

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy for Urban Youth Using Arts Education to Elevate Student Voice and Student Agency

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Introduction

*All learning is social. It is with our peers that we will ultimately find our voice and change our world. It is in community that our lives are transformed.*ⁱ -- Peter Block, *Culturally Relevant Arts Education for Social Justice*

Imagine a child between the age of 5-10 walking through a neighborhood and community ranked third relative to size and ranked fifth nationwide as the most violent city in the country.ⁱⁱ Imagine the fear a young child must feel trying to make it safely to the front doors of their elementary school. On some nights, this same young child will hear the sounds of gunfire where the noise permeates throughout the community only to find bullets on their walk to school the next morning. This is just one of realities some of the children in our classrooms have experienced. Many have also experienced unimaginable traumas. There was a telling comment made in the book *Hold Fast to Dreams* written by Beth Zasloff and Joshua Steckel. The author Josh Steckel describes the experiences he had working with youth and the reality of the inequalities in education they faced. Zasloff stated, 'For Josh, the most important skill he has learned has been how to set aside his own assumptions and listen. He found he could help his students to see the choices ahead, but only if they felt he was at least trying to understand where they were coming from.'ⁱⁱⁱ The connections he made and how he worked to bridge the gap between home and school for his scholars was critical. This led me to the question: How are educators connecting to our youth who are impacted by trauma and poverty? How are we making an effort as a school community to connect with our students and provide culturally relevant pedagogy^{iv} that is engaging and meaningful to our urban youth in the elementary classroom? The term culturally relevant teaching was developed by Gloria Ladson-Billings^v, which involves educators working to bridge the gap between home and school life and taking the culture of the student to determine how lessons are delivered and taught.^{vi}

My inspiration for this unit came on the first day of our Seminar. I knew there was an identified need for culturally relevant teaching in our inner city schools and I wanted to develop a unit I could use in my own classroom as well as share with other inner city teachers. I knew the Delaware Teachers Institute would provide me with the tools, the space, and the time to create a curriculum unit, which was not only culturally relevant

and meaningful, but integrated the arts. I knew we were going to embark on a journey to help us create engaging ways to combine social justice with arts education that was culturally relevant for the diverse populations we taught. We had a group of educators, throughout the room, passionate about the work they were doing and we were ready to get to work. I wanted to help my scholars not only access the curriculum through the arts but to also, use the arts to help them find their voices and become a stronger community of engaged learners. I set out to create a curriculum unit that will give educators and myself an opportunity to help students find a voice and find purpose in the work they are doing, even when they leave each day knowing some of the difficulties' they face. I wanted them to be excited to come back each day. Our Seminar Leader, Dr. Lynette Overby, University of Delaware Department of Theatre Professor and author of *Interdisciplinary Learning through Dance: 101 MOVEntures* inspired me to really hone in on ways I could integrate the arts into my classroom instruction and address social justice. The arts can make any story come to life, whether it be a personal story, or in historical context. Overby, beginning with our first session taught us engaging ways to address social justice by arts integration.

I currently teach 4th grade at Stubbs Elementary School located in Wilmington, Delaware. Stubbs Elementary is in the heart of the inner city and is located in the Christina School District, which is the largest school District in Delaware servicing over 17,000 students. Stubbs Elementary has approximately 350 scholars currently enrolled who are attending grades Pre-K through 5th grade. We also have an emotional support classroom within our school as well as a REACH program, servicing students with disabilities. Enrollment can also be described as a rolling enrollment because we are in the hub of many of the homeless shelters and do work with a transient population. A majority of our students live in deep poverty and in their community, violence is prevalent. In addition, we also have a dynamic parent engagement program, also known as a community school, as well as strong community partnerships. This year we have developed a school wide plan and involved many key members and leaders from our school and the surrounding community. In this plan, it was important we also developed a program to address the emotional and social issues many of our students are experiencing. In addition, Stubbs Elementary is working in partnership with the University of Delaware to improve literacy and school-wide behavior.^{vii} We have recently moved to the Responsive Classroom model and have implemented Morning Meetings.^{viii}

I chose the Seminar, *Social Problems through Artistic Expressions*, because I wanted to learn how arts education could be used to address the social justice issues that are affecting the community and give my students an opportunity to make societal, cultural, and historical connections through arts education. It was important for me to develop a unit rooted in culturally related pedagogy where other educators and I, working with diverse populations, could utilize to bridge the gaps between home and school for our scholars. Before we began our discussions in Seminar, it was important for us to

discuss the term social justice. Our seminar leader, Dr. Lynnette Overby,^{ix} in just the first session, really helped us as a group to focus on the words that come to us, as educators, when we think of social justice and inequality. Examples we came up with as a collective group included the following: *Dehumanized, Rejected, Marginalized, Institutionalized Racism, Hopelessness, "A way out of no way,"^x Bullied, Outcast, and "I Can't."*

Dr. Overby challenged us to be more culturally competent in our delivery and instruction as well as really find creative ways, using arts education, to connect with the scholars in our classrooms and ultimately have our scholars connect with each other and the world around them. My curriculum unit will also help my scholars to become leaders in their school and their community by learning how to take positive action to improve their schools and their communities as well as educate others on the disparities, as urban youth, they are facing. Overby wanted us to develop a culminating activity that would help us elevate their voices and their personal stories beyond the classroom. My unit will give my scholars, through arts integration, the opportunity to have a voice and elevate that voice. Included in this unit, are ways my students can use photography, poetry, storytelling, puppetry, music, theatre, and dance to elevate their voices and be the agents of change in their classrooms, in their school, and in their community. The unit is designed for elementary scholars in grades 3rd-5th, but can easily be adapted for K-2, middle, and high school scholars. I also encourage educators to connect with their related arts educators in their buildings. I will be collaborating with our music teacher for musical instruments, such as the drums, we can use to help convey the author's message in our performances. Scholars will participate in classroom activities, which will lead to a culminating activity where they become leaders and change-agents in their school and in their community. They will learn how the arts can serve as an avenue to elevate their voices in the community to advocate for something that they are passionate about changing.

