Artistic Practice and Community Process: The Irreduceability of Relationship through Spiritualism in Community-Based Art Education

Dissertation

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By

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Bill Taylor, Ed. D., present in spirit
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Abstract

This participatory action research study was conducted to question, articulate and acknowledge a relationship between spirituality and education through researching spiritual components of community-based art. Building on Daniel’s (2006, 2011) concept of spirit work as a component of a community act—a component serving to promote agency through honoring the wholeness of the individual in mind, body and spirit—I sought to demystify the concept of spirituality as intangible or nebulous by seeking behavioral evidence through my involvement in the creation of a community mural. Theory grounded spirituality in demonstrable actions bound in relationship and served as the underpinning for linking behaviors to spirituality, thus defining spirit as praxis, while also highlighting the social and relational nature of learning.

The site for this research chose me. I was asked to collaborate in creating a mural that transformed the perceptions of a space by those living in and looking in to the neighborhood. The goal—in addition to the visual transformation of the physical space—was to mentor neighborhood youth in the development, application and translation of artistic skills towards potential employment in a quickly gentrifying neighborhood. As can happen in community-based work—because of its emergent and process orientation—our mural plans shifted. We were asked to create a mural for the
Obama presidential campaign, which we did to great success and despite the lack of participation by the youth for whom we had planned this project. The mural we originally planned to create did not materialize.

And yet, what might be deemed a failure by some proved to be the source for deep learning through the relational, process-oriented nature of the community work. What emerged was a distinction between social and material realms, requiring different ways of relating, understanding, navigating and negotiating (Kaplan, 2002; Kestor, 2004) and the recognition that learning to relationally navigate the social realm promotes self-empowerment and social change in a just manner. I suggest that this relational way of understanding, acting and responding is in fact the underpinning—the methodology—of living a spiritual life, and one that offers avenues for resolving the issues found in the material realm.

The results of this research suggest supporting the further development of holistic educational practices, with art education at the forefront of this, as the skills-based practices support the development of intuitive and relational ways of knowing in counterpoint to reductionist ways that largely define educational systems today. Furthermore, the dialogic practices found in contemporary art (Kestor, 2004) offer imaginative avenues for addressing social transformation and can be translated into educational practices.
Dedication

For Janill, a Bodhisattva,
and
Kristy, a lotus blossom
Acknowledgements

The complexity and multi-faceted quality of community-based work is difficult to properly reflect within a document of sole authorship. So many have provided me with information, insight, assistance and laughter, leading to this experience being a significant journey, and one I am, indeed, blessed to have had. I offer my gratitude to the following, reflecting their gifts to me:

Julius .........................................................................................................................................................Trickster
Buzz.........................................................................................................................................................Spirit, Trickster
Dr. Vesta Daniel.................................................................................................................................Community, Empathy
Dr. Karen Hutzel.......................................................................................................................................Clarity
Dr. Bill Taylor, RIP.....................................................................................................................................Compass, Spirit
Dr. Clayton Funk.........................................................................................................................................Grace
Kristy.........................................................................................................................................................Heart, Process
Janill............................................................................................................................................................Healing, Heart, Home
Dave & Selma............................................................................................................................................Perseverance
Christina.......................................................................................................................................................Laughter, Light
Toni..............................................................................................................................................................Family
Gabor, Dale, John, Joe...........................................................................................................................Joy, Poetry, Art, Music, Entertainment
Paul Michael..............................................................................................................................................Sazeracs
Weinland Park (and the fabulous Godman Guild).................................................................................Community
Hilltop, USA................................................................................................................................................Community
Friends at KTC...........................................................................................................................................Compassion
Stauf’s & Cup O’ Joe...............................................................................................................................Tea, camaraderie
Dr. Cynthia Dillard......................................................................................................................................Spirit, Inspiration
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Publications


Field of Study

Major Field: Art Education
Abstract.................................................................................................................................ii
Dedication.................................................................................................................................iv
Acknowledgments....................................................................................................................v
Vita.............................................................................................................................................vi
List of Figures (Images): ..........................................................................................................x

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION...................................................................................................1
   Purpose of the Study..................................................................................................................3
   Background to the Study.........................................................................................................4
   Time and Duration of the Study..............................................................................................7
   Setting of the Study................................................................................................................9
   Ethics and Politics of the Study..............................................................................................12
   Research Questions..............................................................................................................13
   Scope of the Study................................................................................................................14
   Limitations of the Study.......................................................................................................15
   Significance of the Study.....................................................................................................17

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW............................................................................................19
   Introduction............................................................................................................................19
   Organization of this Chapter.................................................................................................21
   Distinguishing Spirituality from Religion............................................................................22
   Defining Spirituality............................................................................................................23
   The Spiritual as Expressed in Art.........................................................................................26
      *Twentieth Century: Color...............................................................................................26
      *Twenty-first Century: Dialogue......................................................................................28
   Spirituality in Holistic Education.......................................................................................31
   The Visual Arts and Holistic Education..............................................................................32
   Re-envisioning Epistemology: Seeking Reflection.............................................................33
      *Bergsonian Metaphysics..................................................................................................34
List of Figures

Figure 1: Short North Jungle, Weinland Park, Columbus, Ohio...............................74

Figure 2: D & J Carry Out, 4th and 8th, Weinland Park, Columbus, Ohio...............88

Figure 3: Short North Wall, 4th and 11th, Weinland Park, Columbus, Ohio..........91

Figure 4: Obama campaign postcard, 2008.............................................................98

Figure 5: Other Paper magazine cover.................................................................99
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Imagine a multidimensional spider’s web in the early morning covered with dewdrops. And every dewdrop contains the reflection of all the other dewdrops. And, in each reflected dewdrop, the reflections of all the other dewdrops in that reflection. And so ad infinitum. That is the conception of the universe in an image.


This image, an ancient metaphor called Indra’s Net, serves as a defining metaphor in my life, looping again and again into awareness, limning layers of consciousness in its unfolding and reflecting both interconnectedness and interrelatedness. It places individuality in community, relationship acting as the medium; it speaks to a conscious deepening of relationship with self and, by extension, with the surrounding world, valuing life in its various manifestations. We could not exist and survive, were it not for our interrelatedness and interconnectedness.

This metaphor speaks of relationship on multiple levels and serves as a lens through which I approach life through an understanding of interconnectedness and interrelatedness. Furthermore, this metaphor conveys what I consider to be a missing link—relationship—in terms of the manner by which we engage, structure and make meaning in our lives. This understanding of existence as interrelated, and thereby expressed through relationship, is reflected by Dr. Martin Luther King’s words:
All I’m saying is simply this: that all mankind is tied together; all life is interrelated, and we are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. For some strange reason, I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be—this is the interrelated structure of reality (1965).

And yet, if we reflect on how we structure our surrounding environment and how it structures us, we see how we have labeled and categorized everything into a myriad of distinctions that form separate worlds. This promotes our ability to understand and control, but in doing so we also tend to lose sight that these worlds and distinctions we have created do affect and penetrate one another. As a result, there is an increasing sense of division and conflict (Kaplan, 2002). This occurs in our educational realm as well: we tend to privilege disciplines to the point of losing site of the commonalities and connections between them, although the recent rise in interdisciplinary and collaborative approaches in learning seeks to address this. We teach to the content rather than the learner. We promote individual autonomy in learning towards competitive ends; in art and art education, the focus tends to be on the individual artist exercising an individualistic conception of creativity.

There is evidence of a pedagogical shift under way, as the value of interdisciplinary approaches to learning is increasingly validated and the co-construction of knowledge acknowledged. If we are to survive this period of time in which capitalism and corporatization order our social structures (Marcuse, 1964) and wreak havoc on our civic health (Putnam, 2000), an emerging understanding of our mutual interdependence—one which places concepts of community at the
forefront—seems a worthwhile consideration and can serve, in fact, as a point of resistance (Nancy, 1991), thereby bringing transformation and change.

I am interested in articulating the spiritual components of community-based art, as I believe that doing so will again illuminate our interrelatedness, thereby developing our capacity to support one another in justice and equity. As a spiritual individual, educator and participant in community-based arts projects, I have come to believe—through this dissertation process, actually—that the act of acknowledging a centering in spirit creates the framework through which an individual is empowered to make greater meaning of a life lived through an understanding of the relational nature of it. In doing so, a greater sense of our interrelated collectivity emerges, with the empowered individual able to work intelligently and compassionately for social change. In our increasingly complex times, to do otherwise will prove to be our downfall. Creative practices, particularly those espoused through art and dialogue, can serve as the vehicle in reestablishing the necessary connections, by developing imagination and promoting possibility.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to articulate spirituality through concrete behaviors, through a community-based art framework as it unfolds in artistic practices. My intention in doing so is to utilize the results as they inform holistic, inclusive educational practices in a creative manner. This research builds on Daniel’s (2006) concept of spirit work as a component of a community act, with spirit serving to promote agency, honoring the wholeness of the individual—mind,
body and spirit—and therefore the diverse perspectives and ways of knowing for the collective good (p. 9-10).

A series of events—which I will go into in the background to this study—led me to want to demystify the concept of spirituality as intangible or nebulous by seeking behavioral evidence as it manifested through my direct participation in a community-based mural in Columbus, Ohio. By doing so, this research seeks to demonstrate spirituality as a conscious, active, relational engagement of one’s heart and mind with external reality towards collective good. This type of relational engagement transforms one’s inner and outer realities and is therefore a praxis-oriented process to addressing the complexities of life in a humane and socially just manner.

My hope is that these findings contribute to more holistic and democratic ways of teaching and learning, while also offering strategies that further support community-university partnerships through a deeper understanding of our interconnectedness.

**Background to the Study**

My choosing to address spirituality as a dissertation topic in art education is an unusual one, even within the context of community-based art, I’m told. It is generally not done unless the individual pursuing doctoral studies is a scholar in religious studies, or perhaps philosophy. The separation between church and state undoubtedly plays a role in the private nature of spirituality and the discomfort in addressing this concept, for many. I certainly compartmentalized my spiritual self,
rarely acknowledging it publicly—in part because to do so seemed disrespectful of something that was deeply private, but I also thought that spirituality was something that should be embodied and acted upon, rather than proselytized about.

It was through conversations with Dr. Bill Taylor, when taking his Spirituality in Education class, that I started considering the possibility that my own life could be better integrated. I realized that my deeply spiritual self was clearly private and partitioned off from the rest of my professional and extracurricular life, due to my following Buddhist, rather than Christian, traditions. I then questioned the possibility of articulating spirituality as a methodology for one’s life with my advisor, Dr. Vesta Daniel. Dr. Daniel’s response reflected her definition of spirituality as “spirit work:” an aspect of the community act and therefore not a methodology, although the active connotation of her definition implied an engaged, praxis-oriented spirituality, in my mind. Learning that the topic of spirituality is rarely discussed in art education, I chose—perhaps naively—to pursue this path. Once committed, it seemed that my intuition guided me, and synchronicity supported me. Dr. Taylor suggested I read Bergson’s (1913) metaphysical theory in laying a foundation for addressing spirituality within a creative and active, process-oriented context, as this theory did so. And a chance lecture I heard, given by Dr. Kasulis, linked Buddhist philosophy to metaphysical theory to lay the foundation by which I would ground the spiritual in the physical, through demonstrable behaviors.

I also had the good fortune to meet Dr. Cynthia Dillard in a digital storytelling course we both took. Dr. Dillard’s work is distinguished in articulating spirituality as a methodology in teaching and conducting research that is grounded in social justice
(2006, 2008). Both she and her work were tremendously inspiring and validating for me: despite our different sources—hers being rooted in African cosmology and DuBois’s “double consciousness,” whereas mine is rooted in Bergson’s metaphysics and Buddhist philosophy—I recognized the essence of a salient spirituality in academia, born of praxis towards social justice in her work.

My interest in community art and community-based art education was motivated by several factors: first, I sought to explore the tension between individual and collective by participating in something that allowed for learning on multiple levels through collective collaboration. It is both my belief and my experience that this type of engagement promotes deep personal learning and growth, in terms of identity and capacity-building, while also promoting an openness to adaptive and emergent paradigms that potentially bring about systemic change—even if only incrementally. In doing so, I sought to better understand community ways of knowing as they could inform institutionalized education, as my experience in teaching in K-12 public schools increasingly left me feeling that the standardization of our educational system—one still modeled on a modernist, industrialist society that no longer exists—held little relevance for the students I served. It did not prepare them for the postmodern-poststructuralist future they would be saddled with, and it did not support the development of personal identity and talents towards contribution within a democratic society; rather, students were taught skill sets for outdated and unfulfilling employment, resulting in their expressing concerns for their futures to me. Again, my hope is that these findings contribute to more holistic and democratic ways of teaching and learning.
**Time and Duration of the Study**

This study began in the summer of 2008 and ended in June of 2010. I was asked to provide artistic guidance to an emerging community-based project, fostered by three men addressing a community need for significant support in the maturation and skills development of the young men in the neighborhood. I collaborated with these community mentors in planning their community mural in the Weinland Park/Short North neighborhood of Columbus, Ohio. Our intention was to facilitate the creation of one mural as a pre-test to creating others throughout the neighborhood, the murals serving as an arts-based entrepreneurial program for the community’s young men. It soon became apparent that a more realistic approach to successfully supporting the young men’s transformation would be to construct a framework for offering relevant job skills—such as house painting, carpentry and construction—in light of the encroaching gentrification of the neighborhood. Thus, the goal of the mentors was to engage the neighborhood’s young men in meaningful, sustainable work; my role was to support them in the creative, artistic component of this venture.

During the summer, the group met twice a week at Julius’s place of employment, an OSU-affiliated halfway house for homeless youth in the neighborhood. I began attending the mentor meetings, at Julius’s request, to get to know the other mentors and strategize as to how we might pursue this mural project, in terms of funding, timeline, site approval, and similar logistical considerations. Late summer, Julius asked me to begin attending one of the twice-
weekly meetings they had been facilitating with the youth so that I could get to get to know them. I did so as a listener, for a month and then began co-facilitating that weekly meeting with Julius, to work with youth in planning the mural and developing their drawing skills. Julius continued to conduct the other meeting with the other mentors, focusing on life skills, job skills and male mentorship. Julius and I either met or talked throughout the week to update one another, coordinating and adjusting our planning. We also attended, with another of the mentors and occasionally a few of the youth, the monthly Weinland Park Civic Association meetings, of which Julius was Vice President.

Through a coincidence of friends eating lunch at a Short North establishment and discussing our mural, I was contacted by the Obama presidential campaign’s National Media Director. He was in the Ohio area documenting the barn murals for the campaign and sought what he referred to as “an urban counterpart” to the barn murals—would we be interested? After discussing this with the youth and received an affirmative response to doing this, we shifted our focus to creating this mural in a one-month time frame. In reality, the creation of this mural took five days, from beginning to end. A well-attended celebration followed two days later, replete with the appropriate politicians and extensive publicity throughout the campaign and election. We paused to gage the impact of our making this mural on the future direction of our work.

This mural pretest, which was completed at the end of September, 2008, never resulted in another mural—the original community mural—for reasons that will be explored further. We occasionally met to discuss and plan our next mural
project in the winter of 2009, considering the site, the acquisition of funding and materials, and the further development of art- and job-related skills. As none of the intended young men participated in the creation of the pre-test mural, we also discussed programming to engage neighborhood young men—this will also be discussed further. We continued to attend the monthly Weinland Park Civic Association meetings to retain community support and gain further insights and feedback into our ongoing plans for projects; we also met with a variety of community stakeholders throughout the duration of this collaboration, in an effort to garner further support towards developing an expanding program for neighborhood youth. Throughout the duration of this study, we, as mentors, worked closely and collaboratively, so as to adapt to the ever-evolving circumstances and continual changes of the neighborhood. My participation in this collaborative officially ended in the spring of 2010 when I moved from Columbus.

**Setting of the Study**

The Weinland Park community sits adjacent to The Ohio State University, a small, two-square mile area once referred to as “the most valuable piece of property that no one knows about,” as well as its “looking like Bagdad,” by OSU President Gee (Council of Graduate Students meeting, Winter 2008). These perceptions are rapidly changing now, with the neighborhood on the cusp of seeing better days through increasing revitalization. Once a thriving blue-collar neighborhood, it is currently a mixed-income, mixed-race community that is host to the largest parcel of Section 8 housing in the state (Pristin, 2003). A site of neglect for decades, despite the
immediate proximity to the university, this community has contended with significant issues of domestic and gang violence, drugs, crime, prostitution, and high rates of unemployment.

The neighborhood is now the site of a great deal of investment on multiple levels: the Ohio State University’s Schoenbaum Early Childhood Center became an essential source of community development and sustainability with its inaugural opening in 2007; adjacent to the Schoenbaum Center is the newly renovated Weinland Park Elementary School. The city government committed substantial monies to Weinland Park as a site for revitalization through the work of Campus Partners, Wagenbrenner Development, Inc., and a host of community partners through a neighborhood collaborative. Community members consequently organized to be involved in this renewal, strategizing to remain active participants in the reconstruction of their neighborhood through the organization of a civic association that has come to serve as a prominent voice in city-neighborhood negotiations.

Both proposed mural sites—the corner of 4th Street and 11th Avenues and the corner of 4th Street and 8th Avenues—are significant within the community. Well-established quick marts mark those corners, each offering a wide array of amenities and extended hours in a neighborhood lacking a grocery store and transportation options. But these sites also harbor a history of death, due to drugs and gang violence. A law was passed preventing pedestrians from approaching passing vehicles on these two corners, as a means of reducing drug trafficking. These sites are also demarcated in the form of tattoos on the necks and knuckles of those who
are members of the Short North Posse gang. And one of the corners is associated with the oral history of “The Night the Men Went Away,” the evening in which a SWAT team came in and arrested all men aged 18 and older, in an effort to eliminate the gang presence in a neighborhood that had lost over one hundred people to drugs or guns on that corner.

As this study sought to discern spiritual behaviors as indicators of individual and collective transformation, this community-in-transition was an appropriate site for evidencing transformative behaviors and actions. My involvement came through my having recently been involved in community volunteer work, leading my primary community partner, Julius, to ask me to facilitate the painting of a mural in the neighborhood. I agreed and continued to work with Julius and other mentors, as we held similar values and beliefs, despite racial and socio-economic differences.

I was completely involved throughout the research process, offering my artistic and teaching experience in support of the community-based projects we pursued. I also taught GED English classes, weekly, at the neighborhood's settlement house as one aspect of my graduate teaching assistantship. In addition, I lived on the periphery of the neighborhood from Spring until Fall of 2009. As a result of these various activities, my interest in and commitment to this neighborhood was strong through my recognizing the strengths and assets of those living in the community. This supported a sense of trust between community members and myself, leading to the participatory approach in developing the study.
Ethics and Politics of the Study

I was asked to lend my artistic and facilitation skills in being one of four mentors in what was to be a community-based project serving a small number of the African-American male youth in the Weinland Park neighborhood of Columbus, Ohio. At the time, I was considering dissertation topics and, based on my evolving interest in community-based arts, I participated in this first mural project as a pre-study to the second one. This was an appropriate stance to take, as we four mentors were trying to discern whether or not the community was committed to supporting this project beyond conversation at civic association meetings, not to mention our discerning if I would be a good fit with the group. The community, through the civic association, was receiving city-based grant support for redevelopment; we were ultimately seeking funding to start a non-profit entity offering support in the development of a variety of artistic skills, which could then be translated into jobs in this rapidly evolving neighborhood, or into micro-enterprises and small businesses that would also support the rebuilding of community.

All participants were informed of my status as a doctoral student and my intentions of working with this group towards conducting research through the creation of a second mural. Julius, the lead mentor, told all potential participants that he had known me through the civic association and then mutual friends of ours; he stated that he thought I would work well with this group. The first mural was, in essence, an audition for me, with my ability to continue determined by my facility in working with the group.
As there were potentially elements of classism, racism and power differentials at play, I was thoughtful and mindful in developing these relationships so as to be equitable; all understood they could choose to participate or not at any given point in time. In the end, none of the youth that Julius sought to recruit participated in the pre-test. Thus, in applying for IRB approval, I focused on interviewing mentors, so as to capture aspects of spiritual behaviors witnessed or experienced through what was a continually emergent process as we sought to create a mural.

Signed consent forms were provided to and signed by two of the participating mentors, each choosing to not use pseudonyms. The application to the Human Subjects Committee at The Ohio State University was approved (Appendix ). I completed and passed the CITI course in fulfillment of IRB requirements as well.

Research Questions

The primary research question focusing this study is:

- *Building on Daniel’s “spirit work” (2006, 2011), how can the action of creating and participating in community-based art reveal possible spiritual components of community-based art, both individually and collectively?*

Within this question is a sub-question that allow me to investigate my primary research question:

- *How can spiritual components of community-based art be described?*

I then have a secondary question:

- *What educational practices are suggested by identifying spiritual components?*
Scope of the Study

In this study, I set out to examine spirituality through the context of community-based art. In doing so, I hope to open dialogue on this topic and demystify how spirituality is embodied in life through the articulation of specific behaviors and values. This broadened interpretation and representation of reality can support the further development and construction of holistic curricular models, serving the needs of a greater number of students by honoring more culturally-engaged ways of living and being human. Thus, there is a social justice intent underpinning this research, in that spirituality acts as a bridge, building relationships, developing empathy and promoting equity.

Community, rather than academia or institutional education, is the appropriate setting of this research: community serves as a source for understanding “what we know, where the knowledge came from and how this knowledge is connected to successful institutional education” (Daniel, 2006, p. 1). Spirituality serves as a primary underpinning of community, by affirming, illuminating and bridging that which unites us all, when manifested in action, both through the individual and the collective. In doing so, it activates a culturally sensitive, social justice orientation in institutional education through legitimizing this concept as an epistemological foundation for the nature of reality of many.
I do not address religion in this research for several reasons. Although artists have addressed topics of both religion and God throughout the ages and continue to do so today, these topics are not addressed within the context of public school art classrooms in the United States; furthermore, they are rarely addressed as topics within the context of academia’s literature (Barrett, et al, 2006). In both cases, there is a fear of breaching the separation of church and state. While there is an increasing interest in addressing the taboo nature of religion and God, whether through the lens of postmodernity (Barrett, et al, 2006) or a re-examination of the Constitutional intent (Noddings, 1993), I am not interested in addressing the institutional aspects and impacts of either; rather, I am interested in the embodiment and enactment of spirituality as a paradigm, from individual to collective and as that impacts institutional education. There is increasing interest in addressing the topic of spirituality, notably in the field of education (Dillard, 2000, 2006, 2008; Miller, 2000), and I seek to add another voice to the conversation from an art education perspective, as a means of further demystifying this topic.

**Limitations of the Study**

As with any qualitative research study, readers should be mindful of making generalizations. This research emerges through participatory action research with a focus on discerning spiritual behaviors as evidenced through artistic practice and dialogue, rendering results unique to the interactions emerging from the participants in time and space.
I interpret others’ perceptions and am the primary instrument—a limitation, but also a guiding strength in terms of the quality of my perceptions and sensibilities (Eisner, 1998). This study relies on my perceptions and sensibilities as the primary instrument, my making sense of the information through thoughts and feelings. I fully participated in this work in seeking to answer and make meaning of the research questions I asked, checking my observations and perceptions through asking other participants about their perceptions and observations in relation to my questions. While generalization is not the intent, this study will provide a rich description of the community and its participants, their perceptions serving as a focal point of the findings.

I distinguish spirituality from religion and do not address the religious implications or connotations of spirit in this study. My reasoning behind this is not the result of a separation of church and state but instead the result of spirituality aligning with the praxis-orientation of this research, which therefore encourages self-reflection and a deeper understanding of one’s positioning to the larger society as integral to empowerment and the creation of a more just social order. Religion, although long a source of cultural sustenance, tends towards tradition-bound hegemony through historically rooted systemic practices that favor the benefit of some to the exclusion of many. I am interested in emergent methodologies and ways of knowing that promote consciousness, capacity and emancipation, particularly as such processes and practices inform institutional social structures. Addressing religion is therefore outside of the scope of this study.
Much of this research is based in my observations, actions and interactions, interpreted through my perceptions, thoughts and feelings. Also prominent is community voice and perception, through the use of essentialist methodology (Witz, Goodwin, Hart & Thomas, 2001), one which is well suited to “explore motivation, spirituality and social awareness as these appear in the past and present subjective experience and consciousness of the individual, forming part of the individual’s self-understanding and world view” (p. 198). This was done both during the interviews and in re-listening to interviews and re-reading notes from dialogues as a means of developing a bridge to “share empathetically and sympathetically the individual’s feelings, state of mind and past experience” (p. 198).

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is twofold. First, the research investigates and articulates spiritual components of community-based art, evidenced in the form of behaviors. Spirituality as a topic in art education has not been explored in depth, nor as a pedagogical aspect of art education. As the relationship between spirituality and education is now increasingly gaining interest and relevance, I seek to demystify the topic by illuminating bridges between the two. In doing so, I believe this research offers an alternative way of thinking and can thereby support the further development of holistic curricular models in institutional education.

Secondly, I seek to further uphold and extend the tenets of participatory action research by acknowledging and incorporating more of a dialogical aesthetic (Kaplan, 2002; Kester, 2004) into this study, reflective of my increasing awareness
of the value and necessity of a dialogic practice and a desire to explore it as a creative practice illuminating social change. Parallel to this, I sought more of a multi-voiced document, through “counterpoint chapters,” or at least significant responses authored by community partners, through which a pedagogy of possibility could emerge—a reflection of the organic, emergent nature of this collaborative research, and an example of collaborative qualitative inquiry that honors the complexity of knowledge construction and, in doing so, the complexity of the human being.

This offers the possibility of a collaborative, co-constructed dissertation between those in academia and community members in the (near) future. While there are examples of qualitative research conducted collaboratively (Paulus, Woodside & Ziegler, 2008), these examples are not dissertations co-constructed with community-based researchers outside academia. I am aware of the complications of fully realizing such work, but I hope to offer a step towards framing mutually informing knowledges through including the voices of co-researchers, in their words, within this academic framework of a dissertation.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

One might reasonably question why I would choose to address the concept of spirituality as a dissertation topic to begin with, let alone have it serve as a focal point. After all, it is infrequently mentioned in the art education canon and omitted from public school art classrooms. Undoubtedly, the separation of church and state brings this concern to the foreground, resulting in teacher wariness and fear in utilizing artistic works addressing this topic in public school art classrooms (Barrett, et al, 2006). Noddings (1993) considers this withholding of either spirituality or religion from classrooms in general to be an improper understanding of the First Amendment, resulting in an ignorance of religions in general, in addition to denying cultural literacy and an avenue for addressing the existential questions of life.

Palmer (2003) also notes the educational price paid in ignoring the spiritual dimension of being human:

I have seen the price we pay for a system of education so fearful of soulful things that it fails to address the real issues of our lives, dispensing data at the expense of meaning, facts at the expense of wisdom. The price is a schooling that alienates and dulls us, that graduates people who have had no mentoring in the questions that both vex and enliven the human spirit, people who are spiritually empty at best and spiritually toxic at worst. (p. 379).
Self-understanding and a capacity for forging connections are foundational to relationship, engendering praxis and leading to both personal and collective empowerment. When embodied, not only can the person “weave a complex web of connections” but in doing so, models that for others, so that “they can learn to weave a world for themselves” (Palmer, 1998, p. 11). Notably, these connections are not in methods but in hearts, “the place where intellect, emotion and spirit will converge in the human self” (Palmer, 1998, p. 11).

In addition to being able to personally address existential questions, thereby creating meaning and relevance in an individual’s life, there are significant social changes requiring ways of re-envisioning the world today. Modern society is plagued by fragmentation (Gablik, 1991). Corporatization and consumerism have reorganized society in a manner that dulls criticality by manufacturing false needs (Marcuse, 1964), shifting the social focus from one of participation to one of consumption (Adams & Goldbard, 2001). As a result, social structures have disintegrated and we feel increasingly disconnected from one another (Putnam, 2000).

This millennium brings an urgency in considering our choices and values through a lens of social responsibility as a result of increasing ecological and sustainability concerns (Gablik, 1995; Grady, 2006; London, 2006, 2011). How are we to make sense of such a world, individually, collectively and culturally? How do we choose to impact the world through conscious choice and moral action? And as artist-educators and researchers, what role does art play in enacting this? Furthermore, how do we educate and conduct research in a manner that is both
responsible and moral, honoring the complex realities of those we serve, as well as those we conduct research with and through?

