Creativity in Art Education: Intersecting with Design, Visual Culture, and Social Justice

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RESUMO — Criatividade em arte-educação: interseção entre design, cultura visual e justiça social — Neste artigo, discutimos e ilustramos com exemplos práticos que a criatividade pode ser utilizada no ensino da arte para promover a justiça social por meio de uma interpretação atualizada da cultura visual e do conteúdo do design, que é inclusivo e emancipatório por natureza. Duas experiências no ensino superior de como a pesquisa e o ensino podem promover o aprendizado criativo dentro de uma concepção contemporânea de ensino de arte, design e cultura visual são examinadas, incluindo o desenvolvimento de habilidades em pesquisa em design e no ensino de cultura visual. Esses relatos esclarecem como a pesquisa criativa e a pedagogia podem se conectar com educação e justiça social em salas de aula da educação básica e outras configurações educacionais, concluindo que pela interseção entre o design, a cultura visual e a criatividade, os arte-educadores podem transformar a injustiça em criação de um interconectado mundo de tolerância, apoio e equidade.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Cultural Visual. Design. Criatividade. Justiça Social.

ABSTRACT — Creativity in Art Education: intersecting with design, visual culture, and social justice — In this article we argue and illustrate with practical examples that creativity can be utilized in art education to promote social justice through an updated interpretation of visual culture and design content that is inclusive and emancipatory in nature. Two experiences in higher education of how research and teaching can promote creative learning within a contemporary conception of design and visual culture art education are examined, including developing skills in research design and in visual culture teaching. These accounts illuminate how creative research and pedagogy can connect with social justice education in K-12 classrooms and other educational settings, concluding that through the intersection of design, visual culture and creativity, art educators can transform injustice toward the creation of a networked world of tolerance, support and equity.

KEYWORDS

Visual Culture. Design. Creativity. Social Justice.

Visual culture is a much-debated term in the United States that has been used since the early 2000s to describe a widening of teaching and learning content considered pertinent in visual arts education. Responding to the unprecedented shift in global culture from text-based communities to image saturation (FREEDMAN, 2003), art educators have argued that visual culture can transform art education, making it “relevant both to contemporary young people and to crucial social issues” (STANKIEWICZ, 2004, p. 5). Our article offers an updated perspective on visual culture

art education by incorporating the role that creativity can play in shaping contemporary educational practices that are well positioned to promote social justice while embracing inclusive views of educational content, methods, and goals.

Our art education careers have been shaped by projects and strategies that support creative activity and collaborative developments through design and visual culture art education practices. Our teaching and research have intersected creativity, visual culture and design projects with diverse K-16 and adult students in varied settings, including rural Indiana towns, inner-city Brazilian schools, urban Ohio community arts organizations, and other settings in United States and abroad. Propelled by a belief that design and visual culture art education can enhance the education of all learners, and that creativity represents a keystone in this process, we have individually and in our collaborations targeted broad understandings of design and visual culture art education while embracing the transformative nature of these approaches and recognizing their potential for contributing to social justice.

Recently there is an overwhelming increased attention to the role of creativity in visual arts education, from the worldwide business recognition of the significance of creativity to remain competitive to art educators' awareness of the limited common ground about conceptions of pedagogy relating to creativity. The topic of creativity has re-entered the imagination of educators in the last ten years, perhaps displacing the attention that visual culture and design have previously enjoyed. However, because creativity is a broad concept that relates to many other fields of study and practice besides visual art and design and visual art, there are many parallel groups, forums, and approaches to understand and incorporate creativity into current visual arts education research and practice. In conducting research for our recent co-edited text on the topic of creativity research and practice (BASTOS; ZIMMERMAN, 2015), we identified a gap between research and practice that targeted the relationship among creativity, design, visual culture, and social justice. We consider visual culture and design to be intrinsically connected in the practice of creativity in art education because visual culture broadly defines relevant content and design offers a critical perspective or methodology to define and approach problems and issues. Therefore, design, visual

culture, and creativity are essentially integrated into educational practices that can promote social justice.

In this article, we augment our most recent collaborations on the topic of creativity in visual arts education to examine this connection between creativity and visual culture and design. We argue and illustrate with practical examples that creativity can be utilized in our field to promote social justice through an updated interpretation of visual culture and design issues and content. We describe the state of the art of creativity research and practice in the United States, based on our experience co-editing a comprehensive text on the topic, and examine two examples in which we implemented research and teaching grounded on inclusive views of design and visual culture. While our article is based on our experiences in the United States, we expect that our diverse global experiences, and diverse backgrounds, with one of the authors being Brazilian, can render our discussion ripe for naturalistic generalizations to other contexts.