Rationale

Through my involvement with DTI, I have produced one unit for elementary educators, which focused on storytelling in the elementary classroom and finding ways to engage all learners. In my current unit, I want to give my scholars an avenue to the arts to address the importance of their culture, other cultures, and the injustices others may have experienced and how those individuals elevated their voices to spark change. I want my scholars to see how the arts can help them express themselves and how the arts can allow them the space they need for this expression and be able to utilize my students' culture as a vehicle for learning. This unit is designed for elementary students in an ELA classroom, however; the mentor texts and the activities developed can be used with any grade level and adjusted to fit in the grade level's curriculum requirement. I also have been working on creating a social justice/multicultural library within my classroom and I

am continually inspired through our Seminar to add new titles to the library. My curriculum unit will be rooted the needs of my scholars and their experiences, because it is these types of lessons, which are grounded in the lives of our students where connections can ignite and spark of the love of learning. The questions listed below I will consider while I develop my unit were located in our course text.^{xi} 1. As an educator, how can I develop culturally relevant pedagogy using artistic expressions to inspire my students to choose their marginality at a “site of radical possibility” instead of a site of deprivation? 2. How can imagination, arts integration, and literacy move learners from being “resisting spectators: to creators of new knowledge for social justice? 3. How can arts be embedded in my unit to build my classroom community and elevate the voices of my scholars not only in the classroom, but beyond in the school and in the community? My proposed idea would be to create a unit, which not only addresses our District CCSS (Common Core Stated Standards) but also addresses the National Arts Core Standards in the visual arts and theatre.

I am very interested in equity in schools and restorative justice^{xii} practices. If I want to narrow the achievement gap my scholars face, I have to ensure my scholars can make the connection between their culture and new knowledge. Research tells us when we help make these connections with our scholars we can help build their student agency and creativity and ultimately help narrow the achievement gap. For my scholars to access the arts, I must create a unit embedded with arts education as well as opportunities for my scholars to explore and study different forms of art, while making literacy connections and connections with the world around them. They will have an opportunity to work with puppetry, photography, visual arts, music, and theatre. They will use the arts as a form of storytelling to address the impact of some of the social issues they are experiencing, their community is experiencing, and what others have experienced over time. They will see how the struggles of others made a positive change in the world because ultimately I want my scholars to elevate their own voices and become a change agent.

Finding a voice can be a difficult task for an elementary student, which is why my unit must ensure my scholars have the time and the space to explore each discipline. It is important for me to create the environment where connections between home and school can be made for my scholars and where scholars feel confident when elevating their voices. I will use a variety of teaching methods and art forms to try and help my scholars find an area they are most comfortable in. I will also be including a parent component, when scholars reach their culminating activity as a way to engage families by valuing their culture and giving students and their families a chance to interact with the school community. According to Hanley,^{xiii} “One of the social justice aspects of this work lives in the empowerment that comes with the clarification of internal voice and the creative

agency that then can be used to transform the world through works of expression. No matter how deep the oppressive conditions, artists can reclaim humanity for themselves and their communities through their creative agency, and they model possibility for others who search for meaning and a way to empowerment.”

Additionally, a majority of my scholars are living in deep poverty and in a community where violence is prevalent. It is important for me to develop a culturally relevant unit rooted in culturally related pedagogy where I and other educators working with diverse populations would benefit from. Hanley^{xiv} also described art as a path out of the chaos and in the book *Rethinking Schools*, “A critical curriculum should be a rainbow of resistance, reflecting the diversity of people from all cultures who acted to make a difference, many of who did so at great sacrifice. Students would be allowed to learn about and feel connected to this legacy of defiance.”^{xv}

Content

Educational Inequalities

Each morning, I and hundreds of other educators travel to schools located in Wilmington Delaware to undertake the daunting task of teaching students whose lives reflect all the traumas of deep poverty and the dysfunctions of communities in turmoil. We are routinely asked why we would ever want to work in some of Delaware’s toughest schools where there is a lack of resources in the classrooms, and where violence is prevalent in the surrounding communities. One of the reasons I do, is because I believe schools can change lives. Schools can change lives in many ways. One of which is to be deeply immersed in culturally relevant pedagogy. Culturally relevant pedagogy focuses on culture within our students’ learning experiences, begins to address some of the inequalities our children are facing, and provides avenues for students to find their voices around the social issues and express themselves. According to Gay, “culturally responsive education as a form of pedagogy used to teach low-income students and students of color who have been perceived as deficient. It teaches students their personal and cultural strengths, their intellectual capabilities, and their prior accomplishments.”^{xvi} Take for instance a student, Deval Patrick, a kid from Chicago, who stated, “What great teachers gave me was not just the skills to take advantage of new opportunities but the ability to imagine what those opportunities could be.”^{xvii}

Over the years, I have heard numerous times statements like “*they can’t learn*” or “*those kids*.” The sad reality is that many of our children living in poverty continue to be marginalized. Many children, which are sometimes referred to as “those kids” by individuals who have not walked a day in their shoes, are living in our inner cities impacted by poverty, homelessness, severe trauma, as well as violence in their

communities. Children in turn are facing many educational, social, and economic challenges. My scholars are not “*those kids*.” They are kids who were given life circumstances they did not ask for, with odds increasingly stacked against them. They are kids with overwhelming resiliency. They still show up every day, despite those odds, ready to do their best work. If you want to see the face of resiliency, then look at face of every one of my students. They are kids who have dreams like you and me. They are kids who have families doing the very best they can with what they have, and, despite the misconceptions, they have families who are involved and who care.

