Collaboration in Contemporary Artmaking: Practice and Pedagogy

Dissertation

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Abstract

In the last few decades, artist groups, duos, and collaborative relations between artists and audiences have become increasingly familiar aspects of artistic practice. A common perspective views artistic collaboration simply as a way of working with people in order to produce a work of art, rather than working alone. This qualitative collective case study presents a more complex view of artistic collaboration in practice and pedagogy, a view that is grounded in the work of contemporary artists and art educators.

This research was conducted to develop an understanding of the motivations, issues and processes involved in the collaborative artistic work at three diverse educational sites. The sites were selected because artist-teachers in these locations, who use collaboration in their own work, already use collaboration as part of their pedagogical practice: Room 13, Lochyside Primary School in Fort William, Scotland, with Artists in Residence Claire Gibb and Rob Fairley; The Embodied Knowledge Ensemble, a graduate seminar taught by Michael Mercil and Ann Hamilton at The Ohio State University, in Columbus, Ohio; and Beyond the Mexican Mural, an undergraduate/graduate level course taught by Judith Baca, offered through the University of California Los Angeles at the César Chávez Digital Mural Laboratory in the Social and Public Art Resource Center in Venice, California. The sites offered diversity in age and/or ethnicity and represented
three different pedagogical models: the artist-teacher and artist-learner collaboration, the artist-teacher as facilitator, and the artist/teacher and apprentices.

Critical and theoretical writings concerned with contemporary artistic collaboration provide the basis for a provisional typology of contemporary collaborative practices that is presented and utilized in this writing. These categories, which include object-centered collaborations, relational collaborations and dialogic collaborations, provide a systematic way of examining the characteristics of collaborative artmaking and provide a basis for analysis of the artmaking at the study sites.

Constructivism and social learning theories similarly inform the analysis of pedagogical practices utilized at the research sites. Conceptions of the social construction of knowledge and the social nature of creative activities provide a broad background for social learning theories and practices, such as cooperative learning, situated cognition, and communities of practice that contribute to an understanding of the pedagogical practices observed.

Although the purpose of this investigation was not to provide a rationale for teaching collaborative artmaking, certain educational benefits were discovered in the areas of democratic social skills, critical and creative thinking skills, and personal and artistic growth. Problems involved in teaching a collaborative approach to artmaking are also presented, along with implications for classroom practice. The findings of this collective case study suggest that continued in-depth research would be beneficial to art educators and to the field of art education.
Dedication

To John:
whose love, encouragement, constant IT support and humor
have made this dissertation possible
and my life truly blessed
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Publications


Fields of Study

Major Field: Art Education
Museum Education
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

When I first began investigating artistic collaboration my motivations were personal, pragmatic, and somewhat naive. Making art with others was something I wanted to learn more about, as issues of collaboration seemed increasingly relevant, even imperative, in my own life within and outside of the classroom, in the art world, and elsewhere on the planet. In order to convince myself that collaboration was a meaningful topic for art education, though, it was necessary first to deconstruct my ideas about the autonomy of the artist and the individual nature of creativity, ideas strongly embedded by an art education based on expressive and formalist notions of what art is and does. I was not the only one with such issues; other art teachers expressed similar misgivings about collaborative work, and perhaps not surprisingly, so did our students.

This inability of students to conceptualize and engage in cooperative artmaking seems troublesome during present times when interest in the co-construction of knowledge and in collaboration of all kinds has grown within many fields and there is increasing recognition of the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration. The question of how to guide students in this direction seems more pertinent now then ever, when many people would agree that we are moving away from the age of the individual and
into a new era where a sense of community is assuming greater importance. According to David Feldman, a psychologist from Tufts University, the central theme of the twenty-first century will involve learning how to find a balance between individuality and social connectedness. He believes that we have “pushed the theme of individuality to its limits” and need to discover “the essential role that relationship, participation, reciprocity, membership, and collaboration” have in human development (cited in John-Steiner, 2000, p. xii). Warren Bennis, professor of business administration at the University of Southern California and Patricia Ward Biederman (1997) echo these ideas, saying, “Cooperation and collaboration grow more important every day. A shrinking world in which technological and political complexity increase at an accelerating rate offers fewer and fewer arenas in which individual action suffices” (p. 1). Translating these ideas into the field of art, critic Suzi Gablik (1995) says, “There is a distinct shift in the locus of creativity from the autonomous, self-contained individual to a new kind of dialogical structure that frequently is not the product of a single individual but is the result of a collaborative and interdependent process” (p.76).

If interrelatedness and interdependence are integral to the Zeitgeist of our times, as these and other writers suggest, what does this mean to us, as art educators? Although most of the artworld is still engaged with the individual production of art, there is evidence that the conception of artistic and creative practice as an individual phenomenon is expanding to include collaborative forms. In addition to teaching solitary artmaking, should we be teaching our students about approaches and contexts for collaborative artmaking? But how does one go about teaching a collaborative approach to art making?
Perhaps I ought to have asked other questions first, before attempting to ascertain how to teach collaborative artmaking. Perhaps it would have been best to ask: Should one teach collaboration in artmaking? Or better yet: Why should one teach a collaborative approach to artmaking? However logical and important, these were not my first questions. Following intuition, I dove into the literature surrounding artistic collaboration, reading voraciously and indiscriminately, letting my interests piqued (or not) by the material at hand lead to the next resource. I did not approach this study as a collaborator, already versed in whatever benefits or pleasures might arise from such practices. Instead, I came as a curious outsider, full of questions and doubts. Raised in a large family, one of my main goals throughout childhood was just to find a space to be alone in, and I discovered that artmaking gave me a legitimate reason for doing so. The romantic idea of the autonomous artist, which formed the basis of my education in art, further sanctioned my reclusive tendencies. For these reasons, I found collaborative artmaking mysterious. Who would want to engage in it and why? How did they do it? Was intersubjective creativity possible? These questions intrigued me. Eventually I came round to the should and the why questions, but not before conducting this study.

Purpose of the Study

This research investigates collaboration in contemporary artmaking and art education pedagogy. In so doing, it necessarily troubles the notion that encouraging individualized artistic creation is the only way to go about teaching art in the twenty first century. The goal of this writing, however, is not to provide a rationale for the teaching of artistic collaboration, but rather to present an investigation of three contemporary sites where artists, who use collaboration in their own work, already use collaboration as part
of their pedagogical practice. My purpose in conducting this collective case study was to develop an understanding of the motivations, issues and processes involved in the collaborative artistic work at these three sites. In doing so, certain benefits as well as problems involved in teaching in this manner were uncovered. The findings that emerged from studying the activities at these sites suggest that continued research in this area will prove useful to art educators and to the field of art education.

**Background to the Study**

Although many contemporary artists work collaboratively, a search of the art education literature reveals little about pedagogical approaches that are based on, or even inclusive of, collaborative artmaking. Given the wealth of literature on contemporary artistic collaborations, the dearth of substantive information on the processes of artistic collaboration in the art education literature is quite surprising. To be sure, art education scholars often collaborate in their theoretical writings, and collaboration is mentioned in the literature, but many articles that purport to be about collaboration in art education practice provide little information about collaborative artistic or pedagogical processes.

The September 2004 issue of the *Art Education* journal provides a typical example of such usage. The title of the issue, *Community, Collaboration, and Culture*, looks promising, and the editor declares that in the spirit of collaboration two or more authors wrote most of the articles in the issue (Carpenter, 2004). Of the seven articles, two present collaborative ventures in art education. The first reports on an intergenerational artistic collaboration between college art students and elders from various cultural groups in a local community, and the second describes a collaborative educational project between a high school and a major art museum. In the former article,
the collaborative project is described and the word collaboration is used ten times, but little is written about the collaborative procedures involved (Alexenberg & Benjamin, 2004). In the latter situation, the collaboration occurred at the institutional level, where museum personnel and classroom educators collaborated in planning this inter-institutional educational experience. The artmaking consisted of each student independently creating a work of art (Hochtritt, Lane, & Price, 2004). Although the word collaboration is used fifteen times, little can be gleaned from this article about facilitating collaborative artistic production among students.

The art education literature regarding collaboration does include writings about community arts projects, but this literature also refers to collaboration mainly on an institutional level, or discusses the projects executed without mention of the collaborative processes involved. These articles demonstrate that art educators are recognizing the increasing importance of collaboration and attempting to incorporate it into their own practices. Since “existing administrative structures are not oriented toward promoting…collaborative work” (Bohen & Stiles, cited in Rutherford, 2005, p. 15), perhaps this is a necessary step for art educators to take, in preparing to accept and encourage collaborative practices in their own classrooms.

However, administrative structures are not the only obstacle blocking collaborative work in the art classroom. Emphasis on individualism within the art education classroom can be linked to various currents in art education pedagogical thought that have been dominant in the United States at different times since the beginning of modernism, especially those emphasizing expressionism.
Arthur Efland (1990) has identified three streams of pedagogical thought that have influenced various movements within the field of art education generally and that became particularly pronounced during the twentieth century: the expressionist, reconstructionist, and scientific rationalist streams (p. 260). The expressionist stream, with its emphasis on individual expression and a less socially constrained pedagogy, emerged in the 1920s as creative self-expression and again in the forties through the work of Herbert Read and Viktor Lowenfeld. Reconstructionism, as a tool to improve or transform society, was an integral aspect of art education during the Depression. Later, in the 1960s and 1970s, it reemerged as the Arts-in-Education movement. Scientific rationalism, which in general education has used the disciplines identified by science for curricular reform, became recognizable as social efficiency in 1910, the scientific movement in the 1920s, and accountability of the 1970s, all of which impacted art education, and emerged in art education in the 1980s as Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE) (Efland, 1990). While these various streams might achieve ascendancy at different times, they never entirely disappear and may continue to affect pedagogical practices even as they subside and become undercurrents to the prevailing art educational theories.

One thing these art educational currents have in common is a desire to legitimate the often-marginalized existence of art education within the system of public education (Efland, 1990). Because of its precarious situation, art education has taken on a chameleonic character, changing colors and identities as it seeks to survive, creating a problem not just of place, but also of definition (Walling, 2001). Peter Smith (1996)
asserts that art education’s marginal position in the schools is partially due to the modern art world’s adherence to formalism, with its lack of vital connection to contemporary society. Since the general public deems formalist art neither relevant nor important, art educators have resorted to activities that emphasize art education’s usefulness in terms of decoration, or in supporting improvements in self-image and motor skills, providing an emotional outlet, or aiding critical and creative thinking. These activities have often resulted in the creation of decorative objects, which Adams and Hamm (1996) describe as cute and comfortable, and which Efland has called a school art style (P. Smith, 1996). This school art has been criticized for its conservatism, populism, and insularity, where ‘making’ becomes largely self-referential (Addison & Burgess, 2003). In addition, and in some conflict with the notion of a school art style, art educators under the influence of these varying streams of art education practice have primarily followed the modernist notion that important art is always the work of an individual creative genius, and taught artmaking as an individualized activity. According to Olivia Gude,

Even art programs that have consciously sought to expand their pantheon of artistic heroes to include women and people of color have tended to persist in teaching that good art is always the product of great individuals. Very few art programs effectively contextualize the making of art within complex social interactions (2007, Metamessages in the Hidden Curriculum, ¶ 4).

Some variation from this emphasis on solitary art making accompanied the advent of DBAE in the 1980s, with its expansion of the field of art education to include history, criticism, and aesthetics. This necessitated a shift from art classes which provided only an opportunity for solitary artmaking, to art classes which also created opportunities for
reading about, thinking about, and discussing art in its philosophical, social, and historical contexts. However, the shift, in many cases, was a shift from an exclusive emphasis on studio to an emphasis on studio informed by the study of history, criticism and aesthetics (Walling, 2001). Nevertheless, this shift did tend to involve more student interaction in art classes.

In general education, a corresponding shift away from a behaviorist model of teaching to a constructivist model also began during the late 1970s, resulting in a greater pedagogical emphasis on discussion and collaboration (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002). This tendency, while impacting art education theory, has not radically affected the general art classroom practice of emphasizing individual creation of material objects. My own observations of art classrooms in the Maryland counties where I previously taught, as well as my recent supervision of student teachers in a number of Ohio schools, confirms Gude’s statement that “the art taught in our schools assumes that portable (potentially saleable) objects of sole authorship are the conception of artistic creation most worth teaching” (2007, Metamessages in the Hidden Curriculum section, ¶ 3).

Dennis Atkinson (2006) adds, to this, the idea that contemporary artwork tends to interrogate the boundaries between artist, art object, and spectator, but contemporary art education practice seems arrested in time. In typical school art practice, the expressive subject is still the dominant discourse and the typical curriculum emphasizes developing skills and techniques for creating material objects (Addison, cited in Atkinson, 2006).

Observation of these currents rising and falling throughout the history of art education during the twentieth century reveals a conception of “traditional” pedagogical
practice as an activity that encourages the individualized production and reception of art objects and aims to build corresponding skills for these activities. The type and quality of the objects created would seem to vary with the prevailing pedagogical streams and social contextual influences, but what remains constant is the emphasis on individual production and reception. This is hardly surprising, since the dominant art historical and art critical discourses, from which art education takes its cues, have also tended to emphasize the production and reception of material art objects and commodifiable aesthetic events, and usually credit the creation of these aesthetic works to individual genius.

There is some evidence that this emphasis may be changing. Arthur Danto (1989), in an essay about artistic collaboration, has written,

Ours is a time in which all conceptual and institutional aspects of the practice of art, the meaning of ‘art,’ and the nature of the artist are being rethought…The existence of active collaborations, rather than collaboration being something merely dreamed of, is evidence of a new attitude and perhaps a new age (p. 64).

If Danto is right, and the number of contemporary artists who engage in collaborative practices would seem to attest to this, then it follows that art educators, who have also been reconsidering the meaning of art and the nature of the artist, ought also to be rethinking what it means to teach art and how pedagogical practices must necessarily change in tandem with these changing conceptions of art and artists. In fact, some art education scholars, noticing this lack of correspondence between contemporary art practices and art education methods and processes, have called for a re-conceptualization of school art education in order to open new possibilities for art education pedagogy (Atkinson, 2005; Desai & Chalmers, 2007; Gude, 2004; Ward, 2005). The findings of
this research study imply that any such reconceptualization of school art education ought to consider the value of collaborative artistic practices.

**Why Teach Collaborative Artmaking?**

This research also suggests that there are probably as many different benefits to be derived from practicing and teaching artistic collaboration as there are collaborative practices, and that turns out to be quite a few. Influenced by Vera John-Steiner’s (2000) qualitative study of dyadic and triadic collaborations in the arts and sciences, I began this collective case study expecting to find that collaboration increased the likelihood of creative innovation. To be sure, collaborative work, if effectively conducted, can enhance innovation. However, my research, both documentary and at the sites in this study, has shown that working collaboratively in the artroom can contribute to enhancing student understanding of democratic processes and what it means to be an active participant in helping to shape the environment in which we live. I am convinced that the overarching reason for teaching collaborative artmaking is that it can *promote democracy* in several different ways. Teaching students to work collaboratively can *encourage participation*, helping students recognize the value of their own contribution, as well as the contributions of others. Group dialogue and decision-making can *enhance critical thinking skills*, focusing attention on the quality of ideas, rather than on their origin. Collaborative work can also *promote the appreciation of diversity and the value of inclusion*, encouraging participants to consider the well being of all of the group’s members. Working together to achieve a shared goal can *strengthen the bonds of community* and reveal our common human interconnections.
Since working collaboratively in any field could result in the above benefits, is there any particular reason to teach collaboration in the art classroom? The answer to this question refers back to my original expectation of the power of collaboration to enhance innovation. If there is a place in the schools for innovative thought, then surely that place is the art classroom. Collaboration in artmaking, by introducing multiple perspectives into the creative process can encourage the continual combination and recombination of ideas, images, and actions. Students can be freed to work with, learn from, and engage in acts of mutual appropriation (John-Steiner, 2000) with more knowledgeable or more skilled peers. Consequently their artistic conceptions and products will not be limited to the skills and knowledge that they themselves already possess. Collaboration within the microcosm of the classroom thus enables students to practice intersubjective innovation, a skill in high demand outside the classroom, where cross-cultural intersubjective interdisciplinary innovation is needed to solve the humanitarian, socio-political and ecological crises that the human community now faces.

**Research Questions/Problem for the Study**

All of the above benefits can be derived from collaborative artmaking. Whether they will result from a particular collaborative endeavor depends entirely upon the collaborative processes involved, and the skill with which they are employed. As a first step in determining how best to teach a collaborative approach to artmaking, I conducted this study to begin to develop an in-depth understanding of contemporary collaborative artmaking in the visual arts and visual arts classroom.

Accordingly, I began with the following main question in mind: What motives, issues, and processes are integral to collaborative work in the visual arts and the visual
arts classroom?

Under this question there are several sub-questions:

- What motivates artist-teachers and artist-learners to work collaboratively?
- How do the goals of artistic collaboration in the art world and in the classroom differ?
- What issues are important in collaborative artmaking? Are these same issues important in teaching situations that make use of or encourage collaboration?
- What are the processes involved in collaborative artmaking? Do these same processes apply in a classroom situation?

**Theoretical Framework**

As the goal of my research was to develop an understanding of the nature and meaning of a particular phenomenon, collaborative artmaking, I determined to locate and study contemporary examples of art education pedagogies that involve artistic collaboration. Qualitative inquiry was a logical choice of methodology, since I wanted to study social processes, experiences and their meanings. Qualitative inquiry is generally concerned with developing an in-depth contextual understanding or interpretation of a particular phenomenon (Jones, 2002), makes use of flexible and responsive data construction methods, and utilizes analysis methods aimed at creating detailed, complex and contextual understandings (Mason, 2002). By reviewing the literature regarding contemporary artistic collaboration and collaboration in educational and innovative contexts, I established the theoretical underpinnings of this study, which are summarized in the next two sections of this chapter.
Contemporary Artistic Collaboration

A wide range of contemporary collaborative practices, which includes object-based, participatory, relational, interventionist, socially-engaged, dialogic, and community-based work, can defensibly be positioned as art. In Chapter 2, I present a brief survey of this wide range of practices, after first defining and delimiting artistic collaboration for the pedagogical purposes of this study. Considering the barriers to legitimizing some of these collaborative practices as art, I then present a rationale for their inclusion. Enlarging the range of recognized art practices in this way expands opportunities for participants and viewers to understand the meaning-making capacities of art, affords practitioners artistic cultural capital which enhances their endeavors, and offers art educators an opportunity to include collaborative artmaking processes within the school curriculum.

I am indebted to Claire Bishop (2006a), Nicholas Bourriaud (2002), and Grant Kester (2004), whose critical and theoretical writings have influenced my thinking and provide the basis for the typology of contemporary collaborative practices presented in Chapter 2. This typology and its attendant examples, which serves to further understanding of collaborative practices and related issues, was helpful in analyzing and describing the artmaking that occurred at the study sites. Although I have created three general categories—object-centered collaborations, relational collaborations and dialogic collaborations—the categories should be seen as mutable. One can imagine them on a continuum with no fixed divisions, beginning with object-centered collaborations at one end, relational collaborations in artworld settings in the middle, and socially-engaged community-based dialogic collaborations on the other end. The categories, thus arranged,
differ with regard to certain important characteristics: motivation, object production, focus on visuality, the linkage between form and process, attitude toward authorship, the social structure of the collaboration, the use of dialogue, and an interest in engaging with the viewer or creating community amongst the participants/viewers. After explicating the various types of collaborative artmaking practices, I discuss the development of these practices within contemporary art by examining historical and theoretical precedents to the conceptual grounding of these works.

**Collaboration in Educational and Innovative Contexts**

Chapter 3 discusses constructivism and social learning theories that provide the basis for my analysis of pedagogical practices utilized at the research sites. Lev Vygotsky’s (1978) theories about the social construction of knowledge and the social nature of creative activities provide a broad background for social learning theories and practices. In Vygotsky’s theories, the interdependence of society and the individual are emphasized and thinking is seen, not as a product of the individual mind, but as a process embedded in a particular cultural and historical context (Daniels, Cole & Wertsch, 2007). Learners are seen as active constructors of knowledge (Hoover, 2006). Social learning theories and strategies, grounded in Vygotsky’s work, such as cooperative learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1997), situated cognition (Brown, Collins, and Duguid, 1989), and communities of practice (Wenger, 2009) are also presented, as they proved useful in developing an understanding of the educational practices employed by artist-teachers in this study.

While cooperative and collaborative learning have been used mainly to present information or assist mastery of concepts or skills in education, collaboration has been
used in other contexts to encourage innovation. The work of systems psychologists, such as Mihalyi Czikszentmihalyi, further support the view that creative activities and conceptions are related to social and cultural contexts. Also presented in this chapter, these social and systems theories of creativity are relevant because they provide a conceptual lens for viewing creative activity as a social process.

**Design of the Study**

In this study I set out to gain an understanding of the motives, issues, and processes integral to collaborative work in the visual arts and the visual arts classroom. Since I sought to examine a contemporary real-life phenomenon using qualitative methods, I chose case study as a useful research strategy, because it uses multiple sources of data to provide in-depth answers to motivation and process questions. The wide range of collaborative artistic and pedagogical practices prompted my decision to create a collective case study, in order to add some breadth to the findings of my research.

**Selection of Sites/Participants**

I elected to study three sites, which were chosen for the following reasons: 1) the artists/teachers at these sites use collaboration in their own work, as well as in their pedagogical approaches; 2) the sites presented diversity in age, ethnicity and pedagogical models; 3) my initial research on these sites indicated that the artist/teachers were motivated, at least partially, by the desire to explore new approaches in art and art education; 4) the quality or type of collaborative work being produced was exceptional. Data constructed about these sites produced context-specific understanding, and because the cases were chosen across a range of contexts, some relevant comparisons have been made. As a participant-observer at the first site, Michael Mercil and Ann Hamilton’s
Embodied Knowledge Ensemble (EKE), a graduate seminar at The Ohio State University, I was able to both experience and observe the collaborative processes involved. At Room 13, a student-initiated and student-run collaborative studio in Lochyside Primary School in Fort William, Scotland, I met Claire Gibb and Rob Fairley, the Artists-in-Residence, numerous artist-learners, and observed the studio in operation. Judith Baca and the Beyond the Mexican Mural (BMM), also invited me to observe their undergraduate/graduate level course offered through the UCLA César Chávez Digital Mural Laboratory at the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC) in Venice, California, and granted me further access to their class through their class website.

**Limitations of the Study**

As in other qualitative research studies, readers should be wary of making generalizations about collaborative artmaking based on the findings from this limited number of sites. In Chapter 4, I have written about the methodology of this study and the necessary limitation on the number of sites included and the time spent at each site. Although additional time spent at the distant sites would have been helpful, extensive documentary research has helped to ameliorate this shortcoming.

My consideration of collaborative approaches and their results led to another limitation of this study. I chose not to study an artist-teacher who works using a popular approach, which I call collaborative assembly. In a typical example of collaborative assembly, the artist takes a large piece of paper, grids it into squares and gives each child a square to decorate. When finished, the squares are glued together to create a “collaborative” art project. This project would seem to have little advantage as collaboration other than, perhaps, ease of display. The children work individually in
decorating their squares, have no input into, and make no decisions about, the final collaborative work.

Variations of this project are quite popular in elementary school; I’ve seen several student teachers and their classes create these collaborative paper quilts. The addition of a theme, such as community or ocean animals, introduces a big idea and creates some unity, but the method of execution is usually the same. The students work individually at their own seats, with little or no consultation with their peers. The teacher, as the master artist, collects and mounts the individual efforts, thus creating the “collaboration”. Although the children may gain some appreciation for diversity and may even see themselves—through such a project—as part of a larger whole, the benefits of collaborative work, such as learning democratic processes, or developing communication skills or collaborative innovation skills, are not integral to this process.

A number of similar collaborative assembly projects, both two and three-dimensional, involve some kind of framework to which individuals attach their personal contribution. Some of the projects involve layering of text and/or images and require some decision-making as to where each individual will place their piece of the whole. While there may be some benefit, in terms of group spirit or solidarity in creating such a joint work, the artworks themselves trouble me. Although the students are given the opportunity to make choices—the project remains the artist-teacher’s and each project resembles the others, marked by the master artist-teacher’s own individual style. These artist-teachers tend to work with large numbers of children—usually an entire class—on the same project and this may account for the need to retain what I deem to be a high
degree of control. However, it seems far more educationally valuable to enable small
groups of students to work collaboratively with each other, than for an adult to
collaborate with an entire group of students, or for an adult to facilitate large group
collaborations with children. For this reason, I have eliminated this type of object-
centered collaboration from my study.

**Significance of the Study**

One roadblock to teaching a more authentic form of artistic collaboration than this
popular collaborative assembly is the myth of the autonomous artist, which was
widespread during the modern era and continues to impact art education. “Of all the
premises on which modern art is built, one of the most unshakable, surely, is the idea of
the artist as a rugged individualist, the singular genius working in isolation, the visionary
driven by intensely personal perceptions, compulsions, and perhaps, demons” (Zorpette,
1994, p. 165). Art educators like myself, schooled during modernist times and embedded
in ideas of authorship and originality, perpetuate the gap between current collaborative
practices in art and art education praxis by reinforcing this premise. Consequently art
students often find it difficult to understand contemporary postmodern art or to engage in
collaborative work.

This collective case study, instigated at the prompting of some subterranean desire
for meaningful artistic interconnections with other human beings, has provided both a
theoretical and a practical basis for a reinvention of my own pedagogical practices. It has
the potential to prompt other art educators to reconsider and reinvent human relations
within their own classrooms.

Focused on the essentially social processes of collaboration, this research is in
tune with recent trends in art education that involve a constructivist approach to learning with its emphasis on the social purposes of the learner and the cultural contexts of artistic production (Althouse, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2003; Anderson & Milbrandt, 2002; Stewart & Walker, 2005). It is also consistent with innovative ideas in the world of design, voiced by designer Bruce Mau (2004), “The old-fashioned notion of an individual with a dream of perfection is being replaced by distributed problem solving and team-based multi-disciplinary practice” (p. 17). Educator Jeff Adams (2005) has also argued that the methods of contemporary art practices, which “elide the boundaries between author, spectator, producer, and participant,” and call individual agency into question, “should prepare the ground for a corresponding pedagogy that is far less didactic, driven instead by a community, collaborative production model” (p. 24).

Although I have confessed to being somewhat reclusive by nature, I also recognize that we have reached a time in history where the problems confronting the human race require that we set aside individual differences and preferences and learn to work together. That this necessity is being acknowledged in fields as diverse as physics, social psychology, design, politics, the environmental sciences, and the humanities is evidence of a change in the Zeitgeist, a change, which has been described as improvisational, creative, and collaborative (Solnit, 2004). The artist Matt Mullican, in a recent lecture at the Wexner Center for the Arts, said, “Artists define for themselves a certain kind of role that does have to do with the Zeitgeist of the time” (personal communication, 2007). Today, a number of artists are choosing to define their roles and their practices in terms of collaboration. As a citizen of the contemporary world, I want to
comprehend what this means, and as an art educator and researcher, I offer this research as a contribution to our growing understanding of contemporary collaborative artmaking, practice and pedagogy. Art educator Olivia Gude points out that in this country, where “the social fabric is threatened by irresponsible individualism and the breakdown of traditional conceptions of community, most art education curriculum teaches students to work silently and alone, immersed in making individual artworks, many of which will be thrown away” (Gude, 2007, Metamessages in the Hidden Curriculum section, ¶ 7). Perhaps there is another way.
CHAPTER 2: UNDERSTANDING CONTEMPORARY ARTISTIC COLLABORATION

This chapter presents an overview of a wide range of collaborative practices in contemporary art, dealing first with the problem of definitions and boundaries and explaining limitations set for the pedagogical purposes of this study. Next I examine the difficulties in legitimizing some collaborative practices as art and present a rationale for their acceptance. A typology of contemporary collaborative artistic practices is established, with examples provided, in order to enhance understanding and further elucidate certain issues foregrounded by collaborative practices, which are significant for a study of art processes. Following this, I show how these practices have developed within the context of contemporary art by examining historic and theoretical precedents to the conceptual grounding of these types of work.

Defining Artistic Collaboration

Clarifying what is meant by artistic collaboration is complicated, for even if we begin with the simple idea that artistic collaboration is the action of working with someone to produce or create a work of art and adopt an open definition of art, we are faced with a number of issues. If we accept the claim of sociologist Howard Becker, that the artist “works in the center of a network of cooperating people, all of whose work is essential to the final outcome” (Becker, 1982, p. 25), then it must be agreed that, in some sense, almost any work of art can be seen as collaborative. Even the most reclusive of
studio artists usually depend upon other people to transform raw materials into the art media with which they work, and also rely upon gallery owners, critics and other members of the field of art to select their work and present it to the public (Csikszentmihalyi & Wolfe, 2000; Gardner, 2001).

To this notion, that an elaborate network of people contribute to the production of a creative work and its identification as art, other scholars add the conviction that the consumers or perceivers of art also make an important contribution. Art historian Robert C. Hobbs (1984) states, “artists conceive and make art, but all of us collaborate in creating its cultural role” (p. 87). Musicologist Keith Negus and Michael Pickering (2004), scholar of culture and communications, concur stating, “we cannot confine creativity to the artist or cultural producer alone,” but rather must view creativity as an “intersubjective and interactive dialogue bringing its participants together in the activity of interpretation, exchange and understanding” (p. 23).

While I agree with these scholars about the importance of the larger society in the production and recognition of art, a less inclusive definition of artistic collaboration is needed in order for inquiry into this topic to become meaningful in a pedagogical sense. If all art is collaborative in nature, then there is no reason to study or theorize artistic collaboration as anything distinctive, and no reason why it might require different processes or pedagogical approaches.

However, there is something different about collaborative artmaking and this difference is at least partially connected to the participants’ intentions. A reasonable minimal requirement for the pedagogical purposes of this study is that the participants
must be aware that they are creating art. If they are unaware that they are collaborating in
the production of a work of art or perceptual/aesthetic conception, then the participants’
actions, and thoughts about them, will be of little value to an educator interested in
artmaking processes. Therefore, our definition will not include the chain of producers and
suppliers who prepare the raw materials from which physical art objects are made, unless
these people are knowing collaborators in the production of a specific artwork. Also
excluded are unintentional collaborators, a situation that occurs when an artist
appropriates the work, representations, or actions of another without their knowledge or
consent as in Vito Acconci’s Following Piece, in which he randomly tracked strangers
and documented their actions in photos and writing, or Adrian Piper’s Catalysis IV, in
which she violated behavioral norms in public places and photographed strangers’
reactions (Freiling, Pellico, & Zimbardo, 2008). Both works depended upon the actions
of people who had not agreed to participate and were not informed of their contribution
to these artistic endeavors. Although their actions were appropriated and aestheticized by
the artists, these unknown strangers, by virtue of their lack of consciousness of the
situation, could hardly be said to be willing collaborators in the art work. Therefore,
studying actions of unwitting collaborators such as these would reveal little about
 collaborative processes that would be useful in a pedagogical sense. However, even if we
limit our definition to conscious collaborators, we must still confront doubts about the
legitimacy of some collaborative artistic practices.

A Rationale for the Acceptance of Collaborative Artistic Practices

The acceptance and recognition of contemporary collaborative practices as art is
an important consideration as the capacity of some collaborative artwork, particularly

socially engaged practices, to challenge normative art practices, makes them somewhat controversial and has caused at least one critic to call them today’s avant-garde (Bishop, 2006b). Although some collaborative artists express frustration with inflexible bureaucratic policies that favor sole authorship, issues of legitimacy arise not because of collective authorship, but primarily because collaborative processes often produce unconventional artistic forms. Within the contemporary world there exists a continuum of collaborative artistic forms that ranges from object-centered collaborations, which find easy acceptance in the commodity oriented artworld; through social forms that inhabit the spaces of art museums and galleries which, though challenging to established aesthetic practices, find acceptance among viewers and critics partially because they respect institutional boundaries; to the far end of the spectrum—social forms that occur outside of an art world context, but use aesthetic experience to alter existing perspectives. In object-centered practices, collaboration is a process that produces a conventional form, but as we proceed along the continuum, we see form and process intermingling to the extent that in socially-engaged works, form is not separate from process, rather, form is embodied in the collaborative process. The nature or content of the work, in each case, calls forth collaboration, and the nature of the collaboration affects the form to a greater or lesser extent. In the following section, we will consider this range of contemporary collaborative practices and suggest a rationale for their acceptance as art work.

If we consent to the limitations on our definition of artistic collaboration presented previously and further confine our inquiry to contemporary art, we are still faced with what London-based art critic Claire Bishop has called “the social turn”, an
upsurge of artistic interest in collectivity labeled variously “socially engaged art, community-based art, experimental communities, dialogic art, littoral art, participatory, interventionist, research-based, or collaborative art” (Bishop, 2006b, p. 179). Some art theorists draw a distinction between art that is participatory and art that is collaborative, claiming that the latter implies cocreation and shared recognition, while the former merely implies assistance (Atkins, 2008). Although we do recognize this issue as important, we shall treat it as a difference in process—the degree to which the collaboration and creativity involved in it is democratic—and not a reason to exclude participatory works from our examination.

Consider the following three examples, offered because they represent key positions on the collaborative continuum mentioned above:

1. In the black and white photograph, Untitled # 27, Tim Roda’s young son, Ethan, is standing next to a long table upon which his helpless father sits; Roda’s long legs have turned to clay. Just before the shot, his son pleaded with him to get up, saying, “Come on, Dad. I know you can do it. Just get up. Get up and walk” (T. Roda, personal communication, April 21, 2006). The photo can be appreciated for Roda’s ironic reference to Gerome’s painting, Pygmalion and Galatea, the sheer ridiculousness of the long skinny clay legs, and the subtlety of the photo’s depiction of the child’s ingenuous trust in the omnipotence of the parent. Roda calls himself a sculptor, and thinks of his work as traveling amidst installation, film, and performance, although his final products are usually photographs. Untitled # 27 appeared in a 2006 exhibition called Collaborations.
2. Maria Pask’s *Beautiful City*, produced for the *Skulptur Projekte Münster 2007*, included a quasi-utopian temporary tent settlement with colorful mobiles hanging from the trees, a vegetable plot, rugs printed with the artist’s colorful drawings, a lecture/reading tent, housing a variety of religious books and a series of speakers from different religious persuasions. The speakers addressed issues previously presented to them by Pask, including whether and how these various authoritative claims to truth could be reconciled with each other. Pask’s working method involves drawing audiences into unexpected exchanges, using the confrontations to break with social conventions and create something new. It is not the colorful formats that Pask orchestrates which constitute her artwork, but rather the intersubjective exchanges that occur within them (*Skulptur Projekte Münster, 2007*).

3. In October of 2000, the Austrian-based collaborative group WochenKlausur built three small houses of shipping pallets in highly frequented public areas in Fürth, Erlangen, and Nürnberg, Germany. Although the conspicuous locations chosen drew attention to this project, called *Public Debate*, the thirty-two discussions held inside these structures remained closed to the public. Without press, camera, microphone or audience, adversaries—whose media-fed conflicts had brought about stagnation of ecological or social development—met face-to-face, often for the first time. With success before an audience thus rendered unimportant, the participants could surrender habitual arguments and consider other perspectives. WochenKlausur was invited to conduct this intervention as part of a larger networking project sponsored by the *Institut für Moderne Kunst, Nürnberg* (*Zinggl, 2001*).
These examples fit our minimal requirements for artistic collaboration because participants had the opportunity to be aware that they were contributing to the production of a work of art, since the works were presented to the public through artworld avenues or in artworld venues, however, some readers/viewers, may have difficulty accepting all three examples as art. *Untitled #27,* a physical art object displayed in an art world setting, is likely to raise little objection, since it so closely resembles familiar art objects. However, *Beautiful City* and *Public Debate,* because they do not easily lend themselves to familiar aesthetic discourses, may cause some consternation. When confronted with unfamiliar artistic forms that challenge conventional ideas, some viewers are likely to disparage them, while some aesthetic theorists just ignore them. For this reason, public opinion and aesthetic theory tend to lag behind artistic practice, as artists are continually reinventing their practice, with the discourse of aesthetics following more slowly and deliberately (Halsall, Jansen, & O’Connor, 2006).

Since Duchamp, there has been a tendency to accept what the artist offers as art, however, the dilemma that one faces in dealing with contemporary collaborative practices is similar to that which philosopher Stanley Cavell (2003) faced in 1965, as he considered Pop Art. Since Pop Art objects were new art forms, there existed no criteria and no pre-existing standards by which to judge them, and the possibility of fraudulence arose. Today some collaborations, like *Untitled #27,* are easily accepted because they present familiar forms, however, works like *Beautiful City* and *Public Debate,* because they involve new art forms, are challenging in the same way that Pop Art forms disrupted aesthetic conventions of their time. The problems seem to arise because many of the
works require the art audience to participate collaboratively in interactive, unscripted, and open-ended ways that frequently leave no physical trace. If the art viewers do not collaborate in the works, they fail to come into existence. Although performance art, Fluxus events and the Happenings of the 1960s and 1970s, have paved the way for contemporary open collaborative art forms, the relational and dialogic aspects of some collaborations, in which form and the content are inseparably intertwined, present forms for which no criteria of evaluation have been established. Further, because these works frequently result in no enduring art objects, the social interactions that constitute them can be mistaken for other social forms common in everyday life. Are Beautiful City, Public Debate and other similar collaborations to be accepted as works of art, or are they frauds—aestheticized bits of education, social work, or politics masquerading as art?

It seems important here to emphasize that we are not at the moment concerned with evaluation of the merit of these works—we are not using the term work of art in an honorific sense. Instead, we use the term in a classificatory sense (Barrett, 2008). Our concern, at this point, lies in determining whether these works can be called works of art and considered as such, not whether they are commendable works of art.

George Dickie’s institutional theory of art provides a useful lens for examining such works. According to Dickie (2004), “A work of art is an artifact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public” (p. 53). While an artifact is commonly understood to be an object made by man, Dickie assures us that artifacts need not be physical objects. He maintains that poems and performances—even improvised performances—are artifacts, in that they are “made by man”. Altering preexisting material, says Dickie,
produces an artifact, and his examples imply that the preexisting materials can be altered either materially and/or conceptually. Essential to Dickie’s theory are the roles of the artist and the public; each must be aware that what is created and presented is art, with the artist having the ability to use artistic techniques to present art of a particular kind, and the public having the ability to perceive and understand the particular kind of art presented.