If Freire’s (1998) insistence that knowledge is the result of ongoing inquiry and creation—born of relationship that is fostered when people come together to exchange ideas, articulate issues and construct meanings that make sense to them—and if our “individualistic ontology” (Gablik, 1995, p. 16) no longer serves us, as evidenced in the current state of society and evolving trends pointing to collaboration and collectivity, then perhaps it is appropriate to reconsider epistemological assumptions to determine how we have constructed our knowledge and how that reverberates within us individually and collectively. With holistic practices and approaches increasingly considered a means of reconnecting with our humanity (Beittel, 1991; Campbell, 2005, 2011; Grady, 2006; London, 2006, 2011; Palmer, 1983/93), it seems timely to consider how we might address spirituality as a relevant component in reframing our worldview, particularly from the viewpoint of reconnection and relationship. Doing so would support a framework for addressing existential questions within an educational context, while also developing consciousness empowerment, thus leading to the desire and ability to addressing social injustices.

**Organization of this Chapter**

I will begin this literature review by distinguishing spirituality from religion as a means of defining the boundaries of this research. I will then define spirituality, first by those in the academy and then through art—historically and
contemporarily. I will then explore Holistic Education and the means by which both spirituality and visual art are utilized within it. Epistemologies with a relational orientation that suggest spirituality will then be examined before addressing socially-oriented pedagogies that serve to ground the theory in practice.

**Distinguishing Spirituality from Religion**

Defining spirituality is no simple task: we consider the spiritual in contrast to that which is material. Ethereal, nebulous, it seems to resist an absolute or concrete definition, preferring instead to exist camouflaged or subtly clarified through personal experience. It is first necessary to differentiate spirituality from religion, as previously mentioned, as the two have been conflated. Van Ness (1996) states that, “Not everything spiritual must be religious; there are ways of understanding the world as a cosmic whole and the self as an enduring agent that are not directly indebted to religion” (p. 7).

In examining the root origins of each word, it is learned that spirituality stems from the word *spiritus*, meaning breath, acknowledging the intangible, personal characteristics of a quality deemed sacred. Heraclitus recognized this unknown quality, as well as the vastness of spirituality with, “You could not discover the limits of soul, even if you traveled by every path in order to do so; such is the depth of its meaning.” Religion, on the other hand, stems from *religio*, meaning to fasten or bind, lending credence to the idea of religion being both a cultural and communal system, one connecting us to a larger whole through agreed upon values and beliefs enacted in rituals and celebrations. Smith (1958) distinguishes between
the two by defining spirituality as “an internal virtue, an internal state,” whereas religion is an externalized institution (Tricycle, Fall 2001, www.tricycle.com). Noddings (1993) offers a similar differentiation, explaining spirituality as “an attitude or a way of life that recognizes something we might call spirit,” while religion is the means of “exercising that spirituality and usually requires an institutional affiliation” (p. 29).

As I am interested in how an individual’s spirituality—developing consciousness and capacity, and being willing to embody and act upon that in a compassionate manner within the context of and in support of a larger community—impacts personal and collective consciousness in transforming social inequities, particularly through the utilization of art within a community-based context towards informing institutional education, I will not address religion in this research.

**Defining Spirituality**


Campbell (2011) distinguishes spirituality from religion, defining it as an awareness of the interconnected nature of all. London (2006) defines spirit as “any quality we hold to be of ultimate value” (p. 12). The spiritual dimension—whether defined by a deity or deities, service, history or geography—provides an essence to
our being (London, 2006, p. 12). Daniel (2006) considers spirit a form of work and a characteristic of a community act. Acknowledging the intangible quality of defining spirit, Daniel approaches the concept through an African lens, defining it as “the activity that animates you, affirms you, inspires you and your community, and ultimately satisfies you” (p. 9). As such, there is a component of morality and agency to this work, empowering an ability to act on behalf of the collective good (Daniel, 2006). Hutzel (2005), speaking from a community art perspective, recognizes spirituality as a method for coping and surviving, a source of strength when working towards change, and as such, a value to be acknowledged. Russell (2007) connects art making to an act of spiritual expression, and in doing so highlights the recent societal trend of reexamining Eastern ideologies and indigenous cultures as a link to that which is sacred, in light of shifting attitudes towards organized religion. And Cook (2009-10), a Buddhist practitioner, views collaboration as the lens through which connection to divinity or spirituality is evoked, through which magic is made, the absence of such magic in adult consciousness resulting in “spiritually bankrupt” lives (Community Arts Convening & Research Project, Maryland Institute College of Art).

Spirituality is addressed to a greater extent in the education literature, although still somewhat of a taboo in academia (Dillard, 2006). Palmer (1983/93) views spirituality as an individual working towards increasingly articulating that edge between internal and external, the personal within relationship of co-creating community. Dillard (2006) defines spirituality through its all-encompassing nature, stating “It is all that is” (p. 68), invoking Hall’s (2001) definition in considering the
power of spirituality as it influences an academic life:

Spirituality...involves conscious relationship with the realm of the spirit, with the invisibly permeating, ultimately positive, divine, and evolutionary energies that give rise to and sustain all that exists (p. 2, as cited in Dillard, 2006, p. 68).

Lipsey (1988) considers spirituality as “something else at work among and through us,” describing it as a process undertaken by either looking deeply within or looking beyond what is known (p. 7). At the intersection of art and spirituality, Abbs (2003) believes, “It is the spiritual in us which aspires toward wholeness, seeks connection, pattern, circumference” (p. 35). hooks (2000) defines a spiritual life as one bound in “commitment to a way of thinking and behaving that honors principles of inter-being and interconnectedness” (p. 77). Coleman (1998) defines spirituality as “intuitive receptivity and an existential posture—one that engages the total self, i.e., intellect, heart, and will” (p. 40). West (1988) proposes a self-reflective “prophetic” spirituality, which Dantley (2003) extends by adding critical theory as a means of moving towards social responsibility within a larger community.

What propels someone to extend self beyond the acquisition of spiritual knowledge and actively engage in supporting and modeling justice through understanding the personal as reflected publicly and collectively? hooks (2003) places love at the core of spirituality, it serving to bridge otherness, affirm individual and collective self-actualization. Spirit becomes work through increasingly defining that edge between internal and external worlds, acknowledging the development of both through engagement in relationship to one another in a willingness to be vulnerable to transformation (Palmer, 1983/93). In other words, we must embrace
the paradox and unpredictability that a spiritual path of authenticity and truth entails, as the ends on that path cannot be dictated. This requires extending ourselves beyond our comfort zone and our intellect to more fully live through our heart, thus reconnecting within and beyond community. hooks (2003) describes the responsibility of living a spiritual path bound in truth and accountability by first challenging us to make living in community a core practice. Secondly, she challenges us to extend ourselves beyond our conceptions of community: “What are the actions that I will concretely do today in order to bring myself into greater community with that which is not here?” (p. 163). Her insight not only serves to challenge individual perception and capacity towards promoting empathy but also highlights the role of diversity that is vital in sustaining collaboration, with difference serving as a point of expansion, strength and connection when held within a collective committed to respectful sharing.

The Spiritual as Expressed in Art

Twentieth-Century: Color

Despite the infrequency of art education being linked with spirituality, there is a rich historical tradition in which art has served religion, while distinctly remaining itself, through expressing the spiritual in both the cultural and communal (Lipsey, 1988).

Art can serve in a bridging capacity by communicating the spiritual aspects of our expression and our humanity, as noted by Ross (1992):

The great forms and traditions of art are descriptive formulae for apprehending and sharing the ineffable, for manifesting the world of feeling,
the life of unconscious impulse, and the world of the human spirit. Art permits the constant reexamination of those first and last things, which constitute the basic questions of human experience. Art is one way in which we may keep alive our sense of the spiritual, the transcendent, and the ideal (p. 181).

Kandinsky was key in exploring and promoting the spiritual content in art as a uniquely modernist function, his seminal Concerning the Spiritual in Art (1977) seeking to articulate a methodology by which the internal is manifested externally, art serving as the vehicle. “This ‘what’ is the internal truth which only art can divine, which only art can express by those means of expression which are hers alone,” (p. 9) supporting his theory that “color is a power which directly influences the soul. Color is the keyboard...the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand which plays, touching one key or another, to cause vibrations in the soul” (p. 25). It’s a very modernist notion, the artwork detached from the maker, an object imbued with meaning distinct from the artist who created it, and reflective of the fractured manner in which we view our modernist and postmodernist reality.

Kandinsky believed contemplative meditation systems could potentially offer a methodology through which artists could strengthen their capacity in developing awareness towards bridging inner depths with a correspondingly expanding universe (Lipsey, 1988); and, in fact, contemplative practices are recognized for developing self-discipline, which translates to an increased ability to observe and pay attention—key in creating art. Kandinsky also acknowledged the influence of metaphysics and Theosophy in his understanding of art as expressing the inner, or esoteric, reality, rather than an exoteric one (Kandinsky, 1977). Lipsey (1988)
believes twentieth-century art wished to be a spiritual art, with Kandinsky laying the foundation for doing so.

Some of Kandinsky’s Bauhaus colleagues were also inspired by spiritual practices (Grady, 2006). Itten and Klee were influenced by Steiner and Bergson, resulting in self-inquiry and spiritual expression being vital components in the curriculum developing design for social change. This fell by the wayside with Itten’s resignation and resulted in design founded in an industrial focus through art and technology, but it does point to a precedent for spirituality informing art education.

The task at hand, in the twenty-first century, is to not only deepen our understanding of this hidden content but to also embody and express it, carrying it forward in a manner that “sheds light on something more than itself...and helps us look after ourselves and one another,” (Lipsey, 1988, p. 6). While the hidden spiritual content of twentieth-century art is beyond the scope of this dissertation, Lipsey highlights art’s role in healing our fractured existences: culturally, he sees a lack of understanding of what an authentic spirituality is and therefore an inability to enact it, in contrast with contemporary artistic production that stands in no relation to the spiritual and psychological teachings that informed modern art.

**Twenty-first Century: Dialogue**

Divisiveness and perceived disconnection are the results of social structures being established on individualism and competition. This has led to an interest in and development of collaborative practices as a means of working with others in a positive manner that creates and serves a collective whole. Participating in dialogic practices
with an open mind and ear act as a creative means of sharing both common experiences 
and differences; the results are an expansion of perceptual phenomena, leading to the 
perceptual transformation of self and other. Reciprocity strengthens commonality; 
difference serves as fuel in expanding the whole within a framework of connection.

Artists including Suzanne Lacy, WochenKlauser, Jay Koh, and Adrian Piper have 
expanded their creative practices beyond object-based traditions to also embrace 
dialogue as a performative vehicle between diverse communities (Kestor, 2004). 
Termed “conversational art,” “relational aesthetic” and “dialogue-based public art,” 
Kestor notes this practice emerged from literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin’s belief that a 
work of art can be considered as a type of conversation, one embodying different 
interpretations and meanings, the result of differing perspectives. These artists are 
challenging the types of knowledge an aesthetic experience can produce through direct, 
performative involvement, with the outcomes being a transformation in thought and 
perception and an increase in empathy (Kestor, 2004).

As art builds community through social interaction (Gablik, 1995), this concept of 
dialogue as an artform has increasingly gained credence (Kaplan, 2002; Kestor, 2004).
Dialogue can serve as an interpretive, collaborative art form of its own, shifting 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” (Gablik, 1991, p. 76). To 
participate in dialogue is to invite exploration of what it is to be human by creatively 
examining thought as it shapes and sustains a collective sense of reality (Bohm, 1996).
Dialogue, as a pedagogical model espoused by Freire (1970/2000) is a means of constructing knowledge and theory in an egalitarian manner, thereby promoting social justice. More than mere conversation, this humanizing pedagogy expands consciousness with regards to one’s placement in the larger world. Through an awareness of one’s needs while engaged in learning and considering those of others, critical thinking is developed. Coming to an understanding of and being able to work with the underlying dynamics of a collective can develop the collective capacity for sociopolitical transformation.

Kestor (2004) suggests that dialogically based projects are some of the most innovative art forms of the past twenty years. Acting at the juncture between art and cultural activism, these works have fostered new ways of collaboration in service of addressing relevant issues towards greater, collective understanding. Kestor (2004) notes the challenge and reluctance of the art world in embracing this type of collaborative art form as valid because these types of practices do not adhere to traditional modes of aesthetic judgment; therefore, the majority of these dialogic art practices operate outside of the traditional art world and its institutions. And yet it is precisely dialogue that embraces social complexity and promotes social transformation when enacted as a centered process by an individual open to developing consciousness (Kaplan, 2002).

As an integral component of participatory action research, dialogue promotes a bi-directional flow of information and involves all in the research process (Brydon-Miller, 2001). Critical questioning serves to disrupt accepted norms, values and beliefs (Freire, 1970/2000), thus promoting responsibility for a
given social reality and reengaging participants in consciously changing it (Kaplan, 2002). In light of the social differences between myself and those I was collaborating with, I viewed dialogue as an integral component of this research. Dialogue conveyed that beyond the perceptions and understandings held by each of us, space could be created to promote understanding and empathy in any given social situation. For me, this honors the intention of education, as evidenced in the root word educare, to draw out. It is an unending practice I will continue to develop in alignment with my goal of creatively working towards social justice.

**Spirituality in Holistic Education**

Holistic education can philosophically be traced to Plato and Rousseau, both recognizing the necessity of addressing the whole individual and doing so within a societal context; Dewey applied this approach in the modern era (Campbell, 2011). Postmodern times incorporate a relational and transformational component, with holistic education promoting a motivation for the common good, rather than solely the satisfaction of personal goals and concerns (J. P. Miller, 2005; R. Miller, 2000).

There are three aspects defining holistic education: balance, inclusion and connection (J. P. Miller, 2007). Seemingly beneficial for all students, it is the fact that spirituality is an included aspect of holistic education that brings controversy, the result of a separation between church and state, as previously mentioned. And yet it is important to note that the way that spirituality is defined is key in how holistic education is enacted. Campbell (2011) distinguishes between the more “mystical” and ephemeral stance to spirituality held by early holistic educators and the stance
of contemporary holistic educators, such as J. P. Miller (2005) and R Miller (2007), in which spirituality is grounded in an awareness of the interrelatedness of all of life; therefore, the development of spirituality within contemporary holistic education serves the individual in answering existential questions (conversation with Dr. Bill Taylor, 2010) while also promoting social responsibility and justice (Dillard, 2006). In doing so, it situates the individual within a larger whole, engendering belonging and empathy (Mezirow, 2000).

The Visual Arts and Holistic Education

Holistic education is making inroads in art education. Beittel (1979, 1991) is recognized as a pioneer (London, 2006) advancing a metaphysical and hermeneutic approach. London (2006) has been a significant and often solitary proponent of a holistic approach to art education until recent years, his promoting the integration of mind, body and spirit through the creative act, leading to “elevated behavior” and an integrated society (p. 3). In today’s social justice orientation, London’s (2011) current work has an eastern philosophical flavor and aligns with Deep Ecology, serving to pierce and bridge many of the false divides we contend with in society today; he advocates the creative act as an avenue for revealing possibility towards a life framed by uplifting values. Grady (2006) limns an historical antecedent linking today’s social justice interest and spirituality, referencing the impact of Theosophy and Zen on modernism (Lipsey, 1988) and the Bauhaus’ early motivations of self-examination and community service, through which spiritual self-inquiry manifested in design and architecture for the masses. Grady therefore recognizes
the value of revisiting social change through the lens of spirituality in our 
postmodern reality, in which identity and meaning are fluid and ever-changing. 
Advocating an holistic approach, he notes that art making and the development of 
spiritual awareness towards personal transformation promotes the artist as healer 
in personal and collective capacities.

Campbell (2011, 2012) further situates holistic theory and education within 
the art education realm, linking the increasing value of relationship and recognition 
of interrelatedness as expressed in contemporary artwork and the research 
exploring identity formation (Efland, Freedman & Stuhr, 1996; Parsons, 2004 as 
holistic curriculum aligning with today’s reality, she supports the development of a 
transformative model honoring the whole student, acknowledging this to be 
democratic curriculum connecting student interests within the larger good (Beane, 

**Reenvisioning Epistemology: Seeking Reflection**

With these definitions of spirituality in mind, I sought to find an 
epistemology that embodied a sense of spirit as embedded in praxis. Highlighting 
the foundational qualities of spirituality—community, relationship, engagement, 
care, capacity-developing, and positive actions—was necessary, as was finding an 
epistemology that valued the inherent diversity and the wealth of varied social 
experiences reflected in our society. Bergson’s (1913) treatise on metaphysics and 
Buddhist philosophy informed my research in this vein, as did emergence theory.
Bergsonian Metaphysics

Bergson’s metaphysical treatise states that change is constant, “movement is reality itself,” (Bergson, 1913, p. 143). He notes that although we understand there is change, we have intellectualized it to the point of narrowing our perception of reality; for example, what we perceive to be immobile, stable, unchanging and constant is simply a perception based in intellect but separated from the senses and consciousness (Bergson, 1913, p. 133). Immobility is nothing more than a perception by which we are able to conceptually structure reality to then act and be acted upon. Reality is actually dynamic and ever-changing, rather than static. When this is perceptually comprehended, Bergson suggests, everything around us comes to life and is affirmed through this dynamism and variability.

Bergson’s metaphysical theory underpins this research, as it suggests an understanding of reality that is grounded in increasing consciousness through engaged, embodied action. This is spirituality, as stated by Palmer (cited in hooks, 2000, p. 77):

Action...is the visible form of an invisible spirit, an outward manifestation of an inward power. But as we act, we not only express what is in us and help give shape to the world; we also receive what is outside us, and reshape our inner selves.

Thus, spirituality requires engagement and honors an understanding of interconnectedness through the building of relationships. It insists on a willingness to be vulnerable, to expand perceptions and increase consciousness through engagement with the external world.
These outward actions take form in two capacities: horizontal and vertical (Wilber, 1996). Horizontal capacities are framed through a tension between wholeness and part-ness, resulting in the need to maintain identity and agency, or there is no existence. But there is also existence within a system, so there is an additional need to fit within an environment. Without agency or communion, there is no existence.

Vertical capacities are framed through the self-realization that comes through self-transcendence. If change is constant and the world unfolds through creative emergence, it cannot be reduced: the whole is within the part, the part within the whole. The individual seeks and embodies growth but within a system that has some semblance of reflection and structure. If out of line, the offender will be knocked back into alignment in some manner. The structure can be unpacked and restructured, but there will be a structure. Transcendence is interior work, based in the deepening of consciousness and the resulting definition of identity that unfolds from the inside out.

This points to a need to understand perception, which we can then translate to useful means in community-based work, the arts serving as but one vehicle. Bergson (1913) implies that there are two ways of knowing something: one is relative, the other absolute. The relative way of knowing something is based on point of view and expression of that point of view as it is related to a system, as well as the symbols used in translating the perception. The perception is relative because it is derived from being outside of the object. Absolute perception, on the other hand, is derived from being in harmony with and able to enter into that object or
other by an effort of imagination. Bergson further acknowledges the constant state of change by noting that regardless of movement, what is perceived is not resultant of a point of view formed and then translated because this perception is not solely born of the individual creating it—through an extension of imagination, that interior movement of the other is perceived. Regardless of movement, the inner state, or “states of soul,” are perceived (Bergson, 1913, p. 159).

The implication of Bergson’s philosophy is that there are different ways of considering how reality is known and therefore different ways of constructing knowledge to make meaning. This therefore reflects the rich diversity of our society, as well as the accompanying unique perspectives and social experiences, which are frequently not recognized or deemed credible in the current philosophical mainstream. Also implied through Bergson’s philosophy is the interrelated nature of existence, requiring active engagement if one is to be conscious, responsible and accountable. This is evidenced in such gestures such as listening as a form of active engagement. This is praxis, and it is epistemic: our theorizing and actions inform the way we perceive and understand reality.

**Buddhist Philosophy (Kukai’s treatise on esoteric and exoteric practices)**

As acknowledged through the opening Indra’s net quote, a foundational premise of Buddhist philosophy is the interrelatedness of all, one of the implications of this being that the cosmos is self-expressive and therefore understood not through observation or analyzation but through engagement, through praxis.
Praxis is understood as the learning relationship between interior self and external reality, through engaged, conscious expression. There are esoteric practices done for one’s own pleasure and understanding; these practices are not audience-based and therefore require dialogue as a means of conferring with reality. This concept underscores relationship and the necessity of listening as an active practice and component of dialogue.

Just as there are esoteric practices, there are also exoteric, or external, audience-directed practices. Exoteric practices are performative and demonstrate validity and efficacy, in contrast to esoteric practices, which serve as theory; thus there is praxis, on both an individual and collective level. The wisdom of this lies in an understanding that truth cannot be known solely on the intellectual level but is to be experienced bodily as well. (http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kukai, retrieved January 26, 2010).

**Emergence Theory**

Emergence theory—a branch of complexity theory—brings understanding to coordinated group behavior, or self-organization. Essentially, systems are complex and adaptive, solving problems from the bottom up by building upon simple elements; in other words, this type of intelligence lies in counterpoint to the top-down single executive style of governance (Johnson, 2004). Emergent behavior takes shape in countless forms: the cells of any organism, ant colonies, the human brain, an urban neighborhood, video games, artificial intelligence and the internet
are all examples of adaptive learning and evidence that the whole is often smarter than the sum of its parts.

Jane Jacobs (1961), in her seminal book *The Death and Life of the Great American Cities*, brilliantly argued that the way to improve urban areas and highlight the dynamic qualities they held was to begin at the street level, learning from those that worked. She related that the complexity was composed through the acceptance of change—life as an art form of change, through which individual participants learn to dance their unique dances in a manner that reinforce one another within an organized whole.

This social theory—based in the four principles of neighbor interaction, pattern recognition, feedback and indirect control—articulated the relationship of life through the tensions between individual and collective perspectives, and reflected the relational tenets on which this study is based, doing so in a manner that was not reductive but expansive. For me, this theory is reflective of the social learning that takes place on an everyday basis in community life in all of its complexity and contradictions, highlighting the practices that can lead to transformation, such as in Daniel’s concept of the community act (2006). This theory’s perspective also acknowledges the ongoing process orientation to social learning—one that is always moving and changing, as we do, and therefore requiring practice in collaboration, if one is to be engaged and reflexive, respectful and responsible. Within such a web of mutuality, we start with ourselves in practicing the change we wish to see in the world. This aligns with Buddhist philosophy, Bergson’s metaphysical theory and praxis and therefore acts as an
overarching framework through which I am able to consider social dynamics within the context of this study.

There is evidence of a shift, in terms of the taken-for-granted epistemological structure we have perceived and structured our reality through. The predominant worldview has favored the Cartesian perspective, which privileges the mind and individuality, resulting in a perception of the world being a collection of disconnected objects and a resulting hegemony. Educational research has, as a result, placed a premium on positivistic, objective, neutral research that privileges particular ways of knowing to the exclusion of others.

The previously mentioned theories—Bergson’s metaphysical theory (1913), Buddhist philosophy and emergence theory—suggest a relational way of understanding the world, in which various aspects interact with and affect one another. This type of understanding lies in contrast to that which has dominated since Cartesian times and has flourished in the 20th century, one based in the manipulation and control of matter (Kaplan, 2002). While this approach has served us well in terms of giving us control and mastery over our environment, it reduces the complexities of reality and denies the uniqueness and impact of the social realm through which we all negotiate and navigate daily.

These post-positivistic times have brought an epistemological break. Science is discovering the communal and collaborative nature of existence, as evidenced through the just mentioned emergence theory, highlights the power of adaptive
learning and bottoms-up self-organization (Johnson, 2001). There is evidence of this break in educational research as well, with the value-free claims of social science being questioned through the understanding that knowledge is socially and historically constructed and is therefore never neutral (Lather, 1986). An increasing number of scholars seek to live integrated lives (Dillard, 2000; Gablik, 1995; hooks, 2001), and as such, many are pursuing forms of knowledge that value the complexity and nuance of the world today while still maintaining accountability.

Not surprisingly, Bergson viewed the artist as the one who “makes us see what we do not naturally perceive...what is the aim of art if not to show us, in nature and in the mind, outside of us and within us, things which did not explicitly strike our senses and our consciousness?” (1913, p. 135). This is not to say that the artist is the sole purveyor of this way of perceiving and being; rather, this speaks to those with creative dispositions who also embody “koinonia,” or communion through participation.

With this understanding, I then sought educational practices through which the spiritual is enacted, thereby creating bridges—whether between members in community, partners aligned in a common goal, teacher and student, or community partner and academician.

**Embodying Pedagogies**

In order to discern spiritual behaviors and actions, I sought a framework that reflected the central qualities of spirituality: relational, multidimensional, process- and praxis-oriented, emancipatory and capacity building.
**Social Learning**

Social theories of learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Wenger, 1998) counter the predominant view of learning as an individualistic process, separate from other activities and a result of being taught. Instead, learning takes place through active engagement in social participation, with identity being constructed in relation to the contexts one is situated in. Social learning honors the interactional, relational nature of knowing and meaning making, emphasizing that learning—and hence, education—takes place everywhere, rather than as a separate activity focused on discrete disciplines. As such, it highlights the tension between individual and environment in terms of action and agency in relation to the collective, thereby acknowledging the power dynamics inherent in meaning making, subjectivity and collectivity, as well as the resulting role of agency in the creation and transformation of social structures (Wenger, 1998).

Communities of practice serve a mirroring function, informing individual and collective identity by participating individuals. They highlight the tension embedded in participatory learning by illuminating individual intention and agency, as well as mutuality, within situated experiences (Wenger, 1998). The behaviors and values promoted through this practice include self-awareness, belonging, responsibility, engagement and action, reflection, flexibility and deep listening—all tools and values necessary for social justice and the development of democratic citizens. The mutuality promotes a depth of social interactions that lead to a sustained sense of community over time: respect, trust, a willingness to give and receive, a willingness
to communicate and engage, and reflection are all qualities leading to openness and resulting in emergent possibilities from multiple perspectives (Wenger, 1998). From the individual vantage point, this type of embodied engagement fosters personal growth and therefore empowerment, resulting in boundaries becoming flexible and reconfigured through the increasingly competent experience and developing capacity as a result of individual engagement. This is an example of emergent learning, in which participants are involved in communal praxis towards a transformative process in which they are both challenged and rewarded, individually and collectively, through the crucible of community.

**Participatory Action Research**

Participatory action research is a liberatory-based research methodology, evolving some forty years ago as a means of honoring epistemologies stemming from the theorizing emerging out of daily life experiences of struggle and survival (Hall, 1981). It is an inquiry-driven, inclusive, democratic research method that is responsive to the perspectives and needs of all involved, with an aim of improvement and involvement (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988) and a goal of transformation (Tolman & Brydon-Miller, 2001). The impetus for this type of research originates out of a desire for change or innovation through the deepening understanding of social processes by participants, the resulting knowledge being used to create strategies towards improvement, equity and justice (Somekh & Lewin, 2005). It generally does not begin with a general research question; rather, the inquiry is geared towards finding appropriate, effective
solutions to a specific situation through groups or communities experiencing oppression or subject to control (Schwandt, 2001; Somekh & Lewin, 2005).

Participatory Action Research is distinguishable from several other types of action research through the manner in which it focuses on the politics and power of knowledge production and use. The issue for inquiry emerges from the community, and the research findings are used to the benefit of the group or community. It is democratic in nature, using knowledge and action towards the consciousness raising and empowerment of participants, who are experiencing oppression or subject to control (Schwandt, 2001).

Participatory action research is therefore a compatible methodology for community-based research in that it highlights collective intelligence and the necessity of relationship, serving as an example of how self-organization leads to bottoms-up, collective group behavior and resulting in transformative, systemic change. It addresses inequality and injustice through collaboration with marginalized communities, seeking greater transparency and accessibility of knowledge construction and power systems for those marginalized.

**Praxis**


**Community-Based Art**

Community art encompasses a variety of artistic practices, both traditional and
innovative, and acts as a means of working through relevant issues in the maintenance of a thriving community (Congdon, 2004). A broad range of artistic practices and configurations, combined with the divide between art education goals and delivered content (Congdon, 2004), result in community art being challenging to define. In considering the scope of all that this term could encompass, one could include the work of artists who support groups in expressing and affirming their given cultures, those who make art in support of political movements, and those artists operating through governmental support in public life (Ewell, 2002). In doing so, one can tease out many historical precedents based in a multitude of themes through which the community artist might function. Those artists with an eye for a physical aesthetic, as it reflects the physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of the people living in a community, worked designing public amenities and buildings to promote human harmony through design (Ewell, 2002). Oscar Neimeyer, the Brazilian architect, as well as Frank Lloyd Wright, would fall into this category.

Community arts workers creating settings and techniques by which democratic ideals were fostered through community participation serve as another category encompassed by this term. Touring artists as well as grassroots discussion groups form this group, the demise of which came with an increase in consumerism, and a decrease in bi-directional, participatory activities (Ewell, 2002). Those community-based activities promoting a multi-cultured community create another category in which individuals create, enact and share social techniques that support cultural democracy. Community festivals and folk plays serve as examples and highlight the role of dialogue shaping
democracy, in that participants attending these events were open listeners with a desire to learn, the experience potentially changing their perspective or outlook, thereby strengthening democracy (Ewell, 2002).