As educators, it is critical we begin to address the educational inequalities by making a concerted effort to address culture and diversity beginning in the classroom. One way we can address these educational inequalities is through culturally relevant pedagogy. Hanley stated, “participating in culturally relevant education is meant to provide a path through the chaos of subjugation and alienation experienced by many in schools and society so that they connect to intrinsic motivation and ownership of learning, a result of attention to agency and creativity.” We have an achievement gap in many urban schools throughout the county. Dean James E. Ryan, Harvard Graduate School of Education state, “Our education system, traditional thought of as the chief mechanism to address the opportunity gap, instead too often reflects and entrenches existing societal inequalities.”^{xviii} Finding ways to connect to our student’s diversity and culture as well as the community is critical to narrowing the achievement gap and allowing our students to find their voices. One way our students can find their voices is through arts education.

Connecting to Our Students Background and Culture

How can we ensure we are connecting with our students and providing them with an engaging education that respects their background and culture? This past year, I have had the opportunity to learn from University of Delaware Professor of Theatre Lynette Overby in our DTI Seminar *Social Problems through Artistic Expressions*. There is more diversity in classrooms across the country than ever before. For example, in Wilmington alone, seventy-four percent of students in Wilmington are African American and eighteen percent are Hispanic. Seventy percent our students in Wilmington are impacted by poverty. It is critical we address the diversity we are seeing in our classrooms and ensure we are creating a safe, a supportive, and a positive environment for all students. Schools have a critical role in addressing this diversity and showing appreciation and acceptance of this diversity. One way we can make connections with our students is to ensure we are incorporating culturally relevant teaching strategies and content and we can accomplish this with arts integration. According to Hanley, “the arts change lives through education wherever learning takes place. Meaning making is the core of education.” We have to help our students find meaning behind what we are presenting^{xix} and finding avenues for students to find their own voices and express themselves is critical. According to the National Associations of School Psychologist, “*we would encourage children to channel*

their views and feelings into positive action.” Using the arts can allow student to express their views and feelings they are experiencing.

It is important we also allow our scholars to tell their own stories. Take for instance the below insert from the book *Hold Fast to Dreams* written by Beth Zasloff and Joshua Stecke:

Do you know what it’s like to live my life?^{xx}

Sharing one room with three siblings, living in a two-bedroom apartment with seven people. Hearing and seeing fights, gunshots all night, yelling and screaming every day. Scared to walk anywhere by myself, not eating for a day or two because we don’t have any money, almost being homeless a couple of times. Going to schools trying to keep a smile on my face so my struggles at home didn’t show. Having to listen to my friends tell me about their problems and having to encourage them while yet, I’m hurting inside myself. Running to almost everyone I see just for attention to make my pain go away. That’s my life.

This is just one example of what some children are facing on a daily basis. We have to use our classrooms as a vehicle to allow students to find their voice and express themselves. The arts can allow us to begin addressing culture and diversity and really begin to make connections with our scholars and allow are scholars to also make connections with their peers. Helping my scholars create stories or using theatre, puppetry, and play to tell about their lives or the stories of others are a few ways they can use the arts to express themselves.

Arts education allows youth to explore their own culture and the cultural backgrounds of others. They become the artist. By using their cultural knowledge as opposed to being criticized for their culture, empowers them, inspires them to take ownership of their own learning and can ignite curiosity and intrinsic motivation.

What is Social Justice?

Professor Overby also challenged us in the beginning to really think about the term social justice, what it means, and explore some of the different forms of social justice. We discussed descriptive terms that would possibly be used to identify individuals who are impacted by social justice and how they may feel. We learned social justice can be defined as “*equitable redistribution of resources,*” and “*recognition of culture and identity for those who are marginalized and subjugated in society*” which was noted in our course text *Culturally Relevant Arts Education for Social Justice*. Then, we discussed the impact arts education could have on someone who has been marginalized, have been impacted by a social injustice or have experienced some form of inequality. See our work below:

Examples of Social Justice	Description of the Impact	Integrating Arts to Address the Social Justice
Poverty	Marginalized	Transformed
Access to Education	Dehumanized	Creative Agency
Homelessness	Rejected	Finding their Internal Voice
Discrimination	Institutionalized Racism	Social Power
Racism	Not Feeling Empowered	Humanized
Bias	Bullied	Respected
Diversity	Outcast	Student Agency
Civil Rights	<i>"I can't"</i>	Ownership
	<i>"A Way Out of No Way"</i>	Engagement
	Internalized Oppression	

Based on the impact of arts education, it is clear by the chart above, using the arts is a great avenue for youth to find their voices and find meaning in the work they are doing.

Social Emotional Learning

In Seminar, Professor Elizabeth Pemberton, who was one of our guest speakers from the University of Delaware, discussed the importance of social and emotional learning (SEL) and the positive impact it can have on youth. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, Emotional Learning (CASEL), describes successful Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programs in schools are engrained with five key competencies. These competencies include the following:

CASEL Competencies^{xxi}

1. Self-Awareness- *Identifying Emotions*
2. Self-Management- *Regulating Emotions*
3. Social Awareness- *Developing Empathy*
4. Relationship Skills- *Working Collaboratively*
5. Responsible Decision Making- *Evaluating the Consequences of Individual Actions*

Successful SEL programs, which address the emotional learning of our scholars, must be intertwined with a strong academic program, as they are interdependent.^{xxii} Professor Pemberton described how the arts can be used to regulate emotions our scholars may be feeling or have experienced. The CARE Report on Strategies to Help Close the Achievement Gap stated, "Educators who understand culture can help students develop a positive self-concept by providing knowledge about the histories, cultures, and contributions of diverse groups. Thus, schooling has the potential to lay the foundation for eliminating all forms of discrimination and intolerance."