Since the artists in each of our examples are creating work within an artworld context and presenting this work to an artworld public, and there exists, in each case, some portion of the public that understands the work as art, we can, according to Dickie’s theory, accept these artifacts as works of art. If there exists any doubt about the artifactuality of either Beautiful City or Public Debate, we can refer to Dickie’s assertion that “an artifact need not be a physical object: for example, a poem is not a physical object, but it is nevertheless, an artifact. Still further, things such as performances, for example, improvised dances, are also ‘made by man’ and are, therefore, artifacts” (Dickie, 2004, p. 47). The improvised intersubjective exchanges that constitute Beautiful City and Public Debate become artifacts by virtue of the artistic reframing of these relational and/or dialogic events within an artworld context. The artistic form of these works has merged with the collaborative dialogic process to create a new form, which is nevertheless, made by man, and is therefore an artifact. Thus, we see that our three examples and other similar artistic collaborations can share a common designation as works of art.
However, some contemporary artistic collaborations occur outside an artworld context and may be questionable as art when viewed in relation to Dickie’s institutional theory of art. Although Wochenklausur commences its art work, which it calls social intervention, only at the invitation of an art institution, thereby benefiting from the infrastructural framework and cultural capital of that institution (Zinggl, 2001), other collaborators choose to work within communities and without such sanctions. One such example is Suzanne Lacy, who has worked with other artists, high school youth, and the Oakland Police Department to produce a series of performance interventions in Oakland, California. These dialogical projects and others like them, which use aesthetic experience to challenge stereotypical perceptions and systems of knowledge, resemble, in some ways, the challenge of early twentieth century avant-garde artists to the stifling representational conventions of academic art (Kester, 2006). In attempting to establish a rationale for these dialogic community art practices as art, we can refer to Morris Weitz’s argument that art has no necessary and sufficient properties, for “art” is an open concept (Weitz, 2004). According to Weitz, if we examine what we call “art” with the goal of establishing common properties, we find none—only strands of similarities. Since it is the nature of art to continue to change, new conditions, forms, and movements continue to arise, which require us to extend old definitions or invent new ones. Collaborative art work that occurs outside of an artworld context can, therefore, justifiably be accepted as art by virtue of its resemblance to other works such as Wochenklausur’s interventions, which have been recognized by the artworld.
The difficulty in classifying such community-based works as art lies partially in their resistance to evaluation according to traditional art theories. In addition to the blurring of distinctions between the act of creation, the art object, and its reception—a significant problem in and of itself—the viewer or critic is faced with the political or socially-engaged nature of the issues being addressed. Some contemporary artists, critics and philosophers of art have shied away from direct political involvement—perhaps seeking to distance themselves from associations with fascist or communist propagandist uses of art (Freiling, 2008). Claiming that community-based practices value subject matter over form, some critics dismiss them as being aesthetically undeveloped (Ashford, 2006), while others judge them based on purely ethical criteria (Bishop, 2006b).

Although some aestheticians and critics view ethics and aesthetics as intertwined (Eaton, 2008) or suggest that ethical assessment of attitudes displayed in a work of art are a legitimate part of aesthetic judgment (Gaut, 2004), other critics are reluctant to embrace new forms that require engagement on levels other than those encompassed by formalist views of art.

The extent to which a collaborative work is a social activity also affects its critical reception. Dialogic forms are valued in theatre and live music, but in contemporary art, social activities and discursive practices primarily contribute to the framing and reception of art. Consequently, a gap exists between object-centered works, conceptual relational works that address social practice, and dialogic works that act within and upon our globalized society (Freiling, 2008). Projects occurring within the artworld are easily identifiable, but non-commodifiable community-based collaborative projects or events
may become invisible to critics who depend upon the artworld for their own sustenance and whose work helps drive the art market. Faced with resistance and/or indifference from critics, such art practices often function outside of the parameters of the artworld and its institutions and evaluations (Kester, 2004).

If it is possible for these practices to continue outside the conceptions of the art world, what is to be gained by accepting these open collaborative social forms as art? The answers to this question vary. While some practitioners seem unconcerned with situating their work as art, others find this designation crucial because they rely upon the cultural capital and funding possibilities afforded by art institutions (Kester, 2004). Others claim that presenting their work as art “offers possibilities to put forward ideas without the preconditions of academic work (rules, objectivity), the market (surplus value, capitalist modes of distribution), or activism (the threat of dogmatism)” (Dilettante, 2006, ¶ 1). For some, aestheticizing the work, allows participants and viewers to assume perspectives that they may not be likely to embrace in an everyday setting (Zinggl, 2001). Still other practitioners are concerned that the lack of critical attention and the absence of a historical record forces younger artists to “repeatedly reinvent the wheel” (Kester, 2004, p. 190). For art viewers and critics, the issue matters because it has the potential to expand our understanding of what art can be and how it might contribute to our communal meaning-making. And for art educators, this expansion of the field of art to include participatory and collaborative forms, creates the opportunity to move away from an emphasis on individualized conception and production of art in the art classroom and
to explore the potential of collaborative artmaking practices and the social and creative benefits that these might bring.

**A Typology of Contemporary Collaborative Artistic Practices**

In our endeavor to understand contemporary collaborative practices, we return now to our three prior examples of collaborations. We note that in all three instances, the artists appreciate the potential of collective creative action and dialogue, and value the contributions of other participants in their work. Yet with regard to objectives and outputs, both material and social-cultural, these artistic collaborations vary enormously. In light of this wide range of contemporary collaborative artistic practices, it seems useful to make distinctions between types of collaborations in order to enhance our understanding of them. Such distinctions are not easily made, however, as many artists, like Peter Dunn and Loraine Leeson, who collaborate with various communities in a socially engaged art practice, claim that they have no typical projects, no formulaic approach, and that “the specificity of context requires custom-made processes” (Dunn & Leeson, 1997, ¶ 6). This factor of context-specificity appears frequently in collaborative art.

Despite this variable aspect of collaborative processes, there do appear to be different, if somewhat indistinct, collaborative modes, which are disparately motivated, produce widely differing results, and approach issues of participation in different ways. Asking the reader to keep the mutable nature of these distinctions in mind, I will divide artistic collaborations into the following three categories: 1) objected-centered collaborations, in which an artist works with collaborators—technical experts, assistants, and other artists or interested persons—in an object-centered art practice; 2) relational
collaborations, which occur primarily within the art world and are intended for an art world public, often transforming spectators into participants; and 3) community-based dialogic forms of collaborative practice, which may be primarily dialogic or may combine object-centered and dialogic processes (See Table 1). In the paragraphs that follow, I will use the previous three examples of collaborative artmaking to elucidate the differences between these three types of collaborations. This typology is significant to this study because the collaborative types are based on motivational, material and social/cultural aspects of collaborative work, all of which impact the artmaking processes used. These aspects of artistic work, a consideration in any practice, often go unacknowledged or unquestioned, however, framing collaborative works as art brings them to the forefront.

Although the lines between these collaborative types are decidedly blurred, the categories represent places on the continuum where a number of additional factors seem to cohere. These factors, which again are embedded in other art forms, also emerge as significant in collaborative work framed as art. This clustering of factors makes explicit the relationship of the collaborative form to such issues as authorship—both hierarchical and non-hierarchical collaborative forms; the desire to create a more active subject, one who engages in the work; and the creation of community through the enactment of a social bond (Bishop, 2006a), however temporary. These factors will also be discussed later in this chapter when we look at theoretical and historical precedents for these works in art history, but for the moment, they can be subsumed under the philosophical call to
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Object-Centered</strong></th>
<th><strong>Relational</strong></th>
<th><strong>Dialogic</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>motivation – present personal vision to the viewer, collaboration of convenience</td>
<td>motivation – create new model of sociality within art world</td>
<td>motivation – address specific socio/political issue within a community, seeks transformation of thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>form - focus on visuality and/or materiality, object meant to embody meaning</td>
<td>form- flexible, consists of situation or event, emphasizes interactions, focus on being-together, collective elaboration of meaning</td>
<td>form – flexible, consists of dialogue/interaction, may includes visuality and/or an object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>form often separate from process, meant to embody meaning</td>
<td>form is the process</td>
<td>form &amp; process intertwined, but may include final object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>often sole authorship is claimed</td>
<td>authorship not as important (not a commodity—but in the artworld the situation still credited to an individual)</td>
<td>authorship- may be instigated by artist, who still somehow “owns” the work, or at least documents it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hierarchical structure, dialogue used to carry out artist’s intentions</td>
<td>interaction more or less democratic</td>
<td>tends to proceed more democratically, ideally, in interaction all are equal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>artist &amp; collaborators make the work, viewer contemplates work</td>
<td>blurs the distinction between maker and viewer</td>
<td>blurs distinctions between maker &amp; participants but object/performance may also be presented for contemplation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>creating community not important</td>
<td>interested in creating community amongst participants</td>
<td>interested in advancing/transforming community’s concerns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. A Typology of Contemporary Collaborative Artistic Practices
merge art and life. This issue, while not unique to contemporary collaborative art, is a defining one, for at one end of the continuum we find collaborators content to grant art and everyday life separate places, and at the other end we find artists who aim to merge art and life, to impact real communities in real world ways. Though certainly not a new issue in art, the extent to which it is emphasized in collaborative work partially determines the position of the work on our continuum.

**Objected-Centered Collaborations**

Tim Roda’s collaboratively produced photograph, *Untitled #27* is similar to the production of any artist in a traditional art practice, in that the artist conceives of the work, desires to present a singular vision or work to the world, and retains the right to make aesthetic decisions regarding its production. In Roda’s case, his wife and son usually contribute to the production of his photographs and sometimes also collaborate conceptually in the work. Object-centered collaborative works, like Roda’s photo, tend to focus on visuality. The artist may seek to engage the viewer in the manner of traditional art, which attempts to transform the viewer through an overwhelming encounter—by creating an enjoyable perceptual experience, by shocking the viewer, or by disrupting the viewer’s normal habits of perception.

Materiality is an essential aspect of object-centered collaborations. The artist and collaborator(s) endow the art object with aesthetic significance and/or meaning, which are later perceived by the viewer upon contemplating the finished work of art. The work’s significance or meaning is embodied or embedded in the formal qualities of the piece—which are meant to be apprehended on the level of sensation, in space and time. Since these material relationships are similar to relationships that might be established by
any lone artist working in an expressive or formalist tradition, this type of artistic collaboration does not challenge expressive, formalist or contextually responding to, or evaluating art objects.

Although the viewer treats both art objects that have been produced collaboratively and those that result from a solitary artistic practice similarly, the social/cultural relationships involved in the production of a collaborative art object differ significantly from the production of a single artist. These relationships are often tied to and determined by the artist’s motive for collaborating.

In a collaboration of convenience, the production of an art object may require technical expertise that the artist does not possess, or the scale or conception of the work may be such that a number of people must cooperate in its production. Frequently, such work is conducted in a hierarchical manner, with the author performing the more creative functions, claiming authorship, and having all final authority over the work. As with any joint production, dialogue is essential, however, the goal of dialogue within the hierarchical structure of an object-based collaboration is primarily to facilitate the proper execution of the artist’s vision or plan. Such a collaboration, in which a single artist directs and controls a number of technicians or workers, has been called complementary (John-Steiner, 2000). In complementary collaboration, each participant contributes his or her specific training, skills, and temperament to the production of a finished work. The primary artist may or may not consult with his/her collaborators on aesthetic matters and may or may not publicly acknowledge the contributions of the collaborators.
In contrast to this, another mode of collaboration, *integrative* collaboration happens when participants “develop a shared vision and strive for a common voice” (John-Steiner, 2000, p.110). It is important to note that *integrative* and *complementary* collaborative modes can occur across the range of collaborative types. Numerous co-career couples in the visual arts also provide examples of integrative object-centered collaborations; among them are Berndt and Hilla Becher, Peter Fishchli & David Weiss, Anne and Patrick Poirier, Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison, and Christo and Jeanne Claude. Other artists, like Art & Language, General Idea, the Boyle family and Group Material, concerned with issues of authorship, individualism, and originality, have formed collectives and chosen a shared *non de plume*, as well as adopting integrative collaborative forms of object making. What these integrative collaborative groups share is a collective persona, which can occur when there is commitment to a common cause, to interdependence, and to equality. Such a shared commitment to a common mission often motivates artistic collaborations of a more activist nature, whose work may abandon both object-centered practices and confinement to an art world exhibition space in its efforts to activate a wider audience.

**Relational Collaborations**

Artistic efforts to activate viewers during the 1990’s led to a participatory form of artwork in galleries and exhibitions, which we will call relational collaborations. These works, which are collaborative in that they involve viewer participation in their production, seemed to resist existing aesthetic theories. While the artists themselves may have been unconcerned with this state of affairs, critics and advocates of these art forms saw the necessity of creating new theories to include them in the discourse. Nicolas
Bourriaud (2002), a French curator and critic, wrote the influential book, *Relational Aesthetics*, in an attempt to aid viewers in understanding these works, and, it has been argued, to justify his own curatorial practice. Considerable controversy surrounds this book, with the featured artists themselves entering the fray. Several of them have denied that they are relational artists, and/or refused to appear in a BBC documentary called *Art Safari: Relational Art*, directed by Ben Lewis (BBC Four, 2004). Dissension has focused upon whether such a categorization of artworks is accurate, which works best exemplify this trend, and Bourriaud’s motivation for writing about it. Although the controversy raises several unresolved issues, among them the question of how to evaluate such works, we consider these artworks here as non-object based relational collaborations within the contemporary art world.

*Created for Skulptur Projekte Münster 2007*, Maria Pask’s *Beautiful City*, is an example of such collaboration. Although Pask and her collaborators constructed an installation—a tent city decorated with colorful amateur art, these objects were not the focus of the work. Instead Pask invited guest speakers from various religious persuasions, followers, students, friends and family to camp in the space and aimed to explore the creative social potential of this situation. Like most relational art, *Beautiful City* did not take up a specific political cause, instead it took the relationship between religion, art, and community as its focus, with the aim of introducing new forms of intersubjectivity that resist cultural pressures (Downey, 2007). Commenting on this, Pask writes, “I wish to connect the notion of ‘inclusion' to an attitude where people dare to show the differences and make room to encounter contrasting points of view” (Pask, 2007, ¶ 5)
Through this artwork, Pask endeavored to challenge the modernist view that grants art a cultural position separate from religion and spirituality.

Situated near two permanent public sculptures, *Three Void Stones* by George Brecht (Skulptur Projekte 1987) and *Sanctuarium* by Herman de Vries (Skulptur Projekte 1997) (Pask, 2007), *Beautiful City* created a marked contrast by privileging flexible ideas about form, favoring the construction of situations/events, and emphasizing behaviors and modes of exchange over the display of unusable, commodified objects (Dezeuze, 2006). Like other relational art works, *Beautiful City* didn’t actually provide much to look at, and unlike the permanent stone or brick sculptures flanking it, which exist in and through time, *Beautiful City* was transitory in nature. Typically, relational collaborations exist only for a specified period of time. Their value resides in the social formations, relational interplay, and communications that arise during interaction with the work (Downey, 2007).

Unlike the contemplative stance, practically a prerequisite for making meaning of more traditional art works, relational works invite “being-together” and their goal is “the collective elaboration of meaning” (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 15). The artwork is realized in this “being-together” and all participants are collaborators in its creation. While some critics suggest that there is no real difference between the type of conviviality experienced in relational art and that which one might experience in another location, advocates claim that it pushes artistic boundaries, blurring the distinction between maker and viewer, between what the art work is and what it does. Pask asserts that the aesthetic implication of situating *Beautiful City* between the sculptures by Brecht and deVries
emphasizes both her project’s comment on developments in contemporary sculpture, and its central theme—the integration of contrasting viewpoints into a common shared experience (Pask, 2007).

**Community-Based Dialogic Collaborations**

Pask’s emphasis on process and inclusion of people from a wide variety of societal groups resembles dialogic collaboration, which focuses primarily on “the creative orchestration of dialogical exchange” (Kester, 2004, p. 189) in community settings. Since traditional art criticism and history tend to ignore these works and the projects often leave little physical evidence, most of the available information exists in the form of documentation created by the artists and participants themselves (Kester, 2004). Dialogic collaborations include a wide range of practices from primarily conversational works—such as our example, *Public Debate* by WochenKlausur— to dialogic works that may also include the production of an object, performance, or event.

Like relational artists, dialogic collaborators focus their practice on facilitating interactions between people, but they are especially interested in fostering dialogues among and between diverse communities. Because they are interested in resisting forms of commodified social interaction, they depart from traditional object making to utilize process-based and/or performative approaches. “They are ‘context providers’ rather than ‘content providers’” (Dunn, cited in Kester, 2004, p. 1).

Unlike artists who create object-based “art for art’s sake”, and relational artists, who work within an artworld setting and steer clear of particular political issues, dialogic artists frequently take as their subject matter specific social, cultural, and/or political causes. In *Public Debate*, WochenKlausur deliberately chose to work with specific tense
social/political relationships within contemporary urban culture. Social conflicts were identified through research in local newspapers and through local institutions, and parties involved in the conflicts were invited to participate in private face-to-face discussions, with or without a mediator present. While WochenKlausur laid the groundwork for a peaceful context, the participants provided the actual content of the work.

Similarly, in much dialogic art, traditional art materials are replaced by sociopolitical relationships, and self-expression is sacrificed in favor of the uncertain outcomes of intersubjective engagement (Kester, 2004). Like modern artists, who challenged the traditions of academic art, dialogic collaborators often use the perspective-altering capacity of aesthetic experiences to trouble conventional perceptions and knowledge systems. The collaborative performance and public ritual *In Mourning and Rage*, coordinated by Suzanne Lacy, Leslie Labowitz, and Bia Lowe in 1977, provides an example of this. Calling attention to sensationalist media depictions of the “hillside strangler’s” victims and the way media coverage contributed to an atmosphere of social consent for crimes against women, this collaborative performance offered a feminist analysis of the violence instead (Keegan, 2009). Like most dialogic artworks, *In Mourning and Rage* sought to be accessible and focused on facilitating understanding among participants, rather than valuing incomprehensibility like some modernist art.

Dialogic collaborations also differ from traditional artworks with regard to temporal issues. Rather than trying to create an immediate, overwhelming effect, dialogical artworks require a durational framework. Yet, like relational art, once the work
has been, “lived through” (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 15), it is gone, living on only in whatever transformation the engagement evoked.

While mainstream aesthetics concentrates on formal characteristics of a physical object, which are thought to possess meaning—many dialogical works, like their relational counterparts in the art world, are ephemeral, producing no thing of lasting value. This is not to say that they don’t make use of visuality. A desire to create a mise en scène for the interaction, like WochenKlausur’s Euro-pallet houses, is common among dialogic collaborators (Kester, 2004). The aestheticizing of the event—which takes people out of their normal spaces—seems to create a rupture in ordinary perspectives and an opening for a new form of dialogue to emerge. This reversal of the practice of relational artists, who take normal action into the aestheticized space of the artworld, seems aimed at a similar result.

The works themselves, consisting primarily of conversation, are ephemeral, but may require a sustained engagement by both the artist and the participant/collaborator. A focus on visuality and/or the creation of a physical object may or may not be a part of the work. Although Wochenklausur specializes in short-term projects, some artists engage in what Kester (2004) has called an immersive practice, developing a prolonged relationship with a particular community over months or even years. For these artists, the engagement with a specific community over time is important to creating the kind of trust-based relationship between and among artists and collaborators that contribute to the transformative power of such works. In dialogic work, the artist, too, remains open to
transformation, and it is partially this factor that distinguishes this work from social work, especially if the artist enters the community as a privileged outsider.

The convergence of a diversity of viewpoints and interpretations is also a distinguishing characteristic of dialogic collaborations. Dialogic collaborators seek to resist or transform existing social/cultural relationships and rely upon the interaction inherent in the art work to accomplish this. Through facilitation of the expression of contrasting, even antagonistic points of view, these collaborations make use of the dialogic process to contribute to the collective creation of meaning.

While I have created this typology of collaborative artistic practices as an aid to understanding them, it is important to note again that much collaborative art work, based as it is, in process, refuses to conform to any set of criteria, or may begin as one type and shift into another. Object-based collaborations, with their focus on visuality and the creation of a physical artwork, are the least problematic of the three types. They provide little challenge to existing artworld structures—in the tradition of Western art, the work of assistants/collaborators has long been subsumed into the aura of the master artist, who receives credit for the work. In contrast to this, relational and dialogic collaborations consider the interaction of the participants over a period of time to be of primary importance to the aesthetic significance of the work, with a focus on visuality and/or the creation of a physical object being optional. These collaborators seek to resist or transform existing social/cultural relationships and rely upon the interaction inherent in the art work to accomplish this. I have drawn a distinction between relational artworks, those open-ended artworks that occur primarily within an artworld setting and involve the
artworld public in rather fluid and unpredictable processes, and dialogic artworks that occur in community settings, which involve members of the general public in their production, and take as their objective the transformation of a specific socio/cultural situation. In order to appropriately consider these new types of art work, the viewer’s conceptual scope must include the ephemeral, conditional, and improvisational processes inherent in them. These non-material performative aspects of some contemporary collaborations—the tendency to blur the distinctions between artists and viewers, and the desire to affect issues outside an artworld context—can create difficulty with regard to evaluating this work using traditional aesthetic categories and make the work challenging to some viewers and critics.

**Historical and Theoretical Influences**

Having now described the range of contemporary collaborative art practices that this study is concerned with, let us examine how these practices have developed within the context of contemporary art. Postmodern theory teaches us to doubt the idea that we can measure the progress of art by observing the pattern of movements displacing each other at the cutting edge of culture (Kester, 2004). Thus, rather than trying to define a single historic lineage for the various collaborative practices, it seems more productive to look for historic and theoretical precedents to the conceptual grounding of these types of work. Claire Bishop (2006a) identifies three concerns that provide the theoretical motivation for what she has called "participatory art". These motivations—authorship, activation and community—provide a useful framework for identifying conceptual currents that have risen to the surface in contemporary collaborative practices.
Authorship

The concept of authorship is a recurring issue in discussions of collaboration. Although the history of Western art includes examples of collaborative artistic production—among them medieval craft guilds and Renaissance studios—the Renaissance, with its emphasis on humanism and individuality, brought about the need, not just for skilled workmanship, but also for a distinctive artistic style, as individual artists began to compete for patronage and commissioned works (John-Steiner, 2000). Thus individualism gradually became a core value among the rising merchant class of European society, setting the stage for Enlightenment thinking. Gablik (1995) posits that modernist notions of the artist as autonomous, self-sufficient, and isolated from society are rooted in Enlightenment thinking and tied to an objective scientific worldview. These ideas have grown up alongside an increasing commodification of the art object and a decrease in forms of patronage that allowed artists of earlier times to maintain large studios and employ numerous assistants. Even though collaborative artistic theorization and production has continued in situations such as Baroque ateliers; Impressionist, Cubist, and Surrealist artist circles; and Warhol’s factory, it is common for dominant artists to claim authorship. Possessive individualism, motivated not just by economic interests, but also by the “symbolic economy of recognition” that characterizes the increasingly competitive art world, contributes to a situation where co-authorship is perceived as a hindrance (Wright, 2004, p. 534).

For some contemporary collaborators involved in object-centered practices, authorship becomes problematic because the commodity and recognition value of the artwork produced may be attributed unevenly to the collaborators by the artworld. Some
collaborators in the latter part of the twentieth century, however, “longed for a radical restructuring of art itself” and hoped to “liberate art from the constraints of commerce and aestheticism, and to make art into a vital force in the world” (Sollins & Sundell, 1990, p. 9). The critique of authorship and originality has driven artists, such as Janet Silk and Ian Pollack, who received a collaborative MFA from the University of California at Berkeley in 1998, into collaboration as a “conscious political decision” (Pollack & Silk, 1999, p. 4). Collective production, and/or the realization of a collective persona, becomes, for these collaborators, not only a creative methodology, but also one of the goals of the collaboration.

This negation of individual production can be seen as an extension of one aspect of the historic avant-garde’s “negation of the autonomy of art” described by Peter Bürger (1974, p. 51). According to Bürger, the European avant-garde movements can be regarded as an attack on the luxury commodity role of art in bourgeois society, and commonly “negate those determinations that are essential in autonomous art: the disjunction of art and the praxis of life, individual production, and individual reception as distinct from the former” (p. 53). Dadaism, Surrealism, and Russian Constructivism all involved collaborative practices to some extent, challenged institutionalized art practices, and in some way attempted to dissolve distinctions between art and life. Although common currents underlie these movements, different strategies were employed within different contexts, with Dadaism influencing various anti-art, political and cultural movements including Surrealism, while Russian Constructivism sought to influence
culture by redefining art in relation to industrial production within the context of the Communist revolution (Foster, Krauss, Bois, & Buchloh, 2004).

Duchamp’s Dadaist provocation, in signing mass-produced objects and then exhibiting them as art, negates individual production and mocks the idea of individual creativity (Bürger, 1974). This repudiation of the significance of individualized production leads to “the death of the author”, as Roland Barthes has phrased it (1977a). Although Barthes’ famous phrase refers, not to the collectivization of authorship, but rather to the relationship of the author’s intention to a work’s meaning, in the essay by this name he gives the Surrealists’ practice of collective authorship some credit for the “desacralization of the image of the Author” (1977a, p. 144). This idea is tied directly to the desire of some collaborators to blur the distinction between the artist and the viewer, between production and reception.

Authorship and Activation

The blurring of the lines separating the artist and viewer has emphasized the viewer’s role in the completion of the work. Activation of the formerly passive art viewer is significant to artists involved in relational or dialogical collaborations (Bishop 2006a). In relational art, the reader, or viewer, is essential to the piece, not just as an interpreter of the work—but as an essential component of the work itself, since relational works are constituted by the social interactions, communications, and social formations that come into existence during the “exhibition” of the work. Dialogical collaborations also foreground the importance of social interaction, though some may also produce a material work of art.
In addition to activation of the viewer/reader, Barthes also saw a change occurring in our conception of language and this idea seems to underlie much collaborative work. It is exemplified in his definition of a “work” as related to a “text” (1977b). Although Barthes wrote about language, his distinctions are significant in that they provide a framework for understanding what Bourriaud refers to as “the instability and diversity of the concept of form” in relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 20). While the “work” has a closed meaning, which is meant to be passively received or worked out; the text is seen as active, partial, and plural (S.Walker, personal communication, February 8, 2006), like the open form of a relational work of art. When Bourriaud says, “an artwork is a dot on a line”, he seems to be agreeing with Barthes that its meaning is not fixed, but is realized by the viewer/reader in never-ending connections, overlappings and variations (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 21).

Although to some extent any work of art might be considered open, Umberto Eco (1962) articulated the concept of the open work as one that has certain characteristics: an invitation to make the work with the author, openness to a continuous generation of internal relations from which the viewer must select, and openness to an unlimited range of possible readings (p. 38). Early pioneers of the open work include Robert Rauschenberg, whose *White Painting (Three Panel)* inspired John Cage to compose *4’33’*, a silent musical work, which constructs a time within which the audience listens to chance sound. Since then, various artists have experimented in different media with the idea of the open work, creating a variety of forms including Interactive Art—physical objects that require spectator interaction, for example, Lygia Clark’s *Rede De Elástico*
(Elastic Net) or the One-Minute Sculptures of Erwin Wurm; Conceptual Art—works that invite intellectual or material completion by the viewer including many Fluxus works, like George Brecht’s Water Yam, or the wall drawings of Sol Lewitt; and Installations—which invite the viewer to enter into the work itself, experiencing it through multiple senses. In addition to being seen as inherently more democratic, the open form is thought to have the aesthetic advantages of increased risk and unpredictability. In relational collaborations, this concept of the open work is applied to the realm of human interaction with one of its goals being the activation of the viewer. For example, the relational communal projects of Rirkrit Tiravanija involve gallery viewers in activities that range from cooking and eating curry to a variety of leisure activities such as playing music or broadcasting over community radio. Tiravanija likens his installations to experiments, with the viewers entering into intimate and unexpected contact with each other—becoming participants in these open-ended experiments (Staines, 2006, ¶ 8).

**Activation**

We have discussed the idea of activation in mild terms—mentioning a desire to blur the distinction between artist and viewer, between production and reception. However, this active viewer, or subject, can also be seen as one who is either enlightened as to her own subjugated position and/or “empowered” by her participation in the completion of the work of art (Bishop, 2006a). The participant, thus enlightened and/or empowered, might then be able to participate in creating her own social and political reality. Relational collaborators seek to transform the consciousness of art consumers and activate them by constructing participatory situations within the art world, as “models of sociality”, while remaining concerned with both the use value of conviviality and its
exhibition value (Bourriaud, 2004, p. 44). Other collaborative artists, while continuing to position their work as art, seek a greater effect outside the art world context, and work to activate audiences through processes of dialogue and collaborative production or disruption within communities.

Evident to some extent in Dadaism, Surrealism and Constructivism, activation arises to varying degrees in postwar European collaborative groups like the Lettrist International, CoBrA, and the Imaginist Bauhaus, which merged to form the Situationist International (SI). All were critically involved with Marxism and Surrealism, with the SI also adding an antagonistic confrontation with the growing consumer society, which it saw as a closed “spectacle” that had “transformed our very alienation into so many commodities to consume” (Foster et al., p. 391). The writings of the Situationists, in particular, those of Guy DeBord are a significant influence on collective artistic activity since World War II (Stimson & Sholette, 2007), contemporary relational art (Bishop, 2006a) and dialogic art (Kester, 2004). The goals of the SI were “the utopian task of reimagining collective subjectivity” and teaching “citizens how to stop being passive consumers and how to become self-governing, active producers of their own culture and politics” (Stimson & Sholette, 2007, pp. 38 & 35).

In order to accomplish these goals the Situationists advocated the construction of situations, an avant-garde practice aimed at the dialectical unification of art and life. The SI distinguished the construction of “situations” from the “happenings”, created by Allan Kaprow and others during the 1960’s, and Fluxus events, however, all three can be seen as precursors to contemporary dialogic collaborations, as all sought to change political
and social, as well as aesthetic perceptions of audiences, through direct involvement in participatory events. Some collaborative groups, such as the Guerilla Art Action Group (GAAG), the Black Mask group, influenced by Fluxus and the SI, have protested the complicity of cultural institutions with larger forms of societal domination (Kester, 2004). Along with artistic collaboratives drawing influences from feminism, happenings, and performance art, such as the Artists Placement Group, The Yes Men, and Critical Art Ensemble, they have developed an aesthetic that involves working in real world environments and communicating with mass audiences.

Similarly, the political involvement of Joseph Beuys and his concept of social sculpture, framed in the 1970s, had a strong influence on many subsequent artist collectives (Bishop 2006a; Bourriaud, 2002; Green, 2001; Stimson & Sholette, 2007). Beuys’ conception of social sculpture assimilated art into life in a participatory, interdisciplinary process that used thought, speech and discussion as its core materials (Social Sculpture Research Unit, 2008). On June 27, 1977, Beuys, along with video art pioneer Nam June Paik, and media artist Douglas Davis, performed in the first live international satellite telecast. Beuys delivered a nine-minute speech that set forth his concept of social sculpture:

Art that no longer refers solely to the modern art world, to the artist, but comprehends a notion of art relating to everyone and to [the] very question and problem of the social organism in which people live. Without doubt, such a notion of art would no longer refer exclusively to the specialist within the modern art world but extend to the whole work of humanity (Freiling et al., 2008, p. 130).

Beuys’ insistence on interaction and involvement, and his call to every human being to discover his/her own free artistic being and to participate in the transformation of
the condition, thinking and structures that shape our lives (Social Sculpture Research Unit, 2008) are important forerunners of today’s participatory art and community-based collaborative practices.

**Community**

A renewed interest in community and collective responsibility is a primary motivating factor for participatory art (Bishop, 2006a; Gablik, 1995). The desire for connection also inspires much dialogic work and “community” is a focal point of recent critical and political investigations and debates (Kester, 2004). Jean Luc Nancy’s, *The Inoperative Community* (1991), is a significant contemporary philosophical work on community, which influences discussions of contemporary collaborative artwork (Bishop, 2006a; Kester, 2004).

In this work, Nancy examines community, in particular the mythical Western idea of a lost, harmonious, intimate community. Nancy warns us to be wary of this idea, especially when it becomes the basis for a politics of community, because the desire for a closed and undivided social identity has led historically to disastrous results. He posits that our identities are always constantly changing, being fashioned in response to our experiences with others. It is this mutability, as well as the shock of discovering our own finitude, that we have in common with others, and realization of these aspects of human existence can lead to a new conception of community, one not based on essentialist notions of identity. According to Nancy (1991), “community means, consequently, that there is no singular being without another singular being, and that there is, therefore [...] an originary or ontological ‘sociality’” (p. 28).
Agamben (1993), in *The Coming Community*, seems to agree with Nancy regarding the importance of developing a concept of community that does not depend upon identity. In a phrase that affirms Nancy’s ideas about finitude, Agamben says that in every being that exists, there is a “possibility of not-being that silently calls for our help” (1993, p. 31). He says that there is something that humans ethically are or have to be, which is neither an essence, nor a thing, but rather the simple recognition “of one’s own existence as possibility or potentiality” (1993, p. 43). This “whatever singularity”, a more positive concept than Nancy’s finitude, is what can bring about our being-together in community, and not some aspect of identity.

Although some critics take issue with several of Nancy’s key constructs (Kester, 2004), in particular his distrust of dialogical intersubjectivity and his insistence on the necessity of the abrupt revelation of the myth of the essentialist community, the influence of Nancy and other theorists on community-based art is apparent. Many artists, following Nancy’s line of thinking, see their own role in community art as that of the provocateur or pedagogue. Rancière (2004a) cautions that “political art cannot work in the simple form of a meaningful spectacle that would lead to an ‘awareness’ of the state of the world” (p. 63). Kester also objects to the artist assuming a didactic role and emphasizes the possibilities of mutual transformation of the collaborators in dialogic art work. He posits the possibility of “defining oneself through solidarity with others while at the same time realizing the contingent nature” of such an identification (Kester, 2004, p. 163). For many, the possibility of identification with others, through art making, provides not just a way out of the depersonalization, loneliness, and boredom prevalent in
contemporary culture, but a way of developing critical skills in analyzing perceived reality and generating creativity to reconstruct that reality (Barbosa, 2002).

So far, our discussion of community has focused on recent developments of these ideas among Western theorists and within a Western artworld context. However, it is crucial to our understanding of collaborative trends in contemporary art to look at art within a broader framework. Félix Guattari (1995) says that it is only recently in Western history that the arts—dance, music, and the elaboration of plastic forms and signs on the body and the environment—have separated themselves from ritual activities, systems of representation and multireferenced practices that tended, in archaic societies, to “release social alterity through the union of filiation and alliance” and situate individuals “at the intersection of numerous vectors of subjectivation” (p. 98). Expressing a similar idea, Ellen Dissanayake (2000) asserts that prior to historic times, during which art has been increasingly separated from the rest of life and valued for its own sake, art originated and thrived as a communal activity, intrinsic to human life, which helped humans make sense of experience through valued activities, provided essential experiences of mutuality and belonging, and promoted individual and collective fulfillment.

Extending this idea further, Dissanayake (1992) calls for an expanded view of art inclusive of all societies, past and present. Insisting that a “literate” approach to art, which assumes that art is a representation—an object, an image or a text, is too limiting, she advocates viewing art from the perspective of biological evolution, as a universal behavior, including, but not confined to representation. Her ethological view of art assumes that art as a behavior predates historical records, is characteristic of all human
beings and societies (though its specific manifestation will be limited), and has selective survival value. She suggests that play, art, and ritual have been intimately connected in human evolutionary history and that they share a common root proclivity of “making special” (Dissanayake, 1980). According to Dissanayake, “artistic behavior shapes and/or embellishes everyday reality with the intention of constructing or manifesting (or recognizing) what is considered to be another “level” from quotidian practical life” (1980, p. 401). This embellishment or “making special” serves to unite participants in a shared transcendence of the self, providing social reinforcement for group values and beliefs, thereby establishing the psychological advantages of solidarity and like-mindedness to those pre-literate groups who created arts-based rituals and objects as a way of emphasizing important events or occurrences.

According to Dissanayake (1992), traditional (sometimes called primitive) societies, still practice the arts as an integral aspect of life, “making special” those events and activities which contribute to collective meaning-making, while Western society began to conceptualize art as something apart from life at around the time of Plato. This led eventually to the current state of affairs in the West, where the arts are either regarded as specialties for elite enjoyment or dismissed as an irrelevant frill. However, a careful examination of Western art will reveal that collaborative artmaking has continued to occur throughout history, though it has existed, almost invisibly, in the shadow of dominant theories of individualism and genius. In fact, art as a communal activity has never been far below the surface and the recurring surges of desire to merge art and life in collaborative activities and practices may well be indications of the innate human
proclivity to “make special”—to make meaning of the events and conditions of our every
day life—that Dissanayake speaks of.

Whether or not one accepts Dissanayake’s thesis that the arts have had survival
value to the human species, what seems most relevant to our discussion of artistic
collaboration and community is that viewing art as a behavior shifts the emphasis away
from art as object, quality, text, or commodity, to art as an activity which involves a
community in making or doing and appreciating—with the potential of a transformative
communal experience (1992). While some contemporary collaborative artists aim to
“disrupt” everyday life, I would argue that this is a way of “making special” particularly
appropriate to our time, when the possibilities and probabilities of affirming communal
values might most properly take the form of protesting those values that seem to guide
our current globalized and commodified lives.

Nevertheless, a number of contemporary collaborators work under the assumption
that a collaborative art work can both embody and enact community through the
processes of physical and dialogical interactions (Kester, 2004). This emphasis on
community and communal transformation is a current that was visible during the 60’s
and 70’s when activist artists, such as those connected to the Woman’s Building in Los
Angeles, drawing on the energies of feminism, the anti-war movement, and cultural
consciousness-raising, sought to challenge high art institutional hierarchies by engaging
with elements of the public in their own spaces and daily lives (Kester, 2004). A second
wave of activist artists, including such collectives as Gran Fury, the Guerilla Girls,
REPO-history, Tim Rollins with KOS, and Group Material, reacting to issues of race,
class, gender, and sexuality, developed innovative approaches to community-based art work in the 1980’s and early 1990’s. While these groups remained concerned with the creation of objects and exhibitions, other activist artists have worked in what Suzanne Lacy (1995) has called new genre public art creating projects situated within specific communities and contexts that focused more on collaborative processes capable of generating transformative experiences.

In the 1990’s, some politically engaged artists who worked outside the typical artworld settings of studios, galleries and museums, began to call their interdisciplinary community-based practices “interventions”. These artists, working collaboratively in groups such as subRosa, Critical Art Ensemble, and The Yes Men, create work that combines politics with a light-hearted approach, intent on agitating for social change. One of the goals of these groups is to unite participants in an experience that provides another, perhaps transformative, perspective on everyday life. Many of these collaborative efforts make use of the Internet and other forms of mass media to accomplish their goals. In our current, highly technological, globally interconnected world, the term community has taken on such adjectives as online or virtual, with collaboration occurring primarily in the virtual world. Participation in mass media or mass-mediated collaborative art works raises new political and ethical issues about the value and role of art, artists, and art institutions in our contemporary world (Manovich, 2008).

Conclusion

In the contemporary world, there exist a wide range of collaborative practices that can justifiably be positioned as art. This positioning is useful as it enables practitioners to
capitalize on the cultural latitude that is ordinarily accorded artists, while encouraging and empowering participants and viewers to access atypical perspectives. This expansion of the scope of art practices enlarges our understanding of art and its contributions to communal meaning-making, while freeing art educators to include collaborative artmaking processes within the school curriculum.

These practices can be situated along a continuum with object-centered collaborations at one end, proceeding through relational collaborations that occur in an artworld setting, to dialogical collaborations, which produce socially-engaged community-based forms. While the artists engaged in these practices all value the contributions of their collaborators, they differ with regard to certain key issues: motivation for collaborating, whether or not the practice involves the production of an object and/or focuses on visuality, the extent to which form and process are intertwined, the importance of authorship, the nature of the interaction between the artist and her/his collaborators, the function and importance of dialogue, the desire to activate the viewer, and the interest in engaging with or creating community amongst the participants/viewers.

Ample historic and theoretical precedents exist for the conceptual grounding of contemporary collaborative works. Concerns about authorship, activation and community motivate many such works, with an interest in eliminating the boundaries between art and life providing a defining factor. A common human proclivity toward communally meaningful artistic activities may underpin all such collaborative practices.
CHAPTER 3: COLLABORATION IN EDUCATIONAL AND INNOVATIVE CONTEXTS

On January 13, 2009, the New York Times ran an article headlined, “At M.I.T., Large Lectures Are Going the Way of the Blackboard”. In it, Sara Rimer describes the transformation of M.I.T.’s traditional physics introductory lecture classes into smaller classes utilizing collaborative, interactive learning. The failure rate in these classes, which typically runs at about 10-12 percent, has dropped to 4 percent and attendance is up (Rimer, 2009). These results come as no surprise to educational theorists who favor constructivist pedagogical approaches that focus on active, participatory exploration and learning, and highlight the importance of social context and the larger community of learners. Although the general approach to education in this country continues to reflect values that favor encouraging and evaluating individual achievement, (Hagaman, 1990), the fact that such universities as M.I.T., Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, and Harvard are turning to interactive, collaborative, and student-centered teaching practices (Rimer, 2009) can be taken as evidence of the recognition of the importance of interrelatedness and interdependence in our times. In this chapter, we look at the theories that support cooperative and collaborative forms of learning and innovation and discuss issues of collaboration that arise in these contexts. Understanding the conceptual background of collaboration in these contexts is essential, as such an understanding provides a lens
through which to view the educational and innovative aspects of collaborative artmaking at the sites examined in this study. This perspective is necessary in order to determine the pedagogical implications of the collaborative artmaking practices and pedagogies observed.