Connecting Creativity Research and Practice in Art Education: foundations, pedagogies, and contemporary issues (2015), a book we co-edited, was published in the United States. This book was the first comprehensive volume published in many decades devoted to the topic of creativity research and practice in art education. It contains historical precedents and theoretical stances, by 44 authors from around the world, that represent a variety of points view about the role of creativity and its place in art education; practical applications of creativity theory and practice in diverse educational settings; and use of creativity concepts in present-day national and international research and development projects. In this book, we connected creativity research and practice in art education, with both being essential and equitably represented. The underlying message of this book is that that creativity research and practice needs to be reconsidered in art education with emphasis not only on individual creative expression, but also on development of cultural identity, technology, social media communication, good citizenship, social justice, contemporary art, visual culture, and design issues, and consideration for complex realities of the economic sector.

Our goal was to create a community-of practice in which civic responsibility plays an important role and researchers relate their work to art teaching and learning, as well as, when it was appropriate, theoretical frameworks and their relationship to practice. “This book about creativity and art education presents a beginning research and praxis agenda for the field of art education that prioritizes a rigorous and organized study of creativity as a vehicle *for* art learning and pedagogy that in the future has potential to result in theories and praxis for considering research *of* creativity and art education” (ZIMMERMAN, 2013, p. 19).

As previously discussed, despite some significant research being conducted about creativity and art education, there is often a gap in connecting creativity research and practice. Some contributing factors are that there are two dissimilar stances about how creativity is valued educationally. One is that creativity is valued mainly for its extrinsic outcomes. From an opposing point of view, we believe creativity should be viewed as a valuable in-process, intrinsic, transformational experience in which each individual has rights to creative self-expression and creating bodies of work based on his or her own abilities and concerns with emphasis on increasingly global relationships among culture, people, and economic activity.

Creativity and Contemporary Global Culture

We support and promote a point of view about creativity that privileges its in-process dimension and embraces its potential to promote educational experiences that have individual significance for students and are connected to their local contexts and how these relate to international settings. In this way, creativity research and practice can be well positioned to promote social justice in various global contexts. In our co-authored book (BASTOS; ZIMMERMAN, 2015), we examine how creativity research and practice in art education must be reconsidered to transcend a prevalent emphasis on individual creative expression, toward greater discussion and awareness of creativity’s role in promoting development of cultural identity; facilitating the inclusion of design, popular culture, and mass media in the structure of contemporary art curricula; and preparing today’s learners for universal citizenship. An important goal for us is to promote synergies between creative research and teaching to propel the field of art education forward, by considering many fields of study, such as critical

studies, art history, media studies, philosophy, and anthropology, and how pedagogy might be adapted through these trans-disciplinary fields.

There is a shift, that began in the early years of the 21st century, from focusing on traditional art to visual culture and this has had as much an impact as the change from self-expression to discipline-based art education that took place in the 1980s (DUNCUM, 2001). Scholarship in art education continues to morph in the context of new digital environments where modes of mass media communication are not limited only to writing, but include multimodalities such as images, audio, video games, crowd sourcing, social networks, and collaborative scholarship. Such settings influence “new combinations of thought, words, actions, and images” (KNOCHEL; PATTON, 2014, p. 278) expressed in new modes of visual culture where emphasis on artistic design promotes processes of creativity through collaboration in schools, communities, and cultural organizations.

Reflecting on these contemporary issues, we have continued to support concepts and practices set forth in the creativity book project, directly linking these to our own educational practices in art education that include preparing educators to honor the importance of students' rights, and integrating these with local school and community concerns, as well as considering the transformational potential of creative acts and processes in a new age that focuses on design and visual culture as avenues for art education curriculum and institutional reform and promotion of social justice for all learners. Therefore, we put forth that contemporary understandings of creativity research and practice have the potential to expand and help realize some of the social justice goals that have been articulated as part of the visual culture movement starting in the early 2000s by offering methodological inspiration and in some instances criteria to address the injustices evident in today's society through research and teaching practices that are flexible and responsive to the complex realities of participants' daily experiences.

Creatively Inclusive Pedagogies

It can be argued that the early debates about visual culture art education have expanded art educators' views of what counts as art education content, opening new

venues for educational practices that seek to be more inclusive and promote social justice. There is close relationship between what is considered valid art content and the possibility of democracy. In other words, hierarchical views of art correspond to stratified views of society. On the contrary, an inclusive conception of art that encompasses 'high' and 'low' art, such as academically trained and folk art, media-based, and design products is more conducive to an inclusive and participatory view of society, and, therefore, more likely to promote social justice goals (BASTOS, 2002). Seeking to address the need we identified, both through our creativity book project and our individual experiences as higher education art educators to advance art education practices that promote social justice, we will illuminate how creativity research and practice can actualize design and visual culture art education objectives and inspire contemporary approaches to art education that meaningfully integrate product and process.