Culturally Relevant Arts Education and Student Agency

According to Hanley, “Culturally responsive education is a form of pedagogy used to teach low-income students and students of color who have been perceived as deficient. Culturally responsive education would teach to and through their personal and cultural strengths, their intellectual capabilities, and their prior accomplishments.” When schools tackle this they can really, work to improve learning outcomes and narrow the achievement gap faced by many students living in poverty or affected by a social justice issue. Teachers must accept the reality that many of their students will come to their classrooms with cultural, ethnic, linguistic, racial, and social class backgrounds that are different from their own. According to Ladson-Billings contends that culturally relevant pedagogy has three criteria^{xxiii}:

- *Students must experience academic success.*
- *Students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence.*
- *Students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order*

Student Agency Drives Creativity

Building student agency in the classroom is a key component to ensuring students are engaged in their work and helps them to feel pride in the work they are doing. The arts can be a great tool for engaging students in the work they are doing and making the work relevant to them and their cultural backgrounds.

According to Hanley, “one of the social justice aspects of this work lies in the empowerment that comes with the clarification of interval voice and the creative agency that then can be used to transform the world through works of expression.” Using culturally relevant pedagogy through the arts is a way to allow students to build agency and use arts as a form of expression. For example, we had the opportunity to have a class with University of Delaware Professor Yael Haislip, Program Coordinator for UD ArtsBridge. She gave us a lesson on how we can incorporate music to deliver content, help our scholars get to know each other, which both will help make our classroom community stronger.

We learned songs to welcome our scholars, which served as a get to know you activity. We learned how to introduce ourselves using rhythm and music. Mrs. Haislip introduced us to the mentor text, *Drum Dream Girl* (<http://www.rafaellopez-books.com/drum-dream-girl>), and how we could incorporate the text to teach social justice issues in the classroom. This book selection was a great selection to educate my scholars on what the term “injustice” means. We had the opportunity to act out and perform different portions of the text with other participants in our Seminar to deliver the message the author was trying to convey. We learned how we could make inferences and relate them to how the character was feeling and the impact the injustice had on her. It was a great way to see how the arts can be used to summarize a text. I plan to work with

our music educator to borrow a variety of drums and drumsticks in order for my scholars to summarize the text using play, but to also incorporate the drums to help student make a stronger connection to the text. Through play, they will be able to use the musical instruments to perform the main ideas from the story.

We also discussed ways we can take this activity and implement it in our classrooms creating a highly engaging lesson for students while we addressed a social justice issue. In this case, we addressed gender inequalities. “The arts provides a lens and vehicle for expressing counter stories that challenge racism and other forms of injustice and for generating new stories to embolden action and change,” according to Beel, Desai, and Irani. In *Drum Dream Girl*, the main character fights for what she believed in. These types of stories and messages allow us the opportunity to show are students how voice and advocacy can affect change not only for ourselves but also for others, especially those who have been marginalized.

Arts Integration in the Elementary Classroom

During our Seminar, we learned multiple ways on how we can build arts integration into our lessons and daily practices. One of the most exciting parts of our Seminar was having the opportunity to collaborate with fellow educators as well as practice and model the different forms of art we were learning. We learned how to make arts integration exciting for our scholars and the impact they can have on student engagement and understanding of content being delivered. By integrating the arts into my unit, I will be able to give my scholars a variety of ways to not only express themselves, but also make connections to the work we are doing in the classroom. Culturally relevant teaching is “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes.”^{xxiv} Participating in culturally, relevant teaching essentially means that teachers create a bridge between students’ home and school lives. This can be done while still meeting the expectations of the District and State curricular requirements. Culturally relevant teaching utilizes the backgrounds, knowledge, and experiences of the students to inform the teacher’s lessons and methodology. Here are the important questions I will consider when planning for arts integration: 1. How could our school community use theatre as a praxis for social justice? 2. How might asking young people to illustrate their ideas about school with photographs provide youth, teachers, and the community with better ideas about adolescent’s perspectives- especially about their understandings of justice?^{xxv} 3. What do urban, often diverse, youth believe are the purposes of, supports for, and improvements to school engagement and success?^{xxvi} 4. How can visual art and creative writing relate a counter narrative?^{xxvii} 5. What are the elements of a social justice narrative told through the arts?^{xxviii} 6. What are the characteristics of a learning environment that best promotes social justice through the arts?^{xxix}

Below are some of the art forms we studied which I have included in my unit.

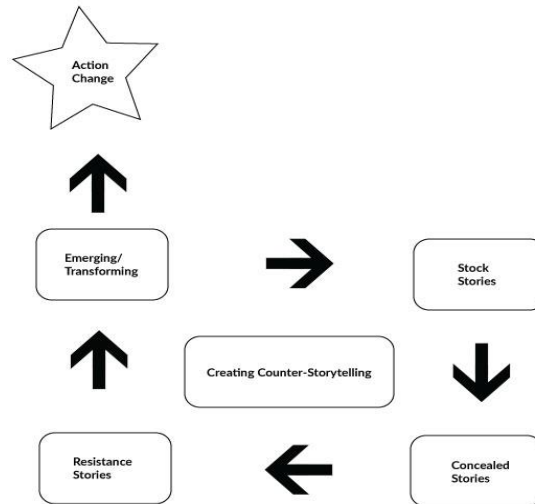
1. Theatre: I was inspired by the work of our Seminar Leader, Lynnette Overby and work she has done with her students at the University of Delaware. One of the first things we had an opportunity to see was a video of her theatre students performing Dave the Potter excerpt: Field Cotton,^{xxx} which she choreographed. I was inspired by the engagement and passion her students embodied in the story they were portraying. We learned how movements can ignite emotions and really help the meaning of a story come to life. We learned about creative dance and creative dramas. We looked at the vocabulary of dance and movement and then tried to role-play and act out our vocabulary words. For example, we learned about space, time, force/dynamics, the body, relationships, and creating. With space, we discussed negative space where the space is not being used and then positive space, where the space that is being used or filled by a person's body.