Land grant institutions, serving as a community anchor in a state, supported the idea of empowering individuals in community through artistic endeavors such as grassroots theatre, folk dramas, artists-in-residence and arts extension services. All served to link creative expression in developing a popular aesthetic (Ewell, 2002). Community centers offering art for the enjoyment of all, in support of the wholeness of the individual and the collective, fall within the community arts framework, as do those entities—such as Settlement Houses—that promoted sustenance through one’s culture and equity for all. While some might view these within the realm of social services, social services were but one aspect of a larger picture of justice—a lens through which such activities as drama groups, art clubs, along with native language programs and the like promoted personal empowerment through culture. Ewell (2002) aligns all who work for social justice within this category: if one considers any creative act that disrupts the traditional means of structuring society, as well as the creative use of dialogue in promoting a change in perceptions towards justice, then those who created and worked within these organizations would fall under this broad umbrella of community artist. Non-profit institutions supporting community arts—community arts councils, the National Endowment for the Arts, Americans for the Arts, to name a few—are a part of community arts history, in that such organizations program and provide grants to artists working in cultural and social capacities. They are certainly worth mentioning for the
organizational stability they provide community artists. Finally, those who develop civic
dialogue and public values through civic organizations contribute to the history of
community arts. A few examples include the Works Progress Administration (the WPA)
and Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed serve as two examples of artistic projects
that generate community participation (Ewell, 2002).

Community art may be defined as “that which is rooted in a shared sense of
place, tradition or spirit” (de Nobriga, as cited by Cruz, 2002) or as that which uses
creative and artistic means in promoting citizenship within a democracy that is
increasingly meaningful and inclusive (Ewell, 2002). Regardless of the agenda—
celebratory, reflective, activist, cultural-based, catalyst and a host of others—at the root
is collective representation through a process orientation (Cohen-Cruz, 2002).
Therefore, the process of engaging people in the making of the work holds as much
value, if not more, than the finished art work.

Art as a communal and collaborative practice gained credibility during the mid-
1970s, in response to an interest in eliminating the boundaries between art and life, as
promoted through modernism, with artists seeking new strategies in using art for social
purposes (Gablik, 1995). Community art is by and large aligned with an activist
perspective today (Cohen-Cruz, 2002). Whether born of a partnership between artist
and activists or the brainchild of an artist, there are a variety of strategic forms the
resulting work takes (Cohen-Cruz, 2002):

- it serves as a collective expression that also impacts the individual;
- the work acts as a site of involvement and expression for spectators;
• the community-art process promotes equality and, thus, activism;
• the activation of space creates presence;
• the work starts small with skills-based actions that hook interest, leading to success and subsequent commitment and activism;
• the work illuminates an issue in a way that mobilizes people to take action.

The artist-activist’s job is largely one of building social capital, bridging information and ideas to broader audiences and with the intent of fostering change (Cieri & Peeps, 2001).

Community-based art operates along a continuum of functions, including: formal and informal; teaching traditional art skills and knowledge (Ulbricht, 2002); valuing local history and culture within art education (Congdon, Blandy & Bolin, 2001) offering an educational context for cultural understanding and appreciation (Daniel, 2006; Ulbricht, 2002) but not necessarily social reconstruction; creating projects that support social change and justice (Carter & Yenowine, 2008; Garber, 2005); supporting community reconstruction (Hutzel, 2005; Lowe, 2000); functioning in relation to public arenas (Garber, 2006); offering curriculum initiatives for social impact in the K-12 classroom (Ulbricht, 2005); promoting individual and community empowerment through critical pedagogy (Adejumo, 2008), and bridging the gap between theory and practice in higher education research (Daniel, 2006; Garber, 2005).

Increasingly, community-based art serves as a cultural response to social conditions by contradicting imposed cultural values, raising consciousness by
embedding unifying principles in a matrix of practice (Adams & Goldbard, 2001; Daniel, 2006; Gablik, 1995). In doing so, this art promotes a socially responsive means of resisting oppressive forces towards personal and collective empowerment (Garber, 2005), uniting participants in a transformative experience (Lowe, 2000) while also transmitting valuable cultural information (Adams & Goldbard, 2001; Daniel, 2005). This shift from an individualistic ontology (Gablik, 1995) to a communal epistemology (Palmer, 1993), supports the benefits of social learning (Wenger, 1998, 2000) and—when framed through aesthetic experience—highlight ways of knowing and conscious engagement through creative endeavors (Daniel, 2006; Hutzel, 2005; Kestor, 2004).

This study sits within the framework of community-based art embodying a social justice perspective. A participatory action research methodology is appropriate and not uncommon within this context. There are many forms that participatory action research can take in serving the unique circumstances of a given context or situation. The collaborative nature of this approach perpetually offers avenues for further research. Dialogic practices that engage, rather than coerce or even encourage, as a form of expanding knowledge for all involved, is something I sought to investigate—not only out of a desire to support social justice practices on a personal level but also as a means of creating space for imagination and wonder beyond immediate perceptions. The issue of agency is an issue I sought to also explore through this research. How can this research be represented in a manner that promotes agency and dialogue by all involved, in mutually beneficial ways? I acknowledge that power and privilege do not disappear, and yet I also seek
avenues for social change outside of social reflexivity, in which academic researchers “earn the authority to represent community members” through negotiating interdependent relations using dialogue (Cushman & Monberg, 1998, as cited in Williams & Brydon-Miller, 2004). I am not interested in representing another, preferring instead to facilitate opportunities that promote self-representation in a variety of contexts. Williams and Brydon-Miller (2004) ask questions in the vein of, “How do we engage others in a manner that meets needs in mutuality while also operating without attachment to self-serving outcomes?” This question speaks to the tension inherent in such work and reflects my interests in engaging in this research.

Conclusion

This review of the literature situates spirituality as a topic worthy of research by first briefly acknowledging the resistance to inclusion and discussion of this topic in the academy, and the reasons for the resistance, then briefly highlighting the consequences of human existence within systemic structures unwilling or unable to address the existential questions of life.

Spirituality is distinguished from religion, then defined by members of the academy before it is historically reflected in art making, art history and art education. Spirituality is then briefly examined as it is expressed through the postmodern practice of dialogue within the art world.

The positioning of spirituality, followed by visual arts, within in holistic education realm serve to contextualize them within today’s reality, offering a
liberatory and transformative curriculum model in fulfilling student needs while serving democratic ends.

Metaphysical theory—as detailed by Bergson and Buddhist philosophy (Kukai)—combined with emergence theory are foundational in understanding the relational component of praxis.

Socially-oriented pedagogies highlight both individual and collective ways of knowing and responding within rapidly changing social conditions.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Chapter Organization

I open this chapter with a theoretical grounding for the research methodology before restating my research questions. I will then detail the qualitatively oriented participatory action research foundation before articulating the research design and means of collecting data. I will then share the means of analyzing the data and the method of sharing the data—portraiture, a phenomenological methodology shaped by cultural context and dialogue, suitable for participatory action research, particularly when one of the researchers is crossing boundaries. I will close with a summarization and a sharing of implications.

Theoretical Grounding

I came to The Ohio State University to pursue doctoral work with little background in theory or research methods and methodology and eight years of teaching art in primarily urban public schools. A near lifelong practice of questioning and challenging my perceptions began growing into my questioning worldviews, the result of life experiences; once in the classroom, this extended as a result of the experiences of those I taught not aligning with the public perception enacted in educational policy or depicted in media. These experiences coalesced into a social justice orientation to life that I have held since childhood. The
underpinning for this orientation is found in the social realm, through the lens of relationship. Thus, seeking to embody holistic educational practices and come into a fuller sense of personal wholeness, I was encouraged by Dr. Bill Taylor to pursue these issues through a spiritual lens; I found a way to be true to this path through Dr. Vesta A. H. Daniel and her community-based art class.

Since relationship and conscious transformation lie at the root of this research, Freire's (1973; 2000) praxis orientation to pedagogy has naturally influenced my thinking, with learning through doing leading to conscious transformation. Bergson's (1913) metaphysical treatise influenced my thinking by offering an ontology grounded in praxis in terms of how one’s perceptions determine one’s ways of knowing and, thus, one’s actions and construction of reality. Buddhist philosophy is based in an understanding that all of life is interrelated and interconnected; the implication of this is that all is self-expressive and therefore understood through ritual engagement—praxis.

Daniel's (2011, 2006) understanding of community as an entity informing other social structures expands conceptualizations of ways of knowing and the resulting manifestations through the community act. Her work supports cultural sustainability and serves to inform power inequities; it was therefore very helpful in analyzing the community-based work I participated in.

Due to this being participatory action research within a community-based art context, both Kaplan's (2002) and Kestor's (2004) examination of dialogical aesthetics—in which bi-directional and reciprocal exchange can blur boundaries between self and other, promoting transformation and identity formation through
an understanding of the social realm—informed my thinking about dialogue as a creative, transformative agent in developing consciousness and informing social change.

**Restatement of Research Questions**

The primary research question focusing this study is:

- *Building on Daniel’s “spirit work” (2011, 2006), how can the action of creating and participating in community-based art reveal possible spiritual components of community-based art, both individually and collectively?*

In support of answering my primary research question, I have one sub-question:

- *How can spiritual components of community-based art be described?*

I have one secondary question, allowing me to apply the results of this research:

- *What educational practices are suggested by identifying spiritual components?*

In structuring the remaining content of this chapter, I would like to thank Dr. Karen Hutzel for her clarity—her methodology chapter (2005) serves as an instructive example by which I structured my own.

**Research Foundations**

**Qualitative Research**

I chose qualitative research methods for this study, as they 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” (Mason, 2002, p. 134).
Qualitative inquiry explores the various dimensions of the social world, constructing meaning through an understanding of the phenomenon (Mason, 2002). It is an engaged practice—one in which participants are interested in understanding the particular circumstances of a situation, while at the same time contending with the complexities and ambiguities of that situation (Schwandt, 2001). This type of research makes possible a different kind of knowing—a knowing from ‘within’ a particular context that can result in cross-contextual generalities (Mason, 2002). Qualitative inquiry can also be praxis-oriented, designed to extend emancipatory knowledge, thereby involving all in a democratic and empowering inquiry (Lather, 1986).

Although there are a variety of approaches in conducting qualitative research, there are some common elements by which it can be defined. First, qualitative inquiry is grounded in a social constructivist perception of reality, with the interest being in how the social world is experienced, understood, interpreted, produced and constituted towards making meaning in a particular social world; the meanings are therefore transitory and situational (Patton, 2007). Secondly, qualitative inquiry uses flexible methods of data generation that are sensitive to the social context of the situation; and third, qualitative inquiry utilizes methods of analysis and explanation to produce complex, detailed contextual understandings leading to holistic explanations of the social context (Mason, 2002, p. 3).
**Participatory Action Research**

Participatory action research collaboratively addresses inequality within a marginalized or oppressed community, seeking solutions to a community issue (Hall, 1981; Williams & Miller, 2004). It embodies the following characteristics: it is democratic (Stringer, 2008), in that all involved—facilitator(s) and stakeholders—are deemed researchers and in control of the entire research process towards creating a more just social order (Hall, 1981; Stringer, 2008). It is equitable through the sharing of power, liberating through the development of critical consciousness, and life enhancing (Stringer, 2008) as a result of a goal of transformation (Brydon-Miller, 2001).

Participatory action research was an appropriate framework for this study in many ways. Its methods are relational and dialogic, thereby necessitating active involvement in the construction of relationship by all (Tolman & Brydon-Miller, 2001). This approach therefore requires the development of trust through an extension of self—a goal in collaborative work but also key in creating a framework by which participants work towards understanding another’s perspectives and life experiences (Tolman & Brydon-Miller, 2001). Relationship and transformation are foundational to this study: as there was a distinct power differential between community members and myself—participating community mentors were African-American men with varying degrees of college experience and living in a low socio-economic environment, whereas I am Caucasian, well-educated and from a middle-class background—this approach was a humanizing one, supportive of social justice through the sharing of power in negotiation and reciprocity (Lather, 1986).
As transformation is the goal of participatory action research, this method is personal, political and interdisciplinary, the result of a pursuit and revealing of different types of knowledge that are useful to all, found through the acknowledgment of relationship (Brydon-Miller, 2001). This, too, aligns with my interests and my stance in pursuing this research, as I seek to engage in research that is relational and transformational, both personally and socially. Our postmodern times increasingly necessitate the dismantling of disciplinary boundaries for those researchers choosing a participatory methodology; while this perhaps brings disciplinary unease for not wanting to lose specific types of knowledge in the process (Tolman & Brydon-Miller, 2001), it also offers the opportunity to see evolving relationships and connections while supporting holistic ways of constructing knowledge (Kaplan, 2002). I sought to engage in a relational form of research that honored intuitive ways of knowing, while also promoting the goal of understanding the experience of others, thus placing myself within the context of working towards social justice.

In serving the interests of oppressed peoples, participatory action research also addresses the issue of power. The acknowledgment of power differentials and strategies for shifting power to those who are oppressed is a key component of the relationship between the facilitator and the marginalized people participating in the research. Hall (1981) suggests three possibilities in facilitating this: unmasking myths, creating popular knowledge and contributing to organizing—all promoting the goal of social justice through which those who are marginalized transform their circumstances through praxis.
A creative, collective process of theory development and practice, participatory action research is a strand of action research, which was developed by Kurt Lewin in the 1940s as a means of addressing the divide between theory and practice through a cyclical process of knowledge construction within a setting, influencing change (Noffke & Somekh, 2005). A wide variety of approaches to action research exist today, but at the root of this process—one which frequently does not start with a research question—is the desire for “change or innovation through a deeper understanding of social processes and developing strategies to bring about improvement” (Noffke & Somekh, 2005, p. 91). As action research is shaped by the values of the participants, there is an adaptability in designing and implementing this methodology to meet the needs of different groups (Noffke & Somekh, 2005).

A participatory action research process can be described as a cyclical, process-oriented framework of looking, thinking and acting (Stringer, 2008). Variations of this routine include an interacting spiral of recycling activity including the following components: plan, act, observe, reflect (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000). As participants work through the stages of this process, there is a recognition of it unfolding in an anything-but-linear manner due to the deep involvement of this work: thus, it is not uncommon to go back to stages, renegotiate and rethink the procedures, interpretations and outcomes. Changes in direction, due to the complexity of the process, are not uncommon.

The fact that participatory action research is indebted to Freirian tenets—it has a relational and dialogic foundation, the research process is framed in a praxis oriented cycle of action and reflection leading to critical consciousness and the goal
of transformation and empowerment—make this a well-suited methodology for my research.

Research Design

The goal of this research was to discern any possible spiritual components of community-based art, on both an individual and collective level, through the act of creating and participating in a community-based mural. With relationship being foundational to this research, a community-based setting was appropriate.

Participatory action research properly framed this study, as it is a liberatory form of research aligning with the community goal of transformation and critical consciousness. In participatory action research, participants are equal researchers seeking consciousness (Freire, 1970/2000), the research leading to fundamental social change (Brydon-Miller, 2006; Hall, 1981). Within this research frame, I construct a portrait (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) as a means of documenting culture by capturing the dynamic complexity of human experience within everyday organized life. This methodology is appropriate for this community-based, art-oriented participatory action research, in that the balance between the structural research design and the creative development of the portrait reflects many of the tensions and negotiations that occur in the reality of those academicians who choose to do community-based work. Furthermore, the dialogical foundation of portraiture, utilized as a means of building relationship and illuminating the essences and goodness of those involved, reflects and aligns with the overarching intentions of this research.
Data Collection

Although I used many data collection techniques in enacting this participatory action research study, those that inform the portrait include observation, interviews, drawings, photographs, videotape, community meeting minutes, newspaper articles and neighborhood plans. In addition, my self-reflective journaling created data articulating my evolving perceptions, understandings and subsequent actions while involved in this research, thereby contextualizing my voice within the portrait.

In collecting and expressing the data, I constantly questioned my perceptions and did my best to remain open to information and evidence that ran counter to initial perceptions or evidence, as responsiveness to the moment is key in representing voice as a research instrument, specifically by using voice as witness and listening device (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Observations, Field Notes

As a participant centered in this research—whether through direct creation and implementation of the work and my reflections on that aspect, or as an observer to a variety of other community aspects and functions—it was important for me to keep field notes so as to detail both verbal interactions and discourses, as well as non-verbal contexts (Mason, 2002) as a means of limning the portrait (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997). The field notes were kept with the intention of addressing several facets of this research: first, I sought to document data that would assist me in
answering my research questions; I therefore kept them in mind and found emergent themes that helped me in considering my questions and channeling my reflections. I also wrote descriptives of contexts, as I sought to capture specifics of the environment and setting so as to assist me in appropriately shaping the context of the portrait (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997). As I came to understand the value of dialogue (Bohm, 1996; Kestor, 2004)—serving as both an aesthetic form of action within the participatory action research framework and as a means of shaping the voice of the portraits—I wrote notes of the conversations soon after, recollecting the conversations to the best of my abilities. Observation offered insight into several community contexts, and I therefore wrote field notes as a means of documentation as well as for illuminating the terrain and assisting my understanding of the particular community. Throughout this process, I sought to increasingly become aware of my selectivity and perspective and how that impacted what I observed and noted (Mason, 2002). I also used field notes to document my own developing perceptions and understandings towards a reflexive analysis of the evolving research from my viewpoint (Lather, class notes; Richardson, 2004).

I kept field notes in a notebook during and after participating in the community experiences. I kept my reflections in a digital journal.

Photographs

I also took photographs throughout my time of working and participating in a variety of experiences during this research period. Taking photographs brought intention to the process of looking, particularly within the context of a rapidly
changing community, while also providing a means of illustrating the assets and a
timeline of events taking place the community. Julius, the primary community
partner I worked with in Weinland Park, also took approximately fifteen
photographs to illuminate the developing contrasts in the neighborhood for a
conference we spoke at.

Over the course of this research, I recognized the ability of photographs to
provide a means of examining perceptions and assumptions, while also critiquing
redevelopment, inequity and disparity. As deCuypers (1997-1998, p. 8) notes,
“photography can (and should) be used in ways that are analytical and socially
relevant, not merely as illustrative support for text.”

Throughout the creation of the pre-test mural, I took photographs of the
process. These were used in a digital story created for The Ohio State University, in
addition to being used for a video created for the Obama presidential campaign
(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gDabHGXpyGA). These images were stored on
my laptop.

**Collected Documents**

I collected the agendas from the monthly civic association and the few
district meetings I attended; I frequently kept meeting notes on them. I also
collected newspaper clippings and city revitalization plans. These informative
documents provided further opportunity for constructing data, whether through
observation of the meetings or analysis of the associated documents, both offering
insight and description to understanding the community and illuminating the
physical setting of the portrait. I also collected newspaper clippings, blog sites and websites, as well as an OSU course description—all noting the creation of the mural or utilizing the mural image in some manner.

**Interviews**

I conducted qualitative, semi-structured interviews with mentors in the community, as I was interested in their perceptions, reflections and our interactions as a means of teasing out data that would inform this research. I informally interviewed two community elders for a graduate course, as a means of understanding the history of the neighborhood and the issues that community members contend with. Both interviews offered me the opportunity to practice structured and unstructured interview strategies. Once I had begun this research, I formally interviewed two of the mentors associated with the research.

The interviews were geared towards illuminating the social realities of the participants through articulating specific views, knowledges, understandings, interpretations and experiences (Mason, 2002), as well as articulating favorable practices for outsiders working in community. I also sought to illuminate specific aspects of our work together—including strengths and shortcomings, assets and detriments, as well as discernable qualities and behaviors that indicated personal change and growth through participation in the project—as a means of gleaning data for supporting better community practices, as well as pointing to potential transformative sites and behaviors during our work together.
I primarily used open-ended questions (Lewin, in Somekh & Lewin, 2005), supplemented by sometimes asking follow-up or clarification questions in conducting my interviews. My planning the interviews in this manner supported a collaborative context in which the interviewee could answer the questions in a free manner; we were generally able to have a more conversational quality to the interviews. As with any ethnographic work, it was important for me to listen deeply and be sensitive to any gestures and the nuances; I had to be open to any shifts and alter or accommodate any negotiations that took place within the frame of the interview in order to provide the interviewee with the necessary latitude to share knowledge, views, understandings, experiences and interpretations in a manner that honored their meanings and realities (Lather, course notes).

Shared consciousness, a quality of essentialist methodology (Witz, Goodwin, Hart & Thames, 2001), became a valuable component of this research during the interview process. In essentialist methodology, the researcher tries to “share empathetically and sympathetically the individual’s feelings, state of mind and past experience, both during the interview and in the many re-hearings of the tapes” (p. 108). Doing so allows the interviewer to “explore motivation, spirituality, and social awareness as these appear in the past and present subjective experience and consciousness of the individual, forming part of the individual’s self-understanding and world-view” (p. 198). Granted, any resulting insights must align with the interactions and communication taking place within the interview.

Interview data and backup files were stored on my personal computer and external hard drive; I have sole access to this material.
Data Analysis

In this qualitative study, the data were segmented, analyzed and coded through a reviewing of the interview transcripts, observational field notes, and collected documents. Photographs and video also served as data, documenting the art making process and finished artwork, as well as the rapidly changing face of the community. Through my review of the relevant literature, I began to identify overarching themes that correlated with behaviors, perceptions and actions in the community, which over time assisted in my establishing general categories for observations and interview questions. In reviewing the data, I initially highlighted those ideas that related to my research questions. With two more examinations of the data, I established categories while remaining open to generating new categories that emerged from the data, keeping questions close by as a crosscheck practice, as recommended by Mason (2002). I then studied both prefigured and emergent categories and reconfigured the data both thematically and relationally through conceptual maps. The data were then reviewed again to tease out and include any additional data relevant to the chosen themes.

Observations, Field Notes, Documents

I conducted a content analysis—a process of identifying, coding and categorizing primary patterns in data—as a means of analyzing field notes (Patton, 2002). After carefully reading the field notes, I inductively coded the data (Patton, 2002) as I worked to address prefigured and emergent foci (Eisner, 1998) to make
sense of the thick data. I went into the site open but maintained an awareness of my research questions and objectives, which allowed me to pre-establish some categories while collecting data (Mason, 2002). I noted my thoughts in my journal as the project progressed, which supported the creation of additional emergent themes (Patton, 2002) in an ongoing process beyond data collection (Mason, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994). I also created and collected relevant documents—newspaper articles, questionnaires, meeting minutes, correspondence, grants and community plans—which, when shared with and by community members, offered illumination and alternative information into the context as physical setting. This macro to micro contextualization delineates an outer to inner process for both researcher and reader in understanding the site (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

The resulting chosen themes were relevant to the topic, reflective of the journey of understanding and the discovered collective meanings and resulted in the findings aligning with the existing theoretical framework (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

**Interviews**

Interviews were audiotaped and then transcribed. The transcriptions were analyzed through content analysis, a process for segmenting, coding and categorizing the primary patterns in the data (Patton, 2002). Transcripts were read, highlighted and coded into themes, the themes then compared to the coded field notes. Emergent themes were then selected, and the transcriptions read and highlighted again to discern the codes relevant to both.
**Narrative Report**

I share this research through the medium of portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), a methodology that records, interprets and illuminates the perspectives and experiences of those participating in this participatory action research. Portraiture is a suitable methodology for participatory action research as it is shaped by cultural context and dialogue between the portraitist and the participants. Phenomenologically oriented, it serves as a vehicle for border crossing, illuminating the inherent complexity and goodness captures the essence of the culture and those in it. Foundational to the creation of the portrait is the development of relationship within the cultural context, as it is through navigation and negotiation that such traits as mutuality, reciprocity, trust and responsibility are fostered between one another and knowledge is constructed.

As the essence of portraiture is being an outsider capturing an insider’s understanding and perspective, the report reflects my process of discovery through my personal account of the activities contextualized within the larger community in a self-reflective voice. But as with any portrait, the “I” voice has its place within the larger collective voice—as framed through personal notes, interviews, observations and images—detailing a descriptive account of participants and community context, honoring collective voice while also drawing the reader in (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).
Summary and Implications

In conducting this study, my hope was to discern possible spiritual components of community-based art, on both individual and collective levels, through the acts of creating and participating in community-based art projects. A praxis-oriented research model within a participatory action research design laid a foundation for an emergent approach to teasing out spiritual components of community-based art practices. This praxis approach lent itself to portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) as the methodological choice in presenting the data collected from this research, a choice made out of my desire to both participate in and share what Richardson (1997) refers to as a collective story—one in which individual is collective, the experience of the collective examined within a larger socio-cultural context towards developing consciousness. The value in this approach is the emphasis on relationship and the development of consciousness through collective relationship. Just as the act of participating in participatory action research brings consciousness towards transformation, the creating of the portrait—framed from exterior to interior and situating the individual (and reader) within the collective—illuminates an emergent consciousness that is reflexive of participant participation, while offering reflective understanding through reader engagement (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The point is to illuminate developing consciousness within the frame of concretely highlighting social connectedness; in doing so, as Richardson (1997) notes, isolation between people dissolves, there is a sense of individual and collective empowerment with collective
action being taken towards social reconstruction, as well as education for liberation.

The portraiture approach is presented in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH AS PORTRAITURE

Introduction

This chapter uses portraiture to tell the story of creating a community mural and the community process involved in attempting to create a second community mural. Bridging art and science by using aesthetics and empiricism to capture the complexity and subtlety of the human experience within organizational life, this method of inquiry focuses on illuminating relationships. The portrait is founded in dialogue and collaboration, intervention and border crossing, with the portraitist seeking to reshape the relationship between researcher and audience, academy and community, through the use of narrative. In constructing the narrative, the portraitist takes a holistic approach, seeking to reflect the perspectives and wisdom of the subjects in a manner that “illuminates the complex dimensions of goodness” and results in a portrait of authenticity and essence (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. xvi). The portraitist acknowledges her role and impact in this negotiative, narrative process, balancing inquiry with insight, witnessing with interpretation, personal perspectives with involvement and critique; in doing so, she sheds light on self-understanding and the transformative meaning making that comes through experience in relationship. Organic
and holistic, portraiture is designed to capture the attention of a broad and eclectic audience as an act of border crossing and community building (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Following Lawrence-Lightfoot’s structuring of a portrait, this is organized from the macro to the micro, paralleling my experience and perceptions as an outsider entering into the neighborhood. Detail is offered throughout the context, as meaning is made contextually, the relationships within a context either supporting or serving as a detriment to meaning making (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Wenger, 1998). Thus, the context offers insight into purpose, perspective, and interpretation for both researcher and reader (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). I include myself within this context in recognition of my impact on the environment—I am a middle-aged, well-educated, white female from a middle class background, and I was collaborating with three African American men, of which two were in their mid-twenties and one a few years younger than me. I include Julius’s voice as much as possible, to create a truer sense of the participatory nature of our collaboration, to honor his voice, and to give a fuller sense of the relational quality to our collaboration as two separate individuals collaborating and respecting one another as equals. Doing so illuminates knowledge as constructed within the context of relationship: self-understanding emerges through relationship and validity from mutuality in relationship (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 136). In weaving together the portrait, I examined the data for emergent themes and patterns, framing it to highlight goodness, detailing evidence while also offering
dissonance to bring cohesion and balance to the whole of the portrait (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

This portrait will then be used to delineate the concrete behaviors suggesting an extension in perception and any action taken in consideration of a larger whole—both components of what I suggest to be embodied spirituality—in Chapter 5 before considering and discussing the pedagogical implications of a demystified spirituality, also in Chapter 5.

**EMERGENT HOPE: A PORTRAIT BASED IN COMMUNITY ART**

**The Weinland Park Neighborhood**

Fourth Street courses north from downtown and into the Old North neighborhood, serving as a secondary artery for navigating Columbus by car—to those in-the-know—in that you are able to escape the perpetually clogged and slow-moving traffic defining the parallel artery of High Street. The tone of this north Columbus neighborhood is a solid, working class one, the streets largely defined by unpretentious two-story brick homes interspersed with Craftsman bungalows on the north end, all having small well-kept lawns and many squeezing a vegetable garden, or perhaps a row of zinnias, along the side of the house. As you dodge potholes and slow for speed bumps on these side streets, made narrow by parking on both sides, you notice the polite manner by which all navigate their turn: everyone partakes in a ritual of nodding and waving as they pass through the one-car path. You can envision, if you don’t witness it
first hand, the neighborly chat in what is a family-friendly, university-oriented
community.

