Community-based Artists: Dialogues of Identity and Learning

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Presentation for:
The Arts and Community PhD Researchers Network
3rd February 2010

ARTIST, LEAVE THE WORLD OF ART!

Artist, leave the World of Art!
Pack your goodies on a cart
Duck out through some tiny hole
And slip away, and save your soul!

Leave no footprints, don’t look back!
Take the dark and dirty track,
Cross the border, bless your heart;
Freedom from the World of Art!

Source: (Leunig, 1999)
**Rationale**

[It is] more pervasive than ever. They [the government] view the arts as a means of achieving broad economic and social goals, such as education, crime reduction and community development. In other words, investment in culture is justified in terms of culture’s ability to promote broad public policy objectives. (McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras, & Brooks, 2004, p. 2)

Within the discourse & debates related to the value of the arts & impact, artists voices were silent about their learning and why they undertook this type of work.

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**Initial Proposition**

When artists become involved in community arts projects they learn about their identity as an artist.

**Review of Literature**

Problems/ concepts requiring clarifications:
- Artist
- Community arts
- Learning
- Identity
Prompts/ questions to guide the study

Identity
• Why do artists who work with communities or in sites of learning choose to involve themselves in that type of arts practice?
• Are there any unifying traits or attributes of artists who choose to work with communities or in sites of learning?
• How does working with communities or in sites of learning influence the artist's identity?
• Does location or place (working in regional locations) affect the artist's practice?

Practice
• How do artists who work with communities or in sites of learning make meaning or theorise about their practice?
• How does the practice of working with communities or in sites of learning influence other work the artist undertakes?
• What are the artist's views of others when involved in the practice of working with communities or in sites of learning?
• How does working with communities or in sites of learning differ from other forms of art practice?

Final Proposition

When artists are involved in community-based arts practice(s), they learn about their identity/ies, as artists.

My intentions were:
1. To gain a sense of the way artists who undertake community-based arts practice perceive themselves.
2. Explore the learning that occurs for them as artists, when they find themselves situated in contexts that involve working with groups of people

My aim was:
To consider how working as a community-based artist may influence their ways of thinking, how they make meaning or learn from the situations in which they find themselves, and how that in turn shapes them.
Who is an Artist?

Problematic

- Different criteria used by governments for census, taxation, employment, grants.
- Qualifications/credentials—formal, informal.
- Not usually main source of income.
- “Artist” rather than painter, sculptor etc.
- Consecrated artist vs Avant-garde artist.
- Outsider – genius or lunatic.

the categorisation of an artist “refuses to fit into any kind of model [or definition]… since part of the profession’s very purpose is to question notions of norms and standards” (Ting, 2002, p. 10)

Who is an Artist?

Prior experience, beliefs established

Prior experience, beliefs established

Artist

Art Work

Audience

Discrete assessment loop used in the composition of art work

Audience constructs discrete loop when viewing art work

Subsequent experience, effect on intentions

Subsequent experience, effect on perceptions

Usual relationship of an artwork between artist and audience.

Who is an Artist?

A socially interactive model of art practice.
Source: (from the work of Stephen Willats (c.1970) cited in Kester, 2004, p. 92)

Community-based arts practice(s)?

- Community arts (Hawkins, 1993)
- Community cultural development (Hawkes, 2003)
- New genre public art (U.S.) (Lacy, 1995)
- Social sculpture (Beuys, 2004)
- Dialogical art (Kester, 2004)
- Making in communities (Sullivan, 2005)
- Relational art (Bourriaud, 2005)
- Socially engaged arts (Centre for Creative Communities, 2005)
- Participatory arts (The Arts Council of Ireland, 2005)
- Socially engaged, participatory and educational arts activity. (Reiss & Pringle, 2003)
- Instrumental & Intrinsic Benefits
Identity/ies

- Self /identity (Combs & Snygg, 1959; Connell, 2002)
- Development / formation (Erikson, 1950; Mishler, 1999)

Static / Fluid?
- Habitus/fields/capital (Bourdieu, 1993)
- Enlightened / sociological / post-modern subjects (Hall, 1992)
- Structure / agency (Giddens, 1991)
- Identity capital (Côté & Levine, 2002)
- Becoming / rhizomes / folds (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987)

Identities mediated by subjective and objective worlds

Learning

- Experiential (Dewey, 1963; Kolb, 1984; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994)
- Disjuncturcure / Transformative (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Jarvis, 2006; Mezirow, 1991; Mishler, 1999)
- Formal/informal / non-formal, conscious /unconscious, learning sites/situations (Foley, 1995; Illich, 1971; Jarvis, 2006; Kalantzi & Cope, 2008)
- Social theory of learning / Communities of practice (Bandura, 1977; Senge, 1992; Wenger, 1998)
- Communitas / societas (Bauman, 1993; Jarvis, 2008; Turner, 1969)
- Lifelong & lifewide learning /education
Concrete Experience  
Active Experimentation  
Reflective Observation  
Abstract Conceptualisation


The whole person:  
Body/  
Mind/  
Self  
Life history

The life world

Action  
Thought/  
reflection  
Emotion

The person in the world (Body/Mind/Self) changed  
The changes memorised.  
Person more

Changed whole person:  
Body/  
Mind/  
Self  
Life history

The life world

What artists do in sites of learning

Artists acquire new labels/identities:
• “Creative Practitioners” (Galton, 2008)
• “Teaching Artists” (Teaching Artists Union, 2009).