Theatre can also be used to promote social justice in communities and I wanted to incorporate theatre into my unit by organizing a showcase where our scholars can perform and use theatre as a praxis for social justice. According to Hanley, "many scholars have explored how schools teach children and youth to be compliant and to reproduce existing social inequities; however theatre offers possibilities for pedagogical engagement toward social justice." Theatre will allow me to bring my scholars, adults, and the community together to have healthy dialogue around social justice issues. Local communities have also used theatre to deal with trauma by including many key people, such as mental health providers, artists, activists, and educators. In these cases, theatre was used for healing.

2. The Art of Storytelling and Stock Stories Scholars will be able to summarize a story, and take that summary and turn it into a performance in the classroom. These important stories, historical, personal, or from their own communities, can be not only be performed in the classroom, but also in their school community during an assembly.

Take for instance the Stock Stories Project.^{xxxi} The Stock Stories Project was a counter storytelling project where scholars from New York and Connecticut had an open dialogue about the label "disadvantaged community." The scholars were asked to think of ways in which they were advantaged versus disadvantaged. Scholars then created a project, using photography or photographic images to represent their advantages. In the middle of their project, a box was cut out in the center of a poster board. This served as a frame for their faces while around the frame were images, which represented their advantages and the positive things in their lives. The adults behind the Storytelling Project Model, described in the book *Culturally Relevant Arts Education for Social Justice*, noted the following, "We found in our work with young people using the Storytelling Project Model

that the arts play a powerful role in developing capacities of agency, imagination, and hope.”^{xxxii} Below you will see the model for the Storytelling Project and the different types of stories involved in the Project.



3. Photography and Poetry Photography is a powerful tool to use to tell a personal story or develop a narrative around a specific topic or theme. Scholars will be introduced to photography and they will learn how to create a photo essay on their community. Scholars will create a personal essay, using photography, to tell a story about a day in their life. Their photo essay will be accompanied by a poem. They will learn key vocabulary and learn basic photography, including what aperture, focus, and shutter speed mean. One idea would be for my scholars to tell us what they see when they look out of their window. We will also conduct a school project using photography where they will be able, in photos, to portray their school day. We will then work to uplift their voices by having a culminating activity that allows them to display their work to the school community and the community outside.

4. Puppetry Scholars will be introduced to puppetry, another art form that will allow students the time and space to deliver a message or a story. They will create their own puppets to tell personal stories and stories in historical context. They will be able to choose a book from our social justice library where they will be able to collaborate with each other to create a storyboard, which summarizes the story. They will then assign roles and create a puppet of their character they are portraying. Scholars will then perform their projects to the class. Poetry is a great way for our scholars to convey a message of personal or historical context. We will learn about the main characteristics of poetry and learn about terms such as the physical aspects and the imagery. Poetry will also be incorporated into

their photo essay projects. Scholars will use a rubric to self-assess and offer peer feedback.

5. Tableaus: Image Theatre uses silent tableaus to make connections to a specific issue based on their own personal feelings or experiences they may have. Tableaus can depict a students' moment of struggle or a struggle created by a group of students.^{xxxiii} They can be compared to a still photograph, a moment in time. They are frozen. In Forum Theatre, participants develop a short play. The play is about a protagonist. The plays typically contain a crisis that escalates and in the end, there is a catastrophe. The protagonist typically is struggling with oppression. These experiences can be transformative and the goal would be for those who experience this, to elevate their voices out into their communities.

Example of Tableau:

“Participants walk quickly around the room, being mindful to not slip into the unthinking pattern of following someone else’s path. “Freeze!” Hector calls. “Find a partner! One of you is a world renowned expert in grassinfallopia- explain it to your partner!” After one minute: “Partners! You are so inspired by that definition of grassinfallopia that you are moved to create choreography about it! Now that participants are in two lines facing each other, each person in line A makes an image, individually, of what it means to be Irish. Each person in line B imitates the image across from them, and adds a sound. Then, in pairs, participants create an image of conflict. “Transform it into an image of friendship!” Hector calls out, “Back to the image of conflict! Friendship! How do we get from here to there?” Participants created a series of transitional images between conflict and friendship- an exercise created on the spot that we called the Derry Bridge.”^{xxxiv}

6. Using Music to Connect with Students: Music integration can be used in a variety of ways and can be very powerful in the classroom. We will use the drums to help tell a story as well as learn how to create music. I will be working with our related arts educators (art and music teachers) to help with supporting the work of the Unit by providing scholars with some of the resources and space to support the work they are doing. During our Seminar, we learned how we could teach our scholars how to create beats and the online website we can use to allow students to incorporate technology to create music to go with their stories they create. We also learned the importance of rhythm. Hip Hop can also be used as an educational tool in the classroom and can be used as a means to spark positive change in the community, whether it is in the classroom community, school community, or the outside community. Hip Hop can be used as a transformative

educational tool and be an avenue for change especially with individuals who are considered less privileged.