Parallel to and one block west of Fourth Street, running one-way south, is
Summit Street. On the north end of Summit are clusters of small businesses—a jazz
club, a creative community collective, a resale store, a few boutiques and taverns—all
occupying enduring brick structures and all reflecting the hard-working, middle class
values of this area. Cars rush unimpeded downtown in a matter of minutes, if going with
the flow of the few traffic lights, and avoid the congestion of the burgeoning Short
North arts district on High Street, which is lined with trendy, niche-branded restaurants
and bars catering to locals, college students and the LBGT community. There are a
variety of boutiques offering clothing, house wares and artisanal ice cream, interspersed
by newly constructed condominiums and catering to an increasingly affluent student
population. Significant to the development of the Short North arts district was the influx
of art galleries, around which the area began developing this identity through the wildly
successful monthly-held art hop night.

High Street serves as the roadway axis, aligning neighborhoods and the
university through a causeway of congestion, with bustling cars, slow-moving busses,
and the occasional bicycles and rickshaws all jostling to move forward and, in the case of
cars, to park. The aforementioned Fourth and Summit run parallel to this busy street
and lie directly east of the university; the unimpeded traffic on these two streets
dissects another small university neighborhood—one identified as both Weinland Park
and the Short North, depending on whom you speak with.
Weinland Park lies directly east of The Ohio State University campus and is one of seven University Area district neighborhoods. It was once a thriving middle-class neighborhood in which community members were gainfully employed at Columbus Coated Fabrics and 3M factories. The closing of the factories brought economic challenges for neighborhood residents; another challenge fell close on the heels of the first, coming in the form of changing zoning laws. While conceptually beneficial, in implementation the zoning codes protected property values for developers, owners, and owner-occupied single-family districts, while increasing densities for multifamily housing. Thus, new zoning codes negatively impacted low-income individuals living in the city (Burgess, 1984). The neighborhood transitioned into student housing with the accompanying disengaged landlords in the early 1970s. By the 1980s, students had fled the area in favor of suburban lifestyles; the neighborhood was neglected by property owners, merchants and the university for two decades (Pristin, 2003). Densely populated, this neighborhood of a third of a square mile in geographical mass became home to the largest number of Section 8 housing units in the country, with only 9% of the community population owning homes. (Pristin, 2003; Weinland Park Neighborhood Plan, 2006).

As with other urban low-income, mixed-race communities situated near college campuses, this neighborhood carries negative perceptions, pointing to issues of inequity based on race and class and resulting in a projected perception of people and places to be avoided. Upon riding through Weinland Park/Short North at the onset of his first tenure, The Ohio State University’s president, Gordon Gee, was shocked by what he saw in this geographical location so close to the well-endowed university he was in
charge of: a dense cluster of abandoned buildings, some boarded up and others burnt out, along streets pockmarked with potholes; overgrown yards framed by broken sidewalks, people hanging out on corners. “I thought I was being driven through Bagdad,” he exclaimed (President Gee, speaking at Council for Graduate Students, Winter 2008). The visual aesthetic of the neighborhood became one of neglect leading into disintegration, invisible to its immediate wealthy neighbor—the university—and largely ignored by the city, save within the context of the police blotter.

(Figure 1: Short North Jungle, Weinland Park).
This is not to say that the neighborhood does not have its assets. In fact, despite the pockets of largely neglected and abandoned properties, there are a variety of assets that community members acknowledge and utilize (Hutzel & Resler, 2009; Kretzman & McKnight, 1993). Geographical assets include the Godman Guild settlement house, a one-story beige brick building on the corner of Sixth and Sixth: once an elementary school, it has been the permanent home of the Guild since 1994, replete with overflow trailers serving as additional office space in the adjacent parking lot. The Guild has maintained a successful mission of serving community needs through a variety of youth and adult programming, promoting self-sufficiency and leadership for well over one hundred years. The Guild also promotes sustainability and nutrition within the community through the large, very active community garden managed by neighborhood youth, the garden’s design symbolically reflecting that of the ages-old oak tree prominent on the corner of this beloved community institution.

Two connecting large red brick buildings—an elementary school and an early childhood center—designate the neighborhood’s investment in its children, actively transforming what was once a crime-ridden area into a well-used park that hosts youth football and the annual community festival, while also serving as welcomed green space to community members. Acting as a lab school for OSU, the Schoenbaum Center serves both neighborhood children and those of OSU faculty members. What distinguishes the Schoenbaum Early Childhood Center from others like it is the community involvement: notable are the community meeting rooms, used by the civic association and others, as well as the large horizontal glass
windows designed by community youth--each is tinted a primary color, the whole effect being that of a Malevich painting. The center is also host to university research: the International Poverty Solutions Collaborative, begun in 2010, seeks to support and provide guidance to “poverty interventions” through interdisciplinary research that creates a “theoretical framework for research on poverty” (poverty.osu.edu).

A few blocks away lies the site of the new multi-million dollar brick police station, housing the precinct and city code enforcement staff. Historically, there has been a great deal of tension and mistrust between community members and police. Declarations of police brutality are not uncommon, nor are remarks of ineffectuality in addressing community needs, such as the significant lag time in responding to burglaries. There is a palpable sense of mistrust for these reasons, as well as the result of police eradicating the neighborhood of a majority of its men in a sting operation conducted in the early 80s to rid the community of the dominant local gang, the Short North Posse (Conversations with Buzz, 2010, and G.S., Winter, 2008). With the city now investing in the area, there are attempts by the police to amend this terse relationship today: a few come regularly to the civic association meetings and the community festival; notably, the code officer has chosen this neighborhood as his permanent beat for the past thirteen years—and the community reveres him for his commitment and compassion.

Directly across the street from the new police station lies a shell of a burnt-out house, a hand-painted “SAVE OUR CHILDREN” sign nailed to the porch. This charred relic is but one example of the ample evidence of abandonment: in walking
the streets, one sees so many houses boarded up, yards neglected, visible windows broken or covered with plywood. And yet the sentiment of the sign reflects what all acknowledge as a significant asset in the neighborhood: the children. Just yards away from this sign, is another sign draped across the front of a convenience store: “STOP THE KILLING.”

*Community and Complexity in Weinland Park*

Community members in low-income areas of cities negotiate the complexity of the area in a variety of ways: creating a critical mass, keeping it simple, encouraging random encounters, looking for patterns in signs, and paying attention to neighbors. All of these support local feedback on multiple levels that not only promotes the sharing of information but adaptation as well and, therefore, survival from the ground level up (Johnson, 2001). The accompanying complexity of social networks highlights the well-developed social capital found in these areas, further supporting community identity and pride (Putnam, 2000).

These methodological forms of communication demonstrate collective intelligence and are evidenced in multiple ways. Julius admonishes youth in the neighborhood to “Pay attention! Look at the signs!” as a means of bringing consciousness to both personal actions and the rapid changes taking place in the neighborhood, so as to be engaged participants. The haphazard or random encounters—for example, me meeting Julius, or my inviting Buzz to join our mural painting—provide new information, understandings, opportunities and resources, while also promoting adaptability and a macro view of the microcosm. The eyes that are
everywhere on the streets promote safety to neighbors through feedback: I had a young man on a bike introduce himself and ask if I needed help in getting to where I was going the first time I went to meet with Julius—he noted that he saw me drive around the block slowly, unsure as to where I was going. He also noted he had never seen my car in the neighborhood. He was correct on both accounts. Likewise, the actions that take place on the sidewalks within the visual scope of neighbors are instructive as to what is occurring in the neighborhood and how to best respond to or resolve a situation; these actions can also be viewed as performative in nature, and thus empowering as well as instructive. Having a critical mass has developed through the creation of representative entities, such as the increasingly active Weinland Park Civic Association, created in March of 2004 through by-laws submitted to the city. These demonstrate an organism of emergent culture based in bottoms-up complexity.

When I first visited Weinland Park, community members often referred to the neighborhood as “the most expensive piece of property that nobody knows about,” due to its close proximity to the university and the resulting recognition that the land could only become increasingly valuable in the eyes of all connected to it at some point in the future. Evidence of this is seen in the tremendous geographical change that has occurred over the past few years and will continue to take place. The unfolding awareness of this neighborhood as a land asset has created space for navigation and negotiation, with several stakeholders intersecting, competing and seeking voice in how Weinland Park is defined and by whom.

Fueled by the university president’s perceptions of this area, in addition to
the recognition that students had fled to the suburbs for housing needs, the
university created Campus Partners in partnership with the city in 1995. This entity
was to address urban redevelopment in the area, with a goal of creating a safe
environment by which to re-involve students closer to campus. In addition to
purchasing several parcels of land in the neighborhood, as well as creating the
largest segment of Section 8 housing in the state, Campus Partners created an
upscale shopping complex adjacent to high-end condominiums for law students and
professionals in 2005. This replaced long-established community shops, bars and
restaurants, as well as several blocks of housing. Called The Gateway, and serving as
a bridge between the university and its neighboring Weinland Park/Short North
community, it is worth noting that there was no community involvement or
representation in its creation or existence—it is also worth noting that within three
years, nearly all the shops had closed, save the Hungry Tuna Saloon, site of a still-
missing medical student. Campus Partners began filling the empty storefronts with
various university offices and initiatives, further situating the university within the
community.

**Julius:** When calling Julius, you’ll go directly to voice mail, particularly if he’s not
familiar with your number. His message is a calling card of sorts, detailing his
accomplishments and assets through the various roles he has held thus far in his young
life: “I am a Teacher, Mentor, Coach, Comedian, Rapper, Writer, Businessman,
Entrepreneur... and Mover but not moved...please leave a message and I’ll get back with
you.” Both cryptic and telling, this message—in addition to detailing his many talents—
also contains a declaration of continued loyalty to his neighborhood, the Short North,
through the phrase “Mover, but not moved.” Julius made this declaration in response to
gossip of his leaving the neighborhood, thereby no longer being committed to it and its youth, when he moved from his long-time apartment due to rising rent prices.

**My Introduction to Julius and the Resulting Collaboration**

I first met Julius on the porch of a then mutual friend’s house: he and his friend were leaving as I arrived. We had been told of one another, leading to introductions and a brief conversation about possible shared interests and the potential of working together on a community-based project at some point in the future. He asked for my card—I didn’t have one—before handing me his, which indicated he was employed by Ohio State, working at the new homeless teen shelter in the neighborhood. I was immediately curious about and impressed by Julius, as he seemed to defy categorization: extremely charismatic and clearly very much a part of this neighborhood, judging by his engaging each and every person who came within the scope of his gaze, ready with a business card and receptive to the potential offered in every encounter.

The next time I saw Julius was many months later at the opening ceremony of the Schoenbaum Early Childhood Family Center, located in Weinland Park/Short North. Columbus dignitaries and neighborhood folk all gathered to celebrate this beautiful educational facility, a site of so much hope and holding the promise of engaged partnership between OSU and the community. Once the ribbon was cut, tours were perpetually given to a never-ending stream of community members, even as workmen
tried to meet city permit deadlines while also making areas presentable for the opening event. Julius, there with a group of his friends, remembered and approached me, asking if I was an artist and if I’d ever painted any murals before. I told him of my background being in ceramics and asked as to why he wanted to know. “I want to change the perception people have of this neighborhood—both people living in the neighborhood and people looking in—and I want to do that by painting a mural.” Julius’s vision was that a mural could not only serve as a point for shifting public consciousness through its visual existence in space and place—it could also serve as a point of consciousness for participants through the act of its creation. He envisioned this mural as the first of many in the neighborhood, the teen participants learning valuable jobs skills while artistically changing the face of their community, then utilizing those skills to transform spaces in other Columbus neighborhoods.

I was immediately struck by Julius’s clarity of vision and drive, not to mention his commitment to youth in the community. That he would, at the age of 23, understand the multiple perceptions held of his neighborhood—whether by those living in or outside of it—and choose to disrupt and challenge that, doing so in a manner that proves of benefit to neighborhood youth, was laudable. I was certainly interested in working with him, but I am no muralist: my only mural experience was born of creating two murals with students while teaching in public schools. I also wondered why he would ask me, rather than someone in the neighborhood, or someone he knew better. He said he had tried to find someone in the neighborhood for months with no results; he had heard I would be someone he could work with. With that, he told me I was
“hired” and asked what my fee would be. As I was considering community-based work as the focus for my study, I agreed to work with him, without the fee and told him how much I appreciated the fact that he considered and was willing to pay an artist fee; after all, any artist or art educator will acknowledge the challenges faced in receiving funding or payment for art or artistic services rendered. This was the seed of our collaboration, one that came to encompass more than painting a mural; we ultimately sought to create some semblance of an organization that supported the artistic development of neighborhood youth towards self empowerment and self sustenance through the development of microenterprises.

A few months and a phone call later, I drove to meet Julius at his workplace one hot summer afternoon. Having become familiar with the neighborhood through a previous community-based art project was instructive in how I considered my participation in this project. I consciously considered how I entered the neighborhood, for example, doing so only when expected and taking a direct path to locations, for example, so as to not encroach on areas I did not belong in. Julius, who greeted me on the porch and introduced me to a young man approaching on his bike who, in turn, told me that I had to be new to the neighborhood as he had not noticed my car before and, having seen me circle around the block looking for Julius’s work place, followed me to check me out. I was coming to understand that the neighborhood was very much like a living organism, with members having an exceptional awareness of each and every activity occurring within it.
Julius both works and lives in Weinland Park, referred to as the Short North by the community’s youth and reflecting both the earlier historical name of the neighborhood as well as the name of the gang that calls this area home. Julius was born and lived his early years here but returned at eighteen and committed his life to the youth of this community, discovering that he loved working with kids through a summer job he once had at the neighborhood Godman Guild settlement house.

His commitment to youth and giving back to community, combined with tremendous charisma and confidence, has carried Julius far. He will tell you of a challenging childhood, being reared by a single mother and finding a dead body in his back yard at the age of four. He claims he was trouble in school because he always spoke his mind—a quality he continues to value and make the most of to this day—and if he wasn’t actively engaged and challenged, he was asleep. Despite this, and as a result of his being very bright, he graduated from high school, returned to the neighborhood and earned an associate’s degree.

Julius was clearly being groomed to represent his neighborhood: his job with Ohio State positioned him for continuing a college education that included graduate school; he was soon the Vice President of the Weinland Park Civic Association and also served as a board member of the University Area commission. He walked the streets every day, as I discovered when I joined him on occasion, speaking to each and every person he saw, lending assistance where he could, offering to mediate when necessary, and introducing himself to anyone he didn’t know. To the individual who tries to avoid or pretend he does not know Julius? He laughs, “He can pretend he don’t know me all he wants, but he’s gonna get to know me because I
ain’t goin’ anywhere and this is my neighborhood!” Incidentally, in said conversation, it took several minutes, but Julius did find the connection by which they had met and knew of one another and the point was made: if you have lived in Weinland Park, Julius knows you! His clarity and outspokenness, combined with a commitment to truth and to his community, make Julius a bright rising star.

Our meeting that day included a third person, Julius’s close friend S. New to the neighborhood, he lived next door to where Julius worked. A tall, lumbering, quiet man with long dreads and a wicked sense of humor, S prefers to remain a detached, invisible observer, later offering Julius feedback. The two share a similar perspective on life, in terms of their dedication to youth and community rebuilding, as well as their skepticism of social structures; they therefore bonded quickly. S, like Julius, is very bright and creative: he had taken classes at Ohio State and was just embarking on his dream of being a filmmaker when I first met him, committed to documenting his newly adopted neighborhood from the community members’ perspectives. Over time, his clarity and determination have paid off, as he recently received funding and created a short film addressing some of the issues and assets of the neighborhood.

In listening to Julius—amid a constant stream of young people coming in and out of the house, seeking snacks, work, advice and a place to relax and watch TV—I learned the project was to involve seven of the neighborhood’s young men as an opportunity to creatively express themselves while earning some money and being supported in making different life decisions through the benefits of male mentorship. My role would be to provide the necessary logistical skills—creating a
mural timeline, budget and curriculum and co-facilitating the execution of the mural—within the larger framework of mentoring neighborhood young men. I learned that the Weinland Park Civic Association had been awarded a citywide safety grant for re-investing and re-building the neighborhood; this mural project was Julius’s attempt to fulfill that by mentoring youth and involving them in a skills-based opportunity in which they would have the chance to express themselves creatively. Although verbally given support of the awarded grant through civic association discussions, Julius was uncertain as to when the actual monies would come through. Believing it was just a matter of time, he therefore sought to lay the organizational groundwork by planning the project and wasting no time in getting young men involved, his intention being to keep track of the hours they worked and paying them once the monies were awarded. I shared basic considerations in planning a mural and my willingness to be a part of this project. I gathered that this was an opportunity for S to meet me and offer feedback to Julius as to whether or not I might be a good fit for working with this group.

I was apparently approved, as Julius called me the next day to invite me to a meeting the following Saturday. Once there, I met another mentor Julius had chosen to be a part of this project. Julius, having never been in any trouble of any sort, recognized the need to involve someone who lent street credence to the project. He therefore involved a long-time friend from Cincinnati who had experienced a deeply challenging childhood resulting in his going down the wrong path before attending Ohio State through a scholarship. The fact that he completed his degree and worked in the corporate world before then choosing to give back to community by
mentoring young men through non-profit work—“I try to save a few lives every
day!”—made him a perfect fit for this project. I listened during this meeting, as the
men involved considered how they wished to structure the mentorship aspect of the
program. They decided there would be two meetings a week: one based in
mentorship, in which life skills and a reconsideration of self within community and
the larger society would be the focus; the other meeting would take place on
Saturday mornings, with me leading the mural project. Food, namely pizza, would
be offered at both meetings. We discussed how to best involve these young men in a
way that was relevant to them, acknowledging their desire for change in their lives,
while also honoring their survival skills.

For me to get to know participating youth, Julius had me come to a few of the
initial meetings, where I was introduced as an artist who would be working with
them and as someone who was “cool.” I listened at these meetings and was
impressed with the young men’s openness and candor, the depth of their
perceptions of the world around them, their sense of hope despite the obstacles they
encountered daily and their recognition of the challenges they would face in
changing their current realities. They sought to be heard, their opinions and
knowledge valued. Their clarity was acute: when asked of their thoughts on what
would stop the killings in the neighborhood, one young man held nothing back,
stating, “I don’t know. Y’all adults created this situation and y’all should solve it,
instead of just handing it to us to solve.”

Two meetings were held in which I worked with the young men in creating
the mural. I began by sharing some general themes I had heard throughout the prior
discussions: issues of survival, hope, respect, money, community, belonging, and death dominated their thoughts and structured their words. Images of community-based artists and muralists, notably Judy Baca, served as examples by which to translate thoughts into images. Initially eager to get started in doing whatever they needed to do to earn money, I sought to involve them in writing about their ideas of strength through survival, then drawing about that. Although interested in sharing stories, none were interested in writing about this—they wanted to get painting, so as to get paid. Two of the seven were receptive to drawing: the others immediately acquiesced and discussed relevant stories of the neighborhood, which the other two drew in response to. We had two preliminary drawings and an open rapport at the end of this meeting.

The second meeting brought more of the same: those who did not envision themselves as artists were happy to leave the drawing duties to the two who were interested while catching up on neighborhood drama and talking with the mentors about returning to school, GED classes and making better life choices. After this particular meeting, the one young man committed to having art in his life continued to work on a drawing for the mural. The others were no longer interested in participating for two reasons: first, they needed to be making money and had no guarantee of when they would be paid for their participation. Secondly, as stated by a young man in a conversation we had after the meeting, “If y’all had asked us, we would have told you there are only two things we’re really interested in doing—basketball and rap. We’ll do this if we see we’re being paid up front, but we’re interested in basketball and rap.” I now knew that despite the thoughtfulness and
clarity of Julius’s vision, it was one that had not been informed by the youth and their interests, save two who were.

We were moving forward still, trusting that when the planning and funds came together, the young men would participate in the actual painting of the mural. To that end, Julius sought the appropriate site. He said the mural could be painted in only one of two places, if it were to have any relevance: both sites would play a role in the final mural project, ultimately, but in different ways than we had originally intended. The favored location by Julius was the corner of 4th and 8th, on the north wall of the D & J Carry Out.

(Figure 2: D & J Carry Out, 4th and 8th, Weinland Park).
I learned that this site has a significant reputation for drug deals and deaths; it is the signifier of those who are members of the Short North Posse, a notorious gang whose members tattoo this geographic location on their necks and across their knuckles. A great deal of lore is associated with this corner: a trusted police officer serving this area for 13 years told me of “the night the men went away,” an evening in which the S.W.A.T. team came to that corner and simply cleared all the men from that area and out of the surrounding buildings as a means of breaking the well-organized gang activity there (Conversation with G.S., Winter 2008; Conversation with Buzz, October, 2008). These men were serving sentences of fifteen years and more, resulting in a decrease in neighborhood gang activity but also leaving the community bereft of men—a generation of community members growing older without the benefit of fathers, brothers, or spouses. I also learned from community members that there had been well over 150 deaths on that corner, the result of drugs or drug deals gone bad. It remains a busy corner of both legitimate and illicit business: the carry out has people continually revolving in and out for snacks, lottery tickets, cigarettes and check-cashing services and beer. It also remains a corner perpetually hosting those hanging out. A law was therefore passed specifically for that corner, prohibiting anyone from approaching a car unless they are getting into it, the violator receiving a ticket.

Julius sought permission to paint the mural on the D & J Carry Out’s wall, as that corner served as a primary point of the negative connotations associated with the neighborhood and targeted those that Julius wanted to see change. He spoke with the manager, who questioned both the legitimacy of the project and Julius’s
ability to see the project through, despite his knowledge of Julius being the Vice-President of the Civic Association and committed community leader. “They think that because I’m black, I dress like this and I live in the ‘hood that I’m not serious, that I can’t do this,” he said, before also noting that when they see a white woman from Ohio State working with him, they would take him more seriously. That was, in fact, the case.

I joined Julius and S. in visiting D & J Carry-Out. I am not sure what I expected to see on entering, but I know it wasn’t wall-to-wall hair extensions—“enough for the Kentucky Derby,” noted S, all lined in perfect rows according to color, length and quality, framing the requisite snacks and candy, drink coolers and a few racks of Tupac t-shirts. We discover that the owner of the carryout isn’t in Iraq, as Julius had been told previously, but was instead at the other market on Fifth Avenue. We also learn that getting permission to paint the mural will require more work than simply my accompanying Julius to discuss the proposal with said owner. Four meetings with various managers, a presentation detailing successful murals from other cities and descriptions of the potential this mural had as a catalyst for change in the community, as well as the promise of gaining their approval of our design before implementing it, and we had our permission.

Our collaboration then took an interesting shift. Friends were discussing the mural over lunch in a local Columbus restaurant one day. A gentleman overheard the conversation and mentioned, “I’m the Media Director for the Obama Campaign. I just flew in from Los Angeles to film the barn murals for TV ads. It would be great to have an urban counterpart to the barn murals—do you think they’d be interested?” I
soon received a phone call from an Obama representative and the Media Director, we met for coffee, and I took this idea to the group for discussion. The young men had sought payment to do the mural; although that was not an option, they still voted to do it, as they valued the opportunity to have both themselves and their work on TV.

When asked about a site for the mural, the young men enthusiastically and unanimously voted to paint it on the corner of 4th and 11th—on the side of the baby blue Chicken Gems building, adjacent to Kelly’s Carry-Out.

(Figure 3: Short North wall, Chicken Gems, 4th and 11th, Weinland Park).
This was also a corner with a considerable reputation, as evidenced by the “Stop the Killing” banner draped across the front of the store.

We called a meeting to create the design for the mural, talking, surfing for images on the web, sketching out some ideas, which I then translated into the final image through Photoshop. The collaborative nature of this meeting was impressive to me, in that we all offered ideas, which were all respected as possibilities, our deciding which worked and didn’t work quite democratically through visually seeing the images juxtaposed with one another. There was no seeming attachment to one’s personal idea or contribution—the ideas simply flowed and were used and disposed of based in what was visually cohesive to us all. The final image shows a silhouette of Obama against a yellow rising sun background. Along the bottom are eagerly raised hands of all skin tones. In the right corner is a silhouette of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, acknowledging the legacy that led to this moment and giving attribution to the quote framing the mural. Obama used this quote in his speech at the Democratic convention: “If you lose hope, you lose the vitality that keeps life moving, you lose that courage to be that quality that helps you go on in spite of it all. And so today, I still have a dream....”

Asked how long it would take to create this mural, we allotted four weeks, considering the work and school schedules of those planning on participating. We then waited to hear of when we could get supplies and begin: in the end, we waited six weeks, as the Media Director had said he wanted to be present to film it. When we finally got the call to start, we had just a few days to get the supplies and begin painting the mural. A private donor secured funding for paint supplies, a local real
estate owner/landlord lent scaffolding, and a local art teacher lent an overhead projector.

Julius, K, S, and I started at 10 a.m. on a Saturday morning. The other mentor from Cincinnati could not make it; only one of the seven young men showed up, this particular young man chuckling over the irony of his now painting over the graffiti he had painted on what was now the mural wall. Conversation was that it might be unsafe for some of the young men to participate: the neighborhood had recently seen a rash of crime of various sorts and accompanying violence. In one instance, one of the young men was related to an individual who had been involved in one of these incidents, and it was therefore unsafe for him to be out. Some of the young men, it was suspected, chose not to participate because they were not being paid. We simply started, first with cleaning the wall, then priming it, Julius blasting old school R & B from his truck to keep the dirty work from getting monotonous. Five high school-aged young women soon joined us for the priming. Neighbors and customers to Kelly's Carry Out stopped by to ask what we were doing. Owners of the neighboring barbershop came to investigate and ask if we would be willing to paint a barber's pole in front of their business. Lula, the manager of Chicken Gem's, kept us both fed and entertained, regaling us with stories of his life experiences and talk of the neighborhood amid a near-constant stream of customers stopping in to order carry-out chicken fingers, wings or fries. I, having just met him, also had the honor of being invited into the kitchen so that he could share school pictures of his three young daughters that he had on the wall. Having previously worked as a delivery
person for a similar operation, he was proud to now be running his own business and was doing well in this neighborhood lacking these types of amenities.

That evening, I brought the overhead projector and projected the mural image onto the wall with the help of the headlights from Julius's truck. Tracing the image with Sharpies in this illuminated space and to Denise Williams’ “Free” on the stereo created an environment fitting of an event. Soon, people drove into the parking lot and stopped to ask what we were doing; neighbors gathered around the semi-circle to watch and chat. Some of the neighborhood children got involved, tracing the raised hands in the spotlight. I then began to recognize and accept that although nothing about this project was going as planned, what was emerging was just as valid and rewarding.

For five intensely demanding days, this mural was the epicenter of the neighborhood. Julius, K., S. and I were the consistent participants throughout. Others came and contributed as they could, and contributed in a variety of ways. L., for example, was there daily, generally on bike, and always engaging, positive, supportive. Neighborhood children and youth came from surrounding homes to join in and make their mark; of course, their parents, curious, followed behind with lawn chairs and gathered to chat. At any given time, particularly at night, there were approximately thirty people gathered around the mural, participating to various extents. For example, a gentleman drove up in his Cadillac one evening, got out and mentioned his teacher training before jumping in and telling participating children how to properly care for paintbrushes. In another instance, two young men ran up to our mural breathless, telling us to give them paintbrushes and let them help—
they were running from the cops. They immediately joined in, painting the background yellow and continuing in that vein long after the cops had stopped by and left in search of them.

One significant participant joined us when I introduced myself and asked him. He had driven up to the carry out with his daughters, and he intrigued me. Buzz is a large man dressed in blue sweats, sporting tattoos, rings on every finger, and several large necklaces—notably a gem-encrusted Scorpion. His is an intimidating presence on the surface, but spend a few minutes talking with him, watch him interact with his daughters or other neighborhood youth, and you discover that he is likely one of the most spiritual people you will ever meet. A music producer and mentor to young men in the neighborhood, Buzz has quite a bit of street credence as well, having turned his life around some twenty-five years ago. He, his girlfriend and daughters joined us every day, and Buzz replaced the Cincinnati-based mentor once we completed this mural and moved forward.

As mentioned previously, we had planned on taking a month to complete the mural, out of consideration for the school schedules of the youth and work schedules of the mentors, in addition to my school and teaching schedule. In reality, it took five days from beginning to end. Although there are likely several reasons for this, two come to my mind: first, once it had started and it was apparent that the young men for whom it was intended to serve as a skills-based apprenticeship would not be participating, Julius was determined to complete the mural regardless. He is a leader in the community, after all, and he maintains his integrity. But also, once started, there was no stopping it—our core group worked ten-hour days with
community members and passers-by joining in throughout, returning with children and grandchildren, painting a few strokes and sticking around to converse with one another. Many commented that they had never seen anything like this in the neighborhood—such a wide array of community members gathering around a central creative event. Buzz noted that he did not stop in that area and had not seen or spoken with most of the people there in twenty or more years—it just wasn’t done. Many remarked that they wanted to be a part of history by participating in a mural that both beautified the community and marked a significant event in the history of the United States.

