). Using Sense to Make Sense of Art: Young Children in Art Galleries. *Early Years*, 27(2), 159-170.
- Munakata, M., & Vaidya, A. (2012). Encouraging Creativity in Mathematics and Science through Photography. *Teaching Mathematics and its Applications* (31), p.121–132.
- Pfeiler-Wunder, A. (2013). Social Class and Art Room Curriculum
- Purtee, M. & Sands, I. (2018). What is Choice? in The Open Art Room, pp.21-44. Davis Publications: Worcester, MA.
- Roberts, T. (2008). What’s Going on in Room 13? *Art Education*, 61(5), 19-24
- Robinson, K. TED 2020 ‘Bring on the Learning Revolution’
- Stauffer, B. (2019, May 23). How to Teach Initiative to High School Students. Applied Educational Systems
- Süzen, H. N. (2020). Art and Aesthetics in Higher Education. *European Journal of Education Studies*.
- Verducci, S. (2019). The Arts and Open-Mindedness. *Educational Theory*, 69(4), 491–505.