Enduring Understanding and Key Learning Questions

This curriculum unit design creates the space and opportunities for my scholars to use the arts such as music, theatre, play, poetry, and the visual arts (photography) to elevate their voices in their classrooms, their schools, and in their community. This unit addresses both the Common Core State Standards and the National Core Art Standards in both visual arts and theatre. This unit also gives other educators culturally relevant pedagogy to help bridge the cultural gap between home and school for their scholars. Students and adults in the school community will learn strategies to make cultural connections and help my scholars make connections to the content they are learning. This unit addresses the need to create a learning environment that best promotes social justice through the arts and help urban youth build their student and find purpose and meaning in their engagement and success.

The overarching goal would be to build a community of engaged learners and to build student agency where there is meaning behind the work my scholars are doing. The other goals of my unit will address the following: 1. What are the characteristics of a learning environment that best promotes social justice through the arts and how do urban, often diverse, youth believe are the purpose of school engagement and success? 2. How can a school community engage parents, students, and the community using arts integration to address ideas social justice issues that affect the community both in personal and historical context? 3. How can I use arts integration to elevate student voice and student agency? 4. How can my students use the arts to elevate their voice and build their student agency and engagement?

Essential Questions

How can I use the arts to elevate my voice and find purpose and meaning (student agency) in the work that I am doing and producing?

How can I read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text?

How can I synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art?

How can I relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen my understanding of an event or experience others have faced?

How can I use music to summarize a story or event? How can understanding characters and events in depth, help the reader, to better comprehend a story or an event. How do characters change over the course of a text?

How can expression through the arts using puppetry, and theater help convey a message or a story? How can I dramatize a story using play, puppetry and theatre?

How can I use photography to illustrate my ideas about my community and my understanding of justice? How can photography tell my story? How can I use my work to elevate my voice within the school and in the community?

My scholars will understand how they can build on their prior knowledge and cultural experiences in the academic setting. They will learn how they can use their internal voice to empower their creative agency through expression as well as use their culture as a vehicle for learning through the arts. They will develop tools and strategies and find ways, through the arts, to build their student agency. My scholars will use photography and storytelling to make connections between prior knowledge and new content. We will also work on building family engagement into their projects, as this is a critical component to making meaningful connections and building academic achievement and student agency.

Objectives

Throughout the course of this unit, students will be practicing skills that will help them meet the success criteria^{xxxv} of the unit. My goal for the unit is to allow students to use the arts to not only find their voices but to elevate them on not only a school community level, but on a community level. Lynette Overby, Seminar Leader, encouraged us to find a way to move the learning outside of the classroom and build up to a culminating activity that not only elevates student voices but also teach them how to be leaders in their school and in their communities. The skills students will be practicing will focus on specific Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in Reading and Writing. Along with the CCSS, Overby encouraged us to incorporate the National Arts Anchor Standards for the visual arts^{xxxvi} in my unit. The National Core Arts Standards include dance, media arts, music, theatre and the visual arts. My unit will primarily focus on visual arts, music, and theatre. My unit objective is for students to have access to arts education within our classroom community, which will lead to a culminating activity without our school, and the community around a social justice issue. Below are the main areas of the National Core Art Anchor Standards, which will be addressed throughout my unit.

Creating- Conceiving and Developing New Artistic Ideas and Work^{xxxvii}

In this area, scholars will be generating and conceptualizing, as well as organizing and developing artistic ideas and work. They will also use rubrics for self-assessment and then refine and complete their artistic work.

Performing, Presenting, and Producing^{xxxviii}

My scholars will have an opportunity to use puppetry to interpret a story around a social justice issue. Using the mentor text, *Drum Dream Girl*, they will focus on the imagery and artistic work of Rafael Lopez,^{xxxix} and they will develop the central message as well as inferences. Using the visual arts they will also have an opportunity to create an essay using photography and then learn how share their work with their school and community, ultimately elevating their voice and advocacy beyond the classroom. They will produce a project that not only elevates their voices but also tells a story about their community. My scholars will analyze, interpret and select artistic work for presentation which may include performing (dance, music, theatre), presenting (visual arts), and Producing (media arts). They will develop and redefine as well as convey meaning through the presentation of their artistic work.

Responding^{xl}

In this unit, my scholars will also learn how to perceive and analyze, interpret intent and meaning, and apply criteria to analyze and evaluate artistic work. They will learn how the arts can convey meaning.

Connecting^{xli}

My scholars will synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art as well had work with their connecting to the personal stories of others. Making a connection to the work they are doing with build their agency and engagement in the material or concept being covered. They will learn to relate artist's ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context and find the deeper meaning and understanding

Finally, I want my scholars to have access to books they are able to relate to providing them with access to a multicultural library, which includes books on social justice and inequalities. They will have access to selecting stories they are most interested in and will help tell those stories through the arts.

Instructional Strategies

Collaborative Learning Groups

Scholars will participate in active class discussion after working in their collaborative pairs and groups throughout the unit. My scholars are stronger writers when they have the opportunity to discuss and learn from others on a topic they are learning about. They will learn to share ideas each other.

Go, Go, Mo

Scholars will think about an important idea they learned. In the Go, Go, Mo activity Scholars place their ideas in a box and pass the document around to the next scholar for each of them to document their ideas. Each scholar will read the prior boxes before they

write in their idea. This will be used with each mentor text we used throughout the unit. We will also use this after each experience with a different art form we participate in.