The overall feeling fostered by the creation of this mural was one of hope, aligning with that of the Obama campaign. Frequent discussion arose as to whether or not one believed Obama would actually be elected and, if elected by the people, if election fraud or the electorate vote could prevent his presidency from becoming reality. Both passers-by and participants frequently asked me if I would vote for Obama, my being white. Nearly all were surprised when I responded my intention to do so, explaining that I found him deeply intelligent, articulate, and I do not hold the values of the Republican Party or those representing it.

At the end of the fifth day, a ribbon-cutting celebration brought the media outlets, state representatives, city council members, and representatives from the mayor’s office, as well as Max Kennedy—son of Bobby Kennedy—in support of the Obama campaign. The Obama staff provided wings, mac and cheese, hot dogs and brownies, which they ordered from Chicken Gems in support of this community business. Community members in attendance noted they had never seen many that
were in attendance at the celebration before: some chuckled about it, while others acknowledged the opportunity to share this positive community piece with others who previously would not have entered the neighborhood. Several told me that they had come from out of town to meet a Kennedy. Most touching, for me, and certainly indicative of the impact this mural had on those who witnessed it, were the comments made to us as we were cleaning up the space in preparation for the celebration. A frail, elderly woman had the habit of walking through the parking lot every day as we worked. On this day, she paused, stared at the mural and tears came to her eyes, as she explained the challenges she faces daily, the result of homelessness and addiction. She doesn’t know anything of her future, other than its uncertainty and often doesn’t know how to go on. And yet once she saw this mural being created, she’d stop by daily and simply gaze at it, reflecting on the message it offered—one of hope for a different future.

The Hope mural had a far-reaching effect: The Obama campaign made a video of the mural’s creation, featuring it prominently in the Ohio campaign and on the President’s blog; those who donated to the campaign received a postcard of the mural.

The Hope mural was featured in numerous newspaper articles and as backdrops for political articles during the Presidential campaign season. In addition, the image was used as a marketing tool in advertising a university course on African-American oral histories of another Columbus neighborhood. There were concerns of the mural being tagged or damaged by graffiti, but it remained unblemished for over three and a half years—a recent incident occurred, which will
be discussed in the epilogue—a testament to community support and a reflection of how the value of hope resonates within the larger public, just as it was reflected as the campaign theme of our nation’s first African-American president.

(Figure 4. Obama Campaign postcard)
(Figure 5. Newspaper with Hope mural featured on front page)

Post Hope Mural: Planning for Our Next Mural

The success of the Hope mural initially returned us to the desire to follow through on the original mural we had planned as a means of involving and supporting the young men in the neighborhood, albeit after a rest of several months. The pace at which we created the Obama mural was demanding: ten to twelve hour days for five days straight was exhausting and allowed no time for reflection or for attention to detail and the refinement of skills, although it did result in our mural being filmed and featured prominently within the Obama presidential campaign. We
agreed to use the cold Ohio winter months to plan, discern a timeline for securing the awarded grant funding and regroup in the spring with warmer weather.

But as with any community-based work, there can be an emergent or even unpredictable quality to it, which Daniel (2006) would acknowledge as the non-linearity of a community act. The fact that all involved all have volition and are operating as free-agents of a sort within a non-specific order creates a tension between a desire for agency and an ability to fit within an environment so as to manifest an end result. Therefore a commitment to engagement and relationship are fundamental in this work, requiring dialogue and feedback as a means of decision-making in achieving an end goal.

Over the course of several months, we held a few sporadic meetings and spoke on the phone periodically. Oftentimes, our scheduled meetings were cancelled due to one of the community mentors being unable to make it as a result of other obligations. We attended civic association meetings in which the dissemination of grant monies was considered, with a variety of community stakeholders presenting plans and programs in the interest of neighborhood revitalization. A series of civic association meetings, sponsored and facilitated by the United Way (a longtime community partner), were devoted to ascertaining community needs and values through holding a World Café. The results of this feedback were validating for the work we sought to implement, as the arts were near the top of several lists. Nine categories defined the role of the civic association in supporting neighborhood revitalization: youth and education; safety and crime prevention; housing; employment and economic development; community engagement; communication;
markets, food and gardening; beautification; and transportation. The arts were favored as vehicles in facilitating revitalization in two categories: in the youth and education category, a desire for more arts programs, including public art, was mentioned. In the employment and economic development category, arts-based initiatives leading to the creation of microenterprises was ranked second of seven means to be considered.

That said, I came to understand that although there were still plans for the mural “because the community expected it” (Conversation with Julius Jefferson, February 24, 2009), everyone was now pursuing their own avenues, in alignment with personal abilities and interests, while also being open to working collectively, the determining factor being an ability to get funding. Julius was considering a variety of other skills-based avenues—lawn care, carpentry and furniture building, house painting, and starting a hip hop franchise like that we visited in Cincinnati—based in his interests and his getting feedback from the young men he sought to mentor. Buzz, being a music producer, sought to use his specific musical talents in mentoring youth; S, with his longtime passion for film, began networking towards receiving funding to create a documentary of the neighborhood from the perspective and voice of community members. And I, having committed to the mural as my research study, sought to follow through on that. It appeared that we would each work our respective avenues and see which developed. To see the mural manifest, I realized that I was on my own in making it happen.

I therefore began networking, beginning with meeting with a Godman Guild board member I knew from teaching GED courses there, in an attempt to solicit
funding for the mural through any connections he might have. I also cultivated a partnership for in-kind support through a chance encounter at the Godman Guild’s community garden, of which I was a member; this in-kind support from Lowe’s generously provided for all the mural materials. I met with two developers and several landlords in the neighborhood in an attempt to create a partnership through which young men would learn carpentry and house painting skills as a means of translating mural painting skills into employment opportunities. To the landlords frustrated by the tagging of their properties, I suggested they hire a young man from the neighborhood to repaint and maintain the properties—again, in an attempt to offer possibilities for translating skills into positive outcomes for all.

I had long been interested in non-profit arts organizations offering the development of art-based skills towards creating microenterprises, such as Boston’s Artists for Humanity. With a little bit of research, I learned of a similar organization in Cincinnati worth investigating, as well as a non-profit arts center that promoted hip-hop culture. I arranged meetings with both, and the four of us road tripped to Cincinnati for an evening to investigate these organizations and see if we could replicate them in the neighborhood.

Both organizations were extremely generous of their time and in sharing their history, knowledge and resources with us, answering any questions we had. The arts organization did a tremendous job of blending fundraising efforts and meeting the artistic needs of youth, grooming a handful for artistic careers. As appreciative as Julius, Buzz and S were of there time and generosity, it was clear to me that this would not be a match—I could go in that direction, but not with this
group of mentors. Although the concepts and strategies offered by the art group
gave these mentors food for thought, I saw their interests did not lie in the visual
arts, save S's interest in film; furthermore, the art group and this group were not a
good match, as they were simply from very different worlds and held different
intentions.

On the other hand, the mentors were completely enamored by and
enthusiastic about the Elementz organization. We met with the founder and then-
leader Islord Allah, an entrepreneur in his late-30s with a degree in fashion design
and psychology from the University of Cincinnati. His commitment to the area's
youth and the neighborhood—he owns a barbershop as well—resulted in his
seeking relevant opportunities and resources as a creative outlet for the area's
youth following the 2001 Cincinnati riots. Successful in his fundraising, the
organization opened nearly four years earlier: we were there two weeks shy of their
four-year anniversary. Islord took tremendous pride in showing us the 7000+
square foot building donated by the city and shared the outcomes of a $400,000
yearly budget that provided I Macs outfitted with Final Cut Pro in room after room
for youth to create and produce music. The basement of the building offered
mirrored practice space and a stage for step, break dance and hip hop performance,
as well as DJ instruction.

Youth streamed up and down the floors throughout the building, all engaged
in meaningful work and in a safe environment in doing so, which was no small
matter for this area. Throughout the building, we witnessed youth who would have
been more apt to harm one another actually working together, ending the session
with a handshake. This type of creative cultural work, which also offered opportunities to challenge perceptions, would speak to and serve the majority of Short North youth in making meaning of their lives, much more so than any visual arts organization would. Islord mentioned his interest in franchising this concept, and Julius naturally sought to make sure that Columbus was the first franchise site.

We drove back to Columbus late that night, energized and reconsidering community engagement in light of our visit to Cincinnati. Conversation ranged from leadership styles to the necessity of having community gatherings—such as weekly potlucks on neighbors’ porches, and monthly poetry slams—all while playing Millionaire on Buzz’s I-phone. We ended the evening planning to meet Saturday to strategize.

Julius sought to move forward including the hip-hop component with the Cincinnati mentor. As he could not make the arranged meeting, nor the following meeting, those were cancelled. They agreed to meet on Sunday, which I could not make. Buzz told me they were returning to Cincinnati on Monday to further pursue the franchising of Elementz in the neighborhood. I couldn’t join them due to teaching duties, but it didn’t really make sense for me to join them anyway, as I am not of that culture. I was glad I was able to foster the connection but had to move forward, focusing on the mural.

I called Julius the afternoon prior to the monthly civic association meeting to find out where the mural project stood, with regard to the budget disbursement that was to be discussed at the meeting that evening. He noted that the mural was still on, as the community expected it, but that he sought to shift some of what would be
the mural budget to the Elementz project. This made perfect sense, as hip hop addressed the needs of the young men; I was relieved to hear that the mural still had a place of consideration, as it served a different aspect of the community and allowed me to complete my study.

That evening at the civic association meetings, we sought information about the grant funding disbursement. Although Julius was the Vice President of the association, he claimed no insight into the process or timeline of disbursement. Attendees were told a steering committee outside of the civic association had been meeting and working with the funding officer to determine the projects receiving funding: ours was one of three, with an explicit suggestion made by the officer for the three projects to work together, as he viewed them as overlapping. Judging by the heated words directed at Julius by a steering committee member after the meeting, I wondered how this would play out in terms of our receiving funding.

In later reflecting on other civic association meeting notes, I recognized many power dynamics at play within a growing and changing civic association. I attended the January 23, 2008 meeting at which a change in civic association leadership and community structure was being shared with attendees, many of whom questioned the resulting shifts in power and subsequent methods of decision-making. The incoming president then shared an alternative possibility for the recently awarded $75,000 to the neighborhood's Health, Safety and Crime Prevention group by the City Council. A volunteer task force had recently met to challenge the award going to a program doing restitution work in the area, but serving teens outside the neighborhood. The task force sought to have Julius and S mentor neighborhood
young men, who would be paid minimum wage to work on neighborhood projects, including graffiti abatement and litter collection. Also shared was a concern that monies be spent on uplifting youth rather than administrative components, as had been done in the past.

I never learned how the grant monies were disbursed; Julius said he didn’t know either. What became apparent to me through my attendance at civic association meetings was that this was an evolving organization, unsure of how to fulfill long unmet needs with the introduction of grant monies from the city. There were an increasing number of individuals seeking involvement in either the dispersal or utilization of funds. The urgency in choosing whom to disburse funding to as a means of solving a variety of issues seemed to place some of the necessary planning processes in the backseat. For example, initial discussions supported the young men in the neighborhood taking over a restitution program that while held in the neighborhood did not involve the area’s youth, specifically, or community members. Over time, conversation noted the implications of having the young men pick up litter to earn these monies, thus identifying the fact that the young men had not been part of a conversation that directly impacted them and how they would make meaning from this process.

As the opportunity to apply grant monies appeared to vanish, motivation seemed to begin to evaporate. The cohesion through which our group—Julius, S, Buzz and myself—had previously directed our energies and functioned towards a collective goal began to dissolve at this point, the result of the circumstances of our individual lives and our desire to have our individual needs met, although that was
not explicitly stated. Julius remained steadfast in his desire to earn a living mentoring the young men in the neighborhood as a means of rebuilding and giving back to community. He was flexible as to the form this took, with several incarnations considered over the course of the near two years we worked together: murals, carpentry and house painting, furniture building, lawn maintenance, and an Elementz franchise were all considered at some point. S is a filmmaker with one short film under his belt: he sought to create a documentary telling the story of the neighborhood through community voices, as well as several shorter thematic films addressing community issues. Buzz sought any opportunity to use music and rap in promoting youth voice, whether through creating cd’s highlighting youth talent or hosting block parties with a musical focal point. And I sought to complete a community-based art project in fulfillment of my dissertation research.

My efforts towards manifesting the mural included my writing a proposal and receiving the necessary art supplies. We had planned to paint the mural on panels, which would then be mounted on the outside wall; I had received permission to use school space, allowing us to work regardless of weather or possible safety concerns in the neighborhood. I was then told at a civic association meeting of a change in ownership of the D & J, resulting in us having to renegotiate permission to use that particular wall for the mural. The young man who had drawn the image for the mural moved out of state. A change in leadership and security standards at the school ultimately left us unable to utilize that space for painting the mural. Furthermore, Julius simply had the understandable priority of having stable employment: having started his own business, in addition to part-time work in the
community, left him with little time to spare in volunteering his time to painting a mural. My advisor, Dr. Vesta Daniel—sage that she is—wisely noted, “It might not happen, but you can write about that, too” which I will do in Chapter 5.

We continued to meet on occasion—whether to update one another as to the status of our respective endeavors, visit with one another and catch up on the changes in the neighborhood, attend various cultural events within Columbus, or present at conferences. Each of these opportunities was illuminating in some manner, but in the end we did not create another mural, nor did any of the other community-based art projects come to fruition through our collective efforts.

In time, I moved from Columbus, Ohio, where this study took place, having accepted an academic position. I continue to stay in touch with Julius and Buzz, Julius having moved out of the neighborhood recently due to escalating rental prices, the result of ongoing revitalization in Weinland Park, in addition to his being a new father. Buzz prepares to marry and has also recently moved, again due to an escalating rent. Research ends, as it must operate within the framework of an academic setting. Yet it is what we glean from the research that propels us forward with a greater understanding of life and our role within it.

**Conclusion**

This chapter offers the research data in the form of a portrait (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) in order to capture the complexity of organizational life and subtlety of the human experience within organizational life in a manner that illuminates relationships. Highlighting dialogue and collaboration, the portrait also holistically
reshapes the relationship between researcher and audience, academy and community, through the use of narrative in a manner that “illuminates the complex dimensions of goodness” in capturing authenticity and essence (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. xvi). This portrait will be used to present the results of the research in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 5
RECONSIDERING SPIRITUALITY:
RESULTS, INTERPRETATIONS, APPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Organization of the Chapter

This chapter offers the results of the portrait in Chapter 4, beginning with a summarization of the research. I will analyze and interpret the research data, as presented in the form of a portrait (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) in Chapter 4. The portrait served as a means of illuminating the complexity of the neighborhood while also highlighting the development of relationship, thus providing the context from which knowledge—in the form of behaviors evidenced—could be gleaned towards answering my research questions. I will then discuss the implications of this research, particularly as it informs current pedagogical thought, and conclude with offering suggestions for further research.

Summarization of the Research

I undertook this research in an effort to investigate and further articulate a spiritual component through community-based art. Rarely addressed in academia, due to a dominant perspective that research has to be value-free, spirituality increasingly emerges as a lens through which praxis is engaged, thereby supporting
self-empowerment and liberatory educational practices. Spirit is defined as: “spirit work” and a component of a community act (Daniel, 2006); a reflexive practice (Campbell, 2005); an individual practice in which the edge between internal and external is increasingly articulated, the personal in relationship bringing an increased awareness of a “hidden wholeness” (Palmer, 1983/93); an underlying process supporting social reconstruction in community arts (Hutzel, 2005); a reflexive and relational form of research and teaching supporting liberatory educational practices (Dillard, 2000, 2008); “intuitive receptivity and an existential posture—one that engages the total self, i.e., intellect, heart, and will” (Coleman, 1998, p. 40), and a life bound in “commitment to a way of thinking and behaving that honors principles of inter-being and interconnectedness” (hooks, 2000, p. 77).

What initially appeared to be an absence of this topic in the literature slowly unfolded into an awareness of an emergent dialogue, particularly as I looked outside the field of art education. The call for more holistic practices—whether in response to our increasingly fragmented reality or born of an increased consciousness towards and interest in liberatory educational practices that recognize a variety of ways of being and knowing—creates space for the further questioning of pedagogies that perhaps no longer serve an expanding, more inclusive sense of being in the world. People increasingly seek to live life in alignment with a larger sense of consciousness and wholeness; the academician, for example, may not wish to split the academic voice from the personal voice, as both embody a growing awareness of spirit (Dillard: 2000, 2008; Palmer: 1983/93; Richards: 1962/1989). Once I made the connection between my understanding of spirituality being a deeply reflexive
and relational practice and the fact that such a practice aligned with a social justice purpose, I realized that owning what was becoming a consciously embodied practice would necessarily illuminate my teaching and learning—it was my personal praxis.

I opened this study with the ancient metaphor of Indra’s Net, which illustrates the interconnectedness of all phenomena—both the undeniable impact and reflection of our intersections with one another, whether perceived in awareness or not. Relationship, and the means by which we engage, is at the core of this study, as it is relationship that makes us part and parcel of this universe, even if our perspectives of this universe are markedly different.

With relationship at the core of this study, it was therefore natural for me to choose community arts as the form and participatory action research as the means through which I would work in illuminating spiritual components of community-based art. As community art, in the form of a mural and a non-mural, is the vehicle through which community engaged in relationship and allowed me to research spiritual behaviors, I will first analyze the creation of the Hope mural for the Obama presidential campaign, then analyze the circumstances and factors that led to the non-mural, my doing so within a larger framework of the community as a living organism. I will then answer my research questions and, in doing so, articulate behaviors that demonstrate an embodied sense of spirituality (Sub-question to Question 1). Contextualizing these behaviors back into theory (Bergson, 1913; Johnson, 2001; http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kukai/, retrieved January 23, 2011) demystifies spirituality, showing it to be an embodied, praxis-oriented
approach to life, grounded in care and action through a humanistic lens. This illuminates potential for a pedagogical shift to take place, which I will discuss in the Implications section of this chapter, before offering suggestions for further research and closing with an epilogue.

**My role and positioning within this community**

Within the context of this research study, I was asked to utilize my art teaching background to facilitate the creation of a community mural. Julius served as the leader of a group of mentors and myself. I witnessed the realities of racism, while Julius, S and Buzz experienced it directly. I address these incidents within the context of behaviors evidenced, later in this chapter.

Working in community is indeed complex. I find it challenging, rewarding and enriching—albeit oftentimes difficult—because the relational and reflexive qualities of such work support and develop my having a clearer understanding of myself and my positioning within the larger world as it exists. I am a white female, well educated and from a middle class background; within this context, I worked with African-American male mentors in a primarily African-American neighborhood that is now being revitalized and is becoming increasingly diverse, in terms of both race and socioeconomic status.

My life experiences have shaped my perceptions and attitudes in a manner that render me sensitive to matters of inclusion versus exclusion; as a result, I have involved myself in social justice-oriented issues from a young age. I have witnessed the realities of racism—some subtle, some not so subtle—throughout my life. As a
result of being a young girl in Birmingham, Alabama during the Civil Rights movement, I witnessed the fear that comes with change, particularly when African American children were bussed to the school I attended. As a young adult going to college in Athens, Georgia, it was not uncommon to witness the KKK parading through the small surrounding towns; Athens itself seemed fairly segregated, the common knowledge being that if you were white, you were affiliated with the university in some way. As a public school art teacher, I frequently witnessed racism in the form of children of color being deemed “problematic” and tracked in less-challenging classes; I was shocked in learning that nearly all of the African American male teens I taught were pulled over constantly and arrested regularly, simply because of their race. I have also had the misfortune of witnessing acts with the intent of cultural genocide while in Tibet just prior to the Tiennamen massacre. I think it can be easy to ignore or be detached from acts of violence, including racism, if one has never been a direct witness to or recipient of said acts. I therefore value the experiences I have had, in that they educated me of realities outside of my own and informed my desire to increase my ability to identify myself with others. “In order to discover ourselves, we need to see ourselves in the other, to understand the other in order to understand ourselves, to enter into the other” (Faundez, cited in Freire; 1998, p. 200).

**The Mentors**

*Julius:* Born in Weinland Park, Julius is an extremely charismatic African American man in his mid-20s, committed to truth, justice, his community and
working with the youth of the neighborhood. Bright and very confident, he was the Vice President of the Weinland Park Civic Association during the first year of our collaboration. Multi-talented and embodying an entrepreneurial spirit, Julius serves as a positive role model and mentor for youth in the community.

**Buzz:** A long-time resident of Weinland Park, Buzz is a music producer and promoter, volunteering at his children’s school and at a local church in his spare time. Buzz also mentors young men in making wise choices, his life experiences serving as an example of how to turn one’s life around to make a positive contribution and have a positive impact.

**S:** From Cleveland, S is a recent resident to the neighborhood. A filmmaker, S has one film under his belt and seeks funding to create his next film, a documentary of the neighborhood from the community perspective.

**Summarization of the Results**

In conducting this research, the primary research question focusing the study was: *Building on Daniel’s "spirit work" (2006), how can the action of creating and participating in community-based art reveal possible spiritual components of community-based art, both individually and collectively?*

The following statements can be gleaned through conducting this research and offer suggestions as to specific actions and conditions by which spiritual components can be revealed:

- Our thinking aligns with our privileging the material realm: we control and manipulate matter. The social realm, in which we navigate and negotiate
with one another as human beings, requires a completely different way of thinking and acting, as we are each unique individuals interacting with one another in constantly changing, interdependent ways. The social realm cannot be controlled and manipulated; it is constructed through connection and relationship.

- Working in community requires an attention to process. Be receptive to the process and manner by which problems or possibilities unfold or are revealed.
- Partner and collaborate with a pre-existing community group or with community members connected in ways that enable them to collaborate.
- Receive and valorize the desires of community members to do the work they have identified as necessary.
- Refrain from making distinctions so that interactions and collaboration may be strengthened.
- Recognize and accept that community-based work can be planned for and organized but cannot be controlled.
- Recognize and accept that community-based projects cannot precisely be repeated as one might repeat a business function. Work conducted within the social realm cannot be manipulated and controlled as work in the material realm can be because each participating individual in the group has a unique way of looking at the world, and each group a distinct perspective based on environmental factors at a given moment in time.
• Approach working with a given set of phenomena by seeking to make connections rather than reduce the complexity to a few simplified components so as to control those components. Reductive thinking rarely works within a community context and disallows alternative approaches that can bring social change.

• Consider social situations as opportunities for possibility to be revealed rather than problems to be solved. Not everything is a problem (a tip of the hat to Dr. Bill Taylor, as we had several conversations about this).

• Working within a social context requires addressing the situations that unfold in an ever-changing, undefined dynamic; social contexts may lack structure or may embody a complex structure that is difficult to navigate. This work therefore demands personal responsibility for one’s perceptions, responses to those perceptions, and actions. Start where you are: you are the center of your universe and are responsible for your reality.

• As such, engaging in community-based work requires attention to social processes, the tools of which are acute observation and deep listening, rather than the application of theory and technique from scientific knowledge. Social processes are understood as they unfold in all their complexity, rather than as they are apprehended.

• There can be action in non-action.

The exploration of these items is included in this chapter.
The first sub-question of this research is:

- *How can spiritual components of community-based art be described?*

The spiritual components of community-based art are identified in this study as behaviors. They include: attention, adaptation, care, celebration, communication, community, connection, creative problem solving, dialogue, empowerment, engagement, experience, grace, history, hope, identity, perception, resistance, respect, self-understanding, serendipity, sharing of resources, structure, trust and wisdom. They were identified through the process of creating the Obama mural and the community process that resulted in the non-mural. As has been mentioned throughout the study, “relationship” is a key element that unifies these spiritual components. The section titled *Describing Spiritual Components of Community-Based Art* addresses the responses to this sub-question.

The second sub-question is:

- *What educational practices are suggested by identifying spiritual components?*

It will be discussed in the section titled *Implications for Art Education.*

I will now analyze and interpret the Hope mural, created for the Obama ’08 Presidential campaign, then analyze and interpret the community process and the subsequent non-mural. This will be followed by addressing the primary research question, through which I discern spirituality as evidenced in behaviors. Implications of this research will then be offered, followed by conclusions.
Analysis and Interpretation of the Pre-test Obama Hope Mural

Our pre-test in determining if murals were a means for creatively engaging youth in skills development unexpectedly took form as the Obama mural—which came to be known as the Hope mural—for his Presidential campaign, as previously noted. We had significant support from the community, in terms of a broad base and diverse cross section of short-term participants. The young men for whom the project was intended did not participate, save one who did so on the first and last days. This was a result of a variety of circumstances: first, the mural was Julius’s vision, rather than the young men’s, for transforming the perception of the community from the inside out through the alteration of space. The young men took pride in the lore that the two mural corners represented: both were sites of gang activity—one was tagged with the “Short North” name—and therefore geographic indicators of street intelligence and survival. They were initially eager to participate because they were teenagers trying to find work and it was a way to earn money, their being paid through a city safety grant awarded the neighborhood. Receipt of the actual monies had not occurred at the time the Hope mural was created. The young men had been told of the possibility of receiving a Target gift card as a token gesture of appreciation for their work on the mural by an Obama campaign worker. When that did not manifest, the young men reconsidered their involvement, weighing whether or not their few minutes of potential fame through the planned video documenting the creation of the mural for the Obama campaign would be worth it to them. In addition, there was a great deal of violence taking place in the neighborhood at the time, so some of them questioned their safety in participating.
As a result of all these factors, the young men did not participate, and while disappointed, I could appreciate what seemed to me to be their honoring their own inherent worth, particularly in a society that seems to not value them and the multitude of gifts they have to offer. In a society in which money is increasingly the sole thing valued, these young men sought to be recognized for their contribution, and in my opinion, rightfully so: to have offered even the small gesture of a gift card would have been an action that acknowledged contribution and worth. Without some acknowledgement, I can understand their hesitation and resistance. Shortly after the election, I listened to a few of these young men question whether or not Obama’s election would truly impact them in their neighborhood. They recognized the enormous amounts of money going through the election process and learned of various initiatives underway. Their criticality was reflected through the need to see themselves as part of a larger whole, and society had largely denied them that through stereotyping them by both race and socioeconomic status. Julius reflected on this afterwards as well, noting the young men’s perceptions and responses, as well:

I don’t know if people expected more or whatever. I knew that you can’t just change things overnight, but I think that the teenagers that we thought were gonna participate, that when they do pay attention to things that is goin’ on, the current events in the world and in society...I think they kinda felt like, “things are worse, not better, for me and he can’t make no change. He didn’t make no change in my neighborhood, so I don’t care about him.” ....I wish I hadn’t missed such a large demographic group, and such an important demographic group, since this is the future of the neighborhood, I mean future leadership. It would have been nice to have them buy into it more. I don’t think they bought into it, they still don’t buy into it. I don’t think they care for real about that issue in particular. I don’t think that’s what they wanted expressed or said (Interview with Julius Jefferson, May 20, 2009).
But participation in the mural did happen, albeit in a less-than-concrete
form: eyes on the street—whether from passers-by or those living in the immediate
area—and word-of-mouth. Julius notes, “It was a real community event...just paint
and a wall!” (Interview with Julius Jefferson, May 20, 2009). An example of the non-
linearity found in a community act (Daniel, 2006), it was not a dependable,
structured form of collaborative, community-based work; rather, it was an emergent
paradigm and therefore required strong leadership if it was to succeed. Julius and I
had to obtain and organize the necessary permissions, materials and support,
ensuring that these aspects were always available and in place. Interaction with the
mural project could not otherwise take place. A visual awareness of all that was
happening in the immediate area, an ability to listen deeply, open-mindedness and a
withholding of judgment, flexibility in combination with seeing several options or
solutions to a given situation, and an ability to recognize patterns amid everything
happening, so as to maintain a structure in carrying forward to the completion of
this mural.

