



6. Educational Strategies

Raphael Vella

Education and participatory projects

While participatory projects in art do not necessarily have educational goals, the historical connections between community arts and education are strong, while pedagogical strategies are increasingly used by contemporary artists who aim for sustainable connections with different publics. Such linkages between participatory arts, education and publics are especially evident when the methods employed by participants and other stakeholders are action-oriented and aim towards some sort of transformation of communities, cultural and political contexts. It is also important to understand that these connections are

sometimes fraught with tensions arising from different aesthetic and social goals: artists may occasionally feel that educational agendas overtake artistic aims when they work with various communities. They may feel that one of their roles as artists in the community is to provoke participants, rather than achieve some kind of consensus with them. Alternatively, participants may feel that the project merely reinforces existing hierarchies even though it is presented under the guise of collaboration, change, and so on (Burdick, Sandlin, O'Malley, 2013). These tensions are intrinsic to projects like these and artists should welcome the possibility of reflecting on and discussing the challenges they experience in collaborative and pedagogical contexts. These challenges expand the possibilities and reach of art, research and social practice.

However, to speak of 'education' as though it had a singular set of aims would also be unrealistic. Factors like degree of participation, participants' needs and age as well as project duration affect educational outcomes in various ways. Independent variables, such as educational attainment or the age of participants at the beginning of a research project can also have an effect on dependent variables such as an interest in particular cultural manifestations. So-called 'pedagogical projects' in the field of social practice can lead to a variety of educational 'benefits'. For example, they can refer to the acquisition of particular skills, like practical skills which contribute to job opportunities and professional development. However, educational strategies are often

transformative in nature, aiming at social change and a critical sense of positionality in all participants. While social transformation may be more difficult to measure or quantify than specific hands-on skills, the unpredictable nature of this sort of research should not be understood as a problem, but a significant value in the spectrum of artistic qualities of projects like these.

These broad distinctions may also imply different options and possibilities related to assessment. Assessing practical skills may seem more straightforward than assessing changes in people's attitudes towards certain issues, for instance. 'Success' or 'impact' in participatory projects involving adult participants may need to be assessed differently from those involving children. Amongst the many forms of assessment, participatory projects may involve artists and academics in:

- Arts-based research
- Action research
- Participant observation
- Keeping of field notes
- Use of video interviews
- Analysis of audience and participant feedback
- Assessment of a group's mental wellbeing
- Artists' reflections
- Surveys
- Analysis of student portfolios
- Pre- and post-assessment of specific skills
- Self-assessment tools

The following are some guiding questions that team members can ask in relation to the evaluation of projects like these:

- How have people in specific groups been affected by or involved in arts projects?
- How has their participation in creative projects increased or improved?
- Did participants learn new skills during the projects? How well did they grasp these new skills?
- Which artistic processes were most successful in attaining specific goals, according to participants?
- Which artistic processes were most successful in attaining specific goals, according to artists and other stakeholders?
- Did artists, stakeholders and participants have similar or different goals in mind when they got together to collaborate on projects?
- What kind of balance was achieved between different goals, and how does this balance reflect a sense of artistic excellence and impact?
- How sustainable are the relationships created between artists and other participants?
- How were audiences affected by the projects?

We will now look at a handful of relevant goals that can be targeted by artists in projects with underserved communities or groups.

Social exchange and critical consciousness

Creative processes employed in participatory artistic projects are often socially engaged, involving artists and others in collaborations that are generated through dialogue and activist goals, leading to the possibility of highlighting inequalities among underserved communities.

Critical Pedagogy: Associated with the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire and more recent thinkers like Henry Giroux and Antonia Darder, critical pedagogy transforms oppressive situations into emancipatory situations by guiding participants to take control of their

own learning, hence becoming more autonomous in the process. For critical pedagogues, education aims for social justice and political transformation. Education is not restricted to schooling, because the communication of culture is, itself, an educational process. While different outlooks on the goals of critical pedagogy have been developed over the years, it generally involves participants in 'problem posing' (Freire, 1970), urging them to ask difficult questions about their own life conditions and therefore supporting the emergence of a critical consciousness, which is understood as the ability to recognise and analyse inequalities and the motivation to affect positive change. Critical pedagogy can be aligned with socially engaged arts projects in various ways, for example:

- Working on theatrical productions with marginalised children with low self-esteem, transforming passiveness into social action and critical thinking processes;
- Using museum collections with local participants as a means of understanding the political roots and agendas of specific hierarchies of knowledge, and developing creative outcomes that critique such hierarchies;
- Working creatively with a group of residents in an urban environment and posing questions about decision-making related to public art, or the historical and political value given to specific streets, monuments or buildings;

- Using cultural funds, sponsorships or invitations from cultural institutions to offer free, public workshops leading to social interventions that improve the life conditions of a particular social group (for example, the work of the artists' group WochenKlausur).