**Part 1**

**Collaboration in Learning Contexts**

For some time, educators have been aware of the importance of actively engaging students in learning and have stressed relating instruction to students’ prior understandings and making real-world connections to students’ lives (Althouse et al., 2003; Glasser, 1998; Hunter, 1982; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). Constructivism, a psychological theory of knowledge based on the idea that the individual constructs and adapts a worldview based on experience (Simpson, 1996), has emerged as one of the greatest influences on education in the last twenty-five years (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002). Two important notions central to the idea of knowledge construction are 1) the learner builds new knowledge based on what she/he already knows and 2) the learner’s role is an active, rather than passive one (Hoover, 2006).

These ideas stand in sharp contrast to pedagogical approaches previously used in the now-defunct M.I.T. introductory physics lectures, which view learning as the transmission of information from one individual (the teacher) to a passive receiving other (the student). According to Gordon Wells (2000), professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz, arguments refuting the conception of the mind as a container for knowledge propositions and the idea of direct transmission of knowledge through text or speech have been convincing. The most serious problem with this transmission view of
learning, he says, is that “treat[ing] knowledge as a thing that people possess […] loses sight of the relationship between knowing and acting and of the essentially collaborative nature of these processes” (p. 67).

Within the context of education, definitions of constructivism vary relative to whether one holds to a perspective based on personal constructivism (Piaget), social constructivism (Vygotsky), or radical constructivism (von Glasersfeld). However, the common emphases on the active role of the learner, the importance of meaning-making, the necessity of building upon prior knowledge, and the focus on knowing as a process rather than knowledge as a product, have contributed to the popularity of constructivism amongst educators (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002). Despite this current popularity as a philosophy of learning, constructivism has been criticized for its tendency towards epistemological relativism (Hua Liu & Matthews, 2005). Critics also include cognitive scientists who argue that the central tenets of constructivism are misleading and foster instructional practices, like discovery learning, that are inefficient and ineffective (Anderson, Reder, & Simon, 2000; Mayer, 2004) and educators who posit that instructional designs based on constructivism are inappropriate for novice learners (Kirschner, Sweller, and Clark, 2006). Acknowledging that not all teaching techniques based on constructivism are effective for all learners, many educators continue to embrace constructivism, which has influenced a variety of curricula as well as institutional practices such as use of cooperative and collaborative learning strategies, heterogeneous grouping, the design and organization of classrooms, and a pedagogical emphasis on language.
Social Constructivism

Vygotsky (1978) emphasized the role of language in conceptual growth. He saw language as a psychological tool that enabled children not only to communicate about their experiences, but also to interpret, work through, and make sense of their experiences (Lloyd & Beard, 1995). Recognizing the important role of semiotic mediation in the process of internalizing cultural knowledge, Vygotsky focused on the social construction of knowledge (John-Steiner and Meehan, 2000). His argument that language is first interpersonal, between the child and the outside world, and then intrapersonal, has caused many educators to rethink learning as an individualized process (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002).

Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), a way of conceptualizing the relationship between the individual and others in learning and development, is central to social constructivist theories. The ZPD, which can be used as a form of dynamic assessment, is defined at its lower level by what the student can do without assistance and at its upper level by what the child can do when aided by adults or more competent peers (Althouse, et al., 2003). Assistance takes the form of cues and scaffolding, provided by a more knowledgeable person, and helps lead the student, through internalization, to intellectual growth.

Recent interpretations of Vygotskian theory emphasize the effect of assistance on identity-formation and the involvement of the whole person in collaborative activity (Wells, 2000). For social constructivists, knowing is rooted in social interaction and learning is an active social process (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002). Social constructivism is grounded in the idea that theories that conceive of learning as an individual cognitive
process misrecognize and impoverish it. Such cognitive models tend to perpetuate an educational system where disenfranchised students are made individually responsible for their own plight (Lave, 1996). The conception of learning as a social and collective phenomenon, rather than an individual, psychological one, offers marginalized students an opportunity to experience “legitimate peripheral participation” in a learning community. Through this social process, a person’s intention to learn is engaged and she/he is empowered through increasing participation in the community of practice (M. Smith, 2003, 2009).

A superficial understanding of the social processes involved in learning and the importance of the role of the expert can lead to ineffective practices, such as the use of unstructured and unproductive dialogue, or a pedagogical model where the expert (teacher) lectures and students then perform set tasks (Hagaman, 1990; Lloyd & Beard, 1997). According to Vygotsky, the teacher must establish a structured environment for teacher-student and student-peer interaction. The task of the teacher is to provide a set of experiences that will motivate students and enable them to learn effectively. With teacher guidance and peer interaction, the students are able to internalize external knowledge, learn critical thinking skills and produce, collaboratively, something that they could not have produced alone (Hagaman, 1990).

Cooperative Learning

One structured form of collaborative learning, known as cooperative learning, has been researched extensively over the past ninety years in hundreds of studies that compare individualistic, cooperative, and competitive learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1997, 2008). Cooperative learning, which can be defined simply as students working
together on structured learning tasks (R. Gillies, 2007), is consistently effective in promoting higher level thinking and academic achievement, fostering positive relationships among students, and improving self esteem (Jones & Jones, 2008). Practitioners claim that cooperative learning works because it utilizes several key educational concepts, among them multiple processing, active involvement, peer-learning, peer-teaching, and personalized interaction (Kealy, 1995).

The research on cooperative learning offers useful suggestions regarding participation in cooperative learning groups—suggestions that may also pertain to collaborative art-making groups. Several elements are essential to successful cooperative learning: promotive interaction, involving simultaneous face-to-face dialogue; positive interdependence, which occurs when the group’s achievement is dependent upon individual contributions and vice versa; individual accountability; development of interpersonal and small group social skills; and opportunities for group processing, reflecting upon both content learning and group functionality (Kealy, 1995; Gilles, R., 2007). The teacher functions as facilitator and guide by formulating and communicating clear expectations, and by focusing conversations through active listening and posing objective, reflective, interpretive, and decisional questions (Lane, 2008). A number of behaviors, which can be taught to students, help to improve group relations, among them compromising, empathizing, encouraging, practicing inclusion, relieving tension and expressing group feelings (Adams & Hamm, 1996).

Even the use of these behaviors, however, will not prevent all problems or conflicts from arising amongst group members. Issues such as social loafing—letting
one’s teammates do all the work, or confrontations between individuals do emerge and it is through resolution of such problems and conflicts that social learning occurs. Time spent working on social skills is not seen as a distraction from the learning task.

Advocates of cooperative learning cite improved ability to interact with others as one of its primary benefits (Adams & Hamm, 1996; Kealy, 1995; Gilles, R., 2007; Johnson & Johnson, 1997, 2008). Just as the educators engaged in cooperative learning with students in their classrooms often speak of creating a community of inquiry or a community of practice that works toward shared goals—artists involved in collaborative artmaking talk of being motivated by the desire to create community. This conception of a community of inquiry or practice will prove important as we examine the collaborative practices at the sites in this study.

**Situated Cognition**

The idea of learning within a community of practice is also central to situated learning, which has been defined as “the notion of learning knowledge and skills in contexts that reflect the way they will be used in real life” (Collins, cited in Brill, 2001). A relatively recent theory of learning, situated cognitive theory attempts to account for learning as an activity involving the concrete particulars of the situation, in contrast to information processing models that emphasize construction of abstract symbolic representations in the mind (Barab & Plucker, 2002). Scholars conducting research on situated cognition see it as a fundamentally social activity defined by the culture and context of the learning situation (Brown et al., 1989; Kirshner & Whitson, 1997).

Knowledge is inseparable from the learning context. As in the theories of Vygotsky (1978), cognition is thought to result from reasoning that occurs when the individual
interacts with the social and physical environment. In contrast to Vygotsky, situated cognition places greater emphasis on internal operations in reformulating knowledge acquired from the situation (Russ-Eft, 2004).

Also known as authentic learning, situated cognition is rooted in John Dewey’s progressive education model of the 1930’s, which emphasizes real world relevance, professional practice, inquiry, knowledge construction, deep understanding, and reflection (S. Walker, personal communication, 2007). When applied to art education, situated cognitive theory implies that students who wish to learn artmaking, should be engaged in the same types of activities as real artists, an idea presented by Manuel Barkan (1962) in his declaration “that artistic activity anywhere is the same, whether at the frontier of art or in a third-grade classroom” (p. 14). Significant activities, emphasized in the situated cognition perspective, include student choice about problem-solving processes, as well as the ability of students to pose their own problems (Darvin, 2006).

Art educators, who base their approaches in situated cognitive theory, will provide students with problem-finding, as well as problem-solving opportunities. In resource-rich, real-life environments, students will be encouraged to pursue their own interests and engage in artmaking as they emulate the rituals and procedures of practicing artists (Barab & Plucker, 2002). Educators will also provide opportunities for group problem solving and group construction of knowledge (Russ-Eft, 2004).

Community of Practice

The concept of a community of practice is significant in considering learning and collaboration in the context of groups. Although this type of learning has been practiced for centuries, the term community of practice was coined relatively recently by Jean Lave
and Etienne Wenger (Wenger, 2009). “Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger, 2009, ¶ 4). Learning may be a primary motivation for the formation of the group, or it may occur as a normal function of social interactions within the community.

Three elements—the domain, the community, and the practice—combine to constitute a community of practice (Wenger, 2009). Members of a community of practice share interest in a common domain, a sphere of activity or knowledge. They maintain a commitment to the domain, and also possess a competence within the domain that distinguishes them from other people (M. Smith, 2003, 2009). Sharing information about their domain, members of a community of practice assist one another, and participate in discussions and activities regarding their domain. They develop a shared practice over time, which may include experiences and stories, resources, tools and instructions for their use, among other things (Wenger, 2009).

The community members learn in and through their interactions with each other through the dynamic “living curriculum”, that constitutes the community of practice (Wenger, 2009, ¶ 12). Novices in the community are motivated to learn by their observations and interactions with central participants. Through legitimate peripheral participation, members of the community develop a desire to speak and behave in appropriate ways, thus moving toward full participation in the community’s socio-cultural practices, constructing their own identities in and through the community (M. Smith, 2003, 2009). Knowledge is gained through lived experience and ongoing
reflection on practice with other members of the community. Reflective practice is an essential element of learning within a community of practice as the individuals within the community collectively make meaning of their experience.

Critics of situated learning and the use of the concept of communities of practice in educational situations argue that tying knowledge too closely to specific contexts can result in the inability to transfer knowledge to another context, and that it is more effective and efficient to provide a combination of abstract instruction and concrete illustrations of this instruction, with an emphasis on transfer to other situations (Anderson et al., 2000). This criticism fails to consider important questions about the situations within which people are most highly motivated to learn. Whether or not there is a relationship between the authenticity and social aspects of a context and the motivation of learners is surely an important element to consider in assessing the effectiveness of this learning theory.

Social constructivism, cooperative learning, situated learning, and communities of practice are conceptions of knowledge construction and learning processes that can contribute to our understanding of both the benefits of and the processes involved in collaborative artmaking within a learning context. Since the examination of collaborative artmaking at the three sites involved in this study will be based partially upon these ideas, I have emphasized pertinent key tenets of these approaches.
Part 2

Collaboration in Innovative Contexts

In educational contexts, collaboration has been used primarily to introduce or share information, foster mastery of concepts, or promote higher order thinking or skill development (Kealy, 1995); however, in the worlds of science and business, collaboration is increasingly being used because it offers other advantages. Foremost among these is the ability of a diverse group of collaborators to increase the creative capacity of an organization (Bennis & Biederman, 1997; Parker, 1994; Paulus & Nijstad, 2003). A considerable amount of research on scientific collaboration, focusing on the analysis of social processes, has been carried out with the goal of improving the efficiency and innovative power of collaborative teams (John-Steiner, 2000; Levine & Moreland, 2004). Psychologists interested in creative or innovative aspects of teamwork have also studied creative alliances of extraordinary people (Bennis & Beiderman, 1997; John-Steiner, 2000) as well as eminent creators (Gardner, 1993, 2001) in an attempt to discover the conditions under which people produce spectacular, paradigm-altering innovations.

The results of this research on collaborative innovation inform this study, as they trouble certain “common-sense” notions about the artistic personality and the individual nature of creativity. My reason for presenting contextual approaches to creativity or innovation within the context of this research is twofold: 1) it is important to understand that although the conceptions of artistic creativity that developed during times when individualism was ascendant persist in art education, research has shown that creative innovation is enhanced by a collaborative approach, and 2) studies of innovative
collaborative groups can provide insight into processes that may enhance the creative potential of artistic collaborations.

**Contextual Approaches to Innovation**

In recent years, the concepts of creativity and originality have come under fire in the artworld. Simultaneously, an upsurge of interest in social and systems theories of creativity has occurred among psychologists and sociologists, who are dissatisfied with unidimensional approaches to the topic of creativity (Feldman, 1999; Mayer, 1999; Paulus & Nijstad, 2003; Sternberg & Lubart, 1999). Convinced that a preoccupation with testing has limited conceptions of creativity, these psychologists call for the inclusion of social/cultural contextual issues as well as cognitive processes and personal qualities (Feldman, 1999). While these biographical and contextual approaches have been criticized by some psychologists for lack of rigorous data, lack of control and/or representativeness, and the need for formulation of testable theories supported by solid empirical evidence, they have succeeded in broadening the study of creativity and are able to provide a richness of detail and authenticity not available in experimental and psychometric studies (Mayer, 1999). In addition, these approaches directly address an issue pertinent to this research—the autonomy of the artist.

Much of the recent research is based upon the pioneering work of Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi who defined creativity as “an idea or product that is original, valued, and implemented” and championed the idea that creativity does not take place in a vacuum (Csikszentmihalyi & Wolfe, 2000, p.81). Embracing these ideas, systems theories of creativity consider, in addition to the individual, two salient aspects of the environment, the cultural or symbolic aspect called the *domain*, and the social aspect
called the *field* (Csikszentmihalyi & Wolfe, 2000). The *domain* can be defined as “the symbol system within which the individual works” (Gardner, 2001, p. 118) and includes information such as rules, procedures and instructions for action (Csikszentmihalyi & Wolfe, 2000). For example, the domain of art includes the actual symbolic system, such as colors, textures, lines and forms, and also artistic styles and movements. The *field* consists of those knowledgeable individuals and institutions that act as gatekeepers to the domain by judging the quality of new work in the domain (Gardner, 2001). In the arts, the field would include gallery owners and critics, as well as agents, fellow artists and people who work in art departments at colleges and universities. Contextual theories do not deny the importance of the individual creator, but they do insist that understanding the impact of the domain and the field are essential to a more complete comprehension of creativity. Research in these areas has uncovered certain characteristics of the individual creator and features of the domain and field, which we turn to now.

**The Artistic Personality**

A common misconception that restricts research and application of creativity studies is the stereotypical image of the artistic individual as a “strange, creative loner with a dark side” (Plucker, Beghetto, & Dow, 2004, p. 86). The idea of an unchanging “artistic personality” has been traced to the middle of the sixteenth century, when the use of a new medium, oil painting, first made it possible for painters to abandon fresco painting and work alone (Abuhamdeh and Csikszentmihalyi, 2004). Vasari, in his famous biographies of eminent Italian artists, described the artist as having “a certain element of savagery and madness” (cited in Abuhamdeh & Csikszentmihalyi, 2004, p. 32).

Psychologists who favor contextual theories (Abuhamdeh and Csikszentimhalyi, 2004)
acknowledge the validity of psychological studies that suggest, like Vasari’s statement, that artists are somehow different, more specifically, that they are autonomous, introverted, nonconforming, and socially aloof, (Feist, 1999, MacKinnon, 1991). However, they reject the idea that these traits are essential to creative artists in all time and places, claiming that they serve only to describe some artists at specific times and under certain conditions. Arguing that artistic creativity is not an individual phenomenon, but a social and cultural one, they assert that the personality traits associated with artists are dependent upon the domain and field of art in operation at the time.

When the domain of art or the predominant artistic style of a period changes, artistic processes also change, and this is accompanied by a change in the personalities of artists (Abuhamdeh & Csikszentmihalyi, 2004). For example, a study by Loomis and Saltz (1984) associated extroverts with representational artistic styles and rational cognitive styles, and introverts with abstract styles and irrational cognitive styles. If the field of art favors particular styles such as abstract styles and selects them, it thereby determines the nature of the domain, which has the effect of reinforcing certain personality traits at specific times. The field can vary greatly in the criteria used to evaluate creators and their products, and these criteria are often connected to prevailing ideological and intellectual currents (Simonton, 2003). This selection process implies that there is no fixed artistic personality, and no reason to think that specific personality traits, such as autonomous or introverted, will continue to be adaptive during different periods.

A study done by Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi in 1976 even suggests that the archetypal personality traits associated with the romantic artist actually lead to failure in
the contemporary art world. They found that the traits of extroversion, aggressiveness, and a flair for self-promotion now seem most predictive of artistic success (Abuhamdeh & Csikszentmihalyi, 2004). These researchers suggest that as the range of artistic media and styles in use continues to grow in the postmodern era, a broader range of personality traits might be expected to appear among artists. Their findings are compatible with the idea presented earlier, that the locus of creativity in the art of our time may be shifting from the autonomous artist to creators who favor more dialogic and collaborative artmaking processes (Gablik, 1995).

The Influence and Importance of the Domain and Field

Dean Simonton (2003) has studied societal interactions to analyze the Zeitgeist—the spirit of the times—and determine if there exists a Zeitgeist most conducive to creative activity. By reviewing both cross-sectional research, which examines variations in the aggregate level of creative activity in groups (defined by civilizations, nations, societies, or cultures) and time-series research, which looks at the aggregate level of creativity displayed by a single group over historical time, he found that the Zeitgeist does influence and perhaps even controls the appearance of eminent innovators and their innovations. He also found that stylistic labels, for example Baroque or Classical, describe similarities that permeate the styles adopted across a range of creators, such as artists, writers, musicians and poets, within a given era. Simonton’s findings that the Zeitgeist appears to influence the creative activity within different domains, in similar ways, lends further support to the idea that the themes of social connectedness and collaboration that are surfacing in some arenas of artistic activity are related to wider societal currents at this time.
Examining the importance of the domain from another perspective, we find that eminent creative thinkers across a range of domains are often talented individuals whose families arrange for them to be taught by experts, thereby providing them with the opportunity to learn the symbolic system of the domain (Gardner, 2001). Access to the domain is crucial, as the creative process can only begin when the necessary information is available (Csikszentmihalyi & Wolfe, 2000). In order to fulfill the potential for creativity in a particular domain, it is essential for youths to be trained by experts as soon as possible. Csikszentmihalyi and Wolfe (2000) assert that “the careers of creative individuals are often determined by chance encounters with a mentor who will open doors for them, and such encounters are more likely in places where the field is more densely represented—certain university departments, laboratories, or centers of artistic activity” (p. 89).

Although the role of the mentor in providing access to the domain can be of primary importance, a group of peers and colleagues can also play a significant role in the process (Hooker, Nakamura, & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003). One of the main benefits is that the peer group often develops a milieu in which creative ideas can arise. Hooker et al. (2003) suggest that “Leonardo da Vinci learned as much from his fellow apprentices, such as Lorenzo di Credi, as he did from the workshop master Verrocchio, and Michelangelo learned from his fellow pupils in Ghirlandaio’s atelier and from the other young men who assembled at the court of the Medici to discuss art and philosophy” (Hooker et al., 2003, p. 241). Besides providing each other with inspiration and
knowledge, and modeling effective skills and behaviors, peer groups often provide each other with needed emotional support.

Researchers (Feldman, 1999; Gardner, 2001; John-Steiner, 2000; Sternberg, 2006) emphasize the importance of other people in creating a supportive environment that rewards creative ideas and contributes to the development of resilience. David Feldman (1999) asserts that, “the enduring belief that great creativity is developed largely alone, without assistance from teachers, mentors, peers, and intimate groups is largely a myth” (p. 176). The support and collaboration of mentors, friends and family, and working partners, though often unacknowledged, is critical (John-Steiner, 2000). For example, although Picasso, and to a lesser extent Braque, are credited with the creation of Cubism, research confirms that a group served as catalyst for this revolution in perception (Gardner, 2001). Another example is the Batignolle group of Impressionist painters, who in addition to providing emotional support for sustained commitment, developed the set of values and the approach to solving shared problems that engendered the Impressionist approach to painting (Farrell, 1982). In contemporary times, the group of artists known as the “Beautiful Losers” (Rose, 2008), similarly provided each other with mutual support for their common DIY aesthetics, inspired by punk, skateboarding and graffiti, which has led to renown in the art world. Investigating the importance of a supportive peer group, Howard Gruber also found that creative people “are not as isolated as once believed: they are, in fact, extremely good at collaborating, at interacting with peers. They often devote their skills and a surprising amount of time to establishing environments and peer groups capable of nurturing their work” (Lavery, 1993, p. 7).
Another significant function of the peer group and/or mentor is that of introducing and championing the novice’s work within the field (Hooker et al., 2003). Simply developing a novel idea or product is not enough; in order for one’s work to be considered of value, the field must accept an individual’s creative efforts. Access to the field may be provided by family connections; but often a creator’s social resources and relationships, which have been formed through contact with a mentor or peer group, will present career opportunities, which might not otherwise exist (Hooker et al., 2003). The practical contextual skill of knowing how to persuade members of the field of the value of one’s work is also important (Paulus & Nijstad, 2003, Sternberg, 2006). Here practical and social personality traits of career-driven artists are favored over the traits of the archetypal lone visionary. Research confirms that successful contemporary artists are those who are willing to sacrifice some personal expressivity for the sake of artistic recognition (Abuhamdeh & Csikszentmihalyi, 2004). This is necessary because “creativity is not an individual phenomenon, but rather relies on the interaction and judgment of people, socially and historically” (Moran and John-Steiner, 2003).

**Group Innovation**

In “Imagination and Creativity in Childhood” Vygotsky says, “Every inventor, even a genius, is always the outgrowth of his time and environment. His creativity stems from those needs that were created before him, and rests upon those possibilities that, again exist outside of him” (cited in Moran & John-Steiner, 2003). In addition to putting forth the idea that creativity is both supported and constrained by the historical time period during which it occurs, Vygotsky recognized the essentially collaborative nature of creative thought. This conception is corroborated by researchers who find that the
“aha” moments that many creative individuals describe, which often emerges when one is alone, can frequently be traced to previous collaborations—it seems that the mind itself is filled with internal collaborations (Sawyer, 2007).

Acknowledging that creativity can thrive in a collaborative environment, psychologists have studied group collaborations in an attempt to understand group creativity and to determine effective collaborative practices (Paulus & Nijstad, 2003). Researchers from such diverse psychological traditions as creativity, cognition, groups, organizational and information systems have conducted both quantitative and qualitative research using a variety of methodologies in laboratories, libraries and in the field. Some of these studies, which have been criticized for experimental designs that take creativity out of context and attempt to measure limited conceptions of creativity among short-term collaborations in groups of strangers, have produced contradictory findings (Kurtzberg, 2005; Levine & Moreland, 2004; Moran & John-Steiner, 2003). While some suggestions for enhancing group creativity are context-dependent, a number of qualitative studies of scientific, business, and artistic group collaborations have arrived at common understandings with regard to successful innovative collaboration.

Just as the research on cooperative learning offers useful suggestions regarding participation in cooperative learning groups—psychological research on innovative collaboration presents additional key findings that may also pertain to collaborative art-making groups. Elements found to be essential to the successful functioning of collaborative innovative teams are clear common objectives, diversity of knowledge among group members, and a fluid group structure which changes as the
problem/environment changes (Bennis & Biederman, 1997; Paulus & Nijstad, 2003; Sawyer, 2007). As in cooperative learning, successful outcomes occur when there is a focus on group processes, especially when training in team dynamics and process-improvement techniques are provided (Parker, 1994; Paulus & Nijstad, 2003). Innovation seems most likely to occur in groups that cultivate an atmosphere of open, playful dialogue, with both deep listening and dissent occurring. Group members must feel free to take risks and to fail, as well as to build upon each others’ ideas (Bennis & Biederman, 1997; John-Steiner, 2000; Parker, 1994; Sawyer, 2007). Innovation tends to occur over time, with the collaborative team taking up ideas and meaning gradually emerging through a dialogic process.

In group innovation, interpersonal dialogue seems to be a key element in sparking intrapersonal creativity. This stimulating dialogue may happen in formal group meetings, but is perhaps even more likely to happen during informal conversations between group members. Keith Sawyer (2007), psychologist at Washington University, explains it in this way:

Collaboration makes the mind more creative because working with others gives you new and unexpected concepts and makes it more likely that your mind will engage in the most creative types of conceptual creativity—combining distant concepts, elaborating concepts by modifying their core features, and creating new concepts. Many new ideas are bad ones; collaboration over time is the best way to select the good ones. And although each single spark of insight is small, collaboration brings them all together and results in breakthrough innovation (p. 124).

Michael Farrell, who has studied artist’s circles that provide critical support for breakthrough innovators, also talks about the importance of group dialogue. He says that the greatest collaborative moments occur with pairs in an atmosphere of openness and
trust where “new ideas seem to emerge from the dialogue without ‘belonging’ to either of the pair”, however, he feels that the critical appraisal of the entire collaborative circle is essential in clarifying ideas and that the “circle arrives at a vision through trial and error, argument, and eventual consensus” (Farrell, 2001, pp. 22-23). The important roles of collaborative team members seem to enhance both the creative contributions of individuals and the possibility that their creative innovations will be accepted and adopted by the larger community.

Conclusion

A common assumption in Western culture is that human beings have thrived among the species and continue to survive because of our ability to create, to generate novel, useful solutions to problems that we encounter. The information explosion and the attendant necessity of specialization has created a situation where the innovative solutions required to deal with our increasingly globalized problems will undoubtedly require group interaction and creativity (Paulus & Nijstad, 2003). The complexity of issues that we face makes it impossible for any single individual to possess all the relevant knowledge and expertise to provide the breakthrough innovations that are now needed. Research on collaboration in educational and innovative contexts provides some insight into how to stimulate such creative collaborations.

In this chapter, we examined learning theories that support cooperative and collaborative forms of learning and found that collaboration in education has been used primarily to present or share new information, provide assistance in mastery of concepts, or stimulate higher order thinking or skill development. We have also seen that contrary to “lone genius” ideas of creativity, collaboration seems to encourage innovative by
providing both a supportive and a stimulating context. Our aim has been to develop a functional perspective for viewing the educational and innovative aspects of collaborative artmaking at the sites examined in this study. This frame of reference will prove useful in analyzing the artmaking practices and pedagogies observed and in determining the pedagogical implications of them.
CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Grounding

I came to the doctoral program at The Ohio State University with little background in research methods and methodology, seventeen years of experience teaching art in the public schools, and the desire to update the theoretical basis of my own pedagogical approach to art education, which had been growing and changing pragmatically throughout the course of my teaching career. Prompted by a conviction that art education should be in synch with contemporary artmaking practices and a growing awareness that contemporary artmaking included collaborative and participatory works of various kinds, as well as the encouragement of a life-long mentor to investigate the importance and benefits of working collaboratively, I decided to focus my research on artistic collaboration and issues related to the teaching of it. This decision grew quite naturally into a research proposal that was based on the desire to investigate collaborative artmaking practices and pedagogies in contemporary art education situations.

Since my research questions revolved around understanding the nature and meaning of specific human interactions in particular contexts, I chose qualitative research methods which are “used when the object of study is some form of social process, meaning or experience which needs to be understood and explained in a rounded way”
Qualitative inquiry is concerned with developing an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon and the meaning constructed by the participants in that phenomenon (Jones, 2002). Although a variety of qualitative research strategies and methods exist, most qualitative research: 1) is grounded in an Interpretivist philosophical position that focuses on the interpretation, understanding, experience, production and/or constitution of phenomena in a particular social world; 2) utilizes flexible data construction methods that are responsive to the social context of the situation; and 3) employs methods of analysis and explanation that aim to produce complex, detailed and contextual understandings (Mason, 2002, p. 3).

My review of related literature, which focused on contemporary collaborative artmaking approaches and collaboration in educational and innovative situations, established the theoretical underpinnings for my analysis of the data in this study. With regard to contemporary artmaking practices, Claire Bishop (2006a) and her theoretical framework for viewing participatory art, Nicolas Bourriaud (2002) and his theories of relational aesthetics, and Grant Kester (2004), who has written extensively about dialogical aesthetics, have influenced my thinking. Their works provide the basis for my categories of collaborative artmaking, which were helpful in analyzing the artmaking at the study sites.

Constructivism and social learning theories provide the foundation for my examination of the pedagogical practices employed. In particular, Lev Vygotsky’s (1978) cultural-historical ideas about the social nature of creative activities and the social construction of knowledge provide a framework for data analysis. In Vygotsky’s theories,
thinking is understood as being embedded in the cultural and historical context that surrounds it and is not confined to the individual mind; rather the interdependence of social and individual processes is emphasized (Daniels, Cole & Wertsch, 2007). Social perspective learning theories, grounded in Vygotsky’s work, with their emphasis on the influence of social and cultural contexts in the construction of knowledge, provide relevant educational perspectives. Cooperative learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1997) situated cognition (Brown et al., 1989), and communities of practice (Wenger, 2009) are especially useful in articulating the pedagogical practices employed.

The work of systems psychologists supports the idea that artistic innovation is rooted in cultural and social phenomena. The work of Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi provides the basis for a conception of creativity that includes social/cultural contextual issues as well as cognitive processes and personal qualities (Feldman, 1999). This work is relevant to my research as it provides a conceptual lens through which to view the creative processes involved in artistic collaboration.

In addition, although I do not consider myself a Feminist researcher, in that the purpose of this research does not involve a commitment to change for women, certain aspects of Feminist theory such as reflexivity (Travers, 2001), voice, representation and responsibility in research (Pillow, 2002) enter into the way I conceptualized and conducted this research. Feminist theories also echo and amplify the interdependence of human beings that is paramount in collaborative work.

**Restatement of Research Questions**

My research has been conducted with the following main question in mind: What motives, issues, and processes are integral to contemporary collaborative work in the
visual arts and the visual arts classroom? Secondary questions that emerged during my review of the literature related to collaboration in contemporary art, education, and innovative situations are:

- What motivates artist-teachers and artist-learners to work collaboratively?
- How are the goals of artistic collaboration in the art world and in the classroom related?
- What issues are important in collaborative artmaking? Are these same issues important in teaching situations that make use of or encourage collaboration?
- What are the processes involved in collaborative artmaking? Do these same processes apply in a classroom situation?

**Research Design**

Since my goal was to gain an understanding of a particular social process, the teaching of collaborative artmaking, case study seemed a useful strategy. Case studies are generally preferred when the researcher aims to answer *how* or *why* questions, wants to investigate a contemporary real-life phenomenon, and wants to use multiple sources of data (Schwandt, 2001). Because my review of the literature revealed a wide range of collaborative artistic practices, I decided to use several cases, a collective case study, in order to provide some breadth as well as depth in the findings of my research. In my choice of cases, I sought to produce a relevant range of contexts and pedagogies, in that I attempted to provide some diversity in terms of age and ethnicity of collaborators and pedagogical models. However, the cases chosen are not intended to be representative of all collaborations of similar groups or types. In qualitative research, if cases are chosen strategically across a range of contexts, the complexity of the data can be used to
construct context-specific understanding, and can also be used in comparison to other relevant contexts (Mason, 2002). This collective case study presents the motives, issues, and processes integral to collaborative work in the visual arts at three educational sites through description, analysis, and interpretation. In addition to documentary research, the study utilized onsite research at each of the sites.

**Selection of Sites**

Since my research interests encompassed both contemporary art practice and art education pedagogy, I decided to seek out situations where contemporary practicing artists who use collaboration in their own work also teach, and use collaboration as an integral part of their pedagogy. My preliminary research discovered three situations of particular interest: Claire Gibb and Rob Fairley of Room 13, Lochyside Primary School in Fort William, Scotland; Michael Mercil and Ann Hamilton and The Embodied Knowledge Ensemble (EKE), their graduate seminar at The Ohio State University; and Judith Baca and Beyond the Mexican Mural (BMM), an undergraduate/graduate level course offered through the UCLA César Chávez Digital Mural Laboratory at the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC) in Venice, California. I chose these three sites, because they provided some diversity in age and/or ethnicity. My preliminary documentary research also indicated that they represented three different pedagogical models: the artist-teacher and artist-learner collaboration, the artist-teacher as facilitator, and the artist/teacher and apprentices. In addition, my research on these sites indicated that the work being produced at each site was exceptional, and that the artist/teachers were motivated, at least partially, by the aspiration to transform existing approaches into new visions. Therefore, I felt that a study of the interactions in these classrooms might
prove useful to myself and other art educators interested in advancing the field of art education.

**Research Participants**

After my initial contact with the artist/teachers at each of these sites, I was invited to visit and conduct research. At this point I prepared and filed the proper OSU Institutional Review Board applications for research at each of the sites in the study (See Appendix A). Exemptions were approved for two of the sites, the EKE and BMM. The third site, Room 13, could not be granted an exemption, as it was overseas and the students were under the age of eighteen, however, the research protocol was approved by expedited review during the summer of 2007.

Participants in this research were artist/learners and artist/teachers at each of the sites who self-selected to participate in the site’s program and who volunteered to be part of this study. Recruitment of volunteers at each site was conducted in the manner most appropriate to the site. In the EKE volunteers were recruited at seminar meetings and consent forms were signed there. The same procedure was used at BMM. In Room 13, however, a different procedure was needed as the students are under the age of eighteen, necessitating parental consent forms. Since the site was overseas and my visit was short, these forms needed to be completed before I arrived in Scotland. During the first week of the 2007 fall term, the Artist-in-Residence of Room 13 gave the students an informational letter and parental consent forms to take home. They were also given my email address and encouraged to email me if they had any questions about the research. The forms were returned to a locked box and I collected them when I arrived at Room 13.
**Data Construction**

*Documents*

Prior to my onsite visits, I prepared by reviewing the literature on artistic collaboration and collaborative and cooperative learning and innovation. In addition, I learned as much as I could about each site by reading available printed materials and Web sites. This documentary review continued at the sites as I gathered and perused a variety of printed materials, such as brochures, syllabi, annual reports, and reproductions of artworks produced. In some instances, in-depth analysis of particular documents contributed to my growing understanding. Throughout my data construction and analysis, I continued to gather documentary materials, broadening and deepening my knowledge and understanding of the activities at these sites.

Documentary research provided for the majority of the data constructed for BMM. For this site, I was given access to the course website, where I could monitor the progress of the class by reading and viewing the course syllabus, course readings and assignments, the course wiki and the student’s written assignments. Digital art projects were also displayed on the site. Data construction from the website was ongoing, as a great deal of material regarding collaborative artistic processes appeared after my visits to the class.

*Observations*

My goal, as an on-site researcher, was to observe the normal activities at the site and to focus on classroom practices, instructional techniques, and other activities especially as they related to or included artistic collaboration. In order to accomplish this, I took extensive field notes. As a qualitative researcher, I was conscious of the selectivity
of my observation, and, as Mason (2002) suggests, I sought to develop a critical awareness of how I was using selectivity and perspective and how that influenced what I observed and took note of. In some instances, I deliberately chose to change my focus, to see if and how that might enlarge my perspective or allow discrepant data to emerge.

In the EKE, making observations was complicated by the fact that I was both participating in and observing the seminar at the same time. Acutely aware that I was the only one taking notes, I tried to minimize the “unintended consequences of being there” as a researcher (Somekh & Lewin, 2005, p. 132) by using a 3” x 5” sketchbook for my note taking. This format, in addition to being unobtrusive, was small enough to fit in my pocket, which was handy, because the seminar was quite active at times. Although this was the only site at which I was both a participant and a researcher, I felt more conspicuous there, as my constant note taking, my status as a novice within the group, and perhaps my age, set me apart a bit from the other students. However, patience, awareness of the circular and cumulative nature of involvement (Wax, 1971), and openness on both sides gradually led to productive conversations with my fellow students, which gave me insight into their views of the EKE.

Interviews / Questionnaires

In addition to constructing data through observations, I conducted interviews with artist-teachers and artist-learners at all three sites using both structured and unstructured interview strategies. Because I was interested in conducting interpretively active interviews, which unavoidably involved collaborative meaning making, I used an informal discussion style rather than a question-and-answer format for the interviews with the artist-teachers (Rhodes, 2000). Nevertheless, I prepared a set of questions for
each interview, knowing that the clarity that comes from a thorough knowledge of one’s objectives contributes to a more meaningful experience. What I enjoyed most about this research method was the opportunity to sit down and have a long focused conversation with a fellow human being about a topic of mutual interest. Because my purpose in conducting interviews was to understand the participants’ perspectives, I was reluctant to use this informal conversational style with the artist-learners, for fear that my status as a researcher, and in Room 13—as an adult, might somehow influence their views. Consequently, with the artist-learners, I used a more formal style, reading my preplanned questions and recording their answers. I did deviate slightly from the questions in some instances, to follow-up on a student’s remark or ask for clarification. These interviews felt stiffer, though some were quite useful for my purposes.

I was able to observe all of the volunteer participants at each site: the number varied from approximately twenty to no students and two artist-teachers at Room 13, the EKE started out with twenty-six students and two artist-teachers the first quarter, and had nineteen students the second quarter; BMM had ten students and three artist-teachers. I also worked only with volunteers for the interviews and surveys, and was unable to recruit or set up interview schedules at the distant sites, prior to my arrival. I conducted a formal digitally taped interview with one of the artist-teachers at Room 13 and the EKE, six artist-learners at Room 13, and three artist-learners in the EKE. At BMM, I conducted an unrecorded interview with one of the artist-teachers. I also conducted one unrecorded interview with an artist-learner in the EKE. Data constructed from these interviews included handwritten notes and transcriptions, if the interviews were digitally recorded.
In addition to these interviews, I took notes on numerous conversations that I had with participants at all three sites.

I augmented this interview data with the administration of a survey with open-ended questions to artist-learners in Room 13, and the administration of a Likert-type survey to students in the EKE. In Room 13, participation in the survey was low with only two students willing to do the necessary writing that the survey, though short, did require. The survey administered in the EKE did yield some interesting results (See Chapter 6).

**Timeline and Duration**

The timeline and duration of the study varied with each site, as two of the sites were at some distance and required extensive travel, thereby necessitating less onsite research. The EKE seminar, on the other hand, was at OSU, where I am a student. I enrolled in the seminar and conducted research as a student participant-observer during the winter and spring quarters of 2006-2007. The class met approximately once a week for two ten-week periods. Onsite data was collected at Room 13 Lochyside during one school week, September 3-7, 2007, throughout the duration of each school day. I also attended a field trip to downtown Fort William with the management team, and was given a tour of the student gallery and studio at Caol, the original Room 13 studio. I collected data onsite at BMM during two five-hour class sessions in December, during the fall term of 2007. Participants at each site were observed during the time period specified, and interviews also took place during this same time period, or shortly thereafter. In the EKE, some interviews were conducted after the class had ended. Although no follow-up research was planned, participants, including artist-teachers and artist-learners at each site were given an opportunity to review the draft manuscript that
was written about their site and to provide comments if desired. Some changes, including factual revisions and additional comments were made after receiving this feedback.