This was not easy work. Nothing was stable or predictable, and we were
constantly multi-tasking, shifting our actions in response to situations as they arose.
For example, purchasing the necessary supplies for the mural was not a matter of
simply getting a check or purchase order to do so, nor was it a matter of
reimbursement. Rather, I had multiple cell phone conversations—between Obama
donors, myself, and Lowe’s employees—while choosing and pushing it all, in
multiple carts through the store and check-out. Julius spoke with various
contractors and developers throughout the city before finding a landlord in the
neighborhood who was able to borrow scaffolding for us to use; he then took the responsibility of putting it up and taking it down daily, storing it at his work site each night. We had so many tell us that they would participate—whether that be the young men or community members from the civic association—and yet none of those supporters appeared once the time came to create the mural. Instead, we relied on our ability to engage all passers-by: old school R & B blaring from Julius’s truck, as well as dialogue surrounding community happenings, politics, and ways of life served as strategies in maintaining that engagement. Thus the mural was completed in five days by our core group—Julius, S, and myself, along with Julius’s girlfriend and younger brother, as well as Buzz and his family—and a host of neighbors and their young children, teens stopping by after school, young men hiding from the police, a girlfriend escaping an abusive boyfriend, families and retirees stopping by out of curiosity, and anyone en route to Kelly’s carry-out, the barber shop or Chicken Gems.

The necessary leadership was one of orchestration and facilitation, as there was clearly a complexity to this collaborative project, in that it held little consistency beyond purpose and image. What we found vital in promoting an effective leadership was a commitment to the work and an ability to communicate effectively with one another and with participants. Feedback, fundamental in understanding the overall organization and finding one’s place within that organization (Johnson, 2000) was a key component of this, both at the outset as we developed trust among one another and as we supported the inclusion of those who participated in the
creation of the mural. Thus, we translated and clarified for one another frequently in
the beginning, thereby minimizing any misunderstandings amongst ourselves.
We also had to listen carefully to community and to those participating. To that end,
we were sensitive to the happenings of the neighborhood at that time, mindful of
any incidents that could threaten our safety and those participating with us. We
listened and facilitated community members’ participation, based in their ability or
manner in which they wished to contribute: small children had to be guided
between the scaffolding to make their mark along the lower part of the mural; older
children received guidance in mixing paint and proper use of a brush, in addition to
climbing scaffolding safely. Some participants came offering wisdom born of
experience: one elder happened upon our event one evening and noted that he had
once been an art teacher in the city—he took over for me, teaching participating
children how to properly hold and use a brush, as well as how to properly clean
brushes. Others chose not to paint at all, instead bringing their lawn chairs and
telling stories or sharing community happenings, while munching on food from
Chicken Gems. Julius notes:

It’s something I’ve not seen in eight years out here (laughs). Yeah, eight years
and all types of little projects and things, and I’ve been involved in a lot of
organizations and entities, and I’ve not seen that type of participation or
excitement without anything. All we were given was the opportunity to
watch and participate. We weren’t given no prizes, no cakes, no cookies, no
juice....You wanna help, help. If you don’t, don’t. if you wanna watch, watch.
And a lot of people chose to help and others chose to watch, but everybody
was supportive...even the cops that were anti-Obama helped! (Interview

We recognized throughout this pre-test the importance of communication,
particularly as each of us, as mentors, came from very different life experiences.
Deep listening, as the starting point of meaningful communication, offered insights into interactions with others and laid the foundation for positive future interactions. As mentioned earlier, I did not speak for the first several meetings I attended, as a means of simply listening and being open to new ways, in addition to respecting the rest of the group for including me. It can be far too easy for someone coming from an academic orientation to find solutions, offer quick answers. But to do so shortchanges any possibility for mutuality and inclusive engagement and results in a more traditional mode of communication in which each participant comes from a place of self interest, resulting in negotiation and manipulation to get one’s needs met.

I was particularly impressed by the manner in which we modeled communication, or dialogue, during our mentor meetings, in that we very consciously and respectfully listened to one another. While I am certainly aware of proper conversational protocol, what struck me about these conversations was that there was never an interruption by one of the other, nor was there the rush to get one’s perspective in or the desire to enter into intellectual competition, nor any comparison that validated or invalidated another’s perspectives—just a mutual respect for and sharing of one another’s thoughts. This is not to say that there wasn’t disagreement, and vigorous disagreement at that, but this way of communicating modeled care and a respect for diversity, in that it created and held space for a variety of thoughts and opinions with judgment held in abeyance. Key to our facility in this respect was that we each recognized one another as individuals who had chosen to honor a personal path in life; each of us also valued and provided
direct, open communication with one another, lending honesty and integrity to our work together.

Towards the end of our collaboration, Buzz and I had a conversation on strategies for collaborating with community in a positive, productive manner. He shared the following:

It’s all in the approach. You have to call in ahead and request landing permission, make sure everything’s right for you to be there. Some people don’t know how to approach the runway, or they miss the landing strip all together! You have to humble yourself—you can’t talk down to anyone. You have to listen deeply to let people know you care. (Interview with Buzz, May 20, 2009).

Through our open, respectful communication, relationship was built and strengthened, the result of trust being created through our increasing ability to hold one another’s perspectives within a larger discussion and without judgment.

We also had to keep the project going, with an eye to completion, particularly in light of the fluidity of participation by community members. Thus, decisions had to be made in the moment as to whether it was more important that small children made their mark in contribution to the mural or whether we adhered strictly to the design and attended to detail. As I explained later to someone commenting on the technique and lack of articulate detail in ours, we felt it more important to honor the overarching goal of collaboration and strengthening community identity through collective participation, as opposed to strictly adhering to and correcting aesthetic detail in our mural. We directed and facilitated, while also allowing space for the individual to contribute in whatever positive manner they chose. We also coordinated the goal of completing the mural in a timely manner that aligned with
the visit of Obama’s Media Director to Columbus, resulting in the video featured in his presidential campaign.

The implementation of the Hope mural activated several discernable changes on multiple levels. Physically, the mural fulfilled Julius’s intention: it transformed the physical space and therefore people’s perceptions of the space. The image of the mural transformed the space from a wall tagged with a neighborhood gang name to one articulated with an image that represented and inspired hope and transformation to those living in the neighborhood and beyond. The sight of a variety of community members contributing to the creation of this mural was at first a surprise to many in the neighborhood, particularly as it was done throughout the day and into the night. Buzz, one of the mentors working on the mural, and “an artist at heart,” notes, “I felt like I was part of the whole community for the first time. I don’t hang there. I could be there on neutral terms and give back to the other side” (Interview with Buzz, May 20, 2009). The area had been deemed unsafe, as previously noted: the alley, littered with empty alcohol bottles, was also known as a site for drug deals. The area suffered from the trauma of multiple deaths, as evidenced by the “Stop the Killings” sign once draped in front of Kelly’s. Buzz further explains how the act of creating this mural impacted his life (Interview with Buzz, May 20, 2009):

Working on the mural dropped a psychological fear I had of being in that area. The mural opened the door for me to go around there again. That’s a troubled area that has had bad experiences. I’ve had friends killed there.

Thus, through active participation and continual dialogue, a sense of togetherness emerged, with people discussing neighborhood issues, common and
familial connections, politics, and the state of the nation at that point in time. The political conversations during the actual making of the mural were based in curiosity, dreams and a trajectory of hope, with imaginings of greater justice if an African American man became President of the United States. As race has been a significant force in the way that opportunity is structured and determined in this country—it has shaped where we live, our educational opportunities and the friends we keep, for example—the potential election of Obama presented possibility, tremendous change and transformation, and ultimately justice leading to a truly United States of America. Curiosity about my perspective on the election first came through a group of shy teenage girls who asked if I would be voting for Obama; my response of, “Absolutely!” was met with surprise initially, with one girl asking, “Even though he’s black and you’re white?” I noted that he was clearly more intelligent than his Republican counterpart and that I believed in what he stood for, not to mention that I always vote Democrat. The follow-up question was, “Do you think he’ll win?” I responded with, “I sure hope so!” noting the uncertainty of the outcome in light of previous election irregularities lacking any sense of accountability. This shared hope spoken served as a point for continuing conversation, as a perception held of me shifted through engagement.

The mural certainly served as a touchstone of hope and possibility for many, as it was intended to. The silhouette of Obama is centered against a backdrop of light emanating out from his figure. Notably, it is a silhouette: while it clearly resembles Obama, the lack of distinct facial features allows the figure to represent everyone. The left finger points up and out, as if pointing to a future that he’s fully
aware of and sees on the not-so-distant horizon. This image is framed along the bottom with raised hands of every skin tone. A quote by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. frames the theme and inspiration of the mural:

If you lose hope, you lose the vitality that keeps life moving, you lose that courage to be, that quality that helps you to go on in spite of it all. And so today, I still have a dream....

In that moment, this quote, which was also used by Obama in his Democratic convention speech, also acknowledged a dream held for decades now potentially being reflected as a reality in the present moment—that all in this country are created equal and judged by the content of their character, as evidenced by an African American man being elected as President of the United States of America.

In addition to inspiring conversation while it was being painted, the mural served as a touchstone of sorts for those working on it and those who passed by it.

Buzz notes the impact his engagement in the creation of the mural had on him:

Working on the last part of the mural—painting the Martin Luther King, Jr. verse—was spiritually cleansing for me because now I’m involved back in the whole neighborhood again....I know that painting is gonna be there forever—or as long as the building is there. This positive action released a lot of troubled spirits. Folks don’t come to where they’ve lost their loved ones, but now they can bring their families to this wall. (Interview with Buzz, May 20, 2009).

For a community member who quietly passed by daily, pausing to reflect as we worked, the effect of this mural was profound: I overheard her speaking to Julius as we cleaned up after completing the mural. This woman told of her challenges in life: long-time addiction issues leading to difficult circumstances. She said she had reached the point where she didn’t know how she would go on, when she noticed
this mural. She stated that she started coming by at the end of every day to spend some time gazing at it, as it gave her hope to go on and inspired her to make changes in her life. Her humble, revelatory experience through her communion with the mural brought chills down my spine and tears to my eyes.

The Hope mural clearly served as an image of visual inspiration for the larger Columbus community too, as it found its way onto magazine covers, newspaper articles, and fliers promoting African American community history courses at the university. The creation of the mural was the focal point of a promotional video shown throughout Obama’s campaign (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gDabHGXpyGA) and led to its image being used as a postcard sent to Obama donors.

As a result of the collective pride focused on this specific area, community members cleaned the area in front of and around the mural. For example, as we were cleaning up our painting supplies once the mural was completed, a youth noted that we needed to attend to the space directly in front of the mural, which had a noticeable amount of litter scattered there. Plants or flowers were suggested for the area; we settled on wood chips, as continual plant care was a responsibility to consider. Community members then attended to the area behind the building—which was overgrown with vines and weeds and a repository for a lot of trash—completely cleaning it out. Now it serves as several parking spaces shaded by a large tree. To this day, the area and the adjacent parking area remain clean and litter-free, the mural having activated this space, transforming it from an invisible one to a
contemplative and dialogical one, rendering it now a point of pride in the neighborhood.

While I was not able to analyze the long-term effects of the mural on the community, I was able to listen to and comment within some of the conversations the mural engendered while we created it and shortly thereafter. Naturally, the distinct possibility of an African American man—and one who is very well-educated, deeply intelligent, charismatic, and good-looking to boot—seriously becoming President of the United States reflected potentiality for all who believed in him. I say “seriously,” as there have been other African Americans who have run for president, including an African American woman—the late, great, and very accomplished Shirley Chisolm. But this was the first election in which it seemed distinctly possible—and after his speech at the Democratic convention, probable—that an African American would indeed become president: this, despite our country’s past and the fact that racism is still an issue largely unaddressed in this country.

Throughout our painting of the mural, a sense of hope pervaded the environment. As mentioned earlier, there were frequent discussions based in, “Do you really think he could win the election and be our President?” The accompanying possibilities and dreams, as expression of unmet needs finding resolution, fueled the conversations. There was talk of getting GEDs, going to college, being able to get small business loans to start small businesses, owning homes—all aspects of realizing the American Dream, which had seemed all too distant to many in this neighborhood.
The Hope mural happened out of a curious synchronicity of events in which our intentions met the need of the Obama campaign and resulted in an urban counterpoint to the other Obama insignia murals, painted primarily on the sides of barns throughout the Midwest. But in a larger sense, our creating this mural addressed a community need to change the perception of an area that had been largely defined by gang activity amid the small businesses. Notably, the mural reactivated that space in a positive, uplifting manner; it remained unblemished for nearly four years until April 6, 2012, when it was discovered that vandals graffitied the mural with racial slurs and swastikas, the destruction making headline news throughout the nation. The larger Columbus community expressed outrage and shock, demonstrating the positive impact of this mural beyond the neighborhood and those who participated in its creation, as well as the political impetus from which it originated. Cleaner and paint were immediately donated, and community members restored the Hope mural within days.

This incident was one of several thought to have emerged in reaction to the recent Trayvon Martin killing. The university’s Frank W. Hale Jr. Black Cultural Center discovered “Long Live Zimmerman” graffiti sprayed along an exterior wall on the previous day; a university dorm dumpster also had racist graffiti sprayed on it. Each of these incidents sparked outrage and shock by those directly affected, reflective of the pain born of not only the hatred expressed but by the recognition of the amount of work still to be done in a day and age in which we have elected an African American president to represent and lead our nation—a day and age in which the majority of the young people that I teach claim that racism no longer
exists, it being of a bygone era. On the university level, students held a sit-in at the Hale Center, calling for policy changes that would bring greater diversity and inclusivity to the university while also establishing an environment for discussions of race. A student group also met with President Gee, who expressed his support of students speaking up about this incident.

The university and Weinland Park communities became aware of these related incidents, occurring within blocks of one another within a twenty-four hour period, each community expressing the need to have larger discussions about race. President Gee sent a letter to the university community declaring an intolerance for racism as well as his belief that this incident offered “an opportunity to take a lead role in heightening awareness and seeking productive solutions to racial injustice that continues to challenge our country” (President Gee's letter to the university community, April 5, 2012). A task force was created in response, leading to both short and long term recommendations in three categories: awareness, climate, recruitment and retention.

Key to the success of the implementation of the mandates suggested in the task force recommendations is the recognition that documentation on paper does not necessarily lead to implementation on all levels throughout the body of the university. As is often the case, there can be a gap between policy and the reality, in this case as reflected in the classroom. While the university has a long-standing policy of inclusion and diversity, this is not reflected in a manner that aligns with current day reality, in that the university does not proportionately reflect the diversity of the larger community or of our nation. With the exception of one
required diversity-based writing course I taught in a five-year period at the university, I had only one or two students of color in a required education course serving twenty-five each quarter, reflective of the larger university population. Notably, each quarter the students in my course expressed their belief of experiencing a diverse climate at the university, as most were from surrounding rural areas and had not experienced diversity prior to coming to the university. Yet when considered within the larger world in which they will serve students in their chosen vocation of teaching, it becomes clear that the university needs to extend itself further in developing a diverse community reflective of society on both the student and faculty levels.

Dialogue is key in tackling this gap between the university’s constructed community and that of our larger society. The university has taken steps to support dialogue within its community but has thus far missed an opportunity to serve as an anchor within the larger Columbus community by taking the lead in addressing the painful issue of racism that continues to plague our country as evidenced by these acts of vandalism and hate, and despite the accomplishments that have been made over the past 40 years. The systemic nature of racism continues to privilege some to the detriment of many and requires acknowledgment and readdress again and again if we are to fully embody the uplifting attributes on which our democratic republic was founded. Participatory action research such as this offers a framework by which to tackle societal issues that may be difficult to address and, in doing so, lay the foundation for constructively creating an increasingly diverse university community that is reflective of the larger society.
Participating in this process taught me the ease with which such activities can occur when they are affiliated with an organization able to provide support or access to support, as none of us had any money to do this on our own. This points to the necessity of institutions bearing a moral responsibility by anchoring themselves in community, extending resources for rebuilding and community empowerment. This is not a hand out but an act of social justice, the individuals in the institution recognizing the enduring systemic inequities privileging some to the detriment of others and owning responsibility for recreating institutions to reflect reality.

**Analysis and Interpretation of the Non-Mural**

One might think that with the success of our Hope mural, for the Obama campaign, that the creation of the second mural was assured; and yet it never materialized. Thus the analysis and interpretation of this aspect of the study is not founded on a final end product in the form of a mural. Instead, it considers the emergent conditions that potentially contributed to it not manifesting, as well as an examination of what was learned beyond the original goal of creating a mural. The seeming failure of this second mural highlights the manner by which our society is structured to privilege a particular way of thinking and knowing—one that focuses on controlling and manipulating matter to specific, concrete ends that are measurable. While valuable, it is also exclusionary of the complexity of our existence and the interrelatedness as human beings and the social means through which we impact one another (Kaplan, 2002). I will therefore examine this non-mural beyond the failure of this aspect—failure as defined by the lack of a material product or
outcome; this allows consideration of alternative ways of learning and knowing through this community-based project. I choose to do so because “failure” is a topic that is avoided by and large, its occurrence cloaked and denied, as if every action taken functions on a straight trajectory of continuity and accountability. Yet life is a process with beginnings, endings, and beginning again. Perhaps it is worthwhile to consider the cyclical processes surrounding the linear trajectories we create as a means of charting and assessing our growth and development; to do so would reveal a more complete picture of the ebb and flow attending the layers of lived experience, while also illuminating the interconnectedness of all. The ability to traverse this social process develops self-awareness and self-empowerment, while also offering a fresh approach to social change (Kaplan, 2002).

The Non-Mural

After the Hope mural was successfully completed, we took some time to learn how the young men were interested in creatively applying themselves. They valued hip-hop and basketball, although there were two young men who were interested in visual art—one in particular dreamt of being an artist and drew a design for the next mural. Julius’s vision for this mural, which one young man used as inspiration in creating his drawing, was based in:

a visual story or timeline of the neighborhood and the people in the neighborhood—more so the people in the neighborhood like since the mid-80s or so when crack came into the neighborhood—just the steps and the processes we were going through in the neighborhood and then where we are now, and where I think it could be.... It can be a neighborhood as developed and beautified and the neighborhood looks better and things are better. But the people who were here—not everyone, but I’m sayin’ at least it should be a majority of the people who were originally here—can live in that
type of environment, and then they can look at that (the mural) and then the
new people who are in the neighborhood can look at it (the mural) and see
like this is the neighborhood we have now. And then the rest of the city, or
whoever comes to the city, can ride past that particular corner where we
were gonna put it, and it not just be the bad story, you know, told about the
murders and the crimes and the drugs that have been sold there but you
know, the whole story (Interview with Julius Jefferson, May 20, 2009).

This non-mural was to be painted at the D & J Carry Out, located on the
corner of 4th and 8th, the site of much of the neighborhood lore and tragedy. The
design for the non-mural was based in history, survival and transformation;
incomplete, it took the form of a triptych. The image on the right is of a group of
muscular young men resembling warriors congregating in front of the D & J Carry
Out; they carry shields and swords, a young man with a raised sword is leading
them. Just to the right is a crouched, fallen warrior; a wilting flower growing
through the concrete sidewalk mirrors him. The group of young men are either
looking up or gazing at the viewer; their stance combined with their gaze suggest
they gather in response to the fallen warrior. Lightening strikes above the group,
indicating a powerful change and potential damage.

To the left of this image, a group of men gather behind the deteriorating
tombstones of those no longer living. They hold spears and gaze at the viewer.
Encompassed by a halo of sorts, which is also reflected in a setting sun behind the
group, this image valorizes those who have passed on. Below this image is a dove
emerging from a bleeding skull, pointing to resurrection and freedom, even in the
most painful of times, through a sheer willingness to be present and remain
engaged.
The central image is one of resurrection—a lone muscular figure emerges from a plot of land surging up, roots dangling, from the surrounding field. The figure is a warrior of sorts and a survivor, as evidenced by the upheld sword and the bleeding stab wound to the abdomen. Winged, he is illuminated by the central sun in the background. The three images are linked through a winding road.

Although an incomplete image, it is clearly a potent one intended to awaken and reengage participants—whether it be those making the actual mural or those from the neighborhood reflecting on it—in the process of change and transformation of their neighborhood, while also valorizing those lost over time. Several themes come into play: hope, resistance, recovery, dialogue. The image evoked hope on the personal level by featuring images of empowered young men living a fuller sense of well-being by overcoming the circumstances of their immediate environment, one bearing a history of negative transactions that were difficult to not be impacted by on some level. If the mural had been created, the image would have given witness to hope on a public level by sharing this vision with the neighborhood and the larger public for contemplation and dialogue. The image offers the opportunity to share and reflect upon historical aspects and lore of the area, while also displaying that the future is not determined but molded by actions made in the present moment. That history of the past but not binding in the present moment speaks to the necessity of resistance as a means of articulating and adhering to a different vision, as these young men would have to do if they were to overcome some of the obstacles they faced daily. Recovery can be evidenced by the shift from the historical perspective that previously encased the young men to their
breaking out into a new sense of time and space. Dialogue, by both those living in
the neighborhood as well as those from outside the area who happen upon it,
complements and extends the image itself, serving as a performative vehicle of
transformation and empowerment through the mere existence of this image.

Julius and I mentored the young man drawing the mural design for a short
time before he moved out-of-state, his leaving the drawing with us along with
permission to use it. I therefore continued to pursue our doing the next mural by
involving the community-at-large; I received in-kind donations of paint and all
necessary supplies towards its completion. I also supported Julius in his pursuing a
partnership with or a franchising of a hip-hop youth organization from Cincinnati, as
previously noted in Chapter 4’s Portrait. We both attempted to align any potential
skills developed through mural participation with an outcome of potential jobs—
whether through house painting, carpentry, construction or graffiti abatement—as
there was considerable talk of such development in this rapidly changing
neighborhood. None of it panned out. I spoke with several developers, contractors
and landlords in the area over a year and a half: in conversation, all were amenable
to working with us, but in reality, none actually followed through in facilitating
something constructive to benefit those Julius and I were working with.

In discussing this with Julius, we agreed that timing and money were the
primary reasons the mural did not manifest. The necessary structure that would
offer monetary support in exchange for skills, time and energy spent never
emerged—this was vital to manifesting positive outcomes in a community in which
members are striving to provide for themselves and their families. Julius notes:
The timeliness and the way that things have to happen in a certain order, well it doesn’t work that way in anybody’s life truthfully, but especially in a poor community where there’s so much going on and changing all the time. It’s hard to fully commit the time or focus on doing a mural or whatever—it happened to be a mural—when I would say that the majority of the young people in the neighborhood, I’d say they just have a lot going on, all the time. And I had a lot going on, you know what I’m sayin’. And it just wasn’t even close to being a priority for me, (laughs).... A lot of it comes down to money because of the way that society is ran. Like if you’ve got more money than you need and you can take care of the basic needs, then that allows you to open up more doors and to have more time to do the things that you really would want to do in life.... It’s hard to live when you’re strugglin’ (Interview with Julius Jefferson, May 20, 2009).

I do not know what came of the city-awarded grant monies, which were originally to support us in this venture, other than that there came to be several factions in the neighborhood seeking a portion of the funding in support of their programs. Dispensation was done through a steering committee—one whose stated purpose was to give voice to those interests not being represented by the civic association. Julius stated that the monies were spent, but the manner in which they were spent was not forthcoming. I was not a part of the conversations and negotiations regarding grant dispensations; I would have thought that Julius—being Vice President of the civic association—would have been included in them, but as he was ending his leadership role at that time, he said that was not the case. It became clear to me through a review of civic association meeting notes that the power dynamics involved in a changing leadership of the civic association, combined with the increased awareness that comes through greater community participation in the process of supporting and defining community revitalization, could bring shifting priorities and a change in the disbursement of resources.
That this mural—which was the seed of this community collaboration and study—never materialized offers an opportunity for deeper understanding and consideration of community processes through participatory action research.

**Addressing Failure**

There is much to be learned—even if only about one’s self—through what is readily labeled as “failure.” It is a bit of a taboo topic for discussion or research, whether in academia or in community-based arts, due to the monetary considerations and professional reputations that have to be preserved if a project, institution or organization is to continue to merit support. We live in an era of assessment, in which success and support is defined by specific, demonstrable capacities and behaviors frequently aligned with national policy—policy that increasingly devalues art and art education, rendering it a social service devoid of artistic traditions, cultural perspective or intellectual understanding, and deliverable through civic fundraising efforts (Chapman; in Smith & Berman, 1992.)

Therefore, there is a reluctance to expose vulnerabilities of a project, program or organization, as doing so can impact the relationships with both an entity’s stakeholders and financial supporters. Yet how do we learn from a situation or project if we cannot unpack and reflect on it in order to address the dynamics and specifics that led to support and success, as well as those that led to the lack thereof? And how can we do so in a holistic manner that brings clarity and wisdom in moving forward, rather than resulting in repercussions to monetary support and reputation
(Garneau & Sethi, notes from Imagining America Conference presentation, New Orleans, LA, 2009).

In an environment in which monetary support is piecemeal or scarce, and cultural perspectives are increasingly devalued, it is easy to point a finger and judge a project in a manner that isolates it from the larger whole of dynamics and circumstances from which all involved might learn. When considered within the larger framework of community, it seems more instructive to examine a project, or non-project, as it relates to the ever-changing organism that is a specific community. The examination of the choices made and changes incurred, and the behaviors and values such changes reflect, can result in clearer strategies for manifesting future projects while also meeting community needs with clearer intent. To do so honors the fact that education occurs everywhere throughout life—not solely within the confines of the classroom or institution—and highlights an opportunity to bring awareness to the potential for social change through examining the complexity of the social realm and the dynamics determining a community endeavor, as opposed to attributing all aspects and outcomes to the material realm.

**Failure, in terms of the Non-Mural**

Some might deem this community-based project as unsuccessful. First, the work did not result in a concrete art product after our successful, instructive pre-test mural. I had to return the art materials awarded us—an act that can threaten the relationship between the granting organization and the receiving entity, thus reducing the possibility of receiving future support, as previously mentioned.
This project could be labeled a failure from the community perspective too, as there was an expectation of another mural as a result of the Hope mural doing precisely as Julius had dreamt: it transformed the space it occupied for those living in the community. In the process, it also reflected a perceptual transformation for community members and the larger Columbus community through the dialogue the image engendered regarding the possibility of Barack Obama becoming President of the United States. Therefore, community members were excited to both witness and participate in the transformation of this notorious corner in the neighborhood, doing so from both an historical and narrative vantage point. And yet, when asked, many community members simply stated with seeming detachment their understanding that things will come together and happen when they are supposed to; in the meantime, life goes on.

From the academic perspective, I wondered if the lack of an art product would deem this effort a failure. After all, a mural was planned and expected, the end product an aspect on which a degree could be awarded, journal papers written and chosen for publication, jobs obtained and tenure granted. Yet the fact that this study was framed through a participatory action research design suggests not only the opportunity for personal and collective growth and empowerment through experience and reflection—it also highlights the dynamic, ever-changing nature of the research process when oriented through this lens. This approach can run counter to an academic context framed by problem-solving, concrete outcomes that are material-based and holding distinct beginnings and endings. And yet it can also
offer insights into the complexities into social ways of knowing and understanding that may not be quantifiable or respond to manipulation.

Several possibilities contributed to our mural not manifesting. First, due to the challenging conditions of life in this distressed community, earning money lies at the forefront of the decision-making process, and understandably so, as people are trying to survive. Therefore, it is probable that the young men Julius based this work in initially agreed to participate in the program because they sought to earn some money for themselves in economically challenged times—times in which all teens were having difficulty in finding work. This is reflected in civic association discussions in which the officers of the civic association sought to address the mentorship of the community’s young men through application to and receipt of the aforementioned grant (Weinland Park Civic Association meeting, January 2009). Although the community had been awarded the grant, the manner in which and to whom it was disbursed remained in limbo for a time; the young men lost interest in participating in a project in which they were uncertain of when they would receive the payment for doing so. In the end, I never learned how this money was disbursed, only that it was spent with no specifics forthcoming.

Secondly, over time it became apparent that only one of the young men involved had a genuine interest in pursuing art as a vocation. He drew the design for the mural and sought community-based opportunities to further develop his skills. I introduced him to a community-based art program led by an African American man in another neighborhood, which he attended for a short period of time before moving out of state. He now works as a tattoo artist.
These two considerations point to a community wishing to address a specific issue of how to proactively reintegrate the young men back into the fabric of their community in a positive, uplifting manner that recognizes their value, and does so in counterpoint to a larger society that stereotypes these young men in a negative manner. This is an aspect of a community act, specifically as it relates to consciously addressing the formative matrix of the community through the inclusion of its young men (Daniel, 2006).

And yet, the means by which this was enacted did not include the voice of the youth for whom this was to serve. The desire to address this need was clearly evident, the means by which to start addressing it offered by the grant. Julius and S. were to initially serve as the mentors to the young men in disseminating this grant, but then two other factions within the civic association sought and were granted the monies, the grant to be distributed equally between the three. There were never meetings that I was made aware of in which civic association leaders, project leaders and youth came together to discuss and plan the form the project would take, with an eye and voice to meeting youth needs, as expressed by them. Julius served as the voice of the young men, and while he certainly served as a mentor and had good relations with them, I would venture that had meetings with relevant leaders and youth taken place—meetings in which monetary awards were linked to specific actions and leading to desired outcomes, as negotiated with the young men—a different framework would have been constructed, one based in skills acquisition linked to creative outcomes. A strong athletic component would have likely been included as a physical means of exertion and expression. Hindsight is
always 20/20, and in this case it seems that although the community was committed to participating in the revitalization process, the actual processes and procedures for implementation of various opportunities seemed largely absent to me. The organizational structure for implementation was evolving, the result of this community not having been organized in a common vision and purpose in the past. As a result, the results and decisions made often appeared to have emerged from shifting community dynamics and veiled decision making, as evidenced by Julius questioning how decisions were made without his knowledge while serving as vice president of the civic association.