Coalitions of diverse concerns and mandates have rekindled interest in the relationship between creativity and education in an effort to reveal important connections to classroom practice. Research evidences that there is no common set of creative traits for all individual (ZIMMERMAN, 2013). Many dispositional factors influence art teachers as they create their own artwork and as they teach their students. Artistic creativity has been defined as a range of processes that include knowledge of art concepts and traditions in a culture, highly developed visual thinking skills, and intrinsic motivation. Problem finding, problem shaping, and problem solving and an ability to become emotionally involved and focus on finding a personal vision are relevant throughout a creative teacher's successful engagements with art making and art teaching.

Without supportive teaching and instructional strategies, students will have limited opportunities to develop their creativity (ZIMMERMAN, 2014). In art class, as in any other school subject, there is not one method of creative teaching to ensure a positive impact on a student's creativity. Educators should select methods that make sense to them, to their students, and to the context where their teaching is taking place. In all phases of teaching for creativity, from ideation through art making, focus always should be on the student. Some general art teaching strategies for promoting creativity

include transforming students from learners to active investigators who hunt for information, make connections, and then construct their own knowledge; using unfamiliar materials that lead to new ideas; focusing on process as well as products; promoting structured tasks for skill building and open-ended, unstructured tasks for self-expression; and helping students create a body of their own work so they can develop personal themes and explore ideas in-depth. Generating a supportive educational environment where creativity can take place involves an emphasis on student meaning-making as a prolonged engagement with a problem; encouraging being playful without constraints when working with materials; encouraging risk taking by experimenting with materials and ideas without fear of sanctions against incorrect solutions, errors, or mistakes; and promoting deep involvement, passion, and imagination.

Our work with art educators focuses on examining how research and teaching can promote creative learning for all, in a contemporary culture of design and visual culture art education; thereby, advancing social justice goals. Ultimately, our vision is to engage in “the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with their reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world” (FREIRE, 2006 [1970], p. 53). We will share two reports focused on mentoring and developing research design and visual culture teaching skills with art education students at the higher education level that illuminate how creative research and pedagogy, with an emphasis on design and visual culture, can connect with social justice education in K-12 classrooms and other educational settings.

Creativity and Inclusive Research Design

The education of future researchers in the field of art education can be considered a form of design education. Seeking to prepare designers to apply high-level problem solving skills, critical thinking, and reasoned judgment in their work (ERTMER; RUSSELL, 1995), design education has also been referred to as *creative education* because of its focus on addressing, unveiling, and responding to problems. The affinities between design and creative education were the focus of a graduate research seminar that Flávia Bastos taught in the fall of 2015. The focus of the course

was to approach research as creative designers, considering the fit between form, content, and context; therefore, being able to anticipate the impact of their actions in the contexts with which they were interacting. Connecting creative and inquiry practices, the course challenged students to reflect upon their motivations in developing graduate-level research projects and embraced creative practice as a means to direct, focus on, expand, and reflect upon their research experiences. Similarly to design education, the methodology for preparing students to develop and implement their master's degree research projects required developing understandings of how to frame inquiry problems, not simply solve them. As part of a creative/design education methodology, each student in the course was required to engage in creative explorations related to their own research topic. These ranged from creative writing/poetry, crafting 3-D ceramics, and in the case that follows, drawing. Creative activity became a space for raising critical questions about research design and opened possibilities for exploring them in unique and personal ways.

One student in this course, Samantha Johnson, integrated all these dimensions very effectively. At the heart of this student's research project was a view of research design as creative and ethically responsive. In this example, her interest in inclusive creativity research began as she developed a program for artists with intellectual disabilities to prepare them to teach as visiting artists in public schools; she also illustrated some of her concepts visually (Figure 1). Her master's degree project was a case study of this experience, in which she considered essential collaborating with these artists as co-researchers, not merely as participants (Figure 2). In order to accomplish this goal, she created a modified ethics research program that granted these artists the status of co-researchers in the project, and allowed them to fully contribute to the data analysis and as co-authors of any future publications (Figure 3).

Figure 1 — The intersection of topics in Samantha’s study

Font: Drawing by Samantha Johnson.

Figure 2 — The field of art education considering artists with disabilities

Font: Drawing by Samantha Johnson.

Figure 3 — Need to include the perspectives of people with intellectual disabilities in research

Font: Drawing by Samantha Johnson.