**Risk and Confidentiality**

As with any educational program, there was some degree of risk to reputation involved if research findings should include reports of activities or results that do not enhance the reputation of the program in the eyes of the public. However, the purpose of this research was not to evaluate the educational programs involved, but rather to investigate collaboration as it appeared within the context of the activities at these sites. Therefore, the questions researched presented minimal risk to the reputations of the artist/teachers and institutions involved. As some of the subjects of the Room 13 research were children, there was some minimal degree of risk that they might inappropriately reveal personal or private information about themselves or their families. The interview questions did not invite inappropriate personal or private revelations and I did not hear or record any such comments made by the children.

Subjects were not identified by name in field notes and documents unless they explicitly agreed to be quoted or agreed to the release of digitally recorded material. Identifiers in field notes for people who wished to remain anonymous were randomly chosen initials. Data and backup files were password protected and stored on my personal computer and my external hard drive and I have sole access to this data. Personal information collected will be stored for a period of five years.

**Data Analysis and Interpretation**

In this qualitative case study research, the processes of data construction, data analysis and data interpretation were organized around emergent themes. I began to
identify these themes during my review of the relevant literature, as certain issues, such as motivation, authorship, parity, mutuality, interdependence, and dialogue seemed of common importance regardless of the type of collaboration or the people involved. Thus, analysis of data actually began with the establishment of general categories, which provided a conceptual focus for my observations, and the basis for my documentary research, and interview and survey questions.

As I constructed data in a variety of forms, I coded the data using a combination of manual and computer based methods. My analysis of notes and transcriptions in electronic form was aided by the use of Zotero, a free open-source Firefox extension that assisted me in collecting and managing notes and references. In analyzing the data constructed from my onsite research I established seven cross-sectional categories which I used consistently across the cases, while remaining open to generating new categories that arose from the data, a practice recommended by Mason (2002), who also suggests keeping one’s research questions nearby to crosscheck them with the data. This turned out to be sound advice, which kept my divergent thinking on track. I had to guard against adhering too rigidly to this, though, as it created a tendency to treat the coded data as more concrete or fixed that it actually was. In coding and analyzing the data, I strove to remember the importance of the context or interaction within which the data was created, so as to code on a more theoretical or interpretive level, rather than on a purely descriptive one. Although I used cross-sectional categories for coding the data, I preserved the contextual or case study form for my analysis as that is consistent with the theoretical underpinnings of my research, which place emphasis on the specific contexts
and persons involved in a particular phenomenon. Somekh and Lewin (2005) advise that “the importance of alternating data collection and analysis cannot be overemphasized” (p. 50) and the timeline and duration of my study allowed this process to occur quite naturally.

Although data construction, analysis, and interpretation are ongoing in qualitative research, interpretation involves more than the recognition of a few themes and ideas (Jones, 2002). Interpretation is an analytic inductive process of meaning making that seeks to produce an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being investigated. As the researcher’s perspective, which includes intuition, creativity and artistry (Jones, 2002) are also integral to this meaning-making process, the interpretation is closely related to the theoretical grounding of the research. In interpreting the data gathered at these sites, I relied upon constructivist learning theories and pedagogical methods that have been derived from these theories. I attempted to tell the stories of the participants at these sites in a respectful way, using their words to present their own views, and not merely to reinforce mine. To assure that the stories were credible, I engaged in both informal and formal member checks (Schwandt, 2001), inviting participants at the sites to check the data, interpretations and conclusions in formative as well as summative ways.

The purpose of the study was not evaluative, though some of my interpretations, based in my personal background and conceptual perspective, may involve some evaluation. My intention was to make my own perspective as transparent as possible, while presenting interpretive descriptions and analyses of the chosen learning sites and the artistic collaboration that occurs in them. In so doing, I hope to contribute to an
increased understanding of how to teach artistic collaboration by providing models and practices of pedagogies that encourage collaboration.

**Validity**

In this qualitative study, several measures were taken to establish the validity or credibility of this study. The standard practice of triangulation, the use of different methods in data collection, was employed, as data was created through the use of documentary research, observations and participant-observation in one case, interviews, and administration of surveys at two sites. Reliability of the data was established by the use of multiple documents, detailed field notes, and digital recording of interviews. In addition to carrying out informal member checks, I also provided the artist-teachers at each site with a draft of the chapter written about their site and they were given the opportunity to provide comments on the manuscript. Although some researchers see member checking as an ethical act, rather than an epistemological one (Schwandt, 2001), I see it as both ethical and epistemological. It is a way of generating additional data that may serve to confirm or disconfirm analyses and conclusions already drawn. At each site at least one artist-teacher expressed that there was no objection to the interpretation of data as it was presented. In addition, artist-learners were given an opportunity to request and review the draft manuscript. In this way, an active search for discrepant data helped to avoid study bias. This study, as is typical of qualitative research, makes no claim toward scientific objectivity, and the researcher’s perspective is understood to be present in the framework, questions, and data collected, as well as the language and writing style of the data analysis and interpretation. The research is, nevertheless, “grounded in systematically collected data, skeptical questioning (of self and actors), and rigorous
examination of biases—always open to disconfirming evidence” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 85). This skeptical questioning came quite naturally to me as I once took a teamwork test, designed to identify good team members and came out quite close to the Lone Ranger end of the scale. Earlier in this writing, I have talked about my predisposition toward solitary work; however, this is perhaps tempered by my growing conviction that our Western preoccupation with individualism needs to be balanced out by relearning the values of interdependence and community.

Limitations of the Study

The case study approach seeks to create in-depth understanding by identifying and describing a particular phenomenon situated in a specific context, and presenting an analysis and interpretation of that phenomenon (Stark & Torrance, 2005). The strength of a case study is that it can take one example of an activity and explore it using multiple methods and data sources, thereby presenting the complex realities of a situation, rather than reducing them to a few variables. Given this focus on providing an in-depth image, the amount of time spent at a site and the timing of the site visits may prove crucial. This study was personally financed and limited by funding and time constraints that did not allow prolonged or periodic visits to the distant sites. Although I tried to balance out this shortcoming with extensive documentary research, I recognize that visiting these sites additional times would have enabled me to construct additional data that would have increased the depth of my analyses.

Another important limitation to this study was my own status as a novice researcher. The opportunities to participate in the EKE and to visit Room 13 and BMM presented themselves at a time when I was just coming to an understanding of how to
focus my research, but had not yet fully developed the philosophical or theoretical perspectives for my study, or a sense of myself as a researcher. Consequently, my uncertainty and inexperience in the field led to some missed opportunities, which might have enabled me to construct richer data. Nevertheless, I took advantage of these opportunities, as best I could, and borrowed courage from Einstein, who once said, “If we knew what it was we were doing, it would not be called research, would it?” (Ralston, 2006, ¶). I was also heartened by Seale’s pragmatic approach to research practice. He views research as “primarily a craft skill, relatively autonomous from philosophical and theoretical considerations” and suggests “drawing on these debates at times to feed creativity or loosen trapped thoughts” (Seale, 2002, p. 99). This makes sense to me as it parallels a common occurrence in the production of a work of art, where there may be no need to theorize while the work is in progress. This does not mean that the work is not based in theory, but rather that the theory often operates in “deep background”, while the artist just goes about the business of making art. Theorizing has been brought to the forefront in my analysis and interpretation of the data collected at these sites, which is presented in the next three chapters.
CHAPTER 5: ROOM 13

Part 1

Introduction

Room 13 is an innovative educational project, which Nicholas Serota, director of the Tate Gallery, has called, “the most important model for artistic teaching in school that we have in the UK” (Drummond, 2007, p. 1).1 Prompted by reports of collaborative artmaking in Room 13 and the claim of Room 13 artists, that nobody really understands what Room 13 is unless they visit one, in the autumn of 2007, I went to Fort William, Scotland, where Room 13 began. Since my visit, I have considered the role of collaboration in Room 13 and reflected upon the studio’s pedagogical practices, which blend pupil autonomy with artistic and intellectual freedom (Harding, 2005). The image of collaborative artmaking that emerges includes snapshots of children working together to create art and pictures of artist-teachers cocreating with artist-learners, as well as an image of Room 13, itself, as an ongoing collaborative work of art—an image that seems in close alignment with contemporary views of dialogic art. Part 1 of this chapter begins with a description of the characteristics and evolution of Room 13, followed by an examination of collaboration in Room 13 from the artworld and educational/innovative perspectives developed earlier in this writing. In this section, I adhere to the Interpretivist

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inclination to explicate these issues through the participants’ own actions and understandings, and where possible, I use relevant voices of the Room 13 artists themselves, in order to retain some of the authenticity of the site. In Part 2, I summarize the benefits of collaboration in this situation and establish a rationale. In addition, I raise some problematic issues with regard to collaboration and artistic education at this site.

What is Room 13?

The original Room 13 is an independent artmaking studio, which is voluntarily attended, funded, and managed by students, ranging in age from seven to eleven, of Caol Primary School, in Fort William, in the Scottish Highlands. Through fundraising projects, the students raise their own capital, with which they order and purchase equipment and supplies, and pay the salary for an adult Artist-in-Residence (AIR), whom they hire to work in Room 13. The Room 13 studio at Lochyside Primary School, which is the main subject of this case study, is also in Fort William. Both Room 13s are autonomous and operate similarly. Each depends upon the school in which it is housed for only heat and light; the students have control over what goes on in each studio. Students rush in to use the studio during recess, at lunchtime and after school, but they are free to come any time, as long as they are caught up on their class work, and have the permission of their classroom teacher. Each year the students elect a management team of their peers, which is responsible for the functioning of the studio. The AIR may or may not be an elected member of the management team. The governing structures, along with almost everything else in Room 13 are mutable; by the time of this writing, some of the structures that I observed and have written about will probably have changed. Championed as an example of democratic education, Room 13’s own website describes
the studio as “a meritocracy that places visual literacy, the ability to think and the skills of visual expression at its heart” (Ideology, 2007, ¶ 3). Finlay Finlayson, a local fisherman and business entrepreneur in Fort William, helped sponsor a catalog for an exhibition of Room 13 artworks at the West Highland Museum. In it, he wrote, “Room 13 is much more than an art room. It is a culture of imagination, enterprise, and self-discipline that goes beyond artistic talent (and) a primary school education.” (Room 13, 2003, p. 1). Before going on to examine collaborative artmaking within Room 13, and Room 13 itself as a dialogic collaborative work of art, let us look briefly at the evolution of Room 13. Since Room 13 has from its inception been a collaborative endeavor, understanding its history and continuing development will aid our comprehension of the milieu in which artistic collaboration occurs at this site.

**How was Room 13 originally founded, and how has it evolved?**

Rob Fairley, the original AIR of Room 13 Caol, first came to the school in 1994, as part of an AIR term at the Fort William Library (C. Gibb, personal communication, June 1, 2009). At the end of his residency at Caol, two girls asked how they could get him to stay, and he replied that it would be easy; all they had to do was pay him. By taking the school photographs and selling them to parents, the children raised enough money to invite Fairley back one day a week. The students have continued to take the annual school photographs and engage in other fund-raising activities in order to support the studio. The Scottish Enterprise, local businesses, and several professional artists and photographers have generously provided resources (Gribble, 2005). However, Fairley, who continues to work primarily as a volunteer, says that funding the studio has always been a major problem (Souness & Fairley, 2005).
In 2000, Catriona Jackson, then the eleven-year-old Managing Director of Room 13, applied to the Scottish Arts Council (SAC) for a grant. Despite being somewhat surprised to find that the applicant was a child, the SAC awarded the grant, which allowed the studio to stay open five days a week and set a precedent for future Managing Directors. Through the efforts of other Room 13 student artists, who spoke at conferences for arts organizations, the program gained wider recognition (Souness & Fairley, 2005). In 2002, Room 13 received the Barbie Prize, a £20,000 award for a body of artwork submitted by the school, and Jodie Fraser, of Room 13, won £1,000 for her entry titled 911 (Lucky, 2004, ¶ 10). The management team used this money, which could not be used for salaries, to purchase supplies and establish a travel fund for the entire school. During this time period, the students began to dream about helping students in other schools create a Room 13 of their own. Lochyside Primary School, just down the road from Caol, took them up on this offer and in 2002, established their own studio.

Then, in 2004, the children’s efforts really paid off and Room 13 was awarded £200,000 over three years to support their idea of spreading the Room 13 concept around the world (Souness & Fairley, 2005). The students of Room 13 at Caol and Lochyside began by speaking with adults interested in Room 13. Through these adults they contacted children in other schools and helped establish twenty-three other Room 13s in Scotland, England, South Africa, India, Nepal, Turkey, and the USA. In addition, the children are currently corresponding with groups that are interested in starting a Room 13 in Australia, Palestine, Israel and other parts of the world. The Nelson Mandela Children’s Fund is also stimulating the development of more Room 13 studios in South

**Why Was Room 13 Needed?**

According to Atkinson and Dash (2005), lecturers at Goldsmith’s University of London, recent government policy in England calls for a “centralized school curriculum to be ‘delivered’ to pupils”. Teachers, in this model, are thought to be “little more than operatives handing down a set of instructions” with no allowance for considering or responding to different learning styles of students (Atkinson & Dash, 2005, p. xiii). The English National Curriculum for art seems divorced from the current and emerging social world of students and learners because the practices and discourses it encourages tend to reproduce essentialist ideas of authenticity, originality, expression, and the self (Atkinson, 2005). Rob Fairley, agrees, claiming “conventional art teaching in schools in the UK does the arts no favours” (Souness & Fairley, 2005, p. 49). He asserts that the exam-based system teaches and tests formulaic procedures that run counter to the creative practices of artists, and that the curriculum fails to address contemporary art or work in new media. Claire Gibb adds that although there are fundamental differences between the English National Curriculum and the Scottish Curriculum, “both are equally inadequate when it comes to the arts” (C. Gibb, personal communication, June 1, 2009). Room 13 seeks to remedy some of these inadequacies, which many believe are caused by educational policies that are not only disconnected from creative practices of the art world, but uninformed by contemporary educational theories.
The Artist-Teachers and Artist-Learners in Room 13

At the time of my visit, the participants in Room 13 at Lochyside Primary School included two adult artist-teachers, Claire Gibb and Rob Fairley, who shared the position of Artist-In Residence (AIR). Rob Fairley, the original AIR at Caol, held that position from 1994-2005. Fairley studied at the Edinburgh College of Art, and subsequently lived alone on a small island for four years, making work based on the land (Atkinson & Dash, 2005). His artistic works, which have been widely exhibited, include drawings in a variety of media, as well as watercolor, oil and egg tempera paintings and ephemeral work consisting of subtle variations in the landscape. Well-educated in a traditional sense, Fairley believes that everyone needs to read Dostoevsky, and listen to Bach, Schubert, and Wagner; he decries the lack of focus on craft and intellectual pursuits in art colleges.

Although Fairley has upon occasion claimed a dislike for children and has described himself as a stork among starlings, it is evident, in the great respect that he shows for the artist-learners, that he enjoys working in Room 13. In describing Room 13, Fairley said, “We are a group of artists working together, with the only difference being that one or two of us are technically (and arguably emotionally—though this is dangerous territory) more experienced” (Souness & Fairley, 2005, p. 49).

Fairley insists that all the artists in Room 13 function as equals, but at first did not collaborate artistically with any of the students. After some time, he developed trust in a few students and would invite them to work on select portions of his pieces. I saw some of these—large full-length watercolor portraits of children in vibrant, pure colors, with sections worked in monochromes, especially the skin. While there is not much visible
overlapping of layers of color, Fairley’s work is overlapped by student work, painted in strategic locations—integrated within his work. Other collaborative diptychs consist of watercolor portraits of individual students, painted by Fairley, each paired with a watercolor painting done by the student pictured. A large collaborative painting on the subject of “Reindeer People”, which involved Fairley and a select group of students, was in progress during my visit. In addition to working as AIR in Room 13 Lochyside two days a week, Fairley was working with Room 13 on the development of a business plan and attempting to establish charitable status for the studio network.

During this same time period, Claire Gibb functioned as AIR of Room 13 Lochyside three days of the week and served as Room 13 Headquarters coordinator on the other two days. Gibb first became involved with Room 13 in 2001, when she volunteered as a sixteen-year old assistant during their first summer program, and later worked alongside Fairley at Caol, eventually becoming AIR of Room 13 Lochyside. She attended some classes at Glasgow School of Art as a teenager, did art in school, and upon graduating from the equivalent of an American high school, she chose to become AIR in Room 13 rather than going on to art school. She explained this decision, saying, “It just seemed to me that there was no contest, the creative environment that I had experienced at Room 13 was infinitely more exciting and the potential for me to develop as an artist was much greater with Room 13” (C. Gibb, personal communication, September 4, 2007). Gibb has been instrumental in developing the Room 13 International Studio Network, working with young people and artists to help establish studios in England, South Africa, India and Nepal.
Gibb embraces a multimedia, multidisciplinary approach in her arts practice and sees collaboration and creative exchange as integral to her work. Her collaborative endeavors with the artist-learners in Room 13 range across the whole spectrum of collaborative processes and she readily assumes a variety of different roles. Whereas Fairley’s artistic collaborations with the artist-learners seem to happen by his invitation, with Fairley maintaining aesthetic control of the work, Gibb is just as likely to relinquish control, as she is to retain it. Often, she says, her role may change within the process of creating a piece. Age and personality may be factors in this. The children tend to see Gibb as one of them, as evidenced by this response to my request to describe collaborating with the AIRs, “Mostly talking to Claire is just like talking to someone our age. She even laughs at Frances (sic) unfunny jokes. So we mess about and then we just start working” (management@Room13scotland, personal communication, November 10, 2006).

Dialogue is a key aspect of collaborative work, Gibb says, but it can be spoken, written, verbal, or visual, and sometimes collaborating artists will choose to work in a form of dialogue with which they are both unfamiliar, for the excitement of discovering a new medium. Dialogue occurs during the execution of a work, but can sometimes precede it, with the work being a result of previous dialogue. Though she thinks common working habits and a common vision are not essential, Gibb asserts that in collaboration, there must be some agreement of intent, about what the piece is trying to do. She believes that “the more exciting collaborations happen when neither artist knows what’s going to
happen, when neither artist has a complete vision of what the piece is going to eventually end up like” (C. Gibb, personal communication, September 4, 2007).

The artist-learners in Room 13 commonly engage in such enthusiastic exploration—of art materials and techniques, of ideas, and of the world around them. Although Fort William has been described as a place where “grey is the only colour on offer as dark rain clouds reach down to slobber over row after row of identical concrete boxes masquerading as houses” (Crace, 2002), the spirits of the children in Room 13 don’t seem dampened by the weather or the local economy. And although these working class children insist that they are not especially talented or exceptional in any way, they do differ from the artist-learners in a typical American art classroom in several important ways: 1) they all choose to come to Room 13, 2) they have no art assignments and get no grades on the artwork they do there, 3) they have responsibility for and control over their art studio, 4) no coercion is used to motivate them to make art or participate and 5) in their own words, they “get the chance to work with adults rather than for them” (Gribble, 2005, p. 22).

The Artworld Perspective

*How is artistic collaboration employed in this situation?*

While Room 13 artists are encouraged to think for themselves and to create art with an attitude of serious professionalism, they are free to work independently or cooperatively as they wish (*Artwork, 2006, ¶ 4*). In an article published in *Studies in Art Education* called, “Room 13 and the Contemporary Practice of Artist-Learners,” Jeff Adams emphasized the importance of collaboration, claiming, “for the members of Room 13, the collaborative acquisition of shared and debated knowledge is a cornerstone of
their pedagogical project” (Adams, 2005, p. 28). Intrigued by the frequent mention of collaboration in the literature about Room 13, I wrote to the students and asked them who collaborates in Room 13. The response I got from Lochyside Room 13 was, “Me, Claire, Josh, Natalie, Stephanie and everyone! Sometimes people work together or give each other advice and ideas” (Room 13, personal communication, November 10, 2006). Fairley agreed that you could call Room 13 a collaborative enterprise, but says that the degree of collaboration varies with the time, place, and people involved. “In Lochyside […] there is a culture of collaboration between artists of all ages. Indeed there is probably more work done by ‘teams’ than individuals” (R. Fairley, personal communication, November 5, 2006). The types of collaboration that I witnessed in Room 13 occurred both conceptually and in the material execution of artwork or tasks, in both complementary and integrative modes. A variety of small and large scale object-based collaborations occur amongst artist-learners, and between artist-teachers and artist-learners. These works range in media from drawings, paintings and collage to performance and bookworks, with some of these occurring over distance and with well-established adult artists. On the conceptual level, Room 13 artists collaborate by sharing ideas, entering a critical discourse about each other’s work, and by self-consciously appropriating concepts from the wider field of artistic practice (Adams, 2005). Some large-scale collaborations include many of the studio members, and at the macro level, all of the studios in the Room 13 network.

At Lochyside Room 13, it is evident that the artist-teacher and artist-learner configuration at work establishes a collaborative community of art practitioners which
“represents emerging resistance to the imposition of tightly governed curricula and regulated pedagogies” (Adams, 2005, p. 23). Room 13, with its open theorizing and critical discourse, provides a model of art education pedagogy that is based on contemporary art and driven by collaborative production. The unique environment of Room 13 stimulates the spirit of inquiry and experimentation so necessary to genuine learning and artmaking, and in so doing, challenges existing educational practices. Room 13 itself can be seen as a dialogical work of art.

**How does this situation relate to the artworld definitions of artistic collaboration?**

**Relational and Dialogic Collaborations**

Each Room 13 studio resembles a relational artwork, as each studio focuses on democratic interactive processes and seems to establish its own model of sociality, depending upon the attitudes of the artist-learners and artist-teachers who work there. Claire Gibb, current AIR at Lochyside, has described Room 13 as such a work of art. “The people who work in the space mold the ambience”, she says. This would seem in alignment with Bourriaud’s claim that relational artworks are “ways of living and models of action within the existing real” (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 13). Just as relational artworks resist social pressures toward commercialized and commodified interpersonal relations within art galleries, Room 13 resists the forms of hierarchical interaction normally operating within the school setting, in favor of more democratic forms. However, the existence of Room 13 within a community setting, and the practice of the artist-teachers of employing conversational exchange as part of their methods, contributes to my image of Room 13 as a dialogic work of art.
“It’s about changing thinking through making art”, says Gibb, who is fascinated by the idea of Room 13 as a social sculpture (C. Gibb, personal communication, September 4, 2007). A sign on the wall of Room 13 Lochyside, acknowledges the influence of Joseph Beuys:

In a conversation on the subject “What is ART?” the artist Joseph Beuys put forward these ideas for a transformation of the way we think about sculpture:

Thinking Forms: How we mould our thoughts
Spoken Forms: How we mould our thoughts into words
Social Forms: How we mould and shape the world in which we live
SOCIAL SCULPTURE—Sculpture as an evolutionary process.
Everyone is an artist.

Gibb agrees with Beuys’ thinking that human beings have an urgent need to learn to be creative in many different ways in order to reshape political, economic and educational environments. Like Guy DeBord (2002), she sees the ubiquitous nature of advertising as the stoking of unfulfilling and unfulfillable desires. She believes that human beings need to discover new ways of thinking in order to survive, and that collaboration has the potential to change the world, by changing the way people think, especially if it is encouraged by the way we teach children.

This attitude is also voiced on the Room 13 website which says, “Our achievements in this area [arts education] are the result of genuine collaboration between adult artists and young people, motivated by ideas for an improved society” (About Room 13, 2008, ¶ 4). This collaboration is characterized by mutual respect, open communication, creative equality and the desire for a shared transformative experience. Participants in the ongoing fluid collaboration that is Room 13 learn how to think, how to articulate
thoughts—in verbal and material forms, and how to work in and with the world in which they live.

An example of this kind of learning transpired during my time in Room 13, which by chance occurred the week before the Mountainbike World Championships were scheduled in Fort William. Since the main surviving industry in Ft. William is tourism, the entire area was geared up to capitalize on the expected influx of 45,000 tourists. Room 13 received a message from the folks at the Fired Art Gallery in the town center, who had noticed the unsightliness of some plywood construction blinds in the center of town. They asked if the artists in Room 13 would like to decorate them. This opportunity necessitated a discussion amongst the members of the management team in which they had to formulate and clarify their individual opinions on the proposed venture, think through the practical implications of the proposal, and arrive at a group decision within a very short time.

Opinions varied. While Gibb suggested that the proposal had been presented in a disrespectful manner, since very little time existed within which to execute the work, and inserted some pointed questions about the difference between art and “decoration”, some students argued that the opportunity to advertise the work of the Room 13 studios should be taken advantage of. While the group was entertaining this possibility, the problem of supplies came up, someone determined that there wasn’t enough paint on hand for such a large project, the treasurer determined that funds to purchase them did not exist, and the managing director placed a phone call to see if the Fired Art Gallery was willing to purchase supplies. Then the size and location of the project were considered and it was
determined that the team would need to view the site before making its decision. Subsequently, a short field trip was immediately arranged with the head teacher. Onsite, there was much discussion about logistics—the amount of time left in which to execute the work, who could work on it and when—but very little consideration of the difference between art and decoration, or the fact that their work would be divided in half, flanking some advertising placards. Considerable disagreement led to frustration and the suggestion that the decision be left to the toss of a coin. This suggestion was rejected and it was finally agreed that insufficient time existed in which to execute the quality of work that they believed would adequately represent Room 13. At this point the students informed the Fired Art Gallery that they would be happy to accept such a proposal in the future if they were given more lead time for the project.

While my lengthy description of this decision-making process does not convey the quality of dialogue and thinking that were prompted by the necessity of making this group decision, it does show how Room 13 provides an environment that encourages thinking and the ability to articulate, and develops the skills of active participation and negotiation within a community of common interest. Room 13, like many community-based dialogic artworks, provides the context within which social transformation can occur.

Object-centered Collaborations

Although the students have an understanding of art that extends beyond the conception of “school art” to include works meant to be shown in galleries, as well as temporary works of art and performance, they tend to understand collaboration as working together to turn an idea into a physical art object rather than a relational or
dialogic form. With regard to collaborating to create physical works of art, most of the children that I interviewed at Lochyside enjoy collaborating and feel that it makes artmaking easier.

What motivates the students to work collaboratively is shown in the following quotations, drawn from interviews with the students:

*Heilidh* – “We drew it all and it was totally different when we painted it, then how we imagined it. It just turns out better working with other people” (H. Wilson, personal communication, September 6, 2007).

*Natalie* – “When you’re painting canvases there’s a lot to paint, so it’s helpful if everybody works […] and we all have ideas, so we put them on the canvas” (N. Brayshaw, personal communication, September 6, 2007).

*Stephanie* – “One person starts off and they get a bit stuck on what they want to do, so they ask another person for help. Sometimes they have really good ideas. So we think, well, maybe I could work with this person” (S. MacLennan, personal communication, September 6, 2007).

*Mark* – “We all work together as a team ‘cuz we share our ideas and come up with our own” (M. Faulkner, personal communication, September 6, 2007).

The students seem to feel that by pooling their ideas and efforts, they can accomplish something more than they could individually. It is interesting to note that even though these students are collaborating to create a physical art object, the main advantage of collaboration seems to be on the conceptual level, with students working democratically to negotiate both the content and production of the work.
In contrast to this, I witnessed a hierarchical collaboration between a boy, whom we’ll call Ian, and his classmate, whom we’ll call Anna. Anna had accepted the task of painting the sky in a cityscape that Ian had outlined. Ian gave specific instructions on how to fill in the sky with blue paint, and once he was certain that Anna understood, he wandered off. A little while later, he returned and reprimanded Anna for sponging in white clouds, as this had not been part of his instructions. He claimed authorship, aesthetic authority over the work, and ownership, as he took the work home when it dried.

I talked to the two students individually about this painting. Anna told me that the painting was entirely imaginary; however, Ian insisted that it was real—a scene from Glasgow that his sister had described to him over the phone. He explained that an airplane had flown so low that his sister had been frightened that it might hit her building. The ominous presence of a large low-flying plane, sandwiched between the earth and sky is the personal vision he intended. He was eager to show the picture to his sister and interested in whether or not she felt it depicted the event accurately. As in a collaboration of convenience that might occur in the artworld, Ian did not consult his collaborator about his idea, but used dialogue primarily to instruct her in how to execute his image. His intention was to transform a personal internal vision into a physical work of art, which he hoped would communicate with an intended viewer.

Although there is an emphasis on idea-generation and process in most of the object-centered collaborations in Room 13, a productive tension does exists between conceptualization, making, and the final end product, which sometimes results in
surprising forms. Consider, for example, two collaborative projects, created in response to the tragedies of 911. Jodi, who stayed home from school on September 11, 2001 and watched the unfolding story of the 911 attacks on television, initiated the first project, a technical collaboration (Room 13, 2003). Moved by the deaths of the people in the twin towers, Jodi determined to memorialize them in a way that would make people want to cry. Since the collapsing towers looked, to her, like falling matches, she and a friend burnt over 3,000 matches, one for each of the victims. In a performance that Fairley describes as solemn and profound, Jodi scattered the “dead” matches onto a prone sized canvas, while the Room 13 artists watched (R. Fairley, personal communication, September 7, 2007). Jodi later applied spray paint to the canvas with its glued-on matches, and the finished material work, titled 911, became the contemplative object that Jodi had intended.

Fairley believes the performative aspect of the work was just as significant as the material object, and its effect on a classmate is documented in a photo titled simply Performance Piece. In this work Lindsey and Jodi explored what it might feel like “to be covered in dust and rubble as it turns into a shroud” (Room 13, 2003, p. 10). Criticism of this work might resemble some criticism of relational artworks in that it might be claimed there is little difference in this “performance” and the play that children normally engage in. However, the same defenses could be raised, since there is no denying the artistic intention of their work, as they carefully documented their “play” in photographs, and also no denying their desire to merge art and life through their creation of this artwork.
The Educational/Innovative Perspective

Is there evidence of a specific pedagogical approach in this situation?

As in the projects just described, collaboration seems to happen naturally and organically among the artist/learners in Room 13, in what Adams has called a “cascade of learning, where members teach, share and disseminate ideas amongst the group” (2005, p. 27). Fairley humorously called this “learning by osmosis” and claimed that you only need to show or tell something to one child and soon everyone in the studio will know it (R. Fairley, personal communication, September 7, 2007). This type of collaboration can be aligned with Vygotsky’s emphasis on the importance of social interaction and the “zone of proximal development” (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). In Room 13, the upper level of each child’s ZPD is constantly being challenged as the AIR and the other children encourage and assist each other in grappling with difficult ideas or tackling challenging tasks. For many of the students, Room 13 provides the only context within the school in which collaborative learning can occur.

This “learning by osmosis” in Room 13 can be aligned with social constructivist theories and their emphasis on the influence of social interaction and context in the construction of knowledge (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2002; Reynolds, Sinatra, & Jetton, 1996; Simpson, 1996; Stewart & Walker, 2005). However, the culture of learning in Room 13 seems most closely aligned with situated cognition theory, in the way that the artist-learners acquire the working and thinking practices of artists in the autonomous art studio within which they work. Along with active construction of knowledge, situated cognition in Room 13 emphasizes real world relevance, and such professional practices as academic and artistic volition, and the development of deep understanding through
dialogue and reflection. Situated cognitive theory also stresses establishing rich contexts within which learning can occur and providing for collaborative problem solving and construction of knowledge (Russ-Eft, 2004). Room 13, functioning as a fluid, ongoing dialogic work of art, provides this kind of rich context that encourages authentic situated learning. In so doing, it replaces the prevailing model of social/cultural relationships in school, where the teacher transmits knowledge, which the students passively absorb, with a model of socially active, mutually engaged learning.

Real World Relevance

As in a collaborative dialogic artwork, activation of the participants is sought by artist-teachers in Room 13 who focus on creating a context for dialogic exchange and empowering artist-learners through their participation in ongoing art work. While, in many classrooms, activation fails, as the separation of schoolwork from life seems so complete that the students can imagine no meaningful connection, in Room 13, the students are actually engaged in real-world tasks. These tasks, such as the Treasurer’s responsibility to handle the bank statements and write checks to pay the bills, and the Managing Director’s task of ordering supplies and administering the studio, have real life consequences. In addition to engaging in artmaking, Room 13 students apply for grants, invest in the stock market, give talks at educational conferences, and take part in expeditions throughout Scotland and Britain, as well as to other parts of the world. Although the children consider input from their AIR and consult with experts while making decisions, ultimately the decisions they make are their own.

In their writings and digital productions, the students of Room 13 stress the importance of these authentic tasks and real decisions. In a speech made for the Creative
Heads Conference, in Dartington Hall, England, in November 2003, Connor Gillies, age eleven, said, “I think the most important thing for me is that in Room 13 everything is real. Lots of children enjoy playing ‘Office’ but because we are running a business for real, the lessons we are learning will stay with us for life” (2006, ¶ 15). Laura Kingswood, the current AIR at Caol, agreed, stating, “Room 13 gives them great confidence. It’s not just the art, but the autonomy it gives them” (Bowditch, 2006, ¶ 17). Jennifer Cattanach, Caol’s headteacher concurs, “The self-confidence that children get from what they do there is unbelievable. Kids who struggle in other areas no longer feel failures, and they feel able to have a go at difficult areas of the curriculum that they would otherwise decide were hard and boring” (Crace, 2002, ¶ 19). In short, the real tasks of running the studio, as well as increasing the students’ practical knowledge, build self-confidence, which encourages achievement in other areas.

**Artistic and Academic Volition**

In addition to the practical learning involved in handling the responsibilities of running Room 13, the students also take their artwork very seriously. “Everything we do is for real,” they say. “If we make a film it is aimed for being on TV […] when we make artwork the pieces we make are meant to be shown in galleries and have to mean something to us” (Souness, 2004). Their artwork is based upon the students’ own interests, and it is this freedom of choice that they value so highly. Shannon Coombs said, “Room 13 has given me the chance and the space to think my own thoughts and to express them in my own way” (Coombs, 2005, ¶ 4). Another student, Amy Bryant, illustrated the Room 13 difference:
In our room, children can choose their own topics, Lucy Mogg from last years Y6 started with the question ‘Who am I?’ It took four months before she began the actual artwork and a year to finish it with some help from her friends. Compare this to our usual classes, where we are told what to do and art is just for an after-noon in which time we have to start and finish the artwork (Bryant, 2005, ¶ 7).

The topics that the students choose can be controversial, but academic freedom is paramount in Room 13. Claire Gibb, current AIR and Room 13 Headquarters Coordinator at Lochyside, said that it is important for the children to know that they can reject any adult proposal (Gribble, 2005), and Fairley, now also an AIR at Lochyside, claimed that it is important to be willing to discuss anything the children bring up. In an email correspondence about censorship, he wrote, “We would not censor political, religious, or personal opinions…..though may subject them to strenuous academic argument!!!!!!” (R. Fairley, personal communication, November 5, 2007). The children enjoy this critical dialogue, feeling that they and their work are being taken seriously, and they are quite adept at defending their work. Regarding her subject matter choice of “emerging sexuality”, Danielle Souness said:

The world in general will accept that Picasso can make his late great etchings on the subject of fading sexuality and praise him for his bravery in making such pieces. But if a young artist makes a piece about emerging sexuality it will be treated with disdain, suspicion and in most school art rooms will lead to the artist getting into trouble. Yet ONLY young artists can deal with such a subject. If you, as an adult artist, do it you are only making work that looks back. Your work becomes a work of memory not of reality (Souness, 2005, ¶ 10).

Upon first reading Souness’ words, I was awed by her eloquence, but skeptical, attributing this to her own precocity, or to the uniqueness of Fairley’s tutelage, but as I continued to research Room 13, I noticed a similar ability to articulate in many of the
children, and I am convinced that the cause lies in the philosophy of learning being practiced in Room 13.

*Construction of Knowledge and Meaning*

When asked to articulate the philosophy of Room 13, Gibb admitted that it is hard to put into words, but that “what is being developed is a sense of yourself and your place within the world” (Drummond, 2006, p. 14). “It’s about teaching, if that’s the correct word, teaching young people how to think, not about giving them pointers on what to think” (C. Gibb, personal communication, September 4, 2007). Fairley agreed that the emphasis is on teaching ideas and conceptualization.

According to David Gribble, author of *Real Education: Varieties of Freedom*, the children describe Fairley’s work in the classroom as “chatting” (Gribble, 2005, p. 17). My observations of both Gibb and Fairley in the studio confirm that teaching and learning occur primarily dialogically, with active listening and questioning being the main stimuli for growth. Although small group sessions on topics such as life drawing or animation led by the AIR, an invited guest, or a student artist, do happen, most instruction occurs as social interaction, primarily in verbal discussion. Favorite topics of discussion include contemporary art, philosophy, and current affairs—Room 13 subscribes to a daily paper, which the children often read. “That’s the one thing that we are different about,” says Fairley. “It’s that we actually think and we think quite deeply about things and then we work from that—all our thinking is transferred into artwork and I’m sure you could go into any primary school and do that” (Souness, 2004).

Mark Faulkner, then chairman of the Room13 management team, demonstrated this ability to use deep thinking to make creative connections during my visit. He asked
me what other sites I was investigating in my research and I showed him the website for the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC) in Los Angeles. After spending some time looking at this website, Mark printed out a picture of a demonstrator holding a sign in defense of a SPARC artwork, which had been attacked by anti-immigrationists. Mark then drew a hunter and placed this sign, which read, “Good Art Confuses Racists” into the hunter’s hands. Curious, I asked Mark why he’d used a hunter in his drawing. He said, “The way I see it, a hunter is a really powerful figure. If a person is a hunter, they don’t necessarily hunt any animal, but they hunt only the animals that they need. It’s the same with ideas. You don’t just take any idea, you have to hunt for the good ones” (M. Faulkner, personal communication, September 5, 2007).

The opportunity that the children have to think for themselves and hunt for good ideas, is commented upon by an anonymous girl in the Room 13 DVD, “The art you get in the classrooms isn’t like the art you get here because the art we do doesn’t really mean anything in the classrooms—but in Room 13 it’s like, I think about every painting” (Room 13 - Where, 2006). Mark, from Room 13 Lochside says, “A world without Room 13 would be quite boring. School would be a place of work and sadness, not a place of thinking and expression” (Room 13 - Where, 2006). Another Room 13 student, in defining art, proclaimed, “It is about asking and answering questions about the things that are really important. Most importantly, it is about thinking, and art is not art if it doesn’t make people think” (Lucky, 2004, ¶ 12).

**Is authorship or artistic autonomy an issue in this situation?**

Although concerns about authorship have colored the collaborative activities of many adult artists, the artist-learners in Room 13 don’t seem to think much about the
issue of authorship and most students looked at me quizzically when I asked them about it. They don’t appear to collaborate as a critique of the concepts of authorship or originality; instead, it seems that these ideas have not had a chance to become rooted in their ways of thinking about art. When I asked the students questions like, “Who had the idea for this work?” or “Whose work will it be when you’re done?” the most frequent answer was, “Both of ours”, or “All of ours”, depending upon how many people were collaborating. The tone of their answers and the accompanying looks seemed to indicate that they considered my question irrelevant, even silly. Similarly, when I asked the students whose name would go on the work if it were shown in a gallery, the answer was simply, “All of our names.”

Authorship was such a non-issue that I soon learned to stop asking about it, but I did discuss it with Gibb. She says that authorship, at Lochyside, is likely to be an issue in the opposite way, in that no artist will claim a piece, for fear of offending others that may have participated in its creation. She thinks that this deference actually contributes to the number of pieces that are unresolved, which nobody takes on and completes (C. Gibb, personal communication, September 4, 2007). This lack of concern with ownership may result from the focus on conception and interactive processes, rather than product, prevalent in Room 13.