Finally, while acknowledging the complexity of this community, it is worth noting that when the patterns of this complexity are founded in and expressed through survival, it takes a special person embodying imaginative leadership qualities to chart new paths through which patterns that are uplifting of all are formed and followed. Julius was in the process of being that person, groomed by the community to represent it socially and culturally. Julius’s deep intelligence, charisma, integrity and his commitment to his community made him a natural shining star and a rising leader, despite his youth. The tensions and necessary navigations between honoring one’s individuation, which Julius was committed to, and community expectations bring a heavy load to bear. Over time, I witnessed Julius question intention and increasingly develop a need to chart his own path, rather than simply follow the directives and expectations of others. This culminated in his choosing to not run for reelection with the civic association. A difficult choice, but Julius places a premium on truth and integrity, and I respected the choices he
made. In the end, this resulted in his needing to attend to his own survival, which
did not allow for the luxury of creating another mural without financial support. I
was unwilling to implement this project without Julius, as this had to be a collective
effort if it was to be successful, and Julius was viewed by community members as
the catalyst for ensuring success.

Sustaining this type of cultural development through the arts, whether mural
painting or other forms, is a challenge—and one in which we were not successful,
despite my attempting to organize another mural or translate painting skills into
neighborhood jobs, my getting in-kind donations to create another mural, and Julius
seeking to bring a music-oriented franchise to the neighborhood. A stable
community infrastructure that supports the voice of its members, as well as the
bridging aspect of social capital (Putnam, 2000), could support these types of
initiatives; otherwise, they are vulnerable to any changes that occur—which took
the form of shifting funding and changing community leadership in this case. The
World Café, mentioned previously, was an appropriate opportunity to assess
community values and interests and, if implemented in the beginning of this
process, could have led to focused, prioritized projects leading to successful (by
community standards) results. Instead, it seems we were all operating from an
emergent paradigm, but without a solid infrastructure and the vital feedback that
would foster adaptation; thus, there was no coalescence (Johnson, 2001). On the
other hand, this can be viewed as part of the dynamic and evolutionary quality of a
community act (Daniel, 2006) through which a goal comes into fruition through the
process-oriented evolution of community members.
Having analyzed the mural and non-mural, I will now consider these two events towards distinguishing behaviors that can be used in answering my research questions.

**Spirituality as Revealed through Participation in Community-Based Art**

The primary research question this research sought to address is:

- *Building on Daniel’s “spirit work” (2006), how can the action of creating and participating in community-based art reveal possible spiritual components of community-based art, both individually and collectively?*

Through constructing and participating in this study, I sought evidence revealing possible spiritual components of community-based art, whether from the individual or collective perspective. Contemporary literature primarily addressed the themes of acknowledgment versus avoidance of the topic and the price paid in terms of self-understanding, notably as the individual moves towards externalizing self-reflective, interior ways of knowing, as well as within a larger context of relationship and the co-creation of community. But examining historical literature based in theory and philosophy—specifically Bergson (1913) and Buddhist philosophy—offered an holistic perspective recognizing active engagement as the lens through which spirituality is acknowledged and demystified. I therefore utilized that as the underpinning for my approach.

Spirituality embodies an active stance bound in relationship: the various definitions, despite the seeming intangibility of spirituality by some, describe far more than the acquisition of a particular type of knowledge—it “animates,” or
breathe life into a situation; it is work as it works; it bridges otherness through the
development of relationship while also affirming individuality and self-actualization.
Spirituality is not a passive state of being—it is not based simply in the acquisition
of spiritual knowledge. Spirituality is active, bound in the recognition of constant
change, our crossing and re-crossing seemingly well-defined boundaries again and
again, only to witness these boundaries shift and collapse through experience,
extension of self, and love. Everything about spirituality spoke of praxis, through
application of knowledge in relationship, leading to wisdom and compassion for self
and others.

Defining spirituality through a lens of praxis, thus acknowledging this as an
active, relational engagement of life, and therefore evidenced in witnessed
behaviors, is supported by both Bergson’s (1913) metaphysical theory and Buddhist
philosophy, in which change is constant, perception creates reality and is grounded
in all the senses—not solely intellect—while also encompassing an expanding
consciousness. As previously noted, engaged, embodied action is

the visible form of an invisible spirit, an outward manifestation of an inward
power. But as we act, we not only express what is in us and help give shape
to the world; we also receive what is outside us, and reshape our inner selves
(Palmer, cited in hooks, 2000, p. 77).

**Describing Spiritual Components of Community-Based Art**

In support of answering my primary research question, I have one sub-question:

- *How can spiritual components of community-based art be described?*

As a result of this praxis-oriented lens provided through Bergson (1913) and
Buddhist philosophy, I sought discernable behaviors that illuminated relationship,
my contention being that these behaviors in relationship reflect spirituality, as spirituality is that sense of the larger whole through which one seeks to contribute in an uplifting manner.

In reviewing the data—field notes based on observations, journal notes based on reflections from my participation, interviews, photographs and collected documents—several times, the following relational categories emerged:

- Attention
- Adaptation
- Care
- Celebration
- Communication
- Community
- Connection
- Creative problem solving
- Dialogue
- Empowerment
- Engagement
- Experience
- Grace
- History
- Hope
- Identity
- Perception
- Resistance
- Respect
- Self-Understanding
- Serendipity
- Sharing of Resources
- Structure
- Trust
- Wisdom

I discuss each of these below in light of the data gleaned from this study.

**Attention:** the act of attention fosters connection and can open one up to an extension of or shift in perception. Julius had two constant refrains to neighborhood youth: “Do your research!” in response to developing an awareness of the consequences of political decisions that affected them, and “Look at the signs!” as a means of getting youth to open their eyes to the changes quietly and quickly taking place around their neighborhood, affecting their ability to remain there. Other behaviors also promoted with neighborhood youth included the value in asking questions and in not making assumptions, but instead remaining open. “You’ve gotta meet people where they are,” Julius notes (Interview with Julius Jefferson, May 20, 2010).

Paying attention opens one up to new information for problem solving. Doing research and recognizing signs fosters adaptation through pattern detection, which
promotes survival through self-regulation and, when shared, collective wisdom (Johnson, 2001).

**Adaptation:** Adaptation was a predominant theme throughout this study, as evidenced in the ever-changing dynamics of the neighborhood with the influx of revitalization projects, and the many shifts and changes we accommodated in attempting to achieve our goals. In terms of our collaborative work, it was our openness to new situations that permitted personal growth and a strength born of flexibility. From Julius: “People say that I have changed, but what does that mean? If I have, is that a bad thing? My heart is the same, but I am not constant. I am many things and growing” (Conversation with Julius Jefferson, March 3, 2009). And from Buzz: “I’m like an open lab trying to see what will work. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn’t and I’d better be able to come up with something else quick—I’m just trying to make [a program] work!” (Interview with Buzz, May 20, 2010).

Adaptation supports complexity and leads to survival. Encountering newness in any manner has no relevance, personally or collectively, if the encounter has no chance of altering behavior (Johnson, 2001).

**Care:** Care was a predominant theme, on both a personal and collective level. During our painting of the Hope mural, for example, I noted and was impressed by all the self-care items in Julius’s truck: floss, toothbrush and paste, brush, face cream, lotion and cologne. I commented on this to Julius and received this response: “Yes, I always stay fresh!” (Conversation with Julius Jefferson, September 24, 2008).
Care was evidenced in gestures of engagement: the retired art teacher stepping in to show children the proper care of paintbrushes when working on the mural; the young man painting a tie and kerchief on the Hope mural’s Obama silhouette once we were done, noting that he now looked professional and complete; and community members cleaning up the area in front of and adjacent to the mural and maintaining the space to this day. Julius displayed care for the youth of the neighborhood consistently by mentoring them, inviting them over for meals, and by telling civic association members to call him at any time, day or night, if they find their child in trouble—he qualified this to clarify that he would not do anything ill-considered or unsafe, but that he would be there to support and resolve a situation to the best of his abilities. And on several occasions, I witnessed community members stop Julius on the street to discuss instances of a lack of response by police, as well as requests by community members for Julius to counsel or serve as mediator.

Care was witnessed in gestures of inclusion and respect. All who sought to make their mark on the mural were welcomed in doing so, even if that resulted in less attention to detail of the mural by some of our younger participants. Care was demonstrated by Julius in his respect for and engagement of every person we encountered on our walks through the neighborhood. Care and respect was evidenced in our mentor meetings, in that we shared food, extended ourselves to listen deeply and completely, and questioned one another towards deeper understandings. Care was evidenced in understanding, rather than judging, the predicament of the young men that we mentors sought to work with.
Care was also evidenced through the desire for the development of genuine relationship. Care was shown to me by Buzz in his sharing family pictures and personal drawings with me. Care was demonstrated through reciprocity, in which the mutual needs of participants were acknowledged and honored. An example of this is my taking Julius out to lunch in appreciation for his giving me his time for an interview.

I also saw care through a willingness to go beyond relating in a manner that solely acknowledged an equitable exchange, instead demonstrating an extension of self that comes with the development of relationship. Within our group of mentors, such behavior was expressed in the form of sharing experiences: sitting down together and sharing a meal, road tripping to Cincinnati to explore new possibilities for youth, or attending area events—including an Angela Davis lecture, local art openings, civic association meetings, museum visits and community festivals. This type of relationship is possible when members are confident of their abilities and seeking something greater than or beyond themselves.

There’s nothing wrong with having an agenda, but it’s nice to be able to work together and try to accomplish what both sides are looking for with both people in win-win situations....People come over when they wanna look like they are helping the poor neighbor or when they wanna learn something instead of just having a real relationship....People just come and do what they’re gonna do. It’s not like a continuous, genuine relationship where you feel like the person really cares. We’re all people, we all need each other! (Interview with Julius Jefferson, May 20, 2010).

**Celebration:** Celebration was evidenced in the nurturing of small gains made towards larger victories. Young people were praised and celebrated for returning to school, enrolling in and completing GED courses and earning trade-based
certificates. Gainful employment was always a reason for celebration. Recognition and celebration of one’s creative gifts was evidenced in the communal praise given the young man who drew the design for the non-mural and in the showing of a community member’s film. And a celebration—in the form of a ribbon cutting ceremony complete with food, attending politicians and media—was held upon completion of the Hope mural. Acknowledgment and celebration of accomplishments—even seemingly small ones—sustains hope, particularly in circumstances when change comes slowly.

Communication: Communication, or the lack thereof, was key in having just relations. “You have to be transparent, honest, understanding that different people communicate in different ways and have different social norms.” (Interview with Julius Jefferson, May 20, 2010). The overarching perception held by those I collaborated with was that people generally had hidden agendas, whether from those within the community or those from outside of the community seeking to do work there. Julius and Buzz both spoke to a lack of transparency and a withholding of information, resulting in “everyone secretly doing things and no one really knowing what’s going on” in the community, rather than “real communication” (Interviews with Julius Jefferson and Buzz, May 20, 2010). This naturally resulted in a lack of trust.

In considering communication between this community and outsiders, Buzz offers appropriate ways for outsiders to communicate, likening this process to an airplane seeking landing permission:

- Plan your approach.
• Humble yourself. You cannot talk down to community members and expect
to get your needs met or have a successful relationship.
• Show, not tell. You can’t come into a community and tell community
members anything.
• Talk openly, honestly.
• Call in a request for landing, knowing you may not have the correct approach
and may have to plan for another go around. Buzz notes that oftentimes
university members have thought, “We’re gonna land regardless,” to which
he responds, “You can’t just land there. What are you bringing that benefits
us?” (Interview with Buzz, May 20, 2010).
These communication strategies acknowledge an understanding that university
members may be unaware of the power held by community and its members
(White, 2005).
Community: Throughout the research, a sense of community was evidenced
in multiple ways. The collective pride born of surviving difficult circumstances
promoted a sense of strength and resiliency. Tremendous pride was taken in
contributing to mural and therefore contributing to the improvement of community.
“Someday when my kids are grown, I will bring my grandchildren here and tell them
how we picked up a brush and made our mark on this mural—we did this hand
right here.” one man projected into the future. A boy I had worked with on a
previous community project came by with his grandfather: “My daddy can’t be here
but he told me to come do this because I’m going to be an artist like him someday.”
Furthermore, the creation of this mural served as a catalyst in community building
while also acting as a symbol of community identity (Lowe, 2004), as evidenced in Buzz’s insight:

Working on the last part of the mural—painting the Martin Luther King, Jr. verse—was spiritually cleansing for me because now I’m involved back in the whole neighborhood again....I know that painting is gonna be there forever—or as long as the building is there. This positive action released a lot of troubled spirits. Folks don’t come to where they’ve lost their loved ones, but now they can bring their families to this wall. (Interview with Buzz, May 20, 2009).

**Connection:** A sense of connection and reconnection was evidenced throughout this study. We encouraged civic participation, inviting all community members we encountered to participate in the mural’s creation. Community members connected and reconnected through the act of creating a mural founded on the concept of hope; in doing so, an invisible and previously neglected space was reactivated, negative connotations released. Buzz noted how his participation in the mural involved him back in the neighborhood again, his previously avoiding that area due to the history of the site.

Julius always made the point of speaking with everyone he encountered on the street, activating social capital (Putnam, 2000) by maintaining the person-to-person bonds he held with community members, while also finding the thread of connection with those he did not immediately recognize or know.

Our group of mentors maintained a connection beyond the mural and continue to stay in touch to this day. By virtue of the fact that our group was small, formed on similar values but also fueled through sociological differences, we were able to create a strong sense of trust, understanding and mutuality over time.
**Creative problem solving:** This valuable ability was reflected in each of us as mentors, making connections and networking towards solving problems in unique ways. Julius borrowed scaffolding from his landlord when we couldn’t afford to rent it. I borrowed an overhead projector from a youth center so we could project and trace our image onto the wall. We agreed to hide two young men from police one night, offering a way to blend into community in exchange for their labor. We were open, flexible and negotiative in so many seemingly small ways that culminated in our achieving our goal, but not in the way we had initially envisioned.

**Dialogue:** Dialogue is foundational, as language is a means by which we make sense of our reality and express that to others. Thus, our use and choice of words can construct meaning making—as evidenced through socially constructed learning (Wenger, 1998)—and if consciously chosen, can serve as a point in transforming a given reality. What immediately comes to mind in writing this is my remembrance of Dr. Daniel offering a “pedagogical moment” in conversing with a Brazilian bank teller who, in holding to a racist stereotype, was initially challenged in completing a business transaction with Dr. Daniel. Communication as an act of resistance to perception took place, which was soon accompanied by a pedagogical shift resulting in a transaction being completed.

Dialogue is a process-oriented way of knowing self within a larger whole, and an acceptance of responsibility for and desire to act out of goodness within that larger whole (Wilson, 2004). Serving as a space or place to consider how thought is generated and maintained within a social context, while acknowledging truth as emergent from personal perspectives, dialogue serves to rebuild relationship amid
our fragmented existence (Bohm, 1996). Dialogue is increasingly considered an artistic practice, stemming from the recognition that artwork may not always be able to address the complexity of today’s social issues (Kestor, 2004). Although some of the artists view themselves as catalysts of transformation through their facilitation of this process, and others view it as a form of social work or activism (Kestor, 2004), it is worth noting that the shift from self-expression—which is traditionally the domain of the artist—to one of communicative exchange levels the playing field, with all involved being equal participants, open to change through dialogic exchange. Thus, this practice promotes democracy by opening an existing system to the creative tensions between individuals and collective, providing participants the opportunity for citizenship through engagement in the cyclical process of listening, reflecting, revealing and then getting a sense of the emerging whole as a result of the process (Wilson, 2004).

**Dialogue within the context of this study:** The Hope mural served as a site of transformation through the dialogue it engendered during its creation; it continues to foster dialogue on many levels to this day. The act of transforming an “in-between” space—a graffiti-tagged wall adjacent to a litter-filled alley and a parking lot that, save for the graffiti, was largely invisible—to one that promotes uplifting reflection and conversation through the community creation of a mural has had long-lasting impact, both in the community and beyond. A young man reflected on the irony of his shifting role in the community, his being the graffiti vandal to now contributing to the beautification of the area through the creation of the mural. The creation of the mural also served as a performative space for transformation.
through dialogue and art making: previously a site notorious for violence and illicit activity, the act of creating a mural—and one thematically based in hope—interrupted the typical flow and patterns associated with the area, resulting in curiosity, conversation and direct participation by community members. Participants noted that the site was once a difficult remembrance of violence and loss for many in the community but now served as a place of conversation and transformation through hope; others noted the opportunity for positive interaction through this supported “event,” prompting many who never went out to spend time conversing, oftentimes with people they had not seen in decades while also meeting new neighbors. The intergenerational makeup of the participants promoted a diversity of perspectives within the commonality of contributing to the creation of the mural; thus the mural acted as a focal point or stabilizing factor through which new insights emerged.

As previously mentioned, the Hope mural had impact outside of the community as well, it serving as a point of hope and cultural insight for many in the immediate area who may have previously not known of the neighborhood or possibly feared entering it. Images of the mural have been featured throughout city newspapers as a backdrop for a variety of politically-oriented news items, in addition to highlighting the mural’s cultural impact. An image of the mural was also used in advertising an English course based in collecting African American histories from another Columbus neighborhood.

Dialogue extended beyond the creation of both the Hope mural and the non-mural for Julius, Buzz and I. It was foundational in transforming some of our
individual perceptions, particularly when based in extension of self and trust of another. Thus, on more than one occasion, Julius and I said to one another, “OK, I didn’t think about it that way, but I see your point,” before reconsidering a thought or approach to a situation or circumstance.

Dialogue served to disrupt perceptions on many an occasion, serving as a tension in engagement: Julius’s sharing of his perspectives of our work and of community-university partnerships at academic conferences, for example, challenged stereotypes held by some in attendance as to the insight and wisdom held by a young man offering a community perspective. Dialogue also disrupted perceptions of my values and beliefs, as evidenced when community members asked who I would vote for in the upcoming presidential election. Dialogue also served to challenge perceptions held of me at the outset of this study, resulting in our discovering commonality in several issues, including concerns we share for how institutional education may not be serving all children in developing their individual capacities to contribute in society today.

Dialogue also served as a vehicle in bridging perceived difference through the act of openness and trust. For example, when initially collaborating, one of the mentors questioned if I could understand his concerns regarding the ramifications of a consumption-driven society with the false needs it fosters and the resulting conformist behavior it promotes. While our social positionings are quite different, our willingness to remain open and actively engaging in listening to one another resulted in mutually informative discussions with a common belief in independent creative thinking as a strategy in offering self-determining alternatives. The Hope
mural itself served as a dialogic bridge, whether between community members in creating it or the larger Columbus public in engaging with it over time.

These dialogic examples evidence attention, adaptation, care, trust, respect, resistance and wisdom and suggest that in enacting this creative form in everyday life, democratic social skills are supported in the form of honest self expression and empathy, thus mutually empowering those participating.

**Empowerment:** During this study, we, as mentors, worked well together and were supportive of one another. While we all were committed to the Hope mural, we also maintained our sense of individuality and adhered to our own visions. This was challenging at times for me, in that a commitment had been made to a community mural—one that community members expected and wanted—and I was counting on that as the focal point of my research; but in light of a clearer understanding of what the young men of the neighborhood wanted and each of the mentors honoring their abilities, the creation of a second mural increasingly dimmed.

Dialogue and action displaying truth to a personal vision and thereby upholding self-empowerment was witnessed in multiple ways. We maintained a sense of equanimity throughout our time working together, being respectful of one another, listening to and discussing one another’s perspectives before coming to some sort of consensus. We honored one another’s personal interests and were open to building bridges in support of one another’s goals. We each have a very strong independent streak in us, needing to adhere to a personal path and set of values that may not and
was not always understood by others but was respected amongst ourselves as acts of maintaining personal integrity.

**Engagement:** Engagement was viewed as both a personal choice and an outcome of participation in this study. Community members chose to engage in the creation of the mural, engage one another in feedback about neighborhood happenings and support one another in an uplifting manner. Engagement was a catalyst in developing a sense of community, whether through participation in the creation of the mural or attending community meetings; with engagement came possibility and hope.

**Experience:** The valuing of real experience—experience born of a process orientation, living and participating in and through a situation—was brought up on many an occasion.

The best way to learn is to do it firsthand. If you wanna learn about people in the Amazon rain forest, why not spend some time building a relationship with the people in the Amazon rainforest? Don’t just stop in here or there, read a book or look at the studies that whoever has made...So it's the same with the inner-city neighborhood....I've taken different sociology classes, and a lot of those statements made...they’re like blanket statements about these neighborhoods, and these people that are teaching this, they’ve never even experienced this, number one, but then number two is that they're the ones educating! Like you can’t be an authority on America if you’re not from America!” (Interview with Julius Jefferson, May 20, 2010).

Examples of relevant, real experience evidenced within this research include Julius sharing his challenging childhood, in this neighborhood, with youth, his doing so to demonstrate that one can still make good choices, be successful and have a positive impact on others, despite obstacles life brings. Buzz also uses his experience of making bad choices as a young man and the means by which he turned his life
around to model wise decision making in mentoring neighborhood youth. The retired gentleman who showed the children the proper care of brushes when painting the mural also demonstrated experience-based wisdom that was relevant to the setting.

**Grace:** “Grace is that capacity to receive what the world is really offering. So grace is that powerful, receptive affirmation of saying "yes" to the opportunities and the circumstances you’ve been given. And, when you do, you find out that there’s always more. You can’t earn it, you can’t deserve it and you can’t pay it back. What you can learn to do is understand that when you are receptive to greater possibility, grace allows those possibilities to serve and empower you. Grace is the idea that everything you could need or want, is in some sense, a process of opening to possibility. It doesn’t mean you’re going to get those things; but, grace is receiving the wonder that the universe is offering.” (Brooks, rajanaka.blogspot.com, retrieved April 5, 2012).

An example of grace was the happenstance that led to my meeting with Obama representatives which resulted in the Hope mural, our remaining open to how it would manifest despite many logistical shifts and changes. Another instance was my chance encounter with a Lowe’s representative in the Godman Guild parking lot, ultimately resulting in our receiving art supplies for the non-mural and then my having to return the materials, the result of the mural not coming together. I had to remain open to the flow and let go of my desired outcome, trusting that I would learn what I needed to learn through this research process. Grace manifested in the form of last minute support from the United Way for Julius to attend a
national conference with me, and grace provided us with the community support in
the creation of the mural, when those we’d planned to work with did not participate.

**History:** A sense of history was evidenced throughout this study, and in
different capacities, all providing sustenance within a sense of place and community.
The declaration of the extended history of Weinland Park not only provided a fuller
picture of this neighborhood as a source of pride for those living there but also
pointed to the shifts in social structures resulting in privilege for some to the
detriment of others, in this case those living in the neighborhood. For generations,
Weinland Park was a strong community of hard working, blue-collar people until
the changing times brought the closure of the two factories providing employment
in the area. A cycle of unemployment and a lack of systemic support and access to
resources became perpetual, those outside of the area choosing to ignore their role
in sustaining this cycle. Interest by the city and university now place this area on the
radar and in eyesight of many, resulting in the demography now shifting. Thus,
history also serves as memory and brings a call to attention, to both what has
happened and what could happen—again, providing a sense of relationship, in this
case between past and present and directed towards future possibility.

History came in the form of pride of place, not only in the sense of the
neighborhood as historically being a stronghold of hardworking, blue-collar values,
but also from the perspective of survival. Weinland Park was once known as the
Short North, this name claimed to this day by the Short North posse, an infamous
gang that brought drugs, crime and violence to the area. Those affiliated with the
gang sport tattoos designating place in the form of name and location: it is not unusual to see Short North or 4th and 8th inked on necks and knuckles.

History also came in the form of what I once thought of as lore but was also confirmed by police, this story detailing the impact of a gang on a neighborhood as attempts to eradicate it changed the fabric of the community. I learned of “The Night the Men Went Away” from several people, all sharing the same perspective: the time came when police conducted a raid of the neighborhood, effectively removing all men, in an attempt to break up the Short North Posse. Those arrested were sentenced to terms lasting a decade or two, leaving the community without men, who in addition to any committed crimes also acted as fathers, spouses, brothers, and providers, among other roles. The fact that there was no discrimination in who was taken resulted in an entire generation or more existing without the benefit of men in the community, save the boys who would grow up to be men, and placed a tremendous burden on the women left to carry on.

History, in the form of oral tradition, preserves ways of knowing and being in a society that now values the monetary system and its corresponding consumption over values that are uplifting of human beings. An elder spoke to the loss of positive role models—people who made something out of nothing and creating small independent businesses, or people who cared for and loved one another, challenged and corrected one another out of care and concern and without fear of reprisal. The lack of a sense of lived history in a positive manner could be a contributing factor to the lack of connection and care evidenced by youth, who may be challenged in how to respond positively to the world handed to them. An awareness of history,
whether through memory or oral history, can on the other hand disrupt silence and bring about consciousness and positive action.

**Hope:** Hope was clearly a predominant theme, as it was the theme of the mural done for the Obama campaign, as previously mentioned. Hope offers possibility, highlights potential, offers another way and therefore provides sustenance and survival in oppressive times. I am reminded of the woman who spoke with Julius at the conclusion of our completing the Hope mural, her noting that her daily visits to it gave her reason to go on when she didn’t think she’d be able to. That statement alone was reason enough for our doing that mural.

Hope was evidenced in the conversations about and participation of children in the painting of the mural. Children always bring hope. Hope was also evidenced in our persistence, as a group of mentors, in seeking that possibility that would manifest in support of our working with youth in the neighborhood.

How does one keep hope alive in oppressive times? Based on our working together, I would suggest that flexibility, interdependence and imagination are key in sustaining hope, as those qualities support a vision that sees beyond the immediate, beyond absolutes or seemingly impenetrable boundaries. Clearly communication is key—communication that conveys care and respect, relationship and community, rather than simply the sharing of information, as hope is relational and highlights the uplifting of human beings. It is a shared aspiration for something beyond immediate, surface perception.

**Identity:** Individual and collective identity was evidenced through affirmations of abilities, values and belonging. The boy who came to represent his absent, artistic
father by contributing to the mural carried on his father’s abilities, thereby
displaying values of respect and responsibility and maintaining a sense of familial
and community belonging. The retired gentleman who had taught art in earlier
years shared his artistic identity, evoking tradition, respect for elders, materials and
process by sharing skills and care for materials with youth who were painting the
mural. Young men identified with and took pride in belonging to a gang as testament
to their survival. The level of evolving self awareness as contributing and shaping a
changing identity was evidenced in children and teens who chose to participate in
creating the Hope mural; in one case, for example, a female teen chose to participate
against the wishes of an abusive boyfriend. Many community members commented
on desiring more creative opportunities, such as this, as a positive means of self
expression and community development. The Hope mural, itself, reflected
community identity, illustrated resiliency and the potential of transformation.

Perception: Thoughts are formed through perception, a lens through which an
individual relates to the larger world. Perception has a strong visual element to it for
most, which is acknowledged within this analysis. Perceptual responses aligned
with either an ability to be open and engaged in the moment—resulting in the
possibility of a perceptual change—or a surface-oriented stance in which one’s
personal projections are imposed on the given moment and resulting in judgment
and a lack of depth in relating.

Perceptions reflecting a surface examination of the neighborhood included,
“They see what it is and they think that’s what it is,” (Interview with Buzz, May 20,
2010) regarding outsiders’ quick visual perception of the neighborhood—one that
denies the complexity of the community, as previously mentioned by Julius. I was once told, “It’s the most valuable piece of real estate that no one knows about," in response to the outsider’s perception of the neighborhood. University students avoided the area for decades, following a perception of the area being unsafe and undesirable (Hutzel & Resler, 2009), although that perception is now changing with the city’s recent investment in the neighborhood. President Gee noted his surprise upon discovering the area, comparing it to Bagdad (Council of Graduate Students meeting, spring 2008). Those living in the neighborhood did not disavow the occurrences that denigrated the area, but they also did not hold them as an all-encompassing perception of the area; theirs was much fuller in its consideration of assets and encompassed the hard working, blue collar people, many who struggled to maintain stability and security with the demise of employment in the area.