Technology

Technology, when implemented correctly, can be a powerful tool to use in the classroom. We currently use Schoology, where my scholars can access many of the activities we are doing in class. Our projects and assignments will be uploaded to Schoology. Scholars will be able to share feedback throughout the lesson via discussion boards in Schoology. This is also a great tool to build parent engagement, as parents are able to stay up to date with the work we are doing in the classroom, by having the capability to log in at any point in the day. Scholars can post their images, poetry, and some of their work and share it with their peers. They can have discussions on their classroom set up in Schoology. Another way scholars will be able to incorporate technology, is with video. The short plays can be made into videos that can be shared with other classrooms within the school. We can also share the work we are doing with our school community and parents via a classroom Twitter or classroom blog. Finally, we will be incorporating Hip Hop and music where they will have access to the resources to create a beat as they convey their messages and stories.

Digital Storyboards

Digital storyboards (<http://www.pbslearningmedia.org/tools/storyboard/>) allow scholars to break out their script into individual pieces or segments. This will help organize their ideas and their story elements. Digital storytelling can also be utilized to incorporate technology within the unit. The storyboards will serve as a script for scholars as they perform their puppet show, presenting a text to the class with music, and if scholars want to also film their stories using video. Storyboards will help my scholars organize their story in chronological order. It will also serve as a visualization and an opportunity for students to make changes. If technology is not available, educators may use a storyboard template. Sample Template: <http://teachersnetwork.org/grantwinners/files/storyboard.pdf>

Circles and Fishbowl

Using circles is a successful restorative practice approach, which can be used in the classroom.

Graphic Organizers

Scholars will use a variety of graphic organizers throughout the unit to help organize some of the work they are doing.

Call and Response, and Talk Back

All three of these learning strategies were outlined in the Chris Emdin book titled, "For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood." These strategies are effective approaches to engage our urban youth.

Classroom Activities

Lesson 1: Using Music and Poetry to Identify Central Idea and Theme of a Story

Objectives

Essential Question: How can I use music to summarize a story or event? How can understanding characters and events in depth, help the reader, to better comprehend a story or an event. How do characters change over the course of a text?

Key Vocabulary: Social Injustice, Main Idea, Theme, Inference, Illustrations, Poetry, Rhythm, Lyrical Presentation, Rhyme, Alliteration, Repetition, Onomatopoeia, Central Message, Inference, Generalization, Inequality, Lyrical Poetry, Main Idea

Instruction and Learning Activity: In Lesson 1, scholars will be provided with a copy of the mentor text, *Drum Dream Girl*, written by Margarita Engle. A Chinese-African Cuban girl who had a dream she had to keep quiet because of the injustice against women inspires *Drum Dream Girl*. The illustrations are equally vital as the words in the text. This is why it is important for scholars to have a copy of the text in front of them while they are listening aloud to the story as a read aloud. Students will listen and following along with the text. Once completed, scholars will break into their collaborative groups to begin their discussions and taking a deeper dive into the text.

Scholars will first be presented with the visual illustration from the text, where the drum is locked in the cage. They will be asked to share ideas, which each other on what the cage represents and what message the author was trying to convey by placing the drum within the cage. They will then collect ideas from others using the [Go, Go, Me \(https://www.engageny.org/sites/default/files/resource/attachments/appendix_protocols_and_resources.pdf\)](https://www.engageny.org/sites/default/files/resource/attachments/appendix_protocols_and_resources.pdf) interactive tool. Scholars will go around after their collaborative discussions, and collect ideas from other scholars on what they believe the author was trying to convey by placing the drum in the cage. This activity will be repeated after collaborative discussions on the main idea and central messages of the text as well as ideas on how they feel the character changed throughout the story.

Scholars should have an opportunity to share their ideas collaborative prior to their group presenting to the class. Using a storyboard, on paper or digitally, collaborative groups will develop their play. Scholars will present their play to the class. They should have someone portraying the father who was an authoritative figure. Mustaches will be provided to groups to help scholars get into character. For example, students can use the mustache if they are performing the father's role. Each group will be provided with three drums and drumsticks to use during their plays they present.

Lesson 2: Integrating Puppetry, Theatre and Storytelling to Convey Meaning in a Text

Essential Question: How can expression through the arts using puppetry, play, and theater help convey a message or a story? How can I dramatize a story using play, puppetry and theatre?

Key Vocabulary: Image Theater, Shadows, Performer, Antagonist, Protagonist, Scene, Stage Positions, Tableau, Dramatization, Movement Story, Smooth Movements (Mirrors), Sharp Movements (Echoes), Locomotor Movements, Non Locomotor Movements, ABA Dance, Shapes, Body, Space and Time (Positive and Negative), Force (Dynamics), Choreography, Creating, Script, Improvisations, Pantomime, Script

Instruction and Learning Activity: Scholars will read the mentor text, *Separate is Never Equal*, by Sylvia Mendez. This text tells the story of her family's fight for desegregation. Her family elevated their voices and helped to end segregation in schools in 1947. This story will be used as a way to model for scholars the use of puppetry and video. Scholars will be broken into collaborative pairs. They will receive a storyboard, can be digital, and will create a puppet show summarizing the events in the story ensuring Sylvia's Mendez's fight and activism is portrayed.

Each collaborative group will present their puppet show to the class. We will be using I-Pads to video tape each performance. The video clips will be uploaded to Schoology, where scholars can create discussions around each video clip. They will be able to critique each video using a rubric. Each group will also complete a self-assessment on how they felt their puppet show told the story of Sylvia Mendez and her family's fight for desegregation. Once scholars had an opportunity to see this modeled for them, they will select a book out of our classroom multicultural library, which also has books that cover a variety of social justice issues. They will create puppets using a variety of materials to portray their character in their story.

Scholars will then have an opportunity to present a puppet show in their collaborative groups, they will then use then create a puppet, which represents themselves. They will use this puppet to then make connections with other students in the classroom, which will then in turn help build the community in the classroom.