**How do the characteristics of the collaborative groups in this situation affect group functioning and productivity?**

The spectrum of collaboration that happens in Room 13 matches the open thinking of the artist-learners. Gibb sees this as one of the major advantages of collaborating with younger artists. Admitting that the age/experience differential can’t be
ignored, she says there is an assumption that the older will lead the younger into areas of exploration, but that this can happen in reverse. “You can’t help but bring your knowledge and expertise, but younger artists bring openness of mind which takes older artists along sometimes.”

The focus on open processes and experimentation in Room 13 may contribute to the number of collaborations that do not lead to a fully resolved outcome. Gibb admits that some Room 13 collaborations are more productive or successful than others and links this to the relationship that is established between the collaborators. When I asked her to define what she meant by successful, she offered a couple of interpretations, singling out both “genuine” collaborations and collaborations that “work”.

A genuine collaboration is a more creative artistic process, she claims, but admits that other forms can still be valuable. She likened the difference to an art teacher who paints a picture as a technical exercise, as an aid to instruction. While this can be useful to her students and is not without value, it may not be imbued with meaning, and may be more controlled, rationalized and prescribed than a painting created through a more genuine artistic process. In the same way, there can be value in having a dominant artist-teacher who directs a collaborative artwork as a form of educating, and is satisfied with the educational value of the piece. However, she believes that in a genuine collaboration, “the idea part, the creative part is shared”. A genuine collaboration, Gibb claims, involves, “the pure raw opening of one artist’s soul to another. A true collaboration is a piece of art that couldn’t have happened without the meeting of minds! It has to be a mutual meeting of thinking. These particular minds are necessary” (personal
communication, September 4, 2007). Gibb seems to be describing what we have previously referred to as intersubjective creativity, or what John-Steiner (2000) has called integrative collaboration.

As an example of a genuine collaboration, Gibb presented a mixed-media digital piece that she and a child artist-learner had collaborated on during the summer school session. Normally, Gibb’s collaborations in Room 13 tend to happen spontaneously, as she accepts or gives input with regard to ongoing work, however this piece evolved out of her interest in a spoken-word/music piece that a friend had sent via the Internet, involving the cyclical nature of war and life—using the metaphor of walking a dog—and the young boy’s interest in African wild dogs. Gibb’s expertise on computer, the child’s uninhibited dog drawings and the spoken-word piece combine to create an intriguing animated music video—a social commentary, whose conceptual and aesthetic properties could not have evolved without the input from each of these minds. This work also seems to exemplify Gibb’s idea of a collaboration that “works”. “Those that work,” she said, “result in a finished piece that contains a uniform vision of an idea. Or deliberate dischord [sic], which can work equally well” (C. Gibb, personal communication, January 15, 2008).

In a statement that seems almost contradictory to her valuing of genuine collaboration, Gibb said that the most successful collaborations in Room 13 are those where a hierarchical relationship is established among the collaborators. She states:

When one child is more dominant in directing another or others, a clear idea for the piece is more likely to emerge, which may then be enhanced or complimented by the ideas of the others. In a situation where both or all collaborators are deferential or submissive to one and other [sic], the piece tends to never really come together – maybe staying on safe, mutually pleasing territory, or maybe just
idle, unsynchronized messing around on the same surface (C. Gibb, personal communication, January 15, 2008).

Sammi, a Lochyside student, concurs. She prefers not to work with other students saying:

When you’re doing on your own, it’s much easier to do it, because if you’re doing it with a friend, they don’t really know what you’re doing. Like have you seen the big animal canvas? Well, people are just free to do whatever they want on it, but I don’t think that everyone’s got the same idea as the person who started it. […] At first, it looked nice, ‘cuz it wasn’t so busy. But then, it got horrible and wrong because people just kept adding extra ideas on to it” (S. White, personal communication, September 6, 2007).

My observations confirm the opinions that Gibb and Sammi have voiced. Although numerous collaborative artworks exist at Lochyside, in various stages of completion, during my visit I was able to witness, in their entirety, both a hierarchical collaboration and another in which the partners were collaborating spontaneously, on equal terms. The first, the Glasgow scene by Ian and Anna described previously, was executed in a hierarchical manner, and resulted in an image that clearly communicated the main artist’s intentions.

The second, a spontaneous collaboration, involved three girls who rushed in, grabbed green, red, and black paint and began brushing it out on a piece of paper, approximately eighteen by twenty-four inches in size. Each girl seemed almost oblivious to the actions of the others, until their paint began overlapping, creating a big grey splotch. Soon, the page was almost entirely grey. While one girl continued to vigorously blot red paint onto the top of the wet grey, another discovered that her paintbrush made “duck” prints, and told a story as she walked the “duck” around the page. Meanwhile, the third girl began painting her hand black. At this point Gibb, who had been circulating the
room, chatting with students, approached and asked them what they are doing and why. This question seemed posed in curiosity, not as a reprimand, and the girls giggled in response, and continued with their work. When the bell rang, the girls quickly washed up and ran off, leaving the painting lying in the middle of the floor.

In discussing this incident afterwards, Gibb talked about the value of the learning that is involved in such experimentation, as well as the importance of asking the students to think about and justify what they are doing. She said, “I try to advocate the culture of ideas—the meaning behind things” (C. Gibb, personal communication, September 3, 2007). Speaking about the need for conservation of materials, which is a main topic of conversation amongst Room 13 artists at the beginning of every school year when new young students first gain access to the studio, Gibb explained that it wasn’t just about saving money, but was also about teaching the responsibility of citizenship in any society. I noticed that the students are quite adept at communicating this responsibility to each other, while staunching maintaining the individual’s right to self-expression.

Although the examples of collaboration cited above would seem to support Gibb’s contention that hierarchical collaborations are more successful, I witnessed another ongoing democratically-produced collaboration involving four girls that seemed to meet her criteria for success. These four girls are fast friends, enjoy working together, have a favorable attitude toward collaboration, and decided to paint a group portrait, with each girl painting herself into the picture. The girls do not take turns at the canvas; instead they all paint simultaneously. Curious about how inevitable differences of opinion were resolved, I asked them. Heilidh commented that things get transformed when you’re
working with other people, but also noted that this happens when you work alone, too.

She felt the transformations in the group painting made the work better (H. Wilson, personal communication, September 6, 2007).

Natalie talked about a disagreement:

We wanted to do polka dots, but we couldn’t decide what color to do them, so we did them white, but then the paint brush had already been used for something so it was like an orangey-pinky color and someone said, “Let’s paint over it,” and someone else said, “No, I don’t want to paint over it,” so we had an argument over that a bit, but we just left them, that pinky-orangey pointy (N. Brayshaw, personal communication, September 6, 2007).

It’s interesting to note that at the time of this conversation the girls had decided to just leave the polka dots, but by the time the work was finished, several months later, they had been painted out. It seems that in this collaborative artmaking process, at least, the girls are learning to voice and recognize difference, to develop tolerance while maintaining workable social relations, and eventually to arrive at consensus.

Part 2

Rationale for Collaboration in Room 13

What is gained by allowing/encouraging collaboration at this site?

Watching the artists in Room 13, I observe that they frequently work together to accomplish a task. Sometimes they collaborate in creating a work of art, at other times they work together to clean up the paint storage area, pay the studio bills, or shoot the annual school photos. While the project may be initiated by one child, others willingly and readily join in, or not, and the process seems to occur quite naturally. Collaboration and collaborative artmaking are neither encouraged nor discouraged there. They just happen. Sometimes the children work together just to get the job done, while at other
times they seem to be working together in order to enjoy the common task or creative work and each other’s company. Frequently, they come together because of a shared interest and a collaborative work grows out of that interest. What all of these situations have in common is that they are initiated and carried out by the children themselves with little interference and with only occasional assistance from the adult artists in the studio. This appears to be a situation where collaboration is not a value added to the situation, but rather a situation where a natural proclivity toward cooperation and communal meaning-making has not been subtracted by prohibitions or injunctions meant to encourage independent effort and facilitate individual accountability.

In such naturally occurring collaboration, it is common to see a child learning, through social interactions, from a slightly more knowledgeable or more skilled peer. Working together provides a context for personal growth, as together they can aspire to do something that they might not have attempted on their own. Balancing each other’s strengths and weaknesses, skills and knowledge, they can take on bigger challenges and take greater risks. Through teaching each other, they gain confidence in their own abilities to solve and find problems, and through learning from each other they come to realize that they don’t always need a higher authority to tell or show them what to do or how to think about it. Conversely, they seem better able to recognize those situations where their combined knowledge, experience, and willingness to experiment are inadequate, and they easily and naturally seek expert advice in those situations. Collaboration helps them gain confidence in what they do know and can do—it teaches
them inner dependence, while at that same time it shows them the value of combined
effort—it teaches them interdependence.

The conceptual collaboration that happens in Room 13 seems to enhance the
students’ abilities to think critically about ideas. Having let go of—or rather never
formed—possessive ideas of authorship, the students are able to focus attention of the
quality of the idea rather than upon its origin or originality. It is interesting to note that
the artist-learners recognize this value of collaborating when they are “a bit stuck” or
want to share ideas. Open theorizing gives the students the opportunity to benefit from
the perspectives of others, thereby broadening and deepening their ideas about art and
life. The active appropriation and incorporation of new ideas into each student’s thinking
and/or artmaking increases the likelihood of creative problem solving of all sorts. Conner
Gilles voices it this way, “Working in Room 13 when you are my age is like opening a
door that lets you change the way you see things and the way you think about things”
(Gibb & Wilson, 2006). Certainly, this is what art education ought to be about.

Any question about collaboration in Room 13 must be considered on the level of
individuals collaborating with each other; however, it must also be considered with
regard to the collaborative community of inquiry as a whole. The obvious advantage to
any one participating in Room 13 is that they enter into a community where they will be
supported in learning how to think for themselves and how to articulate those thoughts in
words and visual forms. In developing the skill of speaking thoughtfully and listening
carefully to each other, students see how limited each individual perspective is, and also
learn to value each person’s contribution. In Room 13 students simultaneously develop
their sense of self, their own voice, and a feeling of belonging to a community where they are encouraged to actively participate in shaping themselves as well as their environment. Collaboration teaches students the vital democratic value of participation and the social skills that enable involvement; it empowers them to contribute to the larger society in a meaningful way.

From an educational perspective, are there problematic areas with regard to collaboration at this site?

The educational approach at this site does present challenges to more traditional methods of education and it may be impossible to isolate the challenges presented by collaboration from those presented by the general pedagogy, embedded, as it is, in collaboration. However, both seem to present unpredictable outcomes—a loss of certainty about what is being taught and learned as well as the time period involved. The classroom teacher’s enforced practice of determining specific learning outcomes and behaviors in advance may need to be modified in order to allow these kinds of collaborations to occur.

This inability to precisely predict the results of a collaborative endeavor may also lead to difficulties in the types of assessments that commonly measure what students learn in the classroom. In Room 13, there are no such assessments. Much of the evaluation of the artwork occurs in the form of conversation—spontaneous and concise, or elaborate and sustained—and is formative, rather than summative. The ubiquitous emphasis on process tends to focus attention on what is being learned, rather than what has been learned, and on the present and future, rather than on the past. Just how does one assess a failed collaborative artwork, one recognized as an irretrievable failure—but
valued because it prompted this recognition by its authors, because of what was learned in the process of making it? Or how does one assign credit with regard to a spectacularly successful work, when those collaborating on it may have contributed unevenly to its creation? An educator who chooses to employ collaboration in the manner of Room 13 would have to confront these issues and perhaps abandon some of the standard structures of assessing and assigning achievement, in favor of more open forms that consider process, as well as product.

**Chapter Summary**

Room 13, an innovative art studio utilized primarily by children ages 7-11, provides a variety of opportunities for collaborative learning and artmaking. The unique pedagogical approach employed exemplifies situated cognitive theory with its blend of real-world relevance, artistic and academic volition, and active construction of knowledge and meaning. Collaborative artmaking occurs between and amongst the artist-teachers and artist learners in the studio, on material and conceptual levels, in a variety of fluid configurations. On a more comprehensive level, Room 13 can, itself, be seen as a collaborative artwork, a social sculpture that aims to transform thinking through making art. Although educators who approach artistic collaboration in this manner may need to develop more process-based methods of lesson planning and assessment, numerous benefits of collaboration can be seen. These include gains in self-confidence and self-reliance as well as recognition of the value of interdependence, increased abilities in critical and creative thinking, and increased motivation, skill and participation in shaping and maintaining the physical and social environment.
CHAPTER 6: THE EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE ENSEMBLE

Part 1

Introduction

The Embodied Knowledge Ensemble (EKE) was a seminar in the Department of Art at The Ohio State University (OSU) that extended through the winter and spring quarters of 2006-2007, offered by Ann Hamilton and Michael Mercil. After seeing the flyer for the course, I contacted Hamilton, requesting permission to observe the EKE, explaining that I was interested in collaborative artmaking, but did not think I was eligible to enroll in the seminar. Hamilton invited me to audition, since the course was open to graduate students from other disciplines, but mentioned that she was not certain the seminar would involve collaborative artmaking of the sort I was interested in. She said she would not mind having a researcher who was participating in, as well as observing the class. This suited me, as I thought it would be more interesting, and less obtrusive, to be a part of the class. I was a participant/observer in the seminar throughout the two quarters.

The structure of this chapter is similar to that of Chapter 5. In Part 1, I provide a picture of the EKE and how it functioned by presenting a narrative of the first class session with some explanatory notes. The focus of the EKE was on process; no physical art objects were created, though we did create a few props for our actions. For this reason, the account of the first session functions well as an introduction to the class, since
it provided the introduction to the group processes for all of the class members.

Following this, I examine collaboration in the EKE from artworld and educational/innovative perspectives, where possible using the voices, actions, or survey responses of the EKE artists to support my analysis. In Part 2, I establish a rationale for collaboration at this site, consider artistic education with regard to this situation, and raise some problematic issues.

**What is the Embodied Knowledge Ensemble?**

Like Room 13, it’s difficult to understand the EKE, unless one has had the opportunity to visit and/or participate in it, and even then, opinions vary. While some students thought of the class as ongoing collaborative art work, others thought of us as an ensemble that was collectively preparing to present a professional-quality performance work to an as-yet-undetermined public. Still others thought the EKE was an artwork that Hamilton and Mercil were creating, using people as a rather fluid and unpredictable medium. Taking an in-depth look at how the class began may help to establish how these different understandings developed and persisted throughout the duration of the seminar.

**Notes from First Class Session**

The account that follows contains excerpts (in italics) from notes that I took on a tiny sketchpad during the first class session as well as comments added later (in regular text). Before the first session, we were instructed, via email, to wear a uniform to class that had at least one removable piece, and read “Nakedness: The Citizen’s Body in Perikles’ Athens”, a section from *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization*, by Richard Sennett.
As students enter, a studio assistant has us pose in front of a black backdrop and takes each person’s picture in their uniform. The soundstage, where the seminar first met, is a weird, rectangular cavernous space, two floors high, painted entirely black, which, oddly enough, given its name, has horrible acoustics. A huge screen, suspended in the air above our heads, about five feet away from one of the longer walls, is alive with scenes from old Busby Berkeley films—Footlight Parade and The Gang’s All Here. These wildly extravagant musical productions, with zillions of showgirls performing kaleidoscopic choreography, play silently in the background throughout the class.

The atmosphere is casual, and everyone seems to know everyone else. Exceptions to this are a group of dancers, who know each other, another student from Art Education and myself. I strike up conversations with other students in an attempt to get a sense of who they are and why they’re here. A design student says he signed up because he thought the experience would be completely wild. An art student, who was in the Hamilton/Mercil seminar last year, says that this year it’s completely different, but I don’t get a chance to follow up on that remark. There is an assortment of “uniforms” including military, waitress, and artists’ clothing, as well as some unusual ones—a blind skier guide, a mountain biker, a guy in a bathrobe, who says he is wearing a “morning uniform”, and AA, who is wearing his “AA” uniform, the same clothes he is wearing every day for a year, as part of a performance piece. Several dancers have come in various costumes, a couple of guys are wearing painter’s overalls, and some people have come in their “everyday” uniforms. While it does not appear that people are trying to out-zany each other, it is clear that the students present are not afraid of expressing uniqueness.
Class begins when Hamilton, dressed as a jester stands at the front of the group, which is seated on wooden folding chairs, arranged in two irregular rows in a semi-circular shape in front of the big screen. I tried to capture more than the gist of Mercil’s and Hamilton’s verbal remarks, but can’t guarantee that I have exact quotes.

Hamilton: Our purpose is to find a practice as an ensemble that builds in time to create embodied knowledge. We have no good definition of embodied knowledge. That’s why we’re offering the class. Our practice is the act of finding out. In class, we’ll do repetitive activities and structures every time. By the end, we’ll create a public performance. We have no written syllabus, though we have a sense of what will happen the next couple of times.

Who are we? We are the material of the class—what we know, how we know, and how we come to recognize it.

Hamilton then outlines a rough calendar for the class, which does not meet every week. The soundstage is noisy and her voice is soft. It tends to drop on the second syllable of words, particularly names, so these are hard to hear. Some of these dates are not on our regular class nights and some people have scheduling conflicts. Participation in the EKE requires flexibility.

Jan. 16 - Focus on actions of embodied knowledge “making verbs”
Jan. 23 - Visitor, Constance de Jong, writer/video artist from New York, whose writing extends into performance. We’ll do exercises based on her writing.
Jan. 24 - Constance de Jong is lecturing at the Wexner
Jan. 25 - Artist Sadie Benning speaks at the Wexner
Feb. 6 - Visitor, Louise Smith, head of theatre at Antioch. We’ll do exercises in class- how the group pays attention to itself/each other.
Feb. 8 - Sadie Benning, Q&A at Wexner. Our first action will occur here. It should be a question.
Feb. 20 - Just us. Converse about juxtaposition of speaking to particular sites.
Mar. 6 - Continue this.
The following quarter we’ll do public demonstrations.

Hamilton offers questions for us to consider:

*Where is a place in public for speaking?*

*Where we can speak together as a collective voice?*

Answers from group: Church, political rallies, chanting.

*What is made when we have a voice together?*

*What is the longing as makers to be solitary and also to speak together?*

Here she adds a disclaimer:

*We don’t know if this will work. If we can figure out how to cultivate attention and pay attention to each other, maybe it will.*

Expectations for the course: Grades will be based on being here and participating. Email in advance if you need to miss a class. We will communicate via website, hopefully.

Mercil then addresses the class.

*Mercil: My question is: What constitutes an ensemble—a body? This course is an extension of the Living Culture Initiative. OSU is a producer of culture. When does OSU constitute itself as a body? Football Saturdays and graduations. Expand this notion. Think of OSU as material for us to work with. This class is a substantiation of the gathering of this material. What is the material substance we are? Will it help us figure out what we can do?*

Mercil explains that we will be doing some exercises to help us tune in to each other and to ourselves as a group. He leads us in these exercises. The first exercises are
movement/body-based. My perception is that these body exercises, which seemed slightly irrational in one way, made us feel more comfortable physically in the group, and reminded us of the embodied nature of all knowledge. For me, this was important. Here’s what we did:

- Figured out our total weight – 3,533 lbs. and our average weight – 153 lbs
- Figured out our total height – 125.4’. tall and our average height 5’4.5”
- Created the longest line we could make as a single unit by standing fingertip to fingertip (This had to fold in on itself to fit in the room.) – 128’
- Created the shortest line by stacking our bodies really tight – 19’
- Figured out the largest volume we could create (standing in a circle fingertip-to-fingertip) – 32’ radius
- Figured out the smallest volume (packing ourselves together) 18’9” diameter

After these activities, Hamilton speaks: *Accumulative knowledge is something we want to be aware of. We’ll do some things every time. We’ll read aloud every time—possibly in groups of four. We also hope to show film references to ensemble movement and speaking. Look for some and let us know what you find.*

*Consider swarming, flocking and herds. How is it that people “miss” each other when walking on a crowded street, or in a crowd? What kind of intelligence is that? We seem to have a desire to separate out and also to be part of the crowd/flock. The next exercises are from Ann Bogart, a theatre director from Columbia University.*

- We walk as a group, across the room, not looking at anyone, but trying to keep an equal distance from everyone the whole time.
- We divide into two groups, about ten to a group, spread out into a circle and then run clockwise. Without anyone leading, we try to change directions, and keep doing this until everyone is out of breath and can’t run any more.

*Hamilton: Social motion. One of the things that may come out of this is taped movement, used in another context. What happens if you display it in public?*
The second set of exercises consists of choral readings. Mercil begins this by speaking: *Vocal aspects are one of the tensions in establishing ourselves as individuals within the group. Terms are fluid and may change. Social motion is different than social movement or action, less metaphorical. The EKE came from a rereading of Thoreau, one of his great interests was embodied knowledge.*

He shows an old medical book that Thoreau was influenced by, *The Human Body and its Connection with Man: Illustrated by the Principal Organs*, by James John Garth Wilkinson. Mercil reads a selection of section headings from this book aloud. *Thoreau read this while he was in residence at and writing about Walden. Thoreau’s sojourn to Walden was about intellectual assimilation of oneself in relation to others. He was not only a nature writer but also a social writer, eloquently writing and speaking his place in the world.*

Mercil mentions another book about Thoreau, *The Senses of Walden* by Stanley Cavell. Mercil: *The Bean Field* is an expression of living culture. The EKE can be built upon this initiative and used to cultivate our relationship to self and the university.

Mercil next launches into a commentary on the *Flesh and Stone* reading, which I have paraphrased here: *In this first chapter, Sennett presents his notion of the voice in public. Social and political relations were established through speaking space. Who is

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*The Beanfield* was a two-year public art project, a 650-square-foot plot of organic beans, which resulted from a partnership between the Wexner Center for the Arts, the Living Culture Initiative in OSU’s Department of Art, and the Social Responsibility Initiative of OSU’s College of Food, Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. Inspired by Thoreau, Mercil sought, through *The Beanfield*, to create a conversation of consequence, which emphasized OSU’s role as a producer of both culture and agriculture (Beanfield, 2006).
allowed to speak, where, to whom, when? What does it meant to have upright relations?

Here there is a somewhat involved explanation of “proper” homosexual relations in ancient Greece, where the notion of proper was related to who allowed themselves to be penetrated by whom, and in what position. Business, culture, and politics require working the crowd. Court and theatre involve an individual addressing the group. The design of the space increases the volume of the speaker’s voice, the passion of the rhetoric, the crowd’s passivity or action. The spaces have qualities: physically the agora is a flat plane surrounded by buildings, in the judiciary the space allows all eyes to see the speaker and each other, the theatre is rounded for easy movement, can become political space, adjudication. The book is odd but beautiful; it physicalizes how the world is made in shape. Social motion becomes social action.

The shape of the OSU oval has changed subtly, but significantly since renovation. It was regraded; now the lowest point is at the center and it is highest at the edges. This enables someone standing at the edge to see everyone in the oval. Look at this during class change. This reshaping reconstitutes the university. (It was modeled after Olmstead’s Central Park design.) How attentive is one to this public space? Community in-reach. Where are we? How can we be here more meaningfully?

Hamilton passes out a script, Claes Oldenburg’s, “I Am for an Art”.

Hamilton: These are the words we invent. These are the words we repeat. Words become embodied when you repeat them.

On the big screen, we watch John Baldessari sing Sol Lewitt on the Internet. Then we read the Oldenburg piece aloud, with Mercil reading the beginning of each line, “I am
for an art” and the group reading the rest. There are a number of lines to this and about halfway down we begin improvising, with people reading pieces alone, in small groups, in duos, all of this being more or less directed by Mercil and/or Hamilton. Suggestions are welcome, and experimentation is the rule.

In these, it seemed that we began to find a common voice. At first, even reading in unison is a challenge, but we read in many different ways. Through these various exercises, our voices get more comfortable with each other. There is a growing sense of cohesion, which seems planned on the part of Hamilton and Mercil. They are very much interested in having us learn to function as a group and much of the evening is spent trying to gain some sense of togetherness in moving, speaking, and reading. We are learning to listen to each other. They are teaching us; though the teaching seems part planned, part spontaneous. They are flexible in the way they approach leading the seminar, with decisions about actions/exercises being made on the spot, on the basis of what is happening in the group, in the now.

At the end of class, everyone takes the removable piece of their uniform and places it on the studio assistant, whose picture is then taken in this composite “uniform”. The evening was enjoyable, yet challenging in ways that differed radically from classes in other parts of the university, where all of the emphasis is on cognition. It seems that we are asking loosely formed, but difficult, questions and exploring—sometimes just “messing around”—trying to find, or “embody” the answers to them.

*The First Quarter Seminar*

The seminar continued in this fluid, mutable manner. Some sessions were more structured than this class, others less. Via email, we received reading assignments, which
generally pertained to the culture of democracy, the place of the arts in democracy, who
speaks, the role of the body and the role of art in speaking, imagination and meaning-
making. Instructions about other assignments and what to wear to each class session were
given. Once we wore orange, the next time a solid tone—we wore hats, patterns, all-
white, and so on—the purpose of this “dress-up” activity seemed twofold: 1) It
contributed to the group identity while providing for individual interpretation of the
instructions and, 2) It appeared that we were searching for a common “costume” that we
could wear when we performed our still-undefined “actions”. Our assignments involved
bringing in quotations or permutations of quotations, and scripts for speaking and
movement that we found or created. In class we continued to perform movements
together and persisted in our attempts to learn to speak as one by reading various things
aloud, including our weekly assignments, in small and large groups, individually and all
together. We read in unison, or created a cacophony of voices. We textualized sound and
spatialized text by situating ourselves in various configurations of time and space as we
spoke. Guest experts in vocal performance and theatre—Constance de Jong and Louise
Smith, assisted us. Sometimes we were asked to bring pieces to be read aloud, or to
create permutations of a line from a document like the U.S. Constitution, occasionally
creating movements to go with them. Experimentation was expected and collaborative
responses to assignments were accepted.

Second Quarter Seminar

For a variety of reasons, the seminar transmuted about the time the winter quarter
ended. The seminar enrollment changed from twenty-five to nineteen; one of the possible
sites that we had entertained for our public actions was ruled out, and Hamilton was
unable to attend several sessions. At this point, it was determined that we would focus on 
*The Beanfield* project and create some kind of public performance/action(s) to happen in 
connection with it. A spring celebration was proposed, a bean soup dinner and screening 
of the documentary, *Our Daily Bread*, at the Wexner Center for the Arts, as a benefit for 
the Mid-Ohio Foodbank: Operation Feed Campaign. Simultaneously, we began meeting 
at Hamilton and Mercil’s studio and added a potluck dinner to each class session. For the 
first meal, we all brought something that contained beans.

While we waited to see if the necessary stakeholders accepted the bean soup 
dinner proposal, we began to focus our speaking, reading and actions on topics related to 
the bean field. For example, for class assignments we created possible costumes for the 
EKE, we researched and brought in facts related to hunger in Ohio, and we brought in 
bean-related lists, such as recipes of foods that had beans in them. Mercil asked us to 
think about how the performing arts assumes a separation and an audience, the difference 
between an audience and an assembly, and the difference between personal expression 
and social expressiveness. Pondering these questions, our class attended artist panels and 
talks, featuring the artists Ellen Lesperance, James Luna, William Pope L., Kerry James 
Marshall, and Matt Mullican. A highlight of the quarter was Oliver Herring’s artist talk at 
the Wexner, where he showed slides of his oeuvre, including ten year’s worth of coat-like 
forms knitted from silver mylar tape, as well as some surprising, funny video shorts, and 
the performance piece *Task*. Herring came to dinner at the studio and spoke to us about 
his own artistic practice, which includes solitary, meditative, obsessively detailed acts of 
making, as well as spontaneous collaborations with strangers. He spoke about
maintaining the integrity of the art work, as both noun and verb, and talked about the important, messy and paradoxical qualities of the artmaking process—of art making as process.

Experimental collaborative speaking and movement dominated our processes throughout the seminar, though at some point we also engaged in activities such as making aprons and weeding *The Beanfield*, in preparation for the coming event. Mercil and Hamilton continued to emphasize that individuality and individual ideas were valued, even though members of the EKE were being asked to merge themselves into the group, to listen to, and to *speak together with* the other members of the group. At about this time, my own nebulous thoughts about the EKE coalesced: In the EKE, rather than using some physical material of the world to create art objects, which embody meaning, we use ourselves. We try to make meaning through the physicality of our bodies, through our voices, through our actions, through the material stuff that we are and do. We are the material, acting in ways that make meaning. We embody the meaning we are attempting to make—hence the Embodied Knowledge Ensemble.

*The Artist-Teachers and Artist-Learners in the EKE*

Participants in the EKE included the artist-teachers, Michael Mercil and Ann Hamilton, who joined the Art Department faculty at OSU in 2001. A married couple, they share a sizable studio in Columbus and collaborate on teaching a yearly seminar to graduate students. Although they maintain separate artistic practices, Hamilton and Mercil have occasionally collaborated on projects, such as the public commissions for the Allegheny Riverfront Park in Pittsburgh, and Teardrop Park in New York City, which were both created with landscape architect Michael Van Valkenburgh (Wittstock, 2001).
Mercil and Hamilton are each established artists with awards and exhibitions too numerous to list.

Michael Mercil is an Associate Professor in the Department of Art at OSU and served as director of Foundation Studies from 1997-1999, and Chair of Graduate Studies from 2006-2008. Mercil earned an M.F.A. in studio art at the University of Chicago (1988) and a B.F.A. in intermedia arts at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design (1978). His artistic practice includes consulting on and developing public art projects, as well as the creation of installations and more traditional works utilizing sculpture and drawing. Recent projects include *The Beanfield, Reading the Daily News*, and *The Virtual Pasture*, all part of the Living Culture Initiative at OSU. Started by Mercil and Hamilton, the Living Culture Initiative seeks “to generate and regenerate relationships between the Department of Art and the whole campus,…to develop sustainable cultural practices at the university” (Mayr, 2006).

Both *The Beanfield* and *The Virtual Pasture* are collaborative endeavors, being created in partnership with the Living Culture Initiative, the Social Responsibility Initiative of OSU’s College of Food, Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, and the Wexner Center for the Arts, and with labor supplied by faculty and students. Mercil’s understanding of collaboration is broad, encompassing different kinds of collaboration and collaborative structures. He sees collaboration as a process, a way of working in which the “circumstance calls out the collaboration,” (M. Mercil, personal communication, July 19, 2007). “When I choose to work collaboratively,” he says, “it’s because what I’m doing requires collaboration.” Likening the goal of his recent work,
creating a public conversation of consequence, to that of other well-known artworld collaborators, Mercil said, “The Beanfield evokes the practice of ‘lifelike art’ by Allan Kaprow or the ‘social sculpture’ of Joseph Beuys, to creatively shape and engage our ecological encounter with the world” (cited in Beanfield, 2006, ¶ 7).

Mercil believes the structure of a collaboration is contingent upon the purpose for collaborating. The goal can evolve from a conversation within a group, or it can be established prior to the formation of the group, but the makeup, structure and group processes will be affected by this. Mutual trust and respect are necessary to a successful collaboration, Mercil says, but he distinguishes between mutuality and equality. Everyone doesn’t need, or want, to have equal say or responsibility, but everyone does need to respect the expertise of other members of the group and to respect the leader. He sees a leader as essential, and believes that a group is not capable of directing itself, since the most conflict occurs when the direction is not clear. Nevertheless, Mercil claims that the process must remain open, and that the leadership can shift during the collaboration.

It’s important for group members to be clear about their roles and motivations for collaboration, because collaboration often involves compromise. According to Mercil, the artworld has no use for collaborations. Galleries, institutions, auction houses, and collectors are all dependent upon viewing the work of art as a commodity. In this atmosphere, it’s difficult to give credit, within a collaborative process, where it is due. Although individual authorship is very artificial, success is often pinned to a single name. For this reason, collaboration becomes a sacrifice for some of the collaborators. The question of who receives credit is always an issue.
Communication is really, really important in collaborative work, Mercil says, but its just as crucial, when you’re collaborating, to take the time to be alone. Once a conversation has been had, people need to have space for individual reflection on the work, before they return to discuss it again. He doesn’t think different ideas or working styles prohibit collaboration, though they may make it more difficult. If there’s mutual respect, difference can serve to enrich collaboration.

In this regard, Hamilton’s attitude toward collaboration is similar. Though she tends to originate her own projects, she often enriches her work by collaborating with such diverse partners as choreographers, landscape architects and engineers, as well as poets and avant-garde composers (Posner, 2007). In speaking about collaboration, Hamilton said simply, “I work collaboratively because I like company” (A. Hamilton, personal communication, May 21, 2008).

Hamilton, who is a professor of art at OSU, earned an M.F.A. in sculpture from Yale University (1985) and a B.F.A. in textile design from the University of Kansas (1979). She taught at the University of California, Santa Barbara from 1985-1991 and subsequently moved to Columbus. Hamilton’s artistic practice, long concerned with the creation of large-scale immersive, sensory-rich, site-responsive environments and the metaphoric use of language and text, has turned, in recent years, to focus on actions of reading, speaking and listening which incorporate the movement of the viewer in time and space. Current works include a public choral performance installation, O at Dialog City in Denver, and Human Carriage at the Guggenheim Museum in New York (Hamilton, 2009).
Hamilton’s early emphasis on large-scale accumulation and material excess in her installations necessitated a hands-on process involving the dedication of a “team of professionals—the artist herself and a number of skilled individuals, either employed by the organizing institution or hired for their specific expertise” (Posner, 2007, p. 216). This team often expanded to include volunteers, typically women, who engaged in simple, repetitive tasks—communal actions of making that seemed to linger inexplicably in the work. Says Hamilton, “When I do big social pieces, it’s a process that I love. The way you come together with people and work side by side is a conversation very different from when you gather for a drink or for dinner […] On the other hand, it’s not the subject of the work; it hasn’t necessarily been central to its meaning” (Enright, 2000, p. 6).

Hamilton and her collaborators just get the job done. Nevertheless, these private acts of making do sometimes continue into the public life of the work. Hamilton’s works, including Human Carriage, have often involved silent human attendants performing some repetitive task. These attendants are often chosen because of a conversation or relationship that developed while the work was being made (Coffey, 2001).

Although Hamilton’s past collaborations tended to remain behind the scenes in the hierarchically structured space of making, Hamilton has recently become more concerned with social forms of art. She sees the legacy of Fluxus as incredibly important to contemporary art, with artists working fluidly between categories. Speaking about contemporary art at the Wexner Center for the Arts on May 21, 2008, she said, “There are so many forms of work now where there isn’t even a thing and artists have a greater and more important responsibility to be the antidote to market-based concerns.”
Many of the artist-learners in the EKE were also interested in social forms of art. More than half of the EKE survey respondents stated that the opportunity to work collaboratively was an important motivation for their participation in the class (See Figure 1). Composed of students from several disciplines, the original seminar of twenty-six included about a half dozen dancers, two art education students, and a number of art and design students—all graduate students. A couple of OSU alumni, who had been studio assistants for Hamilton or Mercil in the past, also participated by providing technical and/or administrative support for class sessions. In speaking to the various participants in the EKE, it became clear that the class members had come to their involvement in the ensemble with different sets of motivations and goals. As we shall see in the following sections, these factors appeared to influence their understandings of what we did in the EKE and of what the EKE was.

Figure 1. EKE Survey results. Item 1. The opportunity to work collaboratively is an important motivation for my participation in this class.
The Artworld Perspective

_How is artistic collaboration employed in this situation?_

Collaboration occurred in the EKE on a number of different levels and in a variety of formations. Mercil and Hamilton collaborated in teaching the class, and some members of the group saw the seminar itself as a collaborative artistic endeavor, a social sculpture and/or a collaborative community of inquiry. Other students saw the EKE as a collaborative artwork, being created by Mercil and Hamilton, while others felt that it was simply a class. I will argue, in the pages following, that the EKE functioned as both a relational collaboration and a collaborative community of practice. However, regardless of how one viewed the overall seminar, it was clear that small-scale collaborations of people engaging in art work, formed and dissolved throughout each seminar session and outside of class, in response to class assignments. These took place on both conceptual and material levels and in both hierarchical and more democratic forms. While some students saw our homework assignments as possible contributions to overall actions or performances that the group might eventually produce, others saw them as prompts to provoke thought on specific topics, or scripts to be used as classroom exercises (BB, personal communication, February 23, 2007). We did, in fact, use these homework assignments as the basis for some of the informal more-or-less democratic collaborations that constituted our speaking/movement practice within the class. In the next section, we examine the characteristics of the EKE and the smaller collaborations subsumed within it, and relate them to the characteristics of artworld collaborations.
How does this situation relate to categories of artistic collaboration in the artworld?

Relational and Dialogic Collaborations

It can be argued quite convincingly, that the EKE was different things to different people and that it remained multi-dimensional throughout its duration. It might also be argued that the EKE was different things at different times, or that it so frequently morphed that it is impossible to pin any particular label upon it. And yet, as we have seen, this openness of form as well as the duration of the interactions, over a specified period of time, are significant characteristics of both relational and dialogic collaborations. By carefully examining elements that seemed to recur, despite continuing mutability, it is possible to relate the EKE to the continuum of artistic collaboration that we established earlier, and in so doing develop a clearer understanding of it.

Initially, the EKE did not take up a specific political cause, and this stance is characteristic of most relational collaborations. The course flyer proclaimed, “The seminar will explore how acts of speaking, acts of listening, and acts of doing are material acts of making”. All of these acts could be performed individually; however, the flyer photo of a group of uniformed children, poised on a staircase, as if on risers, implied that we would be speaking, listening, and making as a group. Both Mercil and Hamilton emphasized the experimental nature of our endeavor—attempting to speak and act collectively, but in a deliberately extemporaneous manner. In this regard, the EKE resembled a relational collaboration, as Hamilton and Mercil’s method involved placing their students in unanticipated situations of speaking/listening/making, in an attempt to break through the social conventions of artistic education and create something new out of this situation. One can easily see the parallel between this and Pask’s working method
of drawing audiences into unexpected exchanges in Beautiful City (Skulptur Projekte Münster, 2007).

Our goal, as defined by Hamilton during the first session, was to find a practice that built over time to create embodied knowledge. Mercil asked us to discover what an ensemble was, and to think about ourselves as the materiality of OSU and what we might be able to do as such. Repetitive activities and structures, we were told, would accumulate knowledge, which would lead to a public performance. These statements led some students, in particular the dance students, to believe that we were attempting to prepare a professional-quality performance incorporating movement and choral speaking, a collaborative work of performance art. This endeavor, if it was our goal, would have placed the EKE much closer to the object-centered end of our collaborative continuum.

When I told one of the dance students that I was trying to understand what the EKE was, she laughed and said, “Isn’t that what we’re all trying to do—understand the EKE?” (BB, personal communication, February 23, 2007). Later, she confided that she felt we were definitely taking a class from Hamilton and Mercil—that there was not, and had never been, a real attempt at artistic collaboration. She wondered why we didn’t more often call in experts, like Louise Smith, the theatre director who led one seminar, to help us learn to do things more effectively. This is, in fact, what Hamilton and other artists often do in a collaboration of convenience, when expert knowledge is needed. BB’s performance orientation gave rise to a certain degree of frustration regarding the EKE’s emphasis on spontaneity and lack of desire to utilize existing cultural knowledge about performances of movement and speaking.
In response to my questions about capitalizing on existing cultural knowledge about performance, two other students claimed that a professional (in any conventional sense of the term) performance was not a significant goal of the EKE. “I think there’s a goal for each one of us to understand how we can act as one—by taking this large mass with different ideas, different working styles, different thought processes, and putting them together to create one thought, one word, one thing that can articulate something powerful. I think that’s the essence of speaking together and doing these activities together”, said Herb Peterson (Personal communication, February 2, 2007).