Perceptions of a surface orientation regarding the mural came from an individual who brought a group of teens for a tour and interview with Julius and I, her commenting on the lack of technique evidenced in the painting of the mural. This difference between her perception and our intention can be found in an understanding of community practices and processes. What was perhaps lacking in technique was released in favor of participation by people varying in age from two to the elderly, all wishing to make their mark in bettering their community and honoring this significant historical event and its impact on American history, society and culture.

The distinct visual differences between myself, Julius and Buzz led to acknowledged differences in how we were perceived and treated throughout the
duration of our working together and highlight stereotyping based on race and/or socioeconomic status. I will note again that Julius is a young, charismatic, African American man in his mid-20s; Buzz is a middle-aged African American man sporting a lot of jewelry and a bandana; I am a middle-aged white woman affiliated with the university. The following examples will illustrate just a few of these occurrences: Julius understood that he was not taken seriously by the storeowner in discussing the creation of a mural, both despite and because he was from the neighborhood. His bringing me with him some time later led institutional credibility to the task at hand in fulfillment of his goal, and he was well aware of that.

I perceived myself as being out of place when introduced by Julius to someone in the neighborhood and receiving no response, glance or acknowledgment—I was invisible regardless of Julius’s inclusion of me. S. held a similar perception when he and I attended the OSU Gateway arts opening, our community representative talking to me about community inclusion in developing the area as an artistic community while ignoring the community member and artist I introduced him to and tried to include in the conversation. Buzz acknowledges being perceived as intimidating by those not knowing him. His response? “Looks can be deceiving. I want people to see what they want to see....They generally get the book with the wrong cover. People who get to know me—I’m nothing like they thought” (Interview with Buzz, May 20, 2010).

There were examples of perceptions transforming through direct personal experience, as well. Area cops who stated they were not Obama supporters, and who held a negative perception of neighborhood youth, found themselves sharing paint
and working on the mural with those same youth in the spirit of community.

Neighborhood youth who questioned me as to who I would vote for in the presidential election were surprised to learn I would vote for Obama, as they thought a white person would not do so. Perceptions of Julius by academicians at a PAR conference changed when they heard him give his perspectives on community-university collaborations; in fact, several professors offered him their cards and suggested he contact them about graduate school possibilities.

Notably, perceptions of space shifted through the creation of the Hope mural, for both those living in the neighborhood and those looking in, as previously stated.

**Resistance:** I noticed a progression of resistance in Julius’s behavior as time passed. He quit attending civic association meetings towards the end of his tenure as Vice President, for example. Some in positions of leadership viewed this as a neglect of responsibility. No one could deem Julius’s behavior to be avoidance, as Julius is very confident, open and a clear, direct communicator, and perhaps this provides insight into how roles were played out within the larger scheme of things. I have witnessed many situations in which attempts at communication were diverted, redirected or turned into personal attacks because Julius spoke to something that others did not want to address, or he simply did not do as others wished or expected him to do.

I believe a more careful look at the larger context reveals not a lack of responsibility but instead resistance as a means of distinguishing and maintaining his individual perspective or vision, his choosing to construct his reality rather than having it constructed for him. “Too many people want you to do what they do, or do
it the way they do it,” Julius notes (Interview with Julius Jefferson, March 2010).

Julius, as mentioned previously, was recognized as a brilliant young man with natural leadership qualities; he was being groomed for leadership positions both neighborhood- and city-wide. But Julius also places a premium on honoring his path, asking questions and speaking truth, his doing so sometimes interrupting the status quo.

**Respect:** “You’ve gotta meet people where they are, literally,” Julius acknowledges (Interview with Julius Jefferson, May 20, 2010). Respect, in honoring a person as they are for who they are, in a manner that is positive and uplifting of the individual, is foundational in any positive, constructive relationship. Respect demonstrates a sense of mutuality or care for the wellbeing of another. As such, respect allows for difference, as we are all unique individuals.

Respect was demonstrated throughout this study, in the way that people listened to one another without interruption, gave affirmations to demonstrate understanding of a situation described, gave one another the benefit of the doubt and questioned something, rather than jumping to conclusions or judgments, honored the choices made or conclusions manifested as part of an individual’s journey in life. Respect was shown through consideration of another by honoring what we individually needed to do and the way we needed to do it, thereby demonstrating an understanding of a larger collective beyond individual personality or interest. Respect was accorded to those having direct, first-hand experience, as opposed to those coming from a knowledge base of abstraction and unapplied theory.
**Self-understanding:** As quoted earlier, “In order to discover ourselves, we need to see ourselves in the other, to understand the other in order to understand ourselves, to enter into the other” (Faundez, cited in Freire; 1998, p. 200). I might also add that seeing others in ourselves supports a sense of mutuality and responsibility through an understanding of the interrelated nature of the world, thus leading to a respect for all and a desire for social justice when situations arise that reveal inequities.

A deeper sense of self and understanding of self in relation to the larger whole was evidenced throughout this study. Each of us, as mentors, had instances when communication was not clear or understood, resulting in a response acknowledging the lack of understanding or of considering the other’s perspective. Also, our willingness to extend ourselves into situations in which we might not have ventured or had the opportunity to experience before informed us, whether our responses to the experience or the responses reflected back to us through the experience. Our ability to engage in these instances reflects a desire for and capacity to honor personal growth, as well as an understanding of collective impact.

**Serendipity:** Serendipity, although not specifically a behavior, is brought to attention here in that it is a behavior of openness to unknown possibility combined with a willingness to act upon any resulting, unfolding opportunities. This sense of openness combined with agency is not a haphazard grasping; rather it speaks to a relational orientation to one’s environment and the larger world, this relationship activated through engaged listening with the understanding that there is always an unknown beyond one’s perception and awareness. This is a spiritual way of
knowing, “the power to make good things happen, even in bad times” (Chandler, 1997, p. 81, as referenced in Daniel, 2006, p. 10).

Serendipitous events are evidenced in this research in several ways: first, the fact that a casual conversation overheard by Obama’s Media Director during lunch at a local restaurant and resulting in my getting a phone call and our having the opportunity to create the Hope mural was incredibly serendipitous. My chance meeting a gentleman in the parking lot when leaving my community garden plot, resulting in our being donated all the materials for our next mural, the non-mural, was serendipitous. That so many community members unexpectedly joined us and participated in the creation of this mural—particularly when the young men didn’t and we realized there was a distinct possibility we’d be doing this alone—was serendipitous. For that matter, my attending Ohio State was serendipitous: as a young girl, my grandfather gave me a buckeye and told me I’d go to college at Ohio State as we watched an Ohio State football game on TV. Being about nine and from Birmingham, Alabama at the time, this made little sense to me, and yet when I unpacked my belongings in Columbus, Ohio, I found that Buckeye and remembered that he’d seemingly planted that seed that was now coming true thirty-five years later.

Just as there is a sense of morality implied by consciously holding a spiritual mindset and embodying a spiritual practice—the result of understanding the world to be bound in a sense of interrelatedness—there is a sense of morality implied in the occurrence of serendipitous events. Embodying a perspective of openness and interrelatedness, enacted through humility, respect for life in all manifestations and
engaged listening places one’s intentions in a framework of “higher good.” This uplifting mindset is open to the spaciousness of new possibilities.

**Sharing of Resources:** This behavior was evidenced throughout the research and represents a flow of assets or resources accommodating the recognition of an uplifting action. Scaffolding was provided by a neighborhood landlord; tools offered by the owner of Kelly’s Carry-Out, the store adjacent to the site of the Hope Mural. The donation of all of the art materials for our second mural—the non-mural—as well as the United Way’s funding of Julius’s joining me in attending a national conference are examples of resource sharing. The sharing of time, ideas, expertise and understandings by arts organizations and community members is also notable in the manifestation of the Hope mural.

**Structure:** The honoring or disavowal of structure, as it supports and uplifts an individual or collective—or doesn’t—was a theme evidenced throughout this study. Although there tends to be a lack of consciousness about or acknowledgement of this by privileged components of society, society does in fact structure certain ways of being as relevant or significant, giving those factions support and visibility. Those living outside of those boundaries find themselves invisible and without support and therefore creating alternative systems for support. Frequently, this inequity is reduced to cultural difference, which prevents those in power from having to address the systemic structural change necessary to bring true equity and justice for all Americans. It therefore becomes easy to point fingers at individuals or groups of individuals, rather than address the oftentimes invisible systemic structure that privileges some to the detriment of others.
Inclusive versus exclusive practices pointed to the manner in which structure was viewed and addressed. Julius and I both have a tendency to think outside of the box and question rules, our doing so to bring a greater degree of inclusion to a situation or process. I, for example, had not considered that it might be viewed as unusual or improper to include my community partners in an academic presentation—I believe that the community partner should speak to and share their experience, rather than simply having me share my perception of their experience in our working together. I thought that my including Julius in academic presentations so would offer a truer, more informative perspective to all participants.

I was surprised at the responses we received, both times that we did this together. There were those who admitted to judging Julius based on his appearance and once having heard him speak then suggested he consider graduate school. Others thought I allowed Julius to use me. Some stated they found it cutting edge and appropriate, while others thought it unnecessary. At the national conference, Julius’s participation resulted in us having conversations with organizers in order to address the restructuring conference fees so as to include community participants. This led to the implementation of such a structure the following year.

Inclusive versus exclusive practices were evidenced within the community as well. As mentors, we were inclusive of all who sought to participate, in whatever manner they chose to participate, in the creation of the Hope mural. Some painted, others watched, a few served as cheerleaders and storytellers, and others documented the process. While it could be said that we had to be inclusive, the result of the young men choosing not to participate, we could have chosen to
completely do it ourselves, allowing community members to solely watch. Instead, we consciously chose to make it a participatory, community event, and our doing so made it hugely successful.

Inclusive and exclusive practices were also evidenced in conversations addressing inequity throughout the study. The inclusive manner with which we as mentors structured our meetings—inviting one another into our homes and sharing both personal space and food—showed openness, respect and care, while also offering opportunities to dispel misperceptions of one another’s lifestyles. I was once asked, for example, how I could afford to shop at Whole Foods, particularly being a graduate student. I was confused by this question, as I very rarely shopped there and did not know where this perception was coming from—I then recognized that my recycling items were in a Whole Foods bag, my having shopped there the result of having received a gift card at Christmas. I explained this and hopefully dispelled the perception of my being a wealthy graduate student.

Exclusive practices, as experienced by community members, were mentioned. The difficulties of being judged and unable to find employment as a young, African American male was spoken of frequently. Julius liked to dispel the myth that his being a young African American man from the neighborhood meant that he fit a particular profile: he has never run afoul of the law and only recently received a jaywalking ticket for trying to resolve a sidewalk dispute between community members. Conversations of an unwillingness to listen or share information, as well as an unwillingness to talk openly or work together, were frequent.
My awareness of inclusive and exclusive practices, based in life experiences, has resulted in my having a tendency to assist people in finding their place within the whole of any structure I function within. I practice inclusivity and challenge myself to extend myself to others outside of a given realm. I do so with a desire to expand my capacity in having a greater understanding of the world, knowing that in doing so I have to be willing to be impacted and changed by such experiences. My doing so has taught me of compassion and empathy and underscores my support of and work towards social justice.

**Trust:** Trust, or the lack thereof, was also a common theme throughout this study. The lack of direct and open communication can result in individuals strategizing, manipulating and fending for themselves. We, as mentors, acknowledged that trust was built on transparency and honesty, and we modeled that when working together. We also acknowledged that trust was built through understanding different communication styles and being willing to question rather than simply react and judge.

**Wisdom:** Wisdom is born of lived experiences and the deeper ways of knowing and being that emerge as a result. I therefore view wisdom as a praxis-oriented state of being—one in which the person living in wisdom does so from the heart, the result of life experience teaching one to perceive and live beyond the dualities of daily living. There is a sense of generosity and compassion embodied by the person of wisdom, which suggests that such an individual promotes a sense of community through relational ways of knowing and being. Wisdom is often shared
through narratives, (Daniel, 2006) which serve to integrate, sustain connection and create common spaces (Putnam, 2003).

Evidence of wisdom enacted was demonstrated in knowing when to listen versus knowing when to speak or act, remaining open in the present moment and seeking understand rather than judging, having consideration and diplomacy in speaking truth, choosing to include rather than exclude, choosing truth and justice over quick solutions or personal satisfactions that are detrimental to others. Wisdom imparted through narratives was evidenced in the personal experiences shared by Julius and Buzz with neighborhood youth, as well as by adults in speaking with children while painting the mural. Wisdom through narrative was also evidenced in the stories of life experiences shared by youth with mentors.

**Behaviors, Spiritually Embodied**

In now considering these behaviors as being of a spiritual nature, I return to Bergson’s *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1913) and Eastern Buddhist philosophy, both offering an interrelated understanding of existence and introduced in Chapter Two’s literature review, as well as Chapter Three’s theoretical underpinning. I am appreciative of a lecture given by Dr. Kasulis (2008) and Dr. John Huntington’s Buddhist art history classes for clarifying this process-oriented way of relating to the world for me.

Vajrayana Buddhist theory and philosophy offers an understanding of the whole, as related through parts. Self-actualization is realized through ritual engagement with the cosmos, which is self-expressive; the cosmos is seen as the Buddha. It is
therefore understood not through observation or analyzation but through engagement, or praxis. There are two ways of engaging with reality from this perspective: exoteric—which is reality and is audience-directed—or esoteric, in which one confers with reality. Esoteric reality is enacted dialogically, as it is interior and therefore obscure. There is no audience, necessarily—it can simply be done as self-expression, for one’s own pleasure. But as a part of the cosmos, one can listen and hear, as that is the other half of dialogue. As the cosmos is self-expressive, and we are part of the cosmos, we can listen for and hear aspects of it because it “talks.” (notes from Kasulis talk, 2008; http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kukai/, retrieved January 23, 2011).

Bergson’s (1913) metaphysical theory offers an understanding of the means by which relationship is developed, distinguishing the two ways of knowing something or someone: relative and absolute. Relative implies going around it, while absolute implies entering into it:

Take for example, the movement of an object in space. I perceive it differently according to the point of view from which I look at it, whether from that of mobility or of immobility. I express it differently, furthermore, as I relate it to the system of axes or reference points, that is to say, according to the symbols by which I translate it. And I call it relative for this double reason: in either case, I place myself outside the object itself. When I speak of an absolute movement, it means that I attribute to the mobile an inner being and, as it were, states of soul; it also means that I am in harmony with these states and enter into them by an effort of imagination. Therefore, according to whether the object is mobile or immobile, whether it adopts one movement or another, I shall not have the same feeling about it. And what I feel will depend neither on the point of view I adopt toward the object, since I am in the object itself, nor on the symbols by which I translate it, since I have renounced all translation in order to possess the original. In short, the movement will not be grasped from without and, as it were, from where I am, but from within, inside it, in what it is itself. I shall have hold of an absolute. (Bergson, 1913: 159-60, italics added).
In other words, the person is the activity, rather than the agent behind it. It is how the cosmos is, rather than what the cosmos is. I am how I do something, not what I do. Therefore, activity defines the person—by thought, word and deed. As the cosmos is expressive and a person is part of the cosmos, that person will seek to relate, to engage, rather than know—this is the relational, bi-directional, reciprocal nature of relationship through extension of self in engagement.

This philosophy recognizes the interrelatedness of all. Just as I am part of the cosmos, the cosmos is part of me, the relationship between us being holographic in nature, the whole being reflected in the part. Therefore, through awareness, my actions enact and reflect my engagement with the cosmos. When conscious of this relationship, there is an understanding that thoughts, words and deeds have impact on a larger whole, like ripples on the water’s surface. Likewise, this understanding of relationship also promotes a sense of gratitude, the result of an awareness of the interrelatedness of all of life supporting one’s very existence in each and every moment—a perspective that lies in contrast to that of today’s systemic structures promoting fragmentation and specialization to the exclusion of the whole, resulting in individuals feeling disconnected, trying to manipulate and control connections to make meaning in life.

The behaviors evidenced and described in this study show an awareness and consciousness of relationship by participants. Whether in thought, word, or deed, these behaviors demonstrate engagement, consideration of self within a larger whole and enactment through praxis. I am suggesting that this understanding and awareness of self within a larger whole—bound in interrelatedness and
interdependence—and consciously enacted through thought, word and deed, is the
foundation of a spiritual life. Such a perspective positions each and every one of us
as a lens reflecting a larger whole, our actions the result of inner power in tandem
with our perceptions to and receptions of the external world as we interact with it.
We transform the world, just as the world transforms us (Palmer, 1983/93).

**Implications for Art Education**

I will now address my secondary question, allowing me to apply the results
of this research:

- *What educational practices are suggested by identifying spiritual components?*

The spiritual components of community-based art are identified in this study
as behaviors because behaviors demonstrate the expressive nature of engagement
and of praxis. They include: attention, adaptation, care, celebration, communication,
community, connection, creative problem solving, dialogue, empowerment,
engagement, experience, grace, history, hope, identity, perception, resistance,
respect, self-understanding, serendipity, sharing of resources, structure, trust and
wisdom. They were identified through the process of creating the Hope mural for
the Obama presidential campaign and the community process that culminated in the
non-mural.

It is important to note that this study is not directed towards advocacy for
any particular belief system, in or out of schools. Rather, it is an explication of
spiritual underpinnings that inform my point of view as an individual and
community member. It provides a point of departure, a foundation for the
consideration of spiritual components in support of discovering better ways of life and ways of functioning optimally within community. This practice enables me, as it positions me as the creator of my reality through increasing consciousness of how I navigate and negotiate my inner world and outer reality. Through collaboration, I gain insight which—through application of a creative process, whether artistically or dialogically—leads to an increasing awareness of those points supporting transformation and resulting in some small, conscious step of change. I become a more conscious and hopefully a better person through this work. This, or some other philosophical underpinning, could enable educators to be increasingly self-reflective and responsible in understanding one’s position within the larger society. In embracing this form of self-empowerment, a more just social order is fostered.

As has been mentioned throughout the study, relationship is the key element unifying the spirit work (Daniel; 2006, 2011) that engaged participants. Distinguishing between relative and absolute ways of relating to the world highlights the manner in which we construct and understand our world: when considered from the relative perspective, the person is the agent behind the activity, relating to various aspects of the world through a perspective at a given point in time, using symbols to express that viewpoint. From an absolute perspective, the person extends self through imagination to comprehend the inner state of an object or person. In doing so, there is harmony between the two; furthermore, the extension of self expands the person’s capacity as a human being, whether through perception or action.
These distinctly different ways of relating to the world have implications in terms of how we perceive and construct our reality, as previously alluded to. When relating to the world from an absolute perspective, the person is the activity, rather than an agent behind it. This brings an understanding of the world through direct engagement, through an increasing awareness of and attunement to the world as demonstrated by entering into it through action.

If relating to the world from a relative perspective, there is not direct engagement into the interior of the other object or person. Therefore, meaning is made through a perspective at a given point in time, which is then expressed through chosen symbols used to translate that perspective. This in turn manifests in thinking that distinguishes, separates and subsequently categorizes and labels aspects external to self. Perceiving the world and its phenomena in this manner fosters a sense that everything is separate and external to the individual self. This lack of direct engagement and connection fosters a desire to control and manipulate external factors. It also creates a perceived lack of direct responsibility for the resulting structuring of the external world because absolute engagement with those externalized aspects of the world has been neglected. In terms of the individual, a questioning of belonging and ability develops through the neglect of the relational connection with the larger whole, which requires a performative aspect in identity development within that whole.

These two ways of relating to the world—relative and absolute—correspond to the manner in which we structure the world. The relative manner of relating to the world corresponds to the material realm, through which we think about
controlling and manipulating matter that is external to us. Through this lens, we seek to reduce the complexity of a situation to recognizable parts in order to label, analyze and measure, in order to control, manipulate and fix. This way of thinking supports achievement and mastery of material world; if we reflect upon our current day reality, it is clear that we have privileged this way of thinking over the past few centuries and to great success.

Yet not everything can be reduced to measurable numbers and controlled; that does not mean that it does not exist. The absolute manner of relating to the world corresponds to the social realm, through which direct engagement by extension of self results in expansion, an unfolding of situations in all their unique complexity. Through this realm, the world is not engaged as a clearly defined problem through which the application of technique and theory born of detached knowledge works to fix the problem. The world is not a problem to be fixed through a reductive paradigm; rather, the world unfolds into complex situations full of ambiguity. We extend ourselves and engage as a means of discerning our role within the context of a larger unfolding pattern. In doing so, we increase our capacity to comprehend and accept our responsibility within our surrounding world. We accept change as being part and parcel of life and are able to acknowledge our role as agents of change and transformation through our awareness of the process orientation of this social realm.

With these two ways of relating in mind, spirituality is understood within this study as an embodied practice of process and engagement resulting in developing consciousness through thought, word and deed; it engenders a sense of
responsibility by virtue of understanding the relatedness, and therefore the impact, of all on all. It aligns with the social realm.

It becomes clear that we exist in an imbalanced world, one that has privileged the material to the exclusion of the social, resulting in a sense of disconnection and alienation as we confront issues of sustainability. Balance can be restored through a paradigmatic shift in institutional education that recognizes the interrelatedness of all.

A holistic approach to learning would offer development and understanding of the social realm and serve as a counterpoint to the analytic approach, which is based in the materialistic realm and discerned through a reductionist approach using scientific methods. This holistic approach requires seeing the world through the lens of wholeness, observing it for relationships between objects rather than simply objects. It is intuitive, relational and non-linear, in complement to the analytical, systemic, reductionary mode of thinking we are accustomed to learning through. Being intuitively and relationally based, this way of thinking and knowing has to be experienced. If properly understood, this is in and of itself empowering. The act of attention, the act of observation—both become moral acts through which we observe, engage and are implicate in the manner by which the world unfolds. We become social artists, engaged in creating the world through how we choose to see it (Kaplan, 2002).

Powerful stuff, this—and a way of knowing and learning that art education is uniquely poised to promote, as it is visual art that develops clear, observational seeing while also acknowledging how one conceptually creates meaning through
visual perceptions. Art education also promotes the development of the ability to see connections, which allows one to experience the whole, through invoking the act of imagination. Art education supports our capacity for observation, creation and reflection through direct participation.

Developing this intuitive understanding of the whole is undertaken through the development of artistic behaviors and skills:

- Observational drawing serves as a means of developing one’s visual perceptions of connection and relationship within one’s environment, while also developing a level of intimacy for connecting to the environment as it unfolds (Kaplan, 2002). The act of attention reveals patterns, rhythms, harmonies and connections leading to stability, connections and relationships; it also recognizes boundaries, imbalance, asymmetry and disruption, fostering the lack of stability, connection and relationship.

- The practice of active listening develops attention, an ability to extend perception beyond one’s self and thereby reengage in the whole.

- Reflection is promoted through detached observation of one’s choices, and reading patterns to develop clarity and gain control of response.

- Dialogue is an act of extension and engagement as a means of receiving feedback, support and creating consolidation through what emerges.

Imagination promotes the ability to see patterns and relationships.

Educators can explore and incorporate any or all of these aspects towards developing a deeper understanding of the interrelatedness throughout all of
existence. Integrated approaches to disseminating curriculum content will naturally foster the opportunity to build connections between disciplines and develop relational meaning making. Each of the previously mentioned art-oriented behaviors and skills can serve to promote engaged learning and can also be utilized in extending and embracing learning beyond the classroom walls. For example, narrative strategies such as portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) and storytelling (Putnam, 2003) enable educators to learn more about their students’ communities. Students and educators can participate in co-constructing the portrait in order to illuminate the complexities of the neighborhood. Observational drawing can lend both visual detail and spatial understanding to community. Engaged listening through strategies such as storytelling and visitations by community members develop the capacity to open and embrace perspectives beyond one’s own, thereby developing depth of self and in an understanding of the surrounding world. Dialogue, as offered through peer learning, small group discussions and mediation, also support the ability to extend one’s self in understanding another, while also honing both possibility and responsibility in engagement.

This study contributes to the demystification of spiritual ways of knowing by describing them through embodied behaviors and a consciously determined extension of self beyond personal perspective. Relationship is therefore at the core of spirituality, with inner and outer reflected in mutual interrelatedness. Relationship requires responsibility. Thus, living a spiritual life in a relational vein may begin with self-reflection and a personal, largely internalized, practice
that—while vital and necessary—necessitates relatedness and the willingness to grow through the perceptions of others. To hold personal perceptions close, rather than offering them in community towards both personal and collective transformation, results in objectification, rather than subjectivism and relativism (Palmer, 1993). This in turn brings what West (1999) refers to as “social amnesia,” meaning our spirituality lacks social consciousness and thus prevents us from analyzing and addressing social systems of power that serve some to the detriment of others. Thus, a spiritually embodied practice is the hallmark of any social justice practice and therefore deeply relevant in light of the social, political and ecological complexities we face today.

Conclusions

In considering spirituality as an engaged, relational form of praxis, this research suggests some fundamental shifts in teaching and learning:

- Meaning is constructed through relational engagement, as defined through praxis. Thus, the person is the activity expressed within an interrelated context, rather than existing behind the activity. Therefore, a person seeks to engage, rather than know, in support of the relational, reciprocal, bi-directional nature of existence. Knowledge is information; wisdom emerges from engagement with the information and resulting in concrete experiences. A process orientation, although deemed inefficient in today’s educational context, facilitates this but requires considered strategies to maintain engagement.
• Relational engagement of this nature requires acknowledging human complexity as it is informed by cultural and communal ways of knowing. Multicultural education that engages and develops cultural understandings through dialogic practices will support the integration of diverse understandings while also promoting the value of community contribution.

• Communication is key—as self-expression, a form of engagement, and a responsibility in interdependence. Dialogic practices based in listening, reflecting and revealing, followed by an openness to sensing an emergent future of the whole (Wilson, 2004) supports an increasing consciousness, both individually and collectively. This practice, in turn, leads to civic engagement and collaborative action, thus supporting democratic pedagogical practices bound in compassion for one another, born of an understanding that we do, indeed, need one another.

• A spiritual paradigm promotes an interrelational pedagogy and, as such, supports ways of teaching and learning that are holistic in orientation, valuing an increasing consciousness that thereby supports the development and unfolding of individual potential towards revealing collective possibilities. Holistic practices will promote relational learning, offering students the opportunity to know self in relation to others, thus defining knowledge (and becoming) as process, rather than solely product. Within the classroom, art can serve as the vehicle in promoting both democratic processes and artistic product; likewise, dialogue can serve to promote both
process and product in a given classroom, developing ethicality, adaptability, resiliency and democracy.

- In doing this type of spirit work (Daniel, 2006) comes the recognition that we all seek to contribute our gifts and abilities to the larger whole of humanity; thus empowered through holistic educational practices, we seek to address the social ills that prevent any contribution uplifting of the human experience. This is “education as a practice of freedom” (Freire, 1970, p. 69).

- Hopefully, the results of this study will encourage emerging methodologies and ways of knowing that promote consciousness, capacity, empowerment and emancipation in school settings. Identification of these specific community-based spiritual components can play a role in the development of holistic curricular models. And, doing so might encourage empathetic, constructive and equitable relationships among community members, students, parents and teachers. Art education is poised to lead the way in this vein, as many of the practices suggested through this holistic approach are foundationally artistic and supportive of relational development. What is needed is an institutional openness to that which is not reductive in process and to that which is not material in nature; in addition, a receptivity to potentiality and possibility, rather than predictability would further engage all in responsible relationship in moving us beyond patterns that no longer serve us. Doing so would situate us in co-creative, empowering processes that respect, appreciate and allow in a manner that is dignifying to all.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A: Institutional Review Board Form

June 16, 2010

Protocol Number: **2010B0138**
Protocol Title: *A PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH STUDY ON TRANSFORMATIVE BEHAVIORS AND ACTIONS IN COMMUNITY, AS VIEWED THROUGH COMMUNITY-BASED ART EDUCATION, Vesta Daniel, Loring Resler, Art Education*
Type of Review: Initial Review—Expedited
IRB Staff Contact: Jacob R. Stoddard
Phone: 614-292-0526
Email: stoddard.13@osu.edu

Dear Dr. Daniel,

The Behavioral and Social Sciences IRB APPROVED BY EXPEDITED REVIEW the above referenced research. The Board was able to provide expedited approval under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1) because the research meets the applicability criteria and one or more categories of research eligible for expedited review, as indicated below.

Date of IRB Approval: June 15, 2010
Date of IRB Approval Expiration: June 2, 2010
Expedited Review Category: 7

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 all investigators and research staff to promptly report to the IRB any serious, unexpected and related adverse events and 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.

Jeanne A. Clement, EdD, Chair
Behavioral and Social Sciences Institutional Review Board

Behavioral and Social Sciences Institutional Review Board

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