Service-learning: By participating in tasks that combine academic learning with civic engagement, learners or participants in service-learning (sometimes called community-based learning) get a deeper experience of specific content whilst rendering a service to the wider community. By offering "a learning strategy in which students have leadership roles in thoughtfully organized service experiences that meet real needs in the community" (Cipolle, 2004, p.14), service-learning helps to build both higher-order thinking skills and a sense of duty, responsibility and solidarity. Service-learning exposes participants to real-life situations and environments, thus helping them to become more analytical and prone to understanding problems from different people's perspectives. The content they engage with becomes more meaningful and contextualised; theory is integrated with practice. Learning becomes more reciprocal, because it does not only rely on institutional needs and strengths, but builds on strengths found within the community. Aligned with the arts, service-learning can take various forms, for example:

- Students following a course in graphic design are introduced to the members and aims of a Non-Profit Organisation or Charity and

help to develop the organisation's online identity and publications related to recruitment and other promotional materials

- Drama students develop a play for residents in a home for the elderly
- Architecture, fine art or interior design students collaborate with the administration and residents in a homeless shelter to develop designs for furniture and redecoration
- Tertiary students use creative writing and/or acting skills to work on new narratives that are 'tested' with young children in rehearsed readings

Skills development

Skills development can be an important component of arts projects because various skills often survive beyond the duration of a project. The selection of particular skill sets for integration in participatory arts projects is often gauged on the basis of an analysis of participants' needs prior to the commencement of a project. Needs can be group-specific or even individual and can be explored through a needs-analysis consisting of, among other things:

- A study of official reports, newspaper articles and surveys
- Interviews or focus groups with different stakeholders

- Producing learner profiles
- Identifying main challenges in specific parts of town
- Analysis of qualifications and prior learning
- Investigation of national or regional provisions in educational sectors

The enhancement of lifelong skills can be integrated into arts projects if artists and other team members are aware of the needs and specific skills that could improve the life conditions of groups of people they are working with. For instance, arts projects can target the development of hard skills (quantifiable, technical and tangible skills such as computing, mathematics, language proficiency, acting and writing skills) and/or soft skills (attitudinal, behavioural and social skills such as teamwork, communication skills, leadership, critical thinking and time management). Some participants may consider such skills as being crucial to their participation in an arts project because they feel that having these skills will support the development of their career prospects. Needless to say, the integration of activities developing hard skills does not exclude the possibility of developing more explicitly political goals.

The Council of the European Union sets recommendations on key competences for lifelong learning, focusing on literacy, multilingualism, mathematics and competence in science, technology and engineering, digital technolo-

gies, personal, social skills, and learning competencies, citizenship, entrepreneurship, and cultural awareness and expression (Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, 2018). The Council considers an investment in basic skills and key competences as crucial to personal fulfilment, health, employability and social inclusion.

In turn, UNICEF considers the following four skill sets as being important for success in school, life and work:

- **Foundational skills:** numeracy and literacy
- **Digital skills:** Understanding and using digital technologies
- **Transferable skills:** Skills like problem-solving or empathy (sometimes called “life skills” or “soft skills”)
- **Job-specific skills:** Skills associated with specific occupations (also called “technical” and “vocational” skills)
(Adapted from www.unicef.org/education/skills-development)

Skills development in participatory arts projects can occur in various ways, including:

- Artists or creative teams working with communities offer face-to-face or online workshops that develop specific skills: for instance, skills in the use of kinds of software, photographic skills, fashion design, and so on.

• ‘Experts’ in specific skill sets can be brought in from outside the community.

• Sometimes, persons or teams are recruited from within the community on the basis of their expertise in a specific discipline. The concept of Manifesta 11 in Zurich in 2016, for example, involved contemporary artists in joint ventures with citizens involved in other professions and vocations, like dentists, flight attendants, therapists and engineers.

• Teams can create Knowledge Building Communities in order to develop interdisciplinary research on specific problems and construct more democratic spaces.

• Artists can also make use of peer learning situations in which learners interact with and teach other learners.

In socially engaged art projects that are informed by educational frameworks such as workshops, the actual process of engaging others pedagogically is often seen as an integral part of the artwork. Helguera (2011) writes that a project that presents itself as an educational workshop requires us to ask “what, specifically, is being taught or learned, and how” (p. 78). It might also be useful to ask whether artists leading such workshops are, themselves, learning new forms of exchange and skill sets as a result of the new encounters generated by such pedagogical experiences.

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