

# International Journal of Education & the Arts

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### Introduction to the Special Issue on the Arts, Education, and Social Justice

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### **Introduction to the Special Issue on the Arts, Education, and Social Justice**

This special issue of the *International Journal of Education and the Arts* is devoted to the exploration of various intersections of the arts, education, and issues of social justice. Indeed, while thematically akin, each of the seven articles included herein represent a range of educational efforts at promoting social justice through several forms of arts, educational settings, and cultural contexts. Each is designed to provide a unique perspective on ways in which educators can -- and do -- work toward using the arts to disturb and disrupt commonsensical ways in which children and adults view and participate in their cultural environments. That is to say, the projects described here are designed to make obvious, and call into question, some of the hidden dimensions of social worlds, and the prevailing power relationships lurking therein, relationships that tend to be debilitating, especially for members of traditionally marginalized social categories.

In his essay, "Decolonizing and Prefigurative Pedagogies: Teaching Art as Social Justice," Dylan Miner focuses on the visual arts in the classroom, initially as they are taught in his own course. Miner suggests an emancipatory pedagogical approach in which the arts are taught within a framework that simulates, or at least "prefigures," a larger "outside" world that is itself more socially just. In describing and elaborating on this framework, Miner creates a kind of dialectic between specific classroom practices and the methodologies and theories that allow them to be imagined in other classroom settings.

Focused primarily on students at the college level, Gail Tremblay of The Evergreen State College is a widely experienced faculty member who explores strategies for encouraging and enabling them to craft works of socially conscientious art. In "Creating Art Environments that Address Social Justice Issues," she offers her seasoned perspective on, and specific examples of how a wide variety of media can be made available for student production of artworks that challenge real world inequities. She is especially interested in the use of a variety of materials (including video and audio tracks) for producing multimedia installation artworks that "allows students to create an environment space that [members of an audience] can inhabit and explore."

In an example of work external to the classroom, Jeanette Haynes Writer explores debilitating power relationships hidden within the prevailing meta-narrative regarding a particular group of people whose lands were stolen from them in an earlier century. She does this by examining a counter-narrative that is implicit within the works displayed in an art show produced by a collective of Oklahoma Native artists. Employing critical race theory and tribal critical race theory, Haynes Writer effectively debunks the privileged "official" history of White pioneer settlers in favor of the experienced realities of a brutally overpowered

indigenous people. The title of her article is “Native Resistance through Art: A Contestation of History through Dialogue, Representation, and Action.”

As is obvious in the title of her contribution, Jenice Leilani View also focuses on the efforts of an indigenous group using the arts during a specific span of time to “fight back” against nearly overwhelming injustices: “Pens and Ploughshares: The Historical Use of Art by African-descended Women to Create Social Justice in the U.S. Jim Crow Era.” The author documents the manner in which, through their use of dance, song, music, drama, painting, sculpture, and literature, these women struggled against the varied manifestations of humiliations and denigrations that abounded in the decades between the end of the Civil War and the 1950s. They struggled through their art, View insists, “to save their lives,” moving beyond silence by committing “revolutionary act[s] of claiming space.”

An indigenous element is again present in the contribution by Jason Mendez in “The Forgotten Point: An Artistic Approach in Supporting a Community’s Call to Action.” In this case, the author himself is a native of the Hunts Point area of the South Bronx, the site of an organized arts-based activity designed to advance revitalization of that community. The specific aims of the activity are to raise provocative questions about, and ultimately incite action alleviating, the unhealthy air pollution within the area. Mendez’s intended audiences include not only local residents, but also policymakers and certain corporate offenders themselves. Finally, this activity involves arts installations that are meant to stimulate a multi-sensory experience among those audience members.

Also concerned with the connections between the arts and activism, Sandra Spickard Prettyman and Elisa Gargarella describe and analyze a community based arts education program aimed at enabling urban teenagers and young adults to “make cognitive, emotional, and social connections to their communities through the vehicle of art.” Prettyman and Gargarella demonstrate how various participants in each of several years’ iteration of the “Arts-UP” program, involved with community partners and artists in residence create works of art that stimulate critical thinking both in themselves and members of the community.

Mary Hanley’s contribution is still another example of the potential of the arts to inspire action in the interests of social justice. The centerpiece of Hanley’s article (“Dandelion Seeds: Poetry as Performance and Research for Social Justice in Education”) is a poem that she composed upon an invitation to perform at the opening of a large rally in Washington D.C. held to call attention to institutionalized injustices related to schooling and education. Her poem was composed using arts-based research forms and strategies, and delivered as a work, she writes, of “performance ethnography,” one designed to complicate thinking about prevailing simplistic notions about schooling. The author is refreshingly upfront in discussing

the importance of an artist's shaping of her artwork for maximal impact on an intended audience, one (here) sympathetic to the kind of educational transformation to which her poetry alludes.

Guest Editors:

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