Throughout the seminar there existed a kind of tension between these two goals—that of creating some “thing” together, which everyone understood to be an immaterial event/performance and that of trying to meet, work, think, and speak as one. The preeminence of open ideas about form, the perpetual construction of various situations and events, the emphasis on interactions, the focus on being-together, and the collective elaboration of meaning are all characteristics that the EKE shares with relational artworks. Like Tiravanija’s open-ended gallery installations, where viewers found themselves cooking and eating together, thereby entering into intimate and unexpected contact with each other (Staines, 2006), the participants in the EKE became part of an open-ended experiment in social interaction. However, unlike the short-term duration of Tiravanija’s installations or Pask’s Beautiful City, EKE members were involved in an experiment of much longer duration, or rather a string of open-ended experiments in which form and process merged, situations and events changed, but the focus on communal meaning-making endured. Like Maria Pask in Beautiful City (Pask, 2007),
Hamilton and Mercil were attempting to integrate various points of view within a common shared experience of the EKE.

Although the EKE embodied many of the characteristics of a relational collaboration, there were some differences. One issue is that relational artists attempt to create new “models of sociality” within the art world (Bourriaud, 2004, p. 44). Typically relational artworks present an open form in an artworld venue, and invite participation from artworld viewers. Although the faculty of the OSU art department helps to constitute the field of art, part of the artworld, the closed nature of the seminar makes it questionable as a relational collaboration. However, the intent of the EKE had been, from the beginning, to present our art work to the public in some way—a performance, action, or event. We did perform one action at a Wexner talk, featuring the artist Sadie Benning, which was our group debut into the public arena. In this action, we presented ourselves as a group of questioners and invited participation from Benning, with other audience members observing. Although we were unable to complete our production of the bean soup dinner with entertainments, we did present a group of actions related to the Beanfield project at the Wexner, in conjunction with a screening of the documentary, Our Daily Bread. This culminating event stimulated lasting change for some class members and led to one of the most fully participatory dialogues of the entire course, when we met for the final summing-up of the seminar. During this discussion, some students, perhaps those most attached to making or producing some “thing” together, expressed a sense of disappointment regarding the bean soup dinner. Other students, however, expressed regret that the class was ending. One of the students declared that it seemed we had
completed two parts of a three-part process. Another commented that it had taken the whole process of the class, including making dinners and eating together, just to become a unit. She felt that we were now ready to go out in public as a group. At this point Mercil asked us to consider what the next action would be, if the EKE were to continue.

In fact, the EKE did continue, after a hiatus of about a year. Although I have written about the EKE in the past tense and was not able to continue my research into this latest incarnation of the seminar, it is interesting to note that the new EKE and Volunteer Corp, a smaller group than our class, which was not premised on a performative aspect, seemed to coalesce as a group more easily. Investigating topics such as relational aesthetics and service art, they quickly evolved to the point of performing actions within the wider community, actions which embodied the ethic of the EKE, a performing of “being” in public. Interestingly, this class officially met for only one quarter, but the community of practice that developed continued to meet regularly throughout the year. The concept of a community of practice will be discussed later in this chapter as we examine educational aspects of the EKE.

The central modus operandi of the EKE involved a general insistence upon dialogue and social creativity, and downplayed the role of objects and artifacts in the artistic process. Although they have not fully embraced the anti-art position of some members of Fluxus, Hamilton and Mercil seem influenced by the Fluxus stance against the art-object as a non-functional commodity (Wijers, 1993). This is consistent with their interest in art as a social practice. The influence of Joseph Beuys (Social Sculpture Research Unit, 2008) echoed in Mercil’s pronouncement, “We are all makers,” on the
day of the seminar auditions, and reverberated in the participatory, interdisciplinary processes we employed using thought, speech, and interaction as our materials. The influence of Allen Kaprow (1993) was also evident, especially during the second quarter of the seminar, when we began to meet in the Hamilton/Mercil studio and incorporate dinner amongst our processes. It was then that the lines between art and life began to blur. For these reasons, it is tempting to think of the EKE as a social sculpture—a dialogic artwork of sorts. However, it was not apparent that the EKE was trying to address a specific socio/political issue within the community—though there were certainly allusions to that. Nor did it seem that we were seeking a particular transformation of thinking—though it seemed that this was occurring, at least for some of the artist-learners.

Object-centered Collaborations

What we made most often were actions of speaking and listening; less frequently, we made things. In response to assignments to create texts for our speaking, pairs of students often collaborated on scripts, and once a collaborative group wrote words, extracted from Thoreau’s essay on his beanfield, onto lima beans, wrapping the beans with copper wire—tendrils trailing—creating tiny elegant gifts, which they distributed to the class members. Costume assignments similarly called forth collaborations; memorably two students created overalls made of dryer sheets when we were asked to dress all-white, and a group of four or five assembled proposed costumes for the bean soup dinner, which consisted of black pants and T-shirts and hand-crocheted olive green beanies. In preparation for the bean soup dinner, the seamstresses among us collaboratively created tunic-like aprons for the EKE members to wear. This
collaboration-within-the-collaboration took on the hierarchical form customary to Hamilton’s installation works, with Hamilton directing the aesthetic decisions and the seamstresses performing the simple, repetitive tasks of cutting, assembling, and stitching the aprons. It’s interesting to note that the words previously written on the lima beans, and subsequently deconstructed when beans were needed for another activity, were reborn in handwritten script on the aprons. This fluid exchange of ideas, materials, and personnel was characteristic of the various small collaborations that occurred within the larger relational collaboration of the EKE.

*Summary of The Artworld Perspective*

In this section we have seen that the EKE resembled an artworld relational collaboration in a number of ways. It was an open-ended social experiment in which Hamilton, Mercil and a group of graduate students participated in exchanges of speaking/listening/moving as material acts of making as a means to embody knowledge. As in a relational artworld collaboration, the focus of the EKE was on *being together*, with an emphasis on interactions, and the processes employed involved the construction of situations and events. Unlike an artworld relational collaboration, the EKE took place primarily within the classroom or studio, but some actions/experiments were executed in an artworld venue. Although in some ways the EKE also resembled a dialogic collaboration, it was not clear that a particular socio-political issue was being addressed within a larger community. Smaller collaborations, both democratically and hierarchically structured, occurred within the context of the larger EKE, and many of these similarly involved speaking/listening/movement, although some focused on material objects and/or visuality.
The Educational/Innovative Perspective

Is there evidence of a specific pedagogical approach in this situation?

Collaborative Teaching

Mercil and Hamilton’s teaching can be seen as a collaborative artistic endeavor.

“Teaching is one form of collaboration that we took on together to begin with,” said Mercil, explaining that the two artists have different working styles and different ways of thinking (personal communication, July 19, 2007). Mercil describes his teaching/working style as precise and structured, but says that he likes to improvise. He selects and prepares the class readings and writes out the assignments, but doesn’t feel the need to approach each class with an agenda. Hamilton, on the other hand, is concerned about having an agenda for each session. She has a clearer idea of what she wants to happen, and worries about preparation and the success of the class. Mercil doesn’t. “Sometimes what actually happens isn’t very good, but that doesn’t mean it’s a failure,” he says (M. Mercil, personal communication, July 19, 2007). The outcome of a class may not fulfill certain expectations, but it may lead to unexpected learning. He likes to stay open to new directions.

In speaking about the effect of differences such as these, the artist Peter Haining has said, “The success of any artistic collaboration is to accept parity, tolerate philosophical differences and contrasting working methods, and try to find common ground” (Haining, 2003, p. 27). Affable and easy-going, Mercil sees disagreement as part of the process, and says that although he and Hamilton may sometimes hold different opinions, they agree on fundamental issues. Other artistic couples mentioned previously
in this writing, like Kristin Jones and Andrew Ginzel or Mike and Doug Starn, say their work also evolves through debate and dialogue (Sollins & Sundell. 1990).

Accepting difference is closely related to the concept of parity, a key issue in collaboration. For this reason, I decided to focus my observations during one class session on power relationships, and investigate the in-class relationship of Hamilton and Mercil to the students and to each other. More than eighty percent of the respondents to the EKE survey agreed that participants in an artistic collaboration should view and treat each other as equals (See Figure 2), but I wondered if that was happening in the EKE. By focusing on power dynamics, I noticed things that previously had been obscured. I saw that although we called Mercil and Hamilton by their first names, a practice not common in many classrooms, we treated them deferentially. For example, even during informal chitchat, no one interrupted them when they spoke, whereas other students were

![Figure 2. EKE Survey Results. Item 2: Participants in a collaborative artistic endeavor should view and treat each other as equals.](image-url)
frequently interrupted. When we broke into small collaborative groups to improvise spoken pieces, all-student groups sometimes functioned democratically; but if Hamilton or Mercil participated, they tended to take the lead. Whether this happened as a result of student deference or teacher initiative was difficult to determine.

If Hamilton was present, she usually started the class and was also the one to end it. Although this gave the impression that it was her class, decision-making, frequently done on the spot, seemed to be equally shared by the couple. Throughout the course of each seminar, Mercil and Hamilton traded off being the leader amiably and often, with Hamilton generally leading the speaking portions and Mercil taking charge of movement activities, positioning within the physical space, and whatever discussion of reading assignments there was. When we had guest experts, both Hamilton and Mercil easily surrendered their positions of power and melted into the crowd.

Some students felt that this was the only time Mercil and Hamilton were actually a part of the group (BB, personal communication, February 23, 2007), and saw them as instructors or leaders (J. Derby, Personal communication, April 27, 2009). Others saw the couple’s participation in the group as more democratic. More than half of the survey respondents saw Hamilton and Mercil as facilitators, rather than as directors or master teachers (See Figure 3). In speaking about this, Herb said:

There’s [sic] probably different forms, as far as a collaborative goes. Initially, it’s them, their idea […] And then they incorporate us and we kind of learn this method of working together […] They’re involved […] I like that, Ann and Michael reading and speaking with us. I find that Ann and Michael working with us, there is no hierarchy. I think that’s where the collaborative happens for all of us together. (Personal communication, February 7, 2007).
The two artists not only switched roles between themselves, but also switched back and forth between being teachers and being equal participants in the EKE. Aimee Sones asserted that Mercil and Hamilton, though they were the instructors on record and responsible to the university for the class, played a different role than most professors because they were also practicing artists. She felt that the kind of collaboration, research and learning that happened in the EKE could not have happened in any other department of the university.

Figure 3. EKE Survey Results. Item 3: The leader(s) of this class primarily played the role of ______________.

Community of Practice

The pedagogical approach of these two artist-teachers involved a process of social learning that is expressed in the following quotation:
We are engaged not just as individuals, but as socii, and we are engaged in the worlds of each other and of ourselves and of things that surround us in concrete social and material situations: worlds that necessarily include us and are in formation with us as we form ourselves in part through cognitive/transformative engagement with each other, our surroundings and ourselves (Kirshner & Whitson, 1997, p. 2).

Although this could have been written by Hamilton, Mercil, or any member of the EKE, it was, instead, written to introduce a book on situated cognition, the social learning theory behind a relatively recently coined term, community of practice. This term, community of practice, describes an age-old approach to learning in which it is assumed that learning is social and results from our experience of everyday life. “Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger, 2009, ¶ 4). Learning can be a causal factor in the group’s formation, or it can be an incidental outcome of the social interactions that occur within the community of practice. The three essential components of a community of practice—a domain, a community, and a practice (Wenger, 2009)—were all present in the EKE.

The domain, as used in speaking about a community of practice, is a more general term than the concept of domain presented in systems theories of creativity (See Chapter 3). A domain is a sphere of activity or knowledge, which in the case of the EKE was the area of artistic practice. An artistic practice involves not just knowledge of the symbol system of the art form itself, but also the ability to think with this symbolic system, and the use of creative intelligence in making technical and conceptual decisions. Members of a community of practice share not just an interest in the domain, but a commitment to it, and a competence within the domain that distinguishes them from other people.
(M. Smith, 2003, 2009). Although participants in the EKE were not all visual artists, they were all graduate students in an arts discipline. They were all committed to the practice of an art form and had developed some degree of competence in creating in and through that form.

Members of a community of practice share information about their domain, assist one another, and participate in discussions and joint activities thereby building a community. In the relationships that develop, members of the community learn from their interactions with each other (Wenger, 2009). In the beginning, the questions that Hamilton and Mercil raised about the possibility of embodying knowledge and learning to listen and speak as a group formed the basis for information sharing, joint activities and discussions. We performed exercises and activities; we read and spoke together in an exploration of these questions. We practiced artmaking as inquiry and researched together, and learned from each other about artistic practice through this process.

Hamilton and Mercil modeled and implemented their own artist-teacher practice in treating the members of the group as both participants in the Mercil/Hamilton artistic process and as artist-learners developing a practice of their own.

Although individuals involved in a community of practice do not necessarily meet on a daily basis, it is important that they develop a shared practice over time. This shared practice might include resources, tools and how to use them, and experiences and stories that enable the practitioners to decide what should be done and how (Wenger, 2009). Members of such a community develop a common repertoire for their practice. In the EKE, Hamilton and Mercil cultivated the growth of the community of practice by
providing resources such as our assigned readings, texts for our speaking, and film and audio clips, as well as incorporating experiences like working with a theatre director and a vocal performer. We also attended artists’ talks, where we learned more about artistic practice in the artworld and were sometimes able to interact with the artists. Members of the EKE were also encouraged to contribute text, scripts, and film clips and to make suggestions for exercises for our common practice.

These three elements, the domain, the community, and the practice, combine to constitute a community of practice. Instead of a group of students learning from a teacher, all of the community members learn together. The community itself forms a dynamic “living curriculum” (Wenger, 2009, ¶ 12) that educates through interaction. As John realized, “At some point, the being-together was the point […] I never really felt—it was a cohort of students that I wasn’t a part of. The project seemed to want a coming together.” (J. Derby, personal communication, April 27, 2009). This realization points to a primary motivation for learning in a community of practice, the desire to become a more central participant. Commonly, “there is a concern with identity, the learning to speak, act and improvise in ways that make sense in the community” (M. Smith, 2003, 2009, ¶ 20). Through legitimate peripheral participation members of the community move toward full participation in the community’s socio-cultural practices, constructing their own identities in and through the practice of the community. In the EKE, some members were already deeply embedded in artistic practice, some were learning to trust their practice, and others were on the periphery, just beginning to be involved in artistic practice. The relational learning in the EKE brought artist-learners in close contact with
other artists within the university, and also with practicing artists in the larger artworld, providing an emphasis on artistic practice as a life-long learning process.

In situated learning—the learning that occurs in a community of practice—activity and perception are understood to precede conceptualization (Buysse, Sparkman, & Wesley, 2003). Learning is rooted in the daily activities of the learners, which can’t be extracted from the complex contexts within which the knowledge must be applied. The open curriculum and mutable activities and actions of the EKE were deliberately embedded, by Hamilton and Mercil, within their own authentic artmaking practice. They began with a set of questions and invited us to share in inquiry and making that focused on these issues. The learning that occurred emerged from the problems and ambiguities that arose during the course of attempting to form a common identity while executing an actual project for an artworld venue. As is common in situated learning, the knowledge that we gained was situated in our lived experience.

Although our learning occurred within the context of our relationships with other community members, one aspect of learning frequently emphasized in a community of practice, reflective practice, did not receive significant attention in the EKE. The concept of reflective practice is based on the assumption that meaning-making occurs at the intersection of professional knowledge and personal experience. Ongoing reflection with the members of the community of practice is an essential element of the approach (Buysse et al., 2003). Although group dialogue did occur regularly within the EKE, it was primarily centered on our activities and oriented toward procedures. Although these were important aspects of our practice, we did not often participate in communal meaning-
making regarding those activities and processes, the theoretical underpinnings of them, or their connections with our own personal experience.

Integral to the idea of reflective practice within a community of practice is the concept of negotiated meaning. As we shall see, individuals within the EKE, by reflecting upon their involvement in the common practice of the class, constructed personal meaning for themselves. However, collective construction of meaning, through dialogue, creates a shared understanding that enriches the personal meaningfulness of the group’s endeavors for its participants. For example, one EKE assignment already mentioned was that of creating a permutation of a portion of the U.S. constitution. Although each of us doubtless had some previous experience with that document, we did not discuss the meaning or significance of the document, personal opinions about it, or the reason for its inclusion in the course work. Nor did we discuss how permuting it might change, or had changed its meaning or significance after we used these permutations in our practice.

Within a community of practice, the process of negotiating meaning involves the engagement of multiple factors and viewpoints in producing a new, shared perspective. One common way of negotiating meaning in experienced-based learning situations is through debriefing, where participants review the experience, attend to feelings about it and evaluate the meaning of the experience (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985). While seen as incomplete, partial, and specific to the context, these negotiated meanings are essential to the ongoing process of learning within a community of practice, which involves both action and interpretation (Wenger, 2008). It may be that interpretation and reflection were somewhat antithetical to the experimental nature of the EKE, which involved an attempt
to collectively embody knowledge. Nevertheless, I have called attention to this difference regarding reflective practices in an attempt to enhance our understanding of collaboration within the EKE.

Is authorship or artistic autonomy an issue in this situation?

Since fluid, flexible process-oriented actions and interactive experiences were the products of the EKE and no commodifiable work of art or performance was produced, authorship did not seem to be an important issue in the EKE. When asked about authorship, Herb said, “If we go out in public and we perform, I assume we’ll be called Embodied Knowledge Ensemble and not Ann and Michael’s class. I find that rather nice, because it feels like I’m really involved” (H. Peterson, personal communication, February 2, 2007). Aimee agreed, “The credit goes to the Embodied Knowledge Ensemble. That’s part of the Living Culture Initiative that Ann and Michael have started. That’s the important thing about this. Everyone recognized that it was a group. You have this pride of saying, I was a part of the EKE” (A. Sones, personal communication, April 29, 2009).

However, there did exist a certain tension associated with the need to produce something noteworthy, or, as John remarked, “at least not embarrassing”. In speaking about this tension, he said:

Authorship was an issue in a political sense. We’re trying to do this thing that was free and experimental. There isn’t room in academia for this. There was a constant struggle in the course, because it needed to succeed in an academic sense—because it’s part of the test, part of the rank and promotion for professors. It was not problematic in the way that Ann and Michael handled it. But we didn’t overcome this need to succeed. It was more of an obstacle than we imagined. (J. Derby, personal communication, April 27, 2009).
How do the characteristics of the collaborative groups in this situation affect group functioning and productivity?

The need to succeed was complicated by the size of the group, and Mercil observed that the collaborative process can be unwieldy if the group is too large.

Speaking candidly, Aimee said,

The idea of a collaboration with twenty-five people seems a little crazy to me. I’ve collaborated with other artists and it gets difficult if there are more than a few. I think there were some struggles in the EKE to come to a consensus. I don’t think there were any negative outcomes, really. It was just hard to get all twenty-five voices to be heard and to be considered valid when you do have deadlines and have to get something done by a certain time (A. Sones, personal communication, April 29, 2009).

This inability to arrive at consensus with such a large group when deadlines were approaching, necessitated a somewhat hierarchically structured form of collaboration regarding aspects of our culminating project. Directed and/or facilitated (See Figure 3) by Mercil and Hamilton, our actions utilized ideas originally introduced by the couple, which had been altered by their journey through the collaborative processes of the EKE.

As is common in a community of practice; voices of fully participating members in the community had the most influence, with participants on the edges of the community experiencing legitimate peripheral participation.

Another characteristic that seemed to affect productivity was the heterogeneous make-up of the various group(s). John declared, “It’s hard to do collaborative work—there are different ideas, different backgrounds, different hopes. I certainly experienced that. I felt that some students weren’t taking the class seriously, weren’t interested in a good product coming out of it (J. Derby, personal communication, April 27, 2009). John
felt frustrated by the students that just seemed to want to hang out together, and another student also expressed impatience at the amount of time that she felt was wasted in unproductive dialogue or action (CC, personal communication, May 5, 2007). In a conversation on the last night of the seminar Hamilton spoke about these issues and seemed to accept them as an inevitable result of the fact that the EKE, despite whatever else it had become, was also, always, just a class—to some of the students (A. Hamilton, personal communication, May 8, 2007).

These comments have been focused on the larger relational collaboration of the entire EKE, but some of them also apply to the smaller collaborations within the group. Frequently, in class, we would be given a set of instructions and then break into smaller groups to create or produce some kind of speaking/action. These smaller groups were usually randomly structured and often dominated by someone who assumed a leadership role. Although we read and spoke about democracy, there did not seem to be an emphasis on learning democratic social skills and these sometimes did not prevail. Time constraints often dictated that we choose the most efficient working method, which tended to be a hierarchical one. While this may have been effective, it did not encourage novices to step into leadership positions.

Collaborations outside of the regular seminar meeting time tended to occur naturally among students who already had relationships with each other and to follow interaction and productivity patterns that had been previously established. An exception to this was the collaborative action of weeding *The Beanfield*. When four women arrived
at the appointed time to help with the weeding, Mercil jokingly said, “There’s something you can write about collaboration—women show up!”

“That’s because women are used to doing work they don’t get credit for,” I responded, and the other women nodded. Although these remarks might easily be dismissed as jokes, they do point to the fact, mentioned earlier, that artists who contribute to a collaborative endeavor may need to be willing to surrender personal recognition for their actions. In this case, the women all understood this and just wanted to contribute their energy to the larger collaborative endeavor.

Part 2

Rationale for Collaboration in the Embodied Knowledge Ensemble

What is gained by allowing/encouraging collaboration at this site?

As in common in many university art departments, there are institutional impediments to artistic collaboration in the Department of Art at OSU. “We like to think that our program is flexible and fluid, but it’s not so easy to work in cross-disciplinary or collaborative ways,” said Mercil (personal communication, July 19, 2007). “Students perceive us as collaborators”, he added, “so they feel free to pursue it. We don’t discourage it.” This tacit permission to collaborate is coupled with an active encouragement for artist-learners to give themselves permission to make—“to let go of the preciousness of materials, to experiment with pieces and parts, and to grant permission to themselves to do kind of wild and crazy things” (A. Sones, personal communication, April 29, 2009). This leads to creative and interesting work, that is characterized by a certain element of playfulness and risk-taking, unlike the student work in many university art departments, where students tend to reproduce the style and
content of the work of their professors (J. Derby, personal communication, April 27, 2009). These experimental attitudes also prevailed in the EKE and contributed to an openness to experiencing collaborative ways of working and learning.

Students experienced the benefits of collaboration in the EKE in various ways and expressed these benefits as follows:

_Aimee_ - I think the benefit is having participated in the experience and how that experience informs your studio practice—or how that experience informs you as a person, or you as a scholar, or you as an artist. Everyone learned something different (A. Sones, personal communication, April 29, 2009).

_EE_: I realized in the course of this class that I don’t really like collaborating in art in a group this large. (EE, personal communication, May 8, 2007).

_John_ - What I really got out of it was a private reflection on the experience of the social interaction. I gained private, personal knowledge—my experience. I don’t know if that’s what collaboration really wants. I never felt that what I got was a shared knowledge—perhaps it should have been. […] In the end, I came away with an understanding. There was a group dynamic and I was the one that had to change. It was hard, but healthy, in an educational sense. (J. Derby, personal communication, April 27, 2009).

_Herb_ - I’ve been finding all of this relevance with everything that I’m doing, the classes that I’m involved in, the EKE, the books I’ve been reading, the work that I’m making, the people that I’m talking to, the things that I’m researching online or in the library. Everything around me for the first time; it’s all making sense and it’s all connecting. I had to step back from that the other day because it hit me, it’s like—Wow! This is the experience of education! (H. Peterson, personal communication, February 2, 2007).

While some students gained knowledge that was personal and specific by their participation in the EKE, others had difficulty expressing what they had gained.

Typically, in situated learning, as in relational artistic collaborations, the value exists in the relationships between people, in the dialogue that happens between people and the systems of relevancies that these interactions call forth. In the EKE, there was a close
connection between activity and knowledge. Learning became part of the process of living and socializing, within the context of the activities and actions of the EKE. Our endeavor began with a set of questions, and we evolved along with those questions. By the end, we had become a different group, capable perhaps of thinking/speaking/acting in partnership with others (DD, personal communication, May 8, 2007). Along the way, some answers were uncovered, along with new questions.

The experimental nature of the collaborative processes in the EKE encouraged us to continue asking questions and to be fearless in our exploration of them. This common theme permeated discussions of the EKE—that the experience of collaborating within the EKE supported risk-taking. Different students voiced it in different ways. One student said that working with famous artists, who weren’t afraid to take actions that had an inherent risk of failure, made him feel much more courageous about approaching his own work. Another said, “I think if you can’t let go, you’re never going to learn what is successful. That’s what this ensemble is giving us…failure is allowed and success is allowed, and to explore that together and know what it is” (H. Peterson, personal communication, February 2, 2007).

*From an educational perspective, are there problematic areas with regard to collaboration at this site?*

Since learning within the EKE was envisaged as a collaborative sociocultural phenomenon, this necessitated a shift from thinking of learning in terms of the individual acquiring knowledge from some decontextualized source, to an emphasis on what learning or knowing was within the context of the community of practice. As with other
process-based approaches to education, in this approach difficulties arose in trying to predict or assess learning. In describing what she had learned, Aimee said:

It’s not quantifiable. There wasn’t a technical skill we were trying to learn. We weren’t making a mold, or blowing glass or creating a painting. It’s like a qualitative experience. That presents issues within academia. Some people won’t place as much value in that qualitative experience. Some people will think there’s no value, if you don’t have five paintings to show for that class—if you don’t have an object. […] It’s not about the painting or the cloth, or the glass, or whatever. It’s about the idea and the exchange (A. Sones, personal communication, April 29, 2009).

John also described this difficulty, “I couldn’t say exactly what I got out of the class and for academia that’s problematic. Maybe it’s just a problem with assessment, with academia, and with the nature of taking a class. Maybe, it’s a fundamental problem with education”. For John, the inability to clearly articulate everything that he had learned didn’t negate the significance of the class. “I really got something out of it. […] It has changed my life” (J. Derby, personal communication, April 27, 2009).

He went on to talk about another issue, “Maybe not everybody got something out of it. Maybe the problem is with the educational perspective. I know this from my own teaching experience—rarely will everybody get everything at once” (J. Derby, personal communication, April 27, 2009). These words point to an issue that Herb expressed in another way:

It’s kind of hard to just perform. It’s hard to listen. It’s hard to kind of reason for yourself, like, why am I doing this without knowing why I’m doing this. There’s no X + Y + this = this is what we’ll be doing. We all have our own ideas, if you polled each one of us; I bet we’d have a different thought (H. Peterson, personal communication, February 2, 2007).

The issues these students speak about point to the human need for the experience of meaningfulness. Although Aimee, John, and Herb found a great deal of personal
significance in the work of the EKE, some students may not have, as is evidenced by the fact that most of the dancers did not continue into the second quarter. The dancers’ performance orientations and expectations for the seminar clashed with the experimental nature of the class—so unlike what they normally experienced in their own artistic discipline (BB, personal communication, February 23, 2007). The inability to intellectually articulate or to reify our learning seemed common among members of the EKE. While some, like Aimee, did not find this bothersome, others like Herb, wrestled with performing actions with unperceived meanings, and/or eventually, like John, came to discover their own personal meanings in the processes of the EKE.

An individual artist engaging in an artistic practice may experience meaningfulness intuitively and thus develop a high tolerance for dealing with ambiguity over time. However, within a community of practice there may be a greater need to articulate a collective experience of meaning. Working within a community of practice “includes not just bodies (or even coordinated bodies) and not just brains (even coordinated ones), but moreover that which gives meaning to the motions of bodies and the workings of brains” (Wenger, 2008, p. 31). In this view, practice is a process through which our experience of the world and our engagement with it become meaningful. It follows that a collective experience and engagement with the world calls for a collective elaboration of meaning.

Perhaps this is why members of artists groups involved in a paradigm shift within the visual arts so often write manifestos. The negotiation of meaning that occurs within the artists’ circle involves a duality that includes not just reification of new formalistic
conceptions through the production of art work, but also participation in the articulation of these conceptions (Bennis & Biederman, 1997, Farrell, 2001, John-Steiner, 2000), which in the case of many artists’ circles in the twentieth century has taken the form of a manifesto. According to Wenger (2008), the creative genius of great artists and scientists can be attributed to both “intense involvement with the reificative formalisms of their discipline” and “a deep participative intuition of what those formalisms are about” (p. 42). In the EKE, we were experimenting with conceptions of speaking/listening/acting as materials acts of making and reifying these conceptions through our active bodily participation. Hamilton and Mercil may have possessed intuitive understandings of the meaning of our actions; however, for some members of the community the informality of our participation was confusingly loose. While art offers freedom of exploration in an organic social way that doesn’t have the baggage of academic rigor (J. Derby, personal communication, April 27, 2009), the EKE existed not only as an artistic practice, but also within the context of a university class, with attendant academic expectations regarding the acquisition of complex knowledge. In a pedagogical situation, explanations and/or the opportunity to engage in collective reflection upon participation and its implications for practice can lead to a greater experience of meaningfulness (Wenger, 2008).

John summed up his thoughts on these issues in the following way:

There was this tension between the need for the project to succeed academically and artistically and the desire of the students to just be in it together. Maybe since I’m preparing to be a professor in Art Education, and I have one foot in both spots, I felt the tension more […] How do you assess chaos? How do you assess it when someone is really challenged to make significant life changes? We want people to do this. […] That’s what we say we want education to do. But how many times does it really happen? It’s one of the few classes I’ve taken that truly
has challenged me on how I think—how I live (J. Derby, personal communication, April 27, 2009).

Chapter Summary

The Embodied Knowledge Ensemble presented a unique opportunity for artists-learners in a university setting to experience artmaking as a social process in collaboration with practicing artist-teachers. Certain characteristics of the EKE resembled those of an artworld relational collaboration, among them, open ideas about form, a focus on interaction and being-together, and the construction of various situations and events. Smaller collaborations, primarily involving speaking, listening, and moving as a group, occurred within the EKE, utilizing both hierarchical and democratic structures. The EKE was also a community of practice, in which learning about artistic practice and artmaking as inquiry occurred as an outcome of the social interactions that constituted the EKE’s processes. Although the mutable, fluid nature of these processes made it difficult to predict, assess, and quantify the knowledge that was being embodied or learned, many EKE participants experienced profound personal and artistic growth as a result of their participation.
CHAPTER 7: BEYOND THE MEXICAN MURAL

Part 1

Introduction

Most people would not regard being stuck for three hours in Los Angeles traffic as a pleasure, but it was exactly that for me one afternoon in the mid 1990s, when I first discovered the murals of LA, as I was given ample opportunity to peruse mural panels adjacent to those spots where I was stopped. That experience stimulated my interest in collaborative artmaking and subsequently led to my investigation of the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC) located in Venice, California. SPARC, a non-profit public arts organization, that has been collaboratively producing and preserving community-based public art works, primarily murals, in the Los Angeles area for the last thirty-two years. Impressed by the compositional and stylistic unity of the SPARC murals, I was curious about the collaborative processes that produced them and contacted Judith F. Baca, one of SPARC’s three founders, who has served as its “prevailing creative force” and most vocal spokesperson since its inception in 1976 (Rangel, 1998, p. 224). For the purposes of this research, I was given access to the website of Beyond the Mexican Mural – Muralism and Community Development (BMM), a course taught by Baca through the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). Through the website, I monitored the progress of the 2007-2008 BMM class online, by reading and viewing the course syllabus, readings, wiki and student assignments. In addition, I visited SPARC in person,
observed BMM class sessions and spoke with participants at the UCLA SPARC César Chávez Digital/Mural Lab, where the course is taught. Due to time constraints, I was not able to conduct formal interviews with any of the artist-learners at this site. Consequently, the quotations from artist-learners are drawn primarily from the class website and published sources and may be positively biased.

In Part 1 of this chapter, I follow the format established in the first two case studies and provide an overview of BMM before turning to an exploration of collaboration within the context of this class. I examine BMM from artworld and educational/innovative perspectives, using documentary research, as well as the voices of BMM participants to support my analysis. A rationale for collaboration at this site is provided in Part 2, which includes a discussion of benefits and problematic educational issues.

What is Beyond the Mexican Mural?

Beyond the Mexican Mural (BMM) is a studio/theory course offered through the César Chávez Center for Interdisciplinary Studies and the World Arts and Cultures and Fine Arts Departments of UCLA. The primary purpose of this course is to provide students with the opportunity to explore and experience community empowerment, education and development through muralism. In partnership with community participants, students in the class investigate these issues through collaborative research, design, development, and execution of a large-scale digitally created image and/or painting which is subsequently installed in a community setting (*SPARC: Course Materials BMM*, 2009). Since its inception, the class has produced a variety of projects including: *Witnesses to Los Angeles History*, a set of six 8’ x 9’ digital murals made in
collaboration with the Cornerstone Theater Company, used as the backdrop for a theatrical production and also displayed independently; the *UES Woven Web Mural* project, a 10’ x 20’ mural designed and created with kindergarten and first grade students from the Corrine A. Seeds University Elementary School on the UCLA campus; and *Estrada Courts*, a series of digital murals created in collaboration with families from the Estrada Courts housing project and installed in their resident initiated community center (*SPARC: Projects*, 2009).

The BMM class meets off-campus in the César Chávez Digital/Mural Lab, which was founded at SPARC in 1996 (*SPARC: The Digital/Mural Lab*, 2009). The Digital/Mural Lab, equipped with high-speed computers, scanners, digital cameras, and large-format printers, is the latest manifestation of Baca’s adherence to the conviction of Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros (1975) that “a muralist must use the most advanced techniques available in order to make his works more socially eloquent” (pp. 60-1). Long at the forefront of an initiative to reformulate the Chicana/o Indigenist mural aesthetic, Baca has introduced computer technology into the practice of community muralism and joined community activism with scholarship through UCLA courses taught in the Digital/Mural Lab (Latorre, 2000). Using a teaching methodology that combines theory with practice, Baca trains university students about community issues through an artistic practice focused on art as a vehicle for social change. In order to understand collaborative artmaking in BMM, it will be helpful to look briefly at the founding and evolution of SPARC and the Digital/Mural Lab. SPARC began as a community
endeavor, and understanding its roots in collaboration and activism will assist us in
gaining a perspective on the artistic collaboration that occurs at this site.

_How was SPARC originally founded, and how has it evolved?_

SPARC’s history is interwoven with Chicana/o issues and with the Chicano
movement “questioned the political and cultural expediency of assimilation” and
championed cultural reclamation, particularly focused on developing cultural pride and
forging new forms of identity for Chicanas/os (Rangel, 1998, p. 225). The movement
drew inspiration from the Civil Rights Movement and resistance to the Vietnam War, a
war into which Chicano youth were being drafted at a disproportionately high rate.
Centered on concerns important to Chicana/o youth—educational access, police brutality,
drug abuse, immigration, workers’ rights, and political representation—the movement
took organizing youth as one of its primary concerns (Rangel, 1998).

It is within this context, that Judith Baca, a Chicana, an art teacher and anti-
assimilationist, who had first learned to paint while relegated to the back of her
elementary classroom for her inability to speak English (Kanellos, 2006), was fired from
her job at Bishop Alemany High School for participating in protests against the Vietnam
War (Laezman, 2005). Subsequently hired by the Los Angeles Department of Recreation
and Parks (LADRP) to teach art programs in the parks, Baca says that she “came to
murals through graffiti”, as she recognized the cultural significance of the tattoos and
_placas_ (signature graphics) of the gang youths who hung out in the parks (Isenberg, 2000,
p. 155).
Intent on finding a way to encourage young people to work together and inspired by *Los Tres Grandes* (The Three Greats—Siqueiros, Rivera, and Orozco), Baca began painting murals in her spare time with a group composed of members from four rival gangs—The White Fence, Primera Flats, Quatro Flats, and Evergreen—who became known as *Las Vistas Nuevas* (New Vistas) (Barnett, 1983, p. 110). It was these first mural projects, produced in the parks of East Los Angeles with Neighborhood Youth Corps “cool-out” money, which caught the attention of Sy Greben, the General Manager of LADRP, who had served as director of the Peace Corps under John F. Kennedy (*SPARC: Brief History*, 2009). Appointed initially by Greben to head a murals program in East Los Angeles, Baca later became director of the L.A. Citywide Mural Program, and it was while she served in this capacity that censorship, with regard to community issues depicted in the murals, led to the foundation of SPARC.

SPARC’s mission, to serve as a leading resource in public and community-based art, is based on a “conviction that the voices of our disenfranchised communities need to be heard and that our preservation of the commons is critical to creation of a civil society” (*SPARC: About SPARC*, 2009, ¶ 4). The organization was originally formed as a temporary means of circumventing city control and a way of channeling nonprofit and private monies into a single mural project, *The Great Wall*, which Baca had envisioned while directing the L.A. Citywide Mural Program (Rangel, 1998). Invited by the Army Corps of Engineers’ Aesthetic Planning Division to work on a plan for the Tujunga Flood Control Channel in the San Fernando Valley, Baca conceived of the project as a site of public memory (Baca, 2001). She saw its mile-long length as an opportunity for an
unlimited narrative, and, thus was born an alternative history of the State of California as pictured through the eyes of the various ethnic groups that comprised its population (SPARC: About the Great Wall of Los Angeles, 2009). The Great Wall, one of world’s longest murals, brought together over four hundred diverse youth from all over the city along with artists, oral historians, ethnologists, scholars, and community members during the course of its production (SPARC: About the Great Wall of Los Angeles, 2009). Painting on The Great Wall continued in alternate summers over the course of twelve years, and SPARC grew along with the project, becoming a full-scale arts institution by 1977; and by 1983, it had “generated a network of social services” to attend to the needs of the young workers who collaborated on the projects (Rangel, 1998, p. 233).

The hope of SPARC’s founders was to continue with mural making “in such a way as to animate public discourse and free expression of diverse communities of the city without direct official intervention” (SPARC: Brief History, 2001, ¶ 12). While to some extent, this hope has been realized in SPARC, the organization and its activities have remained controversial throughout its thirty-two year history, sometimes being forced to decline public funds or discovering its work at the center of public controversy over censorship issues (SPARC: News Archive, 2009). Although Baca began coordinating murals to foster Chicana/o cultural pride, through SPARC, The Great Wall, and numerous other murals, this purpose has expanded to providing a voice for many marginalized people and groups, and to promoting interracial harmony.

In 1994, Baca, who had been teaching at the University of California, Irvine, joined the founding faculty of the California State University, Monterey Bay, an
institution newly established with an emphasis on information technology and interdisciplinary teaching (UCLA/SPARC, 2009). At about this time, a group of UCLA students staged a hunger strike, calling for a Chicana/o studies department and requesting that Baca continue her innovative work as part of the UCLA faculty. Both of these desires were realized in 1996. With the creation and utilization of the Digital/Mural Lab, Baca and her students challenge the digital divide, which threatens marginalized people who may not have access to technology. By consulting with and creating community via the Internet, they call into question time-honored notions of community, redefining it in technological terms. They also challenge traditional conceptions of muralism, by using Photoshop software to combine hand-drawn and pre-existing photographic imagery into seamless compositions, which can then be transferred to a wall surface and painted, or digitally printed on mylar, making the murals portable and replaceable (Latorre, 2008).

*The Artist-Teachers and Artist-Learners in Beyond the Mexican Mural*

The Artist-Teachers for BMM at the time I visited were a collaborative team, headed by Baca, which included Fahrad Akhmetov, Digital/Mural Lab director, Carlos Rogel, Digital/Mural lab technician and web developer, and a studio assistant. Baca expressed pride in the pedagogical and collaborative skills of her team, which had taken some time and effort to establish (J. Baca, personal communication, December 4, 2008).