Perform a number of roles:
• Experiencer, Reporter, Analyst, Activist (Lacy, 1995),
• Educator, Role model, Collaborator, Social Activist, Researcher/Enquirer (Pringle, 2002),
• Artist, Teacher, Researcher, (A/R/Tography) (Irwin et al., 2006)

Facilitate learning by:
• Dialogic rather than cued elicitations or directives (Galton, 2008; Kester, 2004)
• Extend rather than change pupils’ initial ideas. (Galton, 2008; Pringle, 2002)

Can establish partnerships:
• Towards learning; for learning; in learning. (Bagnall, 2007)
Research Approach

12 artists who live in regional Australia

Participants referred via cultural workers

Semi-structured interviews

Research Design

Methodology

Paradigm – constructivist/interpretivist
Hermeneutic phenomenological/narrative research approaches
Qualitative in nature (most appropriate)
Inductive/ spiral analysis
Thematic

Hierarchy of conceptualization

Criteria used

Based on the following: (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Cherryholmes, Popkewitz, Walker, & Schratz, 1992; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2004; Creswell, 2003, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Elliott, Lather, Schratz, & Walker, 1992; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Holstein & Gubrium, 2005; Janesick, 2000; Laiptomtong & Ezzy, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 2005; Mertens, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002; Richardson, 2005; Riessman, 2002, 2008; Squire, 2008; van Manen, 1997; Wolcott, 2001)
Research Design

Key supports/ concepts for me through the process

- Bricoleur (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lévi-Strauss, 1966)
- Rhizomatics (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987)
- Reflexivity/ reflexive bracketing/ reflexive questions (Creswell, 2003; Gearing, 2004; Patton, 2002)
- A/R/Tography (Irwin et al., 2006; Sullivan, 2005)
- Writing as a method of Inquiry, creative analytical process (CAP) (Richardson, 2005)

Plateaus emerge
Plateaus emerge
Findings

My first training was with my grandmother. Just one of those situations where I always loved it and I was a good drawer as a kid, it was just one of those sort of things where everyone said, ‘oh you’re so good’ and it made me feel good, but my grandmother was a bit of a painter and I used to just adore spending time with her and doing it.
Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>having a level of independence &amp; unpredictability of it</th>
<th>more than the financial or income we obtain</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>balance or link with other work we do</td>
<td>Why we do this work</td>
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<td>energy &amp; variety where we find ourselves working</td>
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<tr>
<td>We challenge ideas of what being an artist is</td>
<td>elements of advocacy &amp; social justice</td>
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… that’s what’s exciting to them and its terrific and it’s exciting because we’re not real sure what we’re going to get … well every one was different – every one of our projects had to be different for us to want to do them I think. We never want to repeat, repeat, repeat.

Findings

<table>
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<th>We can be flexible and adaptive</th>
<th>There is a need to be business like</th>
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<td>sort of teaching but we are anything but a teacher</td>
<td>The roles we perform when we work this way</td>
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<tr>
<td>How we work with participants depends on how we view them</td>
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I think you sort of have to be a master of stepping in and out of lots of different roles and of being really aware that the project that you’re doing that you want people to own it so you’re there – it’s actually more of a parental role in a way – you’re sort of – you’re there to listen and to find out and you go, ‘okay, I get what you need’. How can I then facilitate that – provide that – so you’re sort of just stepping out there and I’m going to now lead in front instead of sort of just sitting in the middle, and go well I’m now part of what’s going on, to actually sort of sitting back behind and looking at the big picture of what’s going on and what’s going to evolve. So you’re actually doing lots of different things at different times. …
Findings

It’s the beginning of a feeling of, a feeling of potential. There’s an excitement, there’s a feeling which is like a family get-together which happens occasionally, or like a large family gathering. It’s not like a club or a social event which happens and dies away. It’s a real sense of event. The launching of something, like when you’re making something that’s there permanently, or even impermanently, you’re making that event. It’s an expression of minds coming together.

Findings

Had not explored why they did this work
- Moved from tacit/practical knowledge to discursive knowledge
- Went deeper from a job to understanding it was underpinned by their values / beliefs
- Connecting to / with others was important (sense of who they were)
- Broaderened their world provided them with more tangible / intangible resources for their identity capital.

Approaches to working with others
- Sound pedagogy - dialogical, relational, (socially interactive model)
- Could create liminal states for communitas (disrupt the usual)

Problems with descriptor - Community art
- to community-based arts practice(s)
- "dislodge restrictive paradigms of thought" others and their own

Community-based arts sites
- Social places where personal and structural worlds interact
- Artists could challenge others views of them in turn more congruence with their various identities
Findings

Learning had occurred for the artists as a result of being involved in community-based arts practice(s), which they had folded into their identities and had assisted them to further develop agentic qualities to navigate their respective life journeys.

Contradictions & Tensions

Artists by working in sites of learning:
- Wanted to demystify / challenge social / cultural identities of artists
- Confirmed their perceptions of social / cultural identities of teachers
  - Discipline, control, conforming, restriction & outcomes.

Implications for practice

An insight into people who are continually asked to perform amazing feats the impact on them – intrinsic benefits for artists

Rather than focussing on artists’ approaches to pedagogy, or the roles they perform, an examination of the changes to, effects on, and learning that occurs for artists who are continually involved in establishing these environments, may reveal broader understandings of the complexity involved in this work for organisations and government bodies, and in the process reveal a wider range of benefits that can be derived from such projects.
References


References continued


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