Once they are comfortable with the use of their puppets, they will then break into collaborative groups and decide on a cause they would like to advocate for in the school. They will work together, using a digital storyboard, to develop their puppet show. The puppet shows will then be presented school wide during an assembly, visits to other classrooms, and can even be presented during an evening event at school. After this

lesson, scholars will be challenged to create a puppet show disusing an issue they would like to see changed in their school community. This is an opportunity for scholars to elevate their voices beyond the classroom walls. They will learn about pantomimes and improvisations. It is very important each activity is modeled for scholars so they are aware of their expectations. They will be introduced to basic acting tools, which include imagination, mind, voice, body, cooperation, and concentration. They will learn about space, time, and force. They will learn about movement, both locomotor and nonlocomotor movements.

Hints for Scene-Building

1. Each group of performers will give details of the social injustice
2. The performers should include in each scene complications and suspense. It should be evident the performers in each group that they want something but there are obstacles that are impacting them from obtaining what they want.
3. Performers should include a conclusion in each scene were the roadblocks the performers were facing were resolved.

Assessment: The components included in the rubric to be used for assessing are collaboration, puppet design, expression and performance, and delivery of message or content showing evidence of each, minimal evidence, or no evidence. Sample Rubric: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1bC0jGedmdQRWbgOMdQsqFSVDZjR2XKXrxEoqH0MZ7R0/edit?ts=588fe33c>

Lesson 3: Using Photography and Poetry to Elevate My Voice beyond the Classroom

The inspiration for their photo essay project can be drawn from the historical or contemporary struggles for justice they experienced and how they found a “way out of no way.”^{xlii}

Essential Question: How can I use photography to illustrate my ideas about my community and my understanding of justice? How can photography tell my story? How can I use my produced work to elevate my voice within the school and the community?

Key Vocabulary: Aperture, Focus, ISO, Manual, RAW, Shutter Speed, Shutter Release, White Balance, Histogram, Continuous Focus, Depth of Field, Exposure, Digital Media, Elevate, Personal Narrative, Stock Stories

Instruction and Learning Activity: Scholars will be creating a photo essay. They will be challenged to think about what they see when they look outside their window. They will be asked to create a photo essay of what their community means to them, both the challenges and the things they are proud of. Another idea would be to have scholars

create a photo essay on what school community means to them. Before they complete this project, they will learn about stock stories and create their very own stock story telling the story of their advantages. This is a great activity to build a strong classroom community and for scholars to get to know one another. Rather than focus on the disadvantages they would be challenged to think of their advantages.

They will be introduced to key vocabulary to familiarize themselves with the camera equipment and the basic skills of photography. Their images will be enlarged and displayed in their very own art show. Parents and the community will come in to see their work. It will be set up as a gallery walk where scholars will answer questions as others walk through and look at each project. Scholars will be at their own projects available to answer questions about their work. Scholars will accompany their projects with a description of their project, using poetry, hip-hop, music, or an essay. If they are using music or hip-hop, they will be able to use technology to create a beat to go with their song. If they decide to create as song, their performances will be videotaped and uploaded to Schoology, our learning management system, where scholars can have discussions around their projects. Finally, scholars will share their projects with their school community and then with the community outside of the school.

Culminating Activity

Not only should we be asking our scholars to comment on the community and the world around them, but also we have to ensure we are giving them an opportunity to act and become change-agents. We cannot limit their growth to just the four walls of their classroom. The ideas they have developed through the work they have completed throughout the unit, should encourage them to find a cause and find the opportunities to advocate for the cause they are passionate about. The photo essay they created will be displayed during school events for parents and community members to view. Taking this a step further, I will work my scholars to have their work displayed in City Hall, where community leaders can gather to view their work. It is important we allow our scholars to encourage them to take action and become mini activists. We want our scholars to see themselves as change-makers.

Appendix 1

Implementing District Standards Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

My scholars will read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and will work to make logical inferences from it by citing specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support their conclusions drawn from the text. They will determine the central ideas or themes of a text and summarize the key supporting details and ideas. They will also analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of the text. **CC.R.I.4.2** Scholars will determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details. Through arts integration, which includes puppetry and play, they will summarize their work. **CC.R.I.4.8** Scholars will explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support his/her points. They will make strong claims supported by evidence and reasoning and then utilize the arts to convey their messages. **CC.R.L.4.3** Scholars will also work to describe in depth a character, setting, or Drama by drawing on specific details in the text. They will have discussions, using some of the classroom strategies to discuss how characters change over time.

National Standards Core Arts Anchor Standards^{xliii} for the Visual Arts and Theatre

Anchor Standard #1, #2, and #3 Creating: Scholars will generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work. They will organize artistic ideas and work and once they organize and develop. They will be able to redefine and complete their projects and pieces outlined in each lesson activity. Anchor Standard #4, #5, and #6 Performing/Presenting/Producing: Scholars will analyze, interpret and select artistic work to present. They will then develop and refine their work. It is critical; through their projects, they convey meaning through the presentation of their artistic work. Anchor Standard #7, #8, and #9 Responding: Scholars will perceive and analyze artist work. They will then interpret intent and meaning in their artistic work and the work of their others a, including their follow classmates. They will use rubrics to evaluate work and complete a self-assessment of their own work. Anchor Standard #10, #11, and #12-Connecting: Scholars will synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art. They will relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding by studying about some of the injustices others have faced. We will also address some of the core Standards for theatre. Theatre Standard **TH:Cr1.1.4**. will help scholars articulate the visual details of imagined worlds, and improvised stories that support the given circumstances in a drama/theatre work and imagine how a character might move to support the story and given circumstances in a drama/theatre work.

Appendix 2

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