Baca, who studied history and education in addition to art, earned her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees at California State University, Northridge. She describes herself as a muralist, a public artist (Mesa-Baines, 1986), an artist who teaches (Isenberg, 2000), and a political landscape painter (Baca, 2007). Baca credits her grandmother with
establishing the value system that provides the basis for her art. When she returned to East Los Angeles after college, her art education seemed largely irrelevant (Latorre, 2000), and Baca was prompted by a question her grandmother asked about her art, “What is it for?” (Mesa-Bains, 1993, p. 78). From that point on, Baca determined to use her artistic skill to connect with something that had meaning beyond self gratification, and sought to make her art speak to the people important to her—her family and community. Her career as a muralist, an arts activist, a community leader and a visual arts professor has been dedicated to art in the service of social justice and equity. Baca’s work is characterized by “the scope of its vision, the sophistication of community organizing techniques employed, and its impact on national and international audiences” (Lacy, 1995, p. 202). Her recent work includes La Memoria de Nuestra Tierra, a mural for the Denver International Airport, and the World Wall, a collaborative portable mural originally composed of seven 10’ x 30’ panels. Designed to inspire world peace and activist artists, this mural travels globally, with a new panel being added by each country that it visits.

Baca’s artistic practice is so intertwined with collaborative processes that it is impossible to speak about one without mentioning the other. Although she claims to have come to muralism by accident, Baca’s desire to “force cooperation” between dissenting youths led her to the creation of collaborative projects that were too large for one person to execute (Isenberg, 2000, p. 155). Since the gang members she originally worked with were already painting on walls, muralism was a natural step (Mesa-Bains, 1986), which assumed increasing cultural significance within the Chicano movement as Baca and
others educated themselves in the history and techniques of Mexican muralism. Although her collaborative process has changed over time and continues to evolve, it remains based in a focus on cooperation in the creation of art work; and Baca believes that the work is better because of the number of people contributing ideas, skills and abilities. She considers the art work to be conceptual—concerned with community empowerment, the reclamation of public space, and the amelioration of discordant relationships, with the finished material object representing only one aspect of the work (Mesa-Bains, 1993).

Although she believes this collaborative art work to be the basis of democracy and is concerned that every voice has a chance to be heard (Isenberg, 2000), Baca says the hardest part is making a design work as a unified piece and claims that a collaborative art project needs an artistic director (Personal communication, December 5, 2007). At first she disliked any kind of hierarchy, and while she views herself primarily as a facilitator on many projects, providing an environment in which other people can cooperate creatively; she has realized the practical necessity of having an experienced and responsible leader, with authority in artistic and aesthetic matters (Neumaier, 1985).

Rogel and Akhmetov agree that each project needs an artistic director, and also see the necessity of teaching cooperative working methods. Both came to SPARC with a background in working collaboratively. “We see a need to teach collaboration because of the emphasis, in our culture, on individualism,” says Rogel (Personal communication, December 4, 2007). He believes that ads and popular imagery stress individualism, and technology encourages it. Because of this, “There needs to be a guide. We’re not born into a collaborative mode.”
Members of BMM, though perhaps culturally conditioned to value individualism, enrolled in the 2007-2008 class knowing that they would be conducting interdisciplinary research and working collaboratively. Two of the students were recent graduates of UCLA, and the remaining eight came from a number of undergraduate disciplines including visual art, cultural studies, English literature, art history, communications, and Chicana/o studies. All have some sort of art background (C. Rogel, personal communication, December 6, 2007). Three members of the group had been born in Mexico, one came from Russia, several other students had Mexican parents, and two of the students identified themselves as gay or lesbian. In speaking with the students and reading their assignments online, it became clear that they were interested in exploring issues of identity as well as learning about community education, development and empowerment. These identity issues are addressed in BMM as the students reformulate their identities within the new systems of relations in the class.

The Artworld Perspective

_How is artistic collaboration employed in this situation?_

The art work in BMM is grounded in collaborative community projects and what a student gains from being educated in this collaborative artistic process is entirely different from what is learned in other art classes at UCLA (Carlos, Rogel, personal communication, December 4, 2007). Like many artists working in relational and dialogic collaborative modes, Rogel sees the commonly taught traditional process of the artist working alone in a studio as inherently flawed, leading to a kind of art that is difficult for other people to access. In addition to promoting a limited conception of artmaking, the institutional structure of the UCLA system imposes schedules that make collaboration
difficult, since collaboration takes time. Because BMM is taught at SPARC, which is separated both physically and psychologically from UCLA, it is possible to escape, to some extent, the influence of that structure (C. Rogel, personal communication, December 4, 2007). For one thing, BMM is less restricted by time, since the course is offered in a series, spread out over two quarters. This allows ample opportunity for students to experience the benefits of collaboration during all phases of the process.

Typically, the course begins with a team-building session, often an “epiphany” exercise described as collaborative and useful in loosening up the class (AA, personal communication, December 4, 2007). In this exercise, students anonymously record personally significant life events on index cards, which are posted on the wall, read, and sorted into affinity groups by the class. After this, students choose a category and each group creates a presentation about their category. These activities break down barriers by having students work in close physical proximity to one another, and by helping them develop respect for each other through a collective understanding of their common experiences (C. Rogel, personal communication, December 4, 2007). In describing this exercise, two students wrote, “We responded passionately to this activity expressing ourselves with every possible emotion that was within us. We began to feel comfortable with each other and with ourselves” (Dueñas & Conchas, 2009, p. 3).

Building on the dialogic comfort level established in this manner, subsequent classes generally begin with group discussion of an issue, assigned readings, or perhaps a presentation or film that the students watch. During the fall quarter, the focus of the class is on skill-building—working on necessary graphic and computer skills and on laying the
foundation for collaboration, which really kicks in during the second quarter (J. Baca, personal communication, December 5, 2007). Student interactions at this point become focused on a specific community-based project, with analysis of the audience/participants and issues affecting them, oral interviews, and traditional research being conducted by individuals and various collaborative groups. During the second quarter, the entire group also collaboratively designs the project, creates a real or virtual maquette or sketch, seeks community approval and, depending upon the project, they may execute, install, document and dedicate the work. The 2007-2008 BMM class produced and installed a gallery exhibition called *Reinterpretation: A New Generation’s Commentary on Iraq*, which presented collaboratively created, digitally printed maquettes for large scale murals. These maquettes reinterpreted imagery of the US invasion of Iraq, calling attention to media construction of public consciousness about current events (*SPARC: Reinterpretation*, 2009). The class also initiated research and historical interpretation of the decade of the 1970s, interviewed a number of key participants in the events of that decade, and worked collaboratively to create a maquette proposal for the 1970s section of *The Great Wall*.

_How does this situation relate to categories of artistic collaboration in the artworld?_

**Object-centered Collaborations**

Because the work involves the production of a material object—an artwork that is installed in a public setting—it is tempting to think of the collaboration that occurs in BMM as object-centered. However, a close analysis of the situation reveals a greater complexity. As in other object-centered collaborations that occur in the artworld, such as Maya Lin’s *Groundswell* (Art: 21: Lin, 2007) or Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s *Gates*
(Church, 2009), a material object is produced that exists separate from the process that created it. This art object is meant to embody meaning and communicate something to a viewer. Clearly, there is a focus on visuality in the construction, discussion and revision of images that are produced in the Digital/Mural Lab, just as a focus on visuality dominates the production of collaborations of convenience in the artworld. In addition, the hierarchical structure that frequently occurs in object-centered collaborations, which can be seen in the collaborative construction and installation of a piece like Richard Serra’s monolithic corten steel sculpture *Charlie Brown* (Art 21:Serra, 2007), where the artist makes all the artistic and aesthetic decisions, may be present during parts of the BMM process. However there are significant differences in motivation and process that distinguish BMM collaborations from artworld object-centered collaborations. Although they may produce a material object, BMM collaborations are not interested in form for its own sake, neither are they motivated primarily by the desire to present an artist’s unique vision to the world, nor executed in the strictly hierarchical manner of most object-centered collaborations. In BMM, a participant-oriented, intersubjective *process* of art work assumes primary significance.

*Relational and Dialogic Collaborations*

While object-centered collaborations occur in order to facilitate the presentation of the artist’s personal vision to the viewer, relational and dialogic collaborations, like the art work in BMM, are more concerned with human interaction. Relational collaborations seek to construct a model of sociality and focus on the collective elaboration of meaning and the creation of community. These things occur in BMM, however, relational collaborations like Tiravanija’s *untitled (demo station # 5)*, which established a platform
for public interactions, are created temporarily within the art world, with a distinct emphasis on their exhibition value (Schmelzer, 2006). The initial community-building phase of BMM has a different purpose. Rather than drawing strangers together in one-time encounters requiring trust, as in Oliver Herring’s collaborative relational performance Task (Art: 21: Herring, 2007), the students in BMM learn to trust and work with each other over a prolonged period of time.

Central to this process is the utilization of a form of constructive critique foreign to many college art departments. Initially, while the students are building their computer/graphic skills, they work on individual projects, assisting each other with technical aspects of the work. When participating in group critiques of these projects, each artist-learner is encouraged to describe the insights and experiences that led to the creation of her/his own image (Sandoval & Latorre, 2008). Instead of challenging each other’s conceptualizations, forms, or techniques, fellow students offer their differing interpretations in a collective sharing, that enriches the perspectives of all present while nurturing their growing sense of community. In this phase of the process, the focus on conversational exchange, for the purpose of sharing contrasting points of view and making room for differences, resembles the form and motivation of Maria Pask’s relational work, Beautiful City, which had similar goals. As students begin collaborating on projects, these intersubjective exchanges build group awareness, refining individual artistic sensitivities through a collective process.

However, this relational prelude is merely one part of the collaborative process in BMM. Once a sense of trust has been established, the group turns outward, to focus on a
specific artistic project, and begins the conscientious process of research, design, and engagement with community participants that is entailed in public art work. At this point, another type of interaction becomes the focus of the work.

The collaborative projects of BMM, like Suzanne Lacy’s dialogic works with police officers and youth in the Oakland, California (Kester, 2004), are concerned with interactions outside of the artworld, within a specific community. As in the varied projects of Wochenklausur (Zinggl, 2001), research and exploration of a particular social-political issue occurs in BMM, with openness to transforming the attitudes of all participants. BMM projects are based on a conception that artworks are not just decorative or expressive; instead, they are interventions into public space that must consider all of the environmental and social factors inherent in that space. The community participatory process utilized involves soliciting input from historians, cultural informants, storytellers and community residents, giving students the opportunity to compare and synthesize differing perspectives. Like Stephen Willats, who creates dialogic collaborations with residents of public housing estates in various parts of Europe (Kester, 2004), the students in BMM engage in a form of social exchange in which their own presuppositions can be challenged by other participants’ input and responses. Rogel believes that the young people, who enroll in BMM, come to college with a particular worldview that has been shaped by their prior experiences. Encountering contrasting viewpoints, as they engage in community art work, gives these students an opportunity to consciously reconstruct their own worldviews and identities (C. Rogel, personal communication, December 4, 2008).
The openness of the artists themselves to experiencing a change in their beliefs or attitudes through the process of the work is a significant factor in dialogic works (Kester, 2004). In speaking about the transformative power of her early collaborative murals, Baca has said that the immense scale of the murals was effective in engaging more people, and in calling greater attention to the issue of racism in America and to the possibility of interracial harmony (Mesa-Bains, 1986). “When I worked with the kids the experience was so moving and so big […] I began to see that something was going on, how the people I was working with were being changed, how I was also changing and learning” (Mesa-Bains, 1993, p. 79). Young artist-learners also testify to the attitude-altering power of working on the murals. Said Sergio Moreno,

At first I didn't think an assortment of races could work together because in my neighborhood there is primarily one race. This project made me realize that the prejudices I had inside me were not only false but also ignorant. I only wish all mankind could have gone through this experience with me” (Cited in SPARC: Testimonials, 2009, ¶ 5).

The deliberate choice of Baca and her students in BMM to move beyond traditional forms of muralism and become producers of digital cultural work, and to network with others activists in utilizing technology to bridge social, cultural and political divisions is an extension of the desire to effect social change in as broad a manner as possible. While technology has opened up the possibility of creating a more fluid conception of community that reaches beyond the confines of any specific location, the experience for today’s participants engenders many of the same opportunities for learning that community members experienced in the past. Recent artist-learners in BMM testify to this, “The collaborative process is a powerful one because it unifies participants
who then learn from one another. Working together in such a setting enabled us as a
group to create a diverse product that has meaning, history and voice. (Dueñas &
Conchas, 2009, p. 3).

This examination of the collaborations that occur in BMM has shown that the
cooperative creation of a material art object is only one part of the larger dialogic
collaboration that represents the primary goal of the art work in this location. The
physical art object that results from the intersubjective interactions, functions both as
stimulus to and as evidence of the realizations regarding judgments and stereotypes that
occur for the project’s participants (C. Rogel, personal communication, December 4,
2007). In addition, it may encourage reflection and similar realizations for viewers of the
work. As in other dialogic art work, BMM encourages both participants and viewers to
challenge stereotypical images and viewpoints and to question fixed notions of identity
through a cumulative process of conversational exchange.

The Educational/Innovative Perspective

*Is there evidence of a specific pedagogical approach in this situation?*

During her work on *The Great Wall*, Baca developed an apprentice-like approach
designed to teach mural-making skills, while enabling youths to work together in
egalitarian modes across differences of race and class, and she has carried this approach
into her university teaching. In an interview in 1986 (Mesa-Bains), Baca described her
method as a collaborative interweaving of aesthetic principles, environmental issues and
social issues that could facilitate educative and transformative art work when plugged
into any particular social or physical situation. One third of the art work is the actual
painting or production of the mural, while the other two thirds are conceptual, relating to
design and process. Using the analogy of a reverse triangle to describe the structure of the conceptual work, Baca pictured two youths at the bottom point of the triangle, facing each other across an abyss of cultural/historical separation. Above them, as if in geological strata, lie a series of relationships that expand out from the individuals to include communities, municipalities, states, and nations. In this analogy, the relationships that are transformed at the bottom level have the potential to effect change up through all the levels of the triangle (Mesa-Bains, 1986). The expansion of Baca’s work from The Great Wall, through SPARC into a number of community-based projects, and on into the digital realm has increased the number of individuals at the point of the triangle, and increased the number of triangles, creating more expansive opportunities for transformation to occur. But what is the transformation that is talked about? And how does this transformation happen? What is the process?

The transformation, that is mentioned so frequently in the literature about SPARC, refers primarily to a transformation of attitudes regarding racial stereotyping and prejudice, although it can also refer to any attitudinal change. At first, Baca’s projects dealt with developing Chicana/o cultural pride and solidarity, but as her work spread, through the L.A. Citywide Mural program, the focus broadened to include promoting harmony across racial lines.

Baca describes the evolution of the process as follows:

What I’ve had to do is focus increasingly on the support services that will accomplish the goals of the interrelationship between the different cultures, which is the focus of The Great Wall. You know, the kind of naïve focus was to put alongside of each other the stories of different ethnic groups and the history of those ethnic groups…and as we got increasingly better at relating one to each other […], we have also gotten better at relating visually across the boundaries of
Chicano history, black history, Jewish history, and Asian history […] It’s just really one part; the image is one part of the whole concept. And the most interesting concept, even, aside from how to orchestrate that application of paint [is that]…It’s gotten increasingly better as public artwork. The imaging is better.[…] we’ve gotten increasingly better at dealing with our team-building and our interracial relationships (Mesa-Bains, 1986, p. 39).

The pedagogy that developed in this manner, through work on The Great Wall, has evolved and its current version is being employed in BMM, where artist-learners continue to find that their interests and beliefs and prejudices are challenged through their interaction and participation in the creation of actual public artworks designed for display in specific community settings. This pedagogy can be described as constructivist because it depends upon active participation of the learners and active construction of meaning. In BMM, “students are not lectured at. Instead, topics are discussed”; students are not viewed as “empty vessels waiting to be filled”, rather teaching and learning are seen as fluid, and teacher and learner roles as interchangeable (SPARC: The Great Wall Methodology, 2009, ¶ 6). In addition to emphasis on the active role of the learner, Baca’s pedagogy focuses on the necessity of building upon prior knowledge, on knowing as a process rather than knowledge as a product, and on the importance of meaning-making, which are all characteristics of constructivist learning (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002).

**Team-Building**

The initial “epiphany” activity, the team-building exercise that begins each BMM series, establishes the base of prior knowledge upon which the students will build. Significantly, this exercise reveals deeply held personal beliefs—perhaps the very beliefs that will be challenged and transformed through the work conducted in the class. Collaborative production of a material work of art is essential to this pedagogy, because it
is through human interaction over specific issues of importance to the participants, that existing beliefs and prejudices are challenged and changed (C. Rogel, personal communication, December 4, 2007). This process of transforming thinking is consistent with situated theories of learning that view learning as the construction of identity (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Engaging in community art work involves the BMM students in a new system of relations and creates the possibility for them to construct new identities with respect to this new system of relations. This same opportunity is available for all community members that participate in the work.

In BMM students learn, by participating in a real world collaborative community process, how to engage in and engage others in the conceptual and artistic work that comprises the community mural process. In order to teach both aspects of the work, Baca uses an approach rooted in social constructivism, which depends upon the students learning from each other through interaction and dialogue (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002). As the master artist-teacher, Baca establishes a structured environment and provides a set of experiences that both motivate the artist-learners and facilitate effective learning. Baca’s intent is to pass on to her students the process of community mural-making, which includes site analysis, research, design, and production (J. Baca, personal communication, December 6, 2007).

Cooperative Site Analysis and Research

Once the project has been chosen, members of the class expand their knowledge base for the project by participating in an analysis of the site for which the work will be made. Such analysis includes academic research, such as historical documentary investigation, as well as examination of the lived experience of community participants,
often involving oral interviews with community members. In building their knowledge base about the decade of the 1970s, the class that I visited created lists of suggested readings, videos and speakers, relevant to this time period. Students were encouraged to work together in conducting research, reporting to the class, and inviting speakers into the classroom to contribute to the historical investigation. As is typical of apprenticeship, the students learn mostly in relation to each other, with knowledge spreading rapidly and effectively among peers (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

A main precept of this approach to muralism is that the theme should emerge from the concerns of the community in which the mural will be located, as well as from the interests of the mural makers (SPARC: UES, 2009). Student input in these early phases of group problem finding and group problem solving is an important aspect of situated learning (Russ-Eft, 2004). Since each BMM class is composed of different people from different contexts, and each community project is different, a formulaic approach for discovering the mural’s theme is not viable (SPARC: UES, 2009). The selection of issues significant to the community and the development of metaphors and complex images symbolic of these issues, all proceed from group conversations. Baca describes this phase of the process, “You talk it through in a literal way, which develops an attitude that comes from people hashing it out together (Neumaier, 1985).

Together artist-teachers, artist-learners and community participants hone in on important issues, making sense of these matters communally and elaborating on their meaning. In the early days of SPARC, this collective elaboration of meaning tended to occur in person, at or near the community site where the physical artwork would be
created, thus drawing potential participants and funders into the process. While face-to-face interactions are still an important part of the process, in the Digital/Mural Lab, community is also being reinterpreted in terms of common interest and input, as consultation with community members may occur online, as well as in person (Latorre, 2008). During these online or in-person conversations, artist-learners practice inclusion, and learn the skills of empathy, encouragement, and compromise—social skills that practitioners of cooperative learning pedagogy also promote (Adams & Hamm, 1996).

**Collaborative Design and Production**

These group dialogues, which determine the narrative thread and symbolism, or the theme that connects the community’s stories, can also produce areas of conflict within the class. This tends to happen more in the second quarter of the class, during the research and design phases of the project, when the whole group is collaborating (F. Akhmetov, personal communication, December 6, 2007). Conflicts that occur are often about power and leadership issues, rather than point of view. The learning of processes that promote the dialogic resolution of differences is an important educational aspect of the class, just as learning group processes are important in cooperative learning and in the work of collaborative innovative teams (Parker, 1994; Paulus & Nijstad, 2003).

The winter quarter of BMM introduces the students to the process of creating collaborative public art by plunging the students directly into an actual project. This completion of real work in the world is essential to the apprenticeship learning process, as is the assumption of increasingly responsible positions in the work (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Students who successfully complete the first two quarters are eligible to become group facilitators for community projects executed through SPARC with community
youths during after school hours or in the summer. The concept of legitimate peripheral participation, wherein novice learners become more knowledgeable as they are gradually incorporated into a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) is useful in understanding how learning occurs in this situation. Other researchers report that in BMM, “Curriculum included an active learning process whereby youth are charged with responsibilities often given to teachers, adults, or other authority figures—such as planning and executing a mural (Sandoval & Latorre, 2008, p. 90). This increasing assumption of responsibility is part of the development of mastery of the conceptual and artistic techniques of community mural production.

Baca believes that practicing artists need to take responsibility for passing on what they know. In describing her own teaching methods, she has said:

Mural painting is best taught through the apprentice model. It’s the best model for teaching the formal aspects of doing the scale, but the painting is only one part of the process. The most important part is learning how to do it with patience, with insight, and with sensitivity. Public art is one of the most political of all art forms, because what we’re talking about is whose idea of the story has the right to be represented and whether or not it’s good for the public to know all aspects of history (Oregon Public Broadcasting, 1997).

Is authorship or artistic autonomy an issue in this situation?

Presenting the Chicana/o perspective was an important motivation for Baca and other Chicana/o artists in the days of the El Movimiento (the Chicano movement). The use of Indigenist imagery had two main purposes in their mural-making: “to legitimize the Chicana/o/indigenous presence on U.S. soil, and to assert alternative and oppositional cultural expressions from the margins of dominant society” (Latorre, 2008, p. 239). For political reasons, they worked collectively, called themselves “cultural workers” and didn’t sign any of their works (Mesa-Bains, 1986, p. 26). Baca liked the
idea that the work could not be owned by anyone, and therefore would not be of interest to the wealthy. This meant that it didn’t have to go through the censorship of museum exhibitions or meet other museum caveats (Baca, 2004). In speaking about this time, Baca explained:

> We didn’t have other options then. We were not in the galleries, and we were not in the museums [...] So we worked in our communities. We saw the art as daily life activity anyway. Much of the early work was done without even signatures. I didn’t sign my first murals. It was a joyful activity of reclamation of one’s culture and one’s life (Isenberg, 2000, p. 57).

In addition to emphasizing the negation of authorship common to much contemporary collaborative art work, in this quotation Baca also brings up the recurrent motivation of blurring the line between art and life.

Despite this negation of authorship in *El Movimiento*, signature panels punctuate *The Great Wall*, listing participating artist-learners, supervisors, and sponsors. These lists of collaborative partners, also common on the websites of the BMM projects, attest to the pride that students take in their participation in the work. In their testimonials, posted on the SPARC website, the artist-learners express just as much pride in the growth and increasingly cooperative work of the team as they do in the finished product. Nevertheless, the presence of the finished work exists as a visible material reminder of their participation in a successful project carried through to completion. Ernestine Jimenez, who worked on *The Great Wall* for six years, puts it this way:

> This mural opened my eyes so much. Even when I am down and out, I still walk by here and I thank God that I did accomplish something in life and it makes me feel good. I think if it wasn’t for this mural, for me to have my name on it and to have accomplished something, I don’t know where I’d be (*SPARC: Testimonials*, 2009, p. 1).
Students in BMM express a similar appreciation for their participation in the community participatory projects. “Being in the class was the most unique learning experience I have ever had. What we learned went beyond art; we learned to work together creatively. I’ve never had an experience like that” (De La Rosa, cited in Lee, 2000, ¶ 23). Though the students express pride in the art work, both conceptual and material that they produce, there does not seem to be an issue regarding authorship; they are proud of the collective nature of the work.

*How do the characteristics of the collaborative groups in this situation affect group functioning and productivity?*

Watching the artist-learners at work in the Digital/Mural Lab at the beginning of their *Reinterpretation: A New Generation’s Commentary on Iraq* project, I noted the considerate manner they used in giving and receiving comments. At the beginning of one class period, Baca scrolled back and forth through a number of images of the Iraq war that had been selected by individual students. The class task was to select three images that smaller collaborative groups of two or three people would each incorporate in their own *Reinterpretation* mural maquette. Some images recurred, and were chosen for this reason, while other choices were suggested and defended by individual students. Throughout this selection process, respect was the rule with everyone, including Baca, Akhmetov and Rogel commenting upon the images. One student expressed appreciation for this democratic dialogue, typical of Baca’s classes:

She would talk about her experience and then she would open up the floor for us to say something. I really appreciated that because it’s rare to find professors at the university level who are willing to hear the perspective of the students (Anonymous student cited in Sandoval & Latorre, 2008, p. 100).
In this case, Baca presented her view, that using some of the sensationalist horrific images of Iraq that were available online, but not widely circulated in official media, would undermine the overall purpose of the project, which was to focus on media representation of the war. This perspective prevailed with little discussion, which left me wondering, as I had in the EKE, just how democratic the discussion could really be, since any professor does retain a position of power within the classroom.

I asked Baca if she tended to be both the artistic director and the conceptual leader of the BMM projects, and she replied that she doesn’t control the ideas. “You can’t,” she said, “Because the murals are about history and history is always an interpretation. People interpret it differently” (J. Baca, personal communication, December 6, 2007). She admitted to exerting some control over content, especially with regard to sections of The Great Wall. A segment after all, might not be complete if something major was left out. As an example, Judy spoke about a segment of The Great Wall, created previously, which included an image of Rosie the Riveter being sucked into a vacuum cleaner pictured in a suburban television. When the maquette was in the final stages of production, Judy Chicago had visited the studio and suggested the inclusion of a pink ghetto, which was then added. At SPARC, it is common for content to be adjusted as new input comes in, and the projects tend to remain open to change up to the last minute.

Sandoval & Latorre (2008), who also observed BMM, have described Baca’s working relationship with her students as, “a collaboration between intellectual and artistic equals, at the same time as it can be defined as a mentor-mentee type of association” (p. 84). Their focus on the use of digital media and the acquisition of
computer skills in the Digital/Mural Lab recognized that Baca is in the position of learning along with and often from her apprentices, as the young people are able to share significant knowledge of various new technologies and devices.

The use of technology facilitates the collaborative processes in BMM. When the class divided into groups and began combining the three class-chosen images into their mural compositions, the students demonstrated an extraordinary receptiveness to suggestions for changes as they manipulated the images in PhotoShop. At least part of this openness must be attributed to the mutable nature of the software, since, as long as one continually saves the image, no change is permanent in PhotoShop. This feature allows collaborative groups to try out any group member’s suggestion, without the need for elaborate explanation or justification. In many cases, suggestions are just discarded almost wordlessly, with a shake of the head and a nod as acknowledgement that the suggested change is undesirable, once it has been shown. A major advantage of the use of technology in BMM is the elimination of the need to spend time creating thousands of preliminary sketches in order to envision alternate versions of the same work, or to envision a work in situ (Latorre, 2000).

Rogel suggests that working collaboratively in a project-based situation is also an excellent way to teach students to use Photoshop. By working on several projects where the concept is emphasized, rather than mastery of the software, students develop a well-rounded knowledge of PhotoShop, just by learning what they need to know for each project. The lab set-up, with its mobile computer stations, facilitates the process of
working together and learning from each other. Technology is used as a vehicle that facilitates the project and the collaborative process, and not as an end in itself.

The diverse nature of the class contributes in a meaningfully way to collaborative production. Says Laura Duenas, a former BMM student:

Inspiration does not come from a single mind or element. Inspiration comes best from an exchange of ideas and thoughts; a meeting of hearts. This process of collaboration is one that empowers the mind; feeding it with the different sorts of knowledge that we each possess. Furthermore, through collaboration that allows for the expression of each of our individual notions and concepts emerges a victorious union of creation (Dueñas & Conchas, 2009, p.2).

These students have discovered the same thing that scholars involved in researching the functioning of collaborative teams have found—that diversity of knowledge among group members contributes to successful collaborative innovations (Bennis & Biederman, 1997; Paulus & Nijstad, 2003; Sawyer, 2007).

Collaboration is intrinsic to BMM. In this situated learning environment, students gain specific artistic, technological, and community cultural work skills while collaboratively creating a mural that is partially, if not entirely, digitally produced for a specific community site. Although the students do create a material art work, emphasis is placed on the transformative collaborative community process that produces the work, so the art work at this site can be described as dialogic art work. Grounded in the goals and processes of the Chicano movement, the pedagogy at this site utilizes a constructivist approach, which enables the students to learn from and with each other. The relationship with the instructor resembles an apprenticeship with regard to the acquisition of artistic and conceptual skills, but cannot be entirely described as such, since some of the skills being taught by the master teacher and the collaborative teaching team are the skills of
participating in democratic dialogue and working processes. Students learn by experiencing the processes of creating public art: team-building, cooperative site analysis and research, and collaborative design and production. The democratic working methods and diversity of the group promote tolerance and innovation.

Part 2

Rationale for Collaboration in Beyond the Mexican Mural

What is gained by allowing/encouraging collaboration at this site?

In addition to the enhanced ability to innovate just mentioned, BMM students describe other benefits of working collaboratively in the class. Some focus on social skills, such as learning tolerance or the value of interdependence—both within the class and in the larger community—while others focus on developing understandings of art as a process, or art as social engagement. Many believe that working collaboratively in the class has been a life-changing experience.

Carlos Rogel calls the Digital/Mural Lab “a place to grow” (Personal communication, December 4, 2007). By participating collaboratively in the class and then helping to team-teach it, he has learned specific artistic skills and processes for creating public art, and he has also learned techniques for teaching tolerance. Rogel says the student collaborations in BMM manifest a learning that takes place even beyond the classroom, through the Internet or over coffee. In a successful collaboration, such as the previous year’s class, the students continue to work together even after the class ends, using the same techniques and processes online to work and grow together. They continue to dialogue without the need for a guide, and are working on thoughtful
collaborative projects regarding environmental issues, graffiti art, and neighborhood problems.

In addition to providing experience in valuable democratic processes, Rogel believes collaboration enhances the opportunity that the students have to gain technological skills. Although many of today’s students enter college with a repertoire of computer skills and digital competencies, these skills may be less developed in students who come from economically underprivileged backgrounds. Public schools with higher minority student populations tend to have fewer technological resources as well as fewer technologically savvy adult mentors to teach computer skills. Researchers examining issues of technology access and use find that the rate of technology use among Latinas/os in the U.S. is one of the lowest among ethnic minorities, and is well below the national average (Sandoval & Latorre, 2008). Baca’s choice to move community muralism into the digital age resulted from concerns about how the power in technological space was being distributed, her continued desire to empower Chicana/o youth, and a recognition that the use of digital technology could enhance community art work and energize her collaborations with young people (Sandoval & Latorre, 2008).

In 1985, Baca described her collaborative work in the following manner:

I see myself as an urban artist, using the entire environment that I work in, which includes the people in that environment. If I’m talking about transforming an environment—changing, enhancing, making it more beautiful—then I am also talking about changing the people who live in that environment as well. Accepting the whole reality of the space means working with who populates the area and seeing what I can do to better the whole situation (Neumaier, 1985, p. 75).
Baca’s perspective on the reality of community space has evolved as the space and the people in it have entered the digital world, but she still seeks transformation through her collaborative work. A decade later she proclaimed, “I absolutely believe that creative processes, creative thinking and problem solving—the processes that artists use—are the basis of social change. I absolutely believe we can better the world (World of Art, 1997). And in December of 2007 she said, “Transformation is a result of participation with the mural project. These people become civic-minded (J. Baca, personal communication, December 2, 2007).

Baca’s students corroborate this statement:

I learned that art is not about the final result; it’s the process that counts. Rather than just making art and imposing it on the community, it’s about including the community in what is to be created (J. Araujo, cited in Lee, 2000, ¶ 12).

This is the best course I’ve taken at UCLA in four years because it’s extended from the private classroom out into the community […] it’s amazing to see that there is something else I can do with art, something that really is a political act, so it’s a new possibility for me in my life, after I graduate… [This course] is the perfect combination of art, activism and community. (Anonymous student, cited in Sandoval & Latorre, 2008, p. 101).

**From an educational perspective, are there problematic areas with regard to collaboration at this site?**

Clearly, BMM artist-learners value the experiences they have by collaborating in the class and with community participants. However, one of the strengths of the class is also a problematic area for some of the students. Earlier, the issue of time was mentioned and a clear advantage to students in BMM is that the course is spread out over two quarters. This allows plenty of time for team-building, gaining digital media skills, and the collaborative conversations that comprise a great deal of the course, but the length of
the class and the time commitment required is an issue for some students. I spoke to one student, who was attempting to double-major in Chicana/o studies and another subject, as well as doing a minor. She was really enjoying the class—especially the “hands-on” aspect of it, and her work posted online revealed depth of thinking and engagement in the artistic processes. Yet, she was considering not signing up for the second quarter of the class, just because it required so much time. This common criticism of collaboration, that it is an inefficient process, is something that any educator, who is contemplating engaging in collaborative work with her/his class, will want to consider carefully. Will the social, intellectual, artistic and creative skills gained from working collaboratively be worth the time lost to the “inefficiency” of the process?

Since the art work of BMM is based in a collaborative community project that provides a clear objective to the class, and since Baca has carefully delineated the process that will be used to create the work, collaboration in this class does not present the same uncertainty of learning outcomes as we have seen in other collaborative situations. The students will master certain computer graphic skills and certain collaborative working processes, however, as in any classroom situation, there must be an assessment of what has been learned. Because the work is performed collectively, there will always be some uncertainty about the assignment of “credit”. Students who sign up for BMM can take it as Pass/No Pass or for a grade. These grading options may make assessment somewhat simpler, but may not be available to all educators. Assessment is also an issue that should be taken into consideration with the adoption of this collaborative working model.
Chapter Summary

The interdisciplinary course, Beyond the Mexican Mural, offered through UCLA is a studio/theory course where students learn processes designed to enable them to explore and experience community empowerment, education and development through muralism. Working with a master artist and her collaborative teaching team and utilizing digital technology, the students produce a material artwork, usually in mural form, for a specific community environment. The art work in BMM emphasizes a transformative collaborative community process, and can be described as dialogic art work. Students learn through a constructivist approach that sometimes takes on the characteristics of apprenticeship learning, while at other times assumes a more democratic form. Educators who employ this model may need to restructure their lesson planning to allow adequate time for essential team-building, cooperative and collaborative aspects of this approach. The benefits of learning in this collaborative environment include gains in tolerance and democratic social skills, learning the positive values of interdependence, and increased motivation and skill in using art as a vehicle for advancing social justice.
CHAPTER 8: REINVENTING ART CLASSROOM RELATIONS

The sites for this study were chosen in part because they employed different pedagogical models; the artist/teacher and artist/learners as collaborators, the artist/teacher as facilitator, and, the artist/teacher and apprentices. Although my documentary and observational research and analysis have supported these distinctions, other important differences and some similarities in the teaching, learning, and artmaking at these sites have been noted, and will be discussed in this chapter. In addition, some general statements regarding the context specific nature of collaborative artmaking, teaching, and learning can be gleaned from the research at these sites:

- The artistic and educational philosophies providing the foundation for teaching, learning, and artmaking at the sites are congruent with a collaborative approach to artmaking.
- Collaborative processes are context specific, being structured and determined by the motivations and needs of the participants. These motivations often go beyond what is generally included in traditional artistic practice.
- Group characteristics, including composition, size, and social structure, are important factors in the effectiveness of a collaboration.
- Effective leadership is essential.
• Some degree of conflict or tension is inherent in collaboration. This can include a tension between artistic and collaborative goals.

Keeping these general statements in mind, in the first part of this chapter, I summarize and compare the data from the three sites to further develop understandings of artistic collaboration gained at each site, and then proceed to discuss some implications of this research for art classroom practice. In doing so, I recognize that this research can only point to areas of consideration, and that further investigation is necessary in order to answer the many questions that such consideration will raise. I offer it as a precursor to prolonged in-depth interaction and conversation analysis of collaborative processes that will further inform the teaching practices of educators wishing to incorporate collaborative artmaking into their classrooms.

Part 1

Summary and Comparison of Data from the Site

Philosophical Foundations

A significant finding of this research is that a collaborative approach permeates the activities at all three of these sites; collaboration is not just another method of making art in these situations. Instead, there appears to be a philosophical foundation at each site that reinvents traditional artclass relations, that allows and encourages collaboration across a range of different tasks, and tends to blur distinctions between art making and other activities. In each case, participants perceive the entire venture as a collaborative artistic endeavor—a perspective that is easy to understand and embrace, once one has visited the sites.
These philosophical underpinnings are significant in that they point to the need to be open to a different perception of collaboration than that which may immediately come to mind. Aimee expressed this necessity in talking about collaboration within the EKE,

When you say collaboration, you expect something. The idea that comes to mind is two people painting a painting together. The work that we did [in the EKE] redefines the term. It takes some time and research and thought to give yourself permission to accept a new definition for collaboration. As artists in a studio practice, you can’t get from point A to point B, sometimes, without viewing something from a different perspective (A. Sones, personal communication, April 29, 2009).

This first perception of collaboration that Aimee speaks about has been characterized as a kind of positivist cooperation, which has the main advantages of expanding the range of possibilities and resources available to create a work of art or to further the progress of art (Rogoff, 1990). Many object-centered collaborations, and in a broad sense, many stylistic and theoretical artistic innovations in the past have resulted from this kind of collective activity. The second perception of collaboration, that which seems to pervade the sites in this study, is characterized by the tendency to blur distinctions between artmaking and other activities, thus questioning the autonomy of art, and the tendency to emphasize the cultural embeddedness of art work, thereby reducing the significance of the heroic, individual artist (Rogoff, 1990). The collaborative artistic production at the study sites points to a new model of cooperation that requires an interrogation of both what it is to be an artist and what it is to make art.

The willingness to question dominant cultural ideas about the role of art and the artist in society was integral to productive collaborative art work at these sites. Even when artist-learners approached a collaborative endeavor with such openness, tensions
arose regarding what might be perceived as conflicting artistic and collaborative goals. Although my visits to Room 13 and BMM were too short to comment upon the frequency of such conflicts, artist-learners at both sites expressed some degree of frustration regarding tensions between individual artistic ideas, group goals and/or collaborative working processes. The openness of EKE participants to active experimentation prevented such tensions from becoming conflicts, however, within some individuals, tensions existed, as is evident in remarks quoted previously in Chapter 6. Artist-teachers at all sites sought to alleviate these tensions by assisting their students in expanding their perceptions and definitions of art, art work, and collaboration.

Collaboration was employed in context-specific ways at the three sites:

Room 13 - In Room 13 a variety of opportunities exists for children ages seven to eleven to experience collaborative inquiry, learning and artmaking. Material and conceptual collaborations between and amongst small and large groups of artist-learners and artist-teachers form and dissolve organically for technical, material, or conceptual reasons. These are motivated primarily by artistic concerns, however, the collaborative operation of the studio itself is deeply embedded in all the processes of Room 13.

The EKE - Blending artistic and collaborative goals in their activities, members of the EKE experienced art as a social process, exploring collaborative speaking, listening and moving in large and small groups, utilizing both hierarchical and democratic structures. Some collaboratively created material objects served to further the social processes of the more ephemeral art work being produced.
The interdisciplinary course, BMM, afforded UCLA undergraduate students a process-based approach to creating a digitally designed community mural, teaching them about community empowerment, education and development through direct experience. In this process, artistic and collaborative goals are merged with the social goals of dialogic community art work. In this case, also, a range of collaborative groups formed and functioned, utilizing a variety of structures, and produced both conceptual and material results.

**The Artworld Perspective**

Although there was a common willingness to question the autonomy of art, the role of the artist in society, and definitions of collaboration at these study sites, the artist-teachers and artist-learners approached artistic collaboration with different motivations and these various motivations determined who participated and how the participation was structured, as well as the form of the work and final output.

For example, small group object-centered collaborations in Room 13 and BMM, tended to exhibit the characteristics of object-centered collaborations in the artworld. Their intention was to present a personal or combined vision in a visual form that was meant to embody meaning, which a viewer could perceive when contemplating the work. Although the artist-learners in Room 13 tended to think of their art work as the creation of expressive physical art objects, they were not entrenched in traditional views of the artist, and freely chose to collaborate (or not). The collaborations that occurred there seemed more authentic than some of the assigned collaborations at the other sites, since collaborators came together out of mutual interest in some aspect of their work. This lends support to the view of Room 13 itself as a social sculpture, a dialogic collaboration.
aimed at transforming perspectives about art. Both the artist-learners and the artist-teachers spoke of Room 13 as an organic whole, not separating artmaking activities from the collaborative democratic organization and management of their studio.

In contrast to this, participants in BMM were sometimes assigned to their small group collaborations and therefore had to work through differences in viewpoints in order to complete their task. In this case, the resolution of difference through dialogue was an integral aspect of the collaborative endeavor, which is motivated by a desire to promote inclusion and appreciation of diversity. Although the focus of the collaboration is the production of a visual object, form and process are intertwined, with an emphasis on democratic dialogue and interaction.

In these BMM small-group collaborations, participants successfully used dialogue to negotiate artistic and aesthetic decisions and arrive at a common goal. However, the artist-teacher, who also helped to keep the project moving along on track, set the artistic objectives for the work. Similarly, in Room 13, collaborations with a leader focused on the outcome were more likely to be carried through to completion than collaborations that had no clear focus and/or leader. However, some object-centered collaborations did proceed democratically to a successful conclusion.

Another difference between BMM and Room 13 is that Room 13 artists do not usually aim, as an entire group, to collaboratively produce a single physical art object, while BMM often does. This creates the need for a stronger leader in BMM, who can coordinate the efforts of the larger group, and maintain the group vision. However, it is interesting to note that even though the whole BMM group is collaborating on a task, the
class is frequently divided into dyadic or triadic subgroups working on portions of the larger task. This is consistent with the idea that collaboration occurs best through dialogic interaction within small groups (Farrell, 2001). According to the artist-teacher in BMM, the dialogic process accounts for the major portion of the work that occurs at the site, while the material outcome represents only one third of the actual art work.

The creation of physical art objects functioned as a focal point for the transformative interactions that occurred in Room 13 and BMM, but the EKE differed from this, in that the art work primarily assumed the form of human interaction, with physical objects functioning as accessories to this ephemeral work. In addition, the work that occurred in the EKE privileged open ideas about form, a focus on being-together, and the construction of various situations and events—all aspects of relational collaborations. The size and functioning of groups in the EKE varied according to the task, with the artist-teachers assuming strong leadership roles at times, especially when the entire group was working together. This leadership was essential as the artist-teachers maintained the direction and objectives of the work.

Despite these differences, at all three sites the participants value some form of exhibition of the work that they produce. In all cases, deadlines for exhibitions or ribbon-cutting ceremonies provided impetus that propelled the work forward. Although deadlines and exhibitions are also important to individual artists, it may be that they assume added weight in collaborations, as the group must come together for work to proceed. BMM tends to show its work in community settings, while Room 13 and the EKE favor artworld settings; however the social sharing of the group’s work with the
larger community was a necessary completion of the work and a source of pride to the participants.

**The Educational/Innovative Perspective**

The approach to teaching and learning at all three sites is grounded in constructivist learning theory, which sees learning as an active social process, with the teacher functioning as a facilitator to the acquisition of knowledge. Knowledge is seen as situated; it is dependent upon the learning context. Artist-learners create knowledge about artistic practice by working as artists. In Room 13 the pedagogical approach of the artist-teachers exemplifies situated cognitive theory with its emphasis on real-world relevance, artistic and academic volition, deep thinking and reflection. The artist-teachers played a key role in empowering students to make their own artistic and academic decisions, to think consciously and critically about their own and other artists’ choices, and to continually reflect upon the results of their actions. In both the EKE and BMM, the artist-teachers assumed a greater role in structuring the artistic problems that each group addressed and the processes that they used, thereby providing fewer opportunities for the students to discover their own joint problems or to devise their own processes for creating solutions. In BMM, there was a continuing emphasis on group dialogue and decision-making, which tended to reinforce positive interdependence, while promoting critical thinking. These differences in pedagogical approaches are related to the motivation for and intent of the collaborative situation, which will be addressed in more detail in a later section of this chapter.
Community of Practice

The concept of a community of practice is fundamental to developing an understanding of the teaching and learning at all three of these sites. Although some artistic collaborations, especially those that involve a group which has formed a collective persona, do take place within a community of practice, not all collaborations constitute such a community, because they do not all involve commitment to a sustained practice over time. In a community of artistic practice, group members share a passion for a particular practice or approach to artmaking and have a competence in or commitment to developing competence in this practice or approach. By working together over time, they develop a shared practice and learn from their interactions with each other. A motivating factor for learning within such a community of practice is the desire to become a more central participant in the community. In each of the cases in this study, the site presents the opportunity for participants to experience legitimate peripheral participation in a community of artistic practice.

This is most easily seen in Room 13 because the participants have the opportunity to be involved in the community over a prolonged period of time, for four years or more. During this time, they first experience the community as a curious outsider, and if desired, they can become increasingly involved in the community as they gain more competence in the domain of artistic practice by working with and learning from one another. The EKE also functioned as a community of practice, in which learning about artistic practice and artmaking as inquiry occurred as an outcome of the social interactions that constituted the EKE’s processes. A major difference between Room 13 and the EKE is that in Room 13, the community of practice is ongoing, with novices

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continually entering the periphery of the group. In the EKE, a core group of M.F.A.
students were already part of a community of practice, a group accustomed to working
primarily in isolated studio conditions, while developing their visual art practice through
common classes and group critiques. The insider/outsider situation, created by the influx
of novices from other disciplines entering at the same time, coupled with the shorter
duration of the situation, tended to make it harder for novices to become fully integrated.
In addition, the status of the EKE as a temporary community, like that of a relational
collaboration, did not invite the kind of commitment characteristic of a community of
practice. Similarly, the duration of BMM, though longer than most college classes, does
not immerse the students within the activities of a community of practice, rather, the class
functions as an introduction to the SPARC community of practice. Those students who
become committed to SPARC’s sphere of artistic activity, through participation in the
class, have the opportunity to take more advanced UCLA classes at SPARC and/or
become participants or supervisors in other SPARC projects, thereby moving toward the
center of the SPARC community of practice. In each case, increasing involvement in the
community of practice enhances learning.

What is gained by allowing/encouraging collaboration at these sites?

Certain benefits were experienced by at least some of the participants at these
sites, which can be grouped into three main categories: democratic social skills, critical
and creative thinking skills, and personal and artistic growth. In all three situations,
students worked together on common tasks, which gave them a chance to experience the
value of interdependence.
In Room 13 and BMM, artist-learners were provided with an opportunity to practice and learn democratic social skills. Working together on shared tasks, artist-learners developed the skill of listening carefully to each other, thereby discovering the limited nature of each individual’s perspective, and also the importance of each person’s contribution. By being encouraged to speak, students recognized the significance of their own contribution to the group’s endeavor, and were empowered to participate in the group in a meaningful way. Working and learning together to achieve common goals contributed to a sense of community and a recognition of common human interconnections that began within the community of practice but expanded out to include the larger community.

Participants in the EKE were encouraged to experience interconnection in a more intuitive and embodied way, largely through joint activities of speaking, listening, and moving. Although artist-learners contributed scripts for these actions, the artist-teachers assigned the ideas and topics for these scripts and most of the group time was spent enacting them, rather than critiquing or reflecting upon them. Some artist-learners found the experimental nature of these activities to be confusing and sought a less embodied experience of meaningfulness, while others found the class’s actions to be liberating and felt empowered to take greater risks in their own artistic practices as a result of their participation.

Because artist-learners involved in Room 13 and BMM were provided with a number of opportunities for critical dialogue about their ongoing work, they tended to develop a certain degree of tolerance for difference. They had the opportunity to benefit
from other perspectives, thereby broadening and deepening their ideas about art and life. In these contexts, letting go of concerns about authorship focused attention on the quality of the ideas being presented, rather than upon the origin or originality of those ideas. The open discussion and synthesis of various viewpoints contributed to an atmosphere where creative combination and recombination of ideas, images, and actions occurred quite naturally.

A similar creative synthesis of ideas and actions characterized the EKE, however the processes were significantly different. In the EKE, the artist-learners and artist-teachers put forth a wealth of ideas by approaching each assigned task from a number of different perspectives. A group process for coming to consensus was attempted at times, but was impractical because of the size of the group. As a result, the artist-teachers tended to direct the creative synthesis of ideas with the artist-learners contributing and bearing witness to this process.

Artist-learners in Room 13 felt that they made significant personal gains in self-confidence and self-reliance as well as in the abilities to formulate and clearly articulate their own views, both verbally and artistically. Because of these gains, they felt empowered to participate in the ongoing shaping and maintaining of the physical and social environment of their own Room 13 studio as well as the Room 13 International studio network. BMM participants felt similarly empowered and motivated to use their improved artistic and democratic social skills to facilitate community art work as a means to further social justice. The personal gains that EKE participants experienced included a renewed motivation and willingness to take risks in their own artistic practices, and the
ability to see the interconnections between their artistic and scholarly work, as well as insights about their own studio, scholarly and individual lives.

**Part 2**

**Implications for Art Classroom Practice**

My investigation of artistic collaboration at these three learning sites focuses attention on key issues that artist-teachers wishing to introduce collaboration into their classrooms will want to consider. Probably the most important factor to reflect upon is whether the educational and artistic philosophies, that underpin work in a particular classroom, are compatible with a collaborative approach to learning and artmaking. As previously mentioned, there must be openness to expanding traditional views of art, the role of the artist, and perceptions of artistic collaboration. In all three sites of this study, the artist-teachers embrace an approach to education that places social interaction at the center of the learning process and views learners as active participants in the construction of knowledge. Artist-teachers who espouse a more traditional view of learning, who see the teacher as the expert who transmits formal and technical knowledge to the learner, or those who view artistic creativity solely as an individualized endeavor, may have difficulty successfully integrating cooperative or collaborative methods into their classrooms. While this statement may seem laughably obvious, I make it in order to stress the point that it is important for educators to reflect upon their own attitudes, so as to be conscious of how these might impact attempted changes in practice. In the process of conducting this research, my own attitudes about artistic autonomy and creative activity have been transformed, and a similar openness to change may be necessary in order to successfully employ collaboration in classroom artmaking. Attempting to introduce
collaboration without developing an understanding of the philosophies and pedagogical
approaches involved will most likely lead to unsatisfactory results.

Artist-teachers may also need to restructure their methods of lesson planning and
assessment in order to orient them in the more process-based directions that artistic
collaboration requires. The high degree of autonomy regarding planning and evaluation
that the artist-teachers in this study enjoyed may not always be available. Because the
fluid nature of collaborative processes makes it difficult to precisely predict, quantify,
and assess all forms of knowledge gained, it is important for educators to identify
objectives for using collaboration and to provide a structured context within which
fundamental aspects of the collaborative process will occur. Aspects such as motivation,
team-building, integration of diverse viewpoints and conversational exchange and
dialogue must be valued as legitimate reasons for collaboration and must be included in
lesson design and assessment. These essential components of collaboration will not just
magically happen, but must be planned for and facilitated by the artist-teacher. In
attempting to provide an appropriate context for collaboration, the art educator should
consider a number of factors, including those just mentioned, which will be discussed in
the next section.

Issues of Collaboration for the Art Classroom

Motivation

The Artist-Teacher’s Motivation

In the discussion of contemporary artistic collaboration in Chapter 2, motivation
was found to be a significant factor, often determining whether or not to collaborate, with
whom to collaborate, the structure that the art work might utilize, and the form that the
final output might assume. Similarly, art educators should consider their own motives for introducing collaborative artmaking into the classroom, and their learning objectives, because these motivations will determine which processes need to be emphasized. For example, an art educator who wishes to comply with an administrator’s request for a number of gigantic cardboard robots for a school gala, might approach this project with his/her class as a collaboration of convenience or as a dialogic collaboration. In the first instance, the artist-teacher might design all of the robots, with the students learning specific artistic skills by helping to construct them in a hierarchically structured collaboration. The emphasis would be on artistic skill building and specific techniques would be presented and learned. In the second case, the students might learn the value of contributing to their school community, as well as democratic social skills and technical skills, by becoming more completely engaged in the planning of the gala through the collaborative design and creation of the robots. Team building, the recognition of the importance of each individual’s contribution to the larger community effort, and collaborative design processes would be stressed. In either case, the students would most likely enjoy the work and take pride in it, but the processes, learnings and outcomes would be different. So, as we have seen in this simple example, it is important for the artist-teacher to be clear about motivations for collaboration, because these motives will structure the learning activities and determine the outcomes. Motivations for collaboration that go beyond the artistic goals of the work, such as gaining democratic social skills, are important factors in the choice of collaborative modes and may also directly influence artist-learner motivations.
The Artist Learner’s Motivation

It is equally important for the artist-learners to be aware of the objectives for working collaboratively in artmaking. In the unique environment of Room 13, collaboration does appear to happen spontaneously and to grow organically, but this is not the case in most classrooms. If an artist-teacher wants to facilitate collaborative artmaking, it is crucial that she/he help the students understand and value the processes of working collaboratively, otherwise they may not be sufficiently motivated to contribute in meaningful ways, or to sustain their involvement in the group work. This happened with some of the dancers who dropped out of the EKE after the first quarter, either because of confusion about, or disagreement with the objectives of the class. And in Room 13, students are just as likely to spontaneously drop out of a collaborative endeavor, as they are to begin it, as is evidenced by the number of incomplete collaborative works standing about. Even those students who are motivated to work collaboratively are sometimes discouraged by the inefficiency of the process and the conflicts that tend to arise. In BMM, it was necessary for the instructors to reawaken the motivation and commitment of the students at the end of the first quarter, in order to move the students on, into the next section of the class. Because the first quarter had been spent laying the foundation for collaborative artmaking by developing digital artistic skills and by engaging in team building activities, some students were discouraged, like the dancers in the EKE, by the length of the process and the as-yet intangible collaborative product. Students who are aware of the objectives of working collaboratively and have consciously decided to invest themselves in the collaborative endeavor are more likely to experience the benefits of working in this manner.
Materiality

The artist-teacher must also consider whether it is important for the collaborative artistic endeavor to have a material outcome. Although dialogic interaction constituted a major part of the collaborative work at all three study sites, it is interesting to note the role that material objects played. In the EKE, material objects were insignificant as the collaborative inquiry focused on the more ephemeral acts of speaking, listening and moving. The digital murals being created in BMM were integral to the process, providing a focal point for the interaction and learning that occurred by eliciting deep-felt beliefs and attitudes. Likewise, material art objects provided the impetus and focus of the collaborations that the students considered to be art work in Room 13. In this situation, both artist-teachers and artist-learners valued the processes involved in maintaining the collaborative studio, however, the artist-learners invariably assumed that art objects were the focus of all questions about artistic collaboration. The importance of materiality is related to the expectations of the learning group and may also be connected to the developmental level of the students.

For example, I once observed an elementary classroom, where the teacher was facilitating a group interpretation of a work of art. In the middle of the discussion, an impatient third-grader stood up and shouted in desperation, “When are we going to make art? This is supposed to be an art class!” In many schools, the students see the “hands-on” aspect of the art class as one of its primary values. If this sensual and material aspect of the art experience, which is so valued by the children, is missing from the collaborative work, they may not be able to understand, appreciate, or be motivated to contribute to the work. In addition, the importance of a material outcome to the collaborative work may be
related to factors other than age. It may also be related to the original impetus for engaging in the collaborative work. The mural in BMM, in addition to providing a focus for interactions, also afforded the community with material evidence of the collaborative processes and the dialogic transformations that had transpired. Regardless of the age of the participants, the issue of materiality should be examined in relation to the purpose of the collaboration.

*Real World Relevance*

The artist-learners at all three of these learning sites valued the real world relevance of their work. The importance of making connections between the art work that students produce and the real world is a significant issue for any classroom artmaking, however, the effectiveness of a collaborative endeavor may be dependent upon how this issue is addressed. Real world connections should be considered, not only in the conception of the work, but also in its disposition. The artist-learners in this study aspired to exhibit their work, whether tangible or intangible, in real world settings, either within the artworld or in the community. Since sole authorship is often eschewed in a collaborative endeavor, the disposition or exhibition of the work assumes importance for all of the collaborators, as part of the recognition of their participation in the work. Although disposition of the work is also important to individual authors, ownership provides individuals with future opportunities for the kinds of recognition that exhibition affords. Because participants generally do not assume ownership of ephemeral art work or of physical art objects created by a collaborative endeavor, the exhibition of the work may assume greater importance. In BMM, for example, an inauguration or ribbon-cutting ceremony is considered essential to celebrate each of the works produced.
**Authorship and Recognition**

In addition to the exhibition and disposition of the work, the artist-teacher must consider other issues of recognition for collaborative contributions, as well as issues of authorship. This may be especially important in those school classrooms where the disciplinary structure and success of the class may be largely dependent upon individually assigned grades or the recognition that sole authorship brings. Although students entered the study sites knowing that collaborative processes would be employed, this may not always be the case. Regardless of foreknowledge, if an important goal of artistic collaboration is for students to learn and value the collaborative process, and not just the product that is produced, then the artist-teacher may want to consider how this might be reflected in the informal interactions, grading system and assessment procedures.

The classroom situations in this study were somewhat unique with regard to evaluation and assessment. In Room 13, evaluation of collaborative endeavors occurred in an ongoing formative dialogical manner, with no grades or final assessments necessary, as the studio exists outside of the regular classroom structure. In BMM, interpretive discussions of finished work and ongoing dialogues about works-in-progress, as well as reflective dialogues regarding collaborative processes, served to help the students value the process as well as the product. In both the EKE and BMM, evaluation was downplayed and grades were based upon participation in class work and completion of assignments, so pressure to evaluate or justify evaluations was not significant.

If a more traditional grading system is required, the artist-teacher may want to consider how valuing the collaborative process, by including it in the assessment, may
affect the project. It may be important, in providing for assessment of the collaborative process, not just to offer a summative evaluation, but also to encourage ongoing student reflection upon the collaborative process, including student contributions to it. For example, students might be asked to perform both formative and summative self, peer, and group assessments. In this way, it might be possible to avoid a problem common in cooperative learning, identified as “social loafing”, where one or more members of the group reduce their productivity when working in a group (North, Linley, & Hargreaves, 2000). Studies have shown that groups that expect each member to be evaluated individually are more productive (Sawyer, 2007), because those individuals who tend to be non-productive can be held accountable for their actions. The students, as active learners, can observe, evaluate, and modify their own group processes as an integral and ongoing part of the unit. Although I did not observe participants at the study sites engaging in group reflexivity regarding the effectiveness of the collaborative processes employed, research has emphasized the importance of collective reflection on group objectives and processes (Levine & Moreland, 2004).

Processes

Valuing the integration of diverse viewpoints is inherent in the teaching and assessment of group processes and is essential to many collaborative endeavors. In fact, how the artist-teacher and artist-learners approach the challenge of recognizing and valuing difference may have a significant impact on the effectiveness of the collaboration. Because of this, group formation, leadership, team building and group dialogue deserve particular attention.
Group Formation

The type of collaborative team that is formed and the kind and amount of team-building that is required also depend upon the motivation for the artistic collaboration. For example, a hierarchical collaboration, such as our hypothetical artist-directed robot construction, will require only willing subjects who are able to receive and carry out instructions regarding particular artistic techniques, while working together with others in an amiable fashion. However, a collaboration where it is expected that artist-learners will collaboratively solve an artistic problem or collaboratively find and solve an artistic problem will require a different kind of team, and a greater focus on team-building. As the psychologist Keith Sawyer (2007) has pointed out, “Putting people into groups isn’t a magical dust that makes everyone more creative. It has to be the right kind of group, and the group has to match the nature of the task” (p. 73). For this reason, the artist-teacher may want to carefully consider group formation.

Group formation is a complex issue, as different types of collaborative groups may be more effective for different tasks. Research on cooperative learning supports the educational value of heterogeneous groupings as this exposes the students to different, ideas, backgrounds, and experiences (Barkley, Dross, & Major, 2005). However, research in collaborative artmaking has found that artists who work together do so because they share common concerns and commitments (Butler, 2001), or share a common vision, and that this common vision contributes significantly to the group work (Farrell, 2001). Other researchers suggest that the amount and type of diversity in a collaborative innovative group are important and have found that similarity in group members’ life stage, status,
values, and interaction style can facilitate cooperation while diversity in knowledge can stimulate group creativity (Levine & Moreland, 2004; C. Smith, 1997).

If the primary objectives for a collaborative endeavor involve gaining appreciation of differences, as well as learning group processes, such as problem-solving and coming to consensus, it may be most effective to use heterogeneous groupings—based on some relevant criteria—at least for establishing a knowledge base for the project. The artist-teachers in BMM, established heterogeneous groupings as students were beginning to collaborate, in what they termed a “clique-breaking strategy”, in order to pair artist-learners that did not already know each other (C. Rogel, personal communication, December 4, 2007). It might also be beneficial to create homogeneous groups or to allow some autonomy in grouping for some collaborative art-making tasks, as frequently happened in the spontaneous collaborations of Room 13, otherwise the groups might needlessly struggle to discover a common vision, or to synthesize widely differing perspectives.

Similarly, as we have discussed previously, group size can have a significant impact on the effectiveness or structure of the group. If the group is too large, democratic processing becomes impractical; if only small groups are used, the flow of creative ideas may be impacted. Cooperative learning research suggests that in terms of active participation a group size of four or five is optimal (Kealy, 1995). At the study sites, flexible attitudes with regard to group size and structure prevail, and this mutability may be a necessary aspect of collaborative artmaking. However, group formation is an
important issue and the artist-teacher should make conscious decisions about how group size and structure will be determined, rather than taking a non-directive approach.

Leadership

The question of how much control over group structure and processes the artist-teacher should exert is also an important one. Despite the differences in contexts and the range of collaborative situations in this study, artist-teachers at all of the sites felt that a successful artistic collaboration requires effective leadership. What they meant by effective was expressed slightly differently. A common theme was that an effective leader has a sense of purpose about the work and is able to communicate that to the rest of the group. For example, Claire Gibb said that it tends to work best, when one artist, the originator of an idea, takes charge from start to finish, otherwise the collaboration has a tendency to lose direction and when that happens, everyone loses interest (Personal communication, September 11, 2007). Michael Mercil also emphasized the need for direction and saw the role of leadership as essential, but felt that the leadership role could shift during the collaborative process (Personal communication, July 19, 2007). Judith Baca talked about the need to understand and make use of peoples’ best skills in a collaboration, and felt that one person had to have an overall vision, for the collaborative work to come together (Personal communication, December 6, 2007). Each collaborative situation may require a different type of leadership, which is related to the intent and the purpose of the collaboration, however, effective leaders commonly keep the project moving through goal setting and facilitation of decision-making (Parker, 1994).

Since the collaborative process itself is fluid and mutable, it is important for the leadership to remain flexible. At times the leader may need to take or accept
responsibility for the group, while at other times it may be important to merge into and identify with the group. I witnessed this shape-shifting on the part of the artist-teachers at all of the sites in this study, however the extent to which they practiced it depended upon their own personalities, the goals of the collaboration, and the needs of the artist-learners. Since the success of a collaborative endeavor may well depend upon the compatibility of these factors, the artist-teacher will need to appraise them thoughtfully. If, for example, an artist-teacher does not want to relinquish control over style and form, then it would most likely not be productive to attempt a democratic collaboration.

Mutuality/Equality/Democracy

This raises the significant question: Just how important is the concept of democracy to collaboration? Once again, the answer to this question depends upon the motivations and goals for working collaboratively. In a complementary, hierarchically structured collaboration, egalitarianism is not important, probably not even desirable, since the focus is on production of a work of art that presents a singular voice or vision to the world. However, an integrative artistic collaboration, where the participants are striving for a common voice and intersubjective creativity, is firmly rooted in equality and interdependence. Such integrative creative collaborations have been described as “webs of voluntary, mutual responsibility” where people work together as equals focused on a common goal (Bennis & Biederman, 1997, p. 19). Many artistic collaborators who work in this manner stress the importance of equality, mutual respect, and consensus throughout the collaborative process. In these types of collaborations form and process are often merged or intertwined, therefore parity is integral to both artmaking and collaboration.
**Team Building**

Building mutual respect, a sense of equality and the ability to come to consensus is an important task for the artist-teacher in an integrative collaboration. To do this, the artist-teacher must promote a sense of belonging, and an appreciation for the uniqueness of every member of the group and the value that they can add to the collaboration. Exercises like the BMM “epiphany” activity, that invite appropriate self-disclosure, or the numerous group activities of the EKE are useful in contributing to a growing sense of community. Successful group leaders also understand the human need for meaningfulness and find ways to imbue the group’s efforts with a sense of purpose (Bennis & Biederman, 1997; Wenger, 2008).

**Communication**

The most common tool for establishing a sense of purpose and constructing meaning in any educational situation is language, and both artist-teachers and artist-learners at the sites in this study repeatedly stressed the significance of verbal communication. Previously, I have discussed the use and importance of conversational exchange, critical discourse and dialogue at the sites in this study and in all types of artistic collaborations, but it is necessary to stress again the crucial role of dialogue in both cooperative learning and collaborative artmaking. Any artist-teacher contemplating collaborative classroom work should consider what will be communicated and how it will be communicated, as well as what will not communicated and why—all of these factors will affect the collaborative process and the learning that occurs. In speaking about the importance of dialogue, Carlos Rogel said that dialogue was important to collaboration, but that other factors such as body language, imagery, and the “state of being confused...
together” were also important (Personal communication, December 4, 2007). He feels that an essential aspect of collaboration is that the group must face a common dilemma together. It is through experiencing this “state of being confused together” and dialoging about it, that they can come to understand their common human condition, transcend differences and learn to work together to resolve the dilemma.

**Conclusion**

Humanity today faces a common dilemma, one that will increasingly require the innovative collaborative efforts of our finest minds, if we are to resolve it. If innovation is being encouraged anywhere in our schools, it is in the art classroom, but the kind of creativity promoted is usually embedded in possessive ideas of authorship and individualism. If we are to meet the innovative demands of the future, then art educators can contribute by beginning to reinvent art classroom relations. This requires not just the simple addition of a new artmaking method, but rather a restructuring of the pedagogical situation from “education as a practice of domination” to “education as a practice of freedom” (Freire, 1970, p. 69). Artist-teachers in such a situation will not seek to transmit art-related information and skills to artist-students, but instead, will favor an interactive and interdependent kind of exchange. Basing their interactions on trust in the mutual desire to grow, artist-teachers and artist-learners would work together to explore ways that, through art, they might extend their understanding of themselves and their world, and might consider how the use and creation of visual forms might encourage such learning. Such a pedagogical practice might itself be considered collaboration and such a group might become a creative learning community.
Working within such a community, artist-learners might be encouraged to become conscious of the ways that, as Nancy (1991) suggests, our identities are constantly being formed and reformed by the experiences that we have with others. In developing an understanding of how one’s identity is formed, one also realizes that it can be reformed. And in realizing that one’s relationships with others are created or invented, it’s possible to see that they can be reinvented. In uncovering the mythical nature of the stories that we identify people by, and live by, perhaps we can learn to invent new stories that will lead to more sustainable societies (Carter, 2004).

Working in collaboration can provide a context for such reinvention, a context for social and personal growth. While such growth can occur without collaboration, collaborative groups can have profound effects on individuals, helping them to develop the skills and psychological resources that they need to do creative work. And collaboration can have profound effects on the group, as group members begin to envision themselves as thinkers who can explore ideas together, discuss and develop a new vision, and support each other in implementing it.

In this report on the research conducted at these sites, it has not been my intention to present collaboration as a problem-free solution to issues related to an exclusive focus on individualism in art education. Individualized artmaking continues to dominate both the artworld and the world of art education. However, I set out to explore an alternative, to try to understand the motivations of artist-teachers and artist-learners who are choosing to collaborate in contemporary classrooms, and to explore the processes and issues
involved. This investigation has opening my thinking to consideration of artistic collaboration as a viable process and pedagogical approach in the art classroom.

The kind of artistic collaboration that I see as valuable for the classroom is not a smooth, linear process; conflicts and tensions are an inevitable part of human beings working together. After all, inherent in the idea of democracy is the possibility of antagonism. Consensus is not always possible, perhaps not even desirable; yet the possibility for tolerance exists. Learning to voice and recognize differences are important steps toward being able to accept them. Collaborative artmaking in the classroom can be a part of coming to know oneself ethically, in relation to others, where the work is both the process and the product, where the conceptual or material nature of the art work necessitates developing workable social relations that are open, flexible, and subject to reinvention.
REFERENCES


Lane, D. R. (2008). Teaching skills for facilitating team-based learning. New Directions for Teaching and Learning, 106


Roberts, T. An interpretive investigation of untitled # 22, a photograph by tim roda. Unpublished manuscript.


Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Forms (Selected)
April 21, 2009

Protocol Number: 2007B0125
Protocol Title: COLLABORATION IN CONTEMPORARY ARTMAKING: PRACTICE AND PEDAGOGY, Sydney Walker, Teresa Roberts, Art Education.
Type of Review: Continuing Review—Expedited
IRB Staff Contact: Jacob R. Stoddard
Phone: 614-292-0526
Email: stoddard.13@osu.edu

Dear Dr. Walker,

The Behavioral IRB APPROVED BY EXPEDITED REVIEW the above referenced protocol. The Board was able to provide expedited approval under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1) because the research presents minimal risk to subjects and qualifies under the expedited review category(s) listed below.

Date of IRB Approval: April 16, 2009
Date of IRB Approval Expiration: April 16, 2010
Expedited Review Category: 7

In addition, the protocol has been reapprroved for the inclusion of children (permission of one parent sufficient).

If applicable, informed consent (and HIPAA research authorization) must be obtained from subjects or their legally authorized representatives and documented prior to research involvement. The IRB-approved consent form and process must be used. Changes in the research (e.g., recruitment procedures, advertisements, enrollment members, etc.) or informed consent process must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented (except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects). This approval is valid for one year from the date of IRB review when approval is granted or modifications are required. The approval will no longer be in effect on the date listed above as the IRB expiration date. A Continuing Review application must be approved within this interval to avoid expiration of IRB approval and cessation of all research activities. A final report must be provided to the IRB and all records relating to the research (including signed consent forms) must be retained and available for audit for at least 3 years after the research has ended.

It is the responsibility of the investigator to promptly report to the IRB any serious, unexpected and related adverse events or potential unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

This approval is issued under The Ohio State University’s OHBP Federally Assured #00006378.
All forms and procedures can be found on the ORBP website - www.orbp.osu.edu. Please feel free to contact the IRB staff contact listed above with any questions or concerns.

Shari R. Speer, PhD, Chair
Behavioral and Social Sciences Institutional Review Board

Exp Approval New CR
Version 11/21/06

255
May 21, 2008

Protocol Number: 2007IRB0125
Protocol Title: COLLABORATION IN CONTEMPORARY ARTMAKING: PRACTICE AND PEDAGOGY, Sydney Walker, Teresa Roberts, Art Education.
Type of Review: Continuing Review—Expedited
IRB Staff Contact: Jacob R. Stoddard
Phone: 614-292-0526
Email: stoddard.13@osu.edu

Dear Dr. Walker,

The Behavioral IRB APPROVED BY EXPEDITED REVIEW the above referenced protocol. The Board was able to provide expedited approval under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1) because the research presents minimal risk to subjects and qualifies under the expedited review category(s) listed below.

Date of IRB Approval: May 19, 2008
Date of IRB Approval Expiration: May 19, 2009
Expedited Review Category: 7

In addition, the protocol has been reapproved for the inclusion of children (permission of one parent sufficient).

If applicable, informed consent (and HIPAA research authorization) must be obtained from subjects or their legally authorized representatives and documented prior to research involvement. The IRB-approved consent form and process must be used. Changes in the research (e.g., recruitment procedures, advertisements, enrollment numbers, etc.) or informed consent process must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented (except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects).

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It is the responsibility of the investigator to promptly report to the IRB any serious, unexpected and related adverse events or potential unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

This approval is issued under The Ohio State University’s OHRP Federally Assurance #00006378. All forms and procedures can be found on the ORRP website – www.orrp.osu.edu. Please feel free to contact the IRB staff contact listed above with any questions or concerns.

Shari R. Speer, PhD, Chair
Behavioral and Social Sciences Institutional Review Board

Exp Approval New CR
Dear Dr. Walker,

The Behavioral IRB APPROVED BY EXPEDITED REVIEW the above referenced protocol. The Board was able to provide expedited approval under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1) because the research presents minimal risk to subjects and qualifies under the expedited review category(s) listed below.

Date of IRB Approval: June 27, 2007
Date of IRB Approval Expiration: June 8, 2008
Expeditied Review Category: 6,7

In addition, the protocol is approved for the inclusion of children (permission of one parent sufficient).

If applicable, informed consent (and HIPAA research authorization) must be obtained from subjects or their legally authorized representatives and documented prior to research involvement. The IRB-approved consent form and process must be used. Changes in the research (e.g., recruitment procedures, advertisements, enrollment numbers, etc.) or informed consent process must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented (except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects).

This approval is valid for one year from the date of IRB review when approval is granted or modifications are required. The approval will no longer be in effect on the date listed above as the IRB expiration date. A Continuing Review application must be approved within this interval to avoid expiration of IRB approval and cessation of all research activities. A final report must be provided to the IRB and all records relating to the research (including signed consent forms) must be retained and available for audit for at least 3 years after the research has ended.

It is the responsibility of the investigator to promptly report to the IRB any serious, unexpected and related adverse events or potential unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

This approval is issued under The Ohio State University’s OHRP Federalwide Assurance #00006378. All forms and procedures can be found on the ORRP website – www.orrp.osu.edu. Please feel free to contact the IRB staff contact listed above with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Shari R. Speer, PhD, Chair
Behavioral and Social Sciences Institutional Review Board
Room 13 HQ
C/o Lochyside Primary School, Fort William, Scotland, UK, PH33 7NX
Tel/Fax: 01397703377

May 12, 2007

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to inform you that Teresa Roberts, a graduate student, and Sydney Walker, an associate professor, from the Department of Art Education at The Ohio State University, have my support in conducting research titled *Collaboration in Contemporary Artmaking: Practice and Pedagogy* at Room 13, Lochyside, where I am the Artist-in-Residence. I understand that the data from this research will be used for dissertation purposes and for publication in academic journals.

I have agreed to grant Teresa Roberts access to Room 13 to observe normal studio activities and to administer a survey and conduct interviews with volunteers. All participants in the research will complete appropriate consent forms. As Teresa will only be able to visit for one week, I have agreed to assist by passing out informational letters and parental consent forms before her visit. Teresa’s contact information will be provided in the letters, so that any parent or student with questions about the research can contact Teresa. The students will return signed consent forms to a locked box and Teresa will collect these forms when she arrives in Scotland.

She has explained that research subjects, should they choose to be part of the study, will not be required to participate in anything outside of normal class times. Subjects will not be identified in field notes and documents by name, and will not be identified, quoted, or audio taped unless they have explicitly agreed to being audio taped. If they choose not to give their consent, there is no penalty and they can withdraw their consent at anytime.

Should you have any questions about my support of this research, you can contact me via email at management@room13scotland.com.

Sincerely,

Claire Gibb
Artist in Residence
Room 13 Lochyside

Natalie Brayshaw
Managing Director
Room 13 Lochyside

Cc: Miss V Smith, Headteacher, Lochyside RC Primary School
# TITLE PAGE - APPLICATION FOR EXEMPTION
FROM REVIEW BY THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
The Ohio State University, Columbus OH 43210

For office use only

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 2007F03.39

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For Office Use Only

☑ Approved. Research has been determined to be exempt under these categories: 2
Research may begin as of the date of determination listed below.

☐ Disapproved. The proposed research does not fall within the categories of exemption. Submit an application to the appropriate Institutional Review Board for review.

Date of determination: 4/26/07 Signature: [Signature]
Office of Responsible Research Practice

259
To Whom It May Concern,

We are writing to inform you that Teresa Roberts, a graduate student, and Sydney Walker, an associate professor, from the Department of Art Education at The Ohio State University, has our support in conducting research titled Collaboration in Contemporary Artmaking: Practice and Pedagogy in a seminar which we teach at The Ohio State University. We understand that the data from this research will be used for dissertation purposes and for publication in academic journals.

We have agreed to grant Teresa Roberts access to the seminar to observe normal class activities and to recruit survey and interview volunteers. As part of the research, Teresa Roberts plans to observe the seminar during class meeting times taking notes on curricula, instructional techniques and their effectiveness, and other class activities. In addition, she will administer a survey to volunteers from the class and interview students and faculty who volunteer.

She has explained that research subjects, should they choose to be part of the study, will not be required to participate in anything outside of normal class times. Subjects will not be identified in field notes and documents by name, and will not be identified, quoted, or audio taped unless they have explicitly agreed to being audio taped and to the release of material on audiotapes. If they choose not to give their consent, there is no penalty and they can withdraw their consent at anytime.

Should you have any questions about our support of this research, you can contact us at The Ohio State University, Department of Art, 146 Hopkins Hall, 128 North Oval Mall, 292-5072, or at ahamilt@columbus.rr.com or mercil.1@osu.edu.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Michael Mercil and Ann Hamilton
Associate Professor and Professor
Department of Art

art.osu.edu
# Title Page - Application for Exemption

**From Review by the Institutional Review Board**
The Ohio State University, Columbus OH 43210

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| Source of Funding     | N/A                       |

**For Office Use Only**

☑ Approved. Research has been determined to be exempt under these categories: #2. Research may begin as of the date of determination listed below.

☑ Disapproved. The proposed research does not fall within the categories of exemption. Submit an application to the appropriate Institutional Review Board for review.

**Date of determination: 9/11/07**

Signature: Janet A. Schulte, Office of Responsible Research Practices
August 28, 2007

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to inform you that Teresa Roberts, a graduate student, and Sydney Walker, an associate professor, from the Department of Art Education at The Ohio State University, have my support in conducting research titled "Collaboration in Contemporary Artmaking: Practice and Pedagogy" in a class that I teach at the University of California, Los Angeles. I understand that the data from this research will be used for dissertation purposes and for publication in academic journals.

Because I believe that studying the activities of this class might contribute to the existing knowledge about contemporary artmaking, and in particular artistic collaboration, I have agreed to grant Teresa Roberts access to the class to observe normal class activities and to recruit survey and interview volunteers. As part of the research, Teresa Roberts plans to observe the seminar during class meeting times taking notes on curricula, instructional techniques and other class activities. In addition, she will administer a survey to volunteers from the class and interview volunteers.

She has explained that research subjects, should they choose to be part of the study, will not be required to participate in anything outside of normal class times. Subjects will not be identified in field notes and documents by name, and will not be identified, quoted, or audio taped unless they have explicitly agreed to being audio taped and to the release of material on audiocassettes. If they choose not to give their consent, there is no penalty and they can withdraw their consent at anytime.

Should you have any questions about my support of this research, you can contact me at the UCLA/SPARC Cesar Chavez Digital/Mural Lab, 685 Venice Blvd., Venice, CA 90291, 310/822-9560 x14 or at judybaca@ucla.edu.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Judith F. Baca
UCLA Department of Chicana/o Studies UCLA
World Arts and Culture Department Founder
Artistic Director of SPARC and the UCLA/SPARC Cesar Chavez Digital/Mural Lab.