Her research design emphasized the application of collaborative, creative research and practice in art education as a method for establishing a community of inquiry. Her role as a research mentor to her research team of artists with intellectual disabilities was similar to that of an art educator who promotes creativity in her students, helping each one reflect about her ideas, values, and motivations, and from that process-based stance determine a flexible plan of action. Samantha Johnson's project re-shaped expectations about who is considered a researcher and used creative pathways to circumvent institutional constraints, asserting the possibility of research practices in art education not only to generate new knowledge about important issues, but most importantly to do so in ways that honor the dignity and knowledge of all peoples. As researchers committed to investigating today's issues, it is crucial to unpack the influence of commonsensical and mainstream conceptions of creativity and design, so that more nuanced and responsive inquiry can emerge.

This report suggests that arts-informed research can provide opportunities to problematize research methodologies and practices generating inclusive designs that allow all who participate to be respected and recognized. Therefore, arts-informed research has potential for not only disturbing narrow understandings of creativity, but

also of shaping connective and socially-responsive approaches to research design that may have a significant impact on many lives. It also unveils a twofold outcome; a realization that people with intellectual disabilities are capable artists who can expand the concept of who is creative and who is a teacher, and an affirmation that classroom spaces can facilitate experiences of social justice if they remain open to assert, honor, and promote dialogue among those with diverse skills and abilities. Through this experience, students learned from teaching artists with disabilities who also participated in research presentations and contributed as co-authors of publications. These examples honor the creative potential of all of us and underscore the importance of designing inclusive strategies that make possible for people of all abilities to be learners, teachers, and researchers. In conclusion, many of the goals of creative and design education are embedded in this example of inclusive research design that recognizes the social and cultural differences between a group of artists with intellectual disabilities and a novice art education researcher, and through creative, arts-inspired strategies resolves potentially competing values, affirming the close relationship between inclusive research design and social justice.

Creativity and Inclusive Teaching Practices

In 2015, Enid Zimmerman taught a graduate course focusing on creativity and teaching practices for in-service and pre-service K-12 educators. Students in this class were teachers of all subjects as well as administrators and graduate students from all educational fields. There were 20 students in the class that met five intensive days and then each student completed an individual, final project on line to meet class requirements. Emphasis was on dominant approaches to education that include a wide range of visual culture related phenomena that play an important role in contemporary students' lives. Participants in the course designed projects that incorporated ideas that emphasized extending practices of education to include visual forms that fall under headings such as video games, zines, fashion, social media etc. (HICKS, 2004) along with equity of access to and opportunities for quality art education for all learners. It is apparent today that students need to be prepared for a new information age that sustains educational interventions in art education by fostering creative thinking, imagination, and innovation. Creativity is needed to ensure that students have access

to methods of reading ideological content of visual images with art as a vehicle of social transformation. Creativity is also an in-process, *intrinsic*, transformational experience in which each individual student has access to experiences that embody self-expression and based on his or her own abilities and concerns.

Tracey Rivers designed the game *Curativity*, that began with the perception that game playing, as an integral part of visual culture art education, is useful because it simulates real life experiences in a safe social environment where achievement is found in the process of learning itself (SHAPIRO, 2014). The notions of play and games as a means for reflecting critically, though exploration and investigation also influenced this choice for her project. Games can help develop non-cognitive skills as well as cognitive skills in explaining how students learn and if they succeed. These non-cognitive skills, about what you know and how you behave, often are better suited to a game context than to a traditional classroom and textbook contexts (GEE, 2011).

Elementary school students' artwork often are judged by their peers in terms of their dexterity in producing images and not in the ideas they are attempting to portray. Tracy Rivers explained that "if students only judge other students' artwork by narrow skill-centered and traditional criteria, then their interest in making art images can be depressed and they can see their work as not desirable. My game *Curativity* is practical, engaging for students, and allows for mistakes and experimentation to take place in a supportive educational environment." Her game emphasizes that what can be considered creative largely depends on a student's culture, experiences, knowledge, special needs, religious orientation, socio-economic status, gender orientation, and personal preferences.

Curativity, therefore, provides opportunities for students to have in-depth conversations and discussions about what they think creativity means and how it can be applied to all students' work independent of their abilities to portray their ideas expertly and in a predictable manner. Engaging in playing this game can be beneficial not only for those who are receiving curatorial opinions, but also those who are offering them as an opportunity for brainstorming ideas for their own artwork and encouraging them to feel respected and positive about their own creative abilities.

The game was created for players who are eight years and older with detailed directions (Figure 4). There are curators who distribute Muse cards to players who respond to the prompt on these cards. In each round, a curator gives reasons and scores for players' responses (Figure 5). Players may ask for a second opinion from other players (Figure 6). Scoring is based on criteria developed from Torrance's Tests of Creative Thinking (KIM, 2006). At the end of the game, there is an exhibition and each player chooses which of his or her own most creative work will be included; the groups score each other's collaborative exhibitions and the highest score wins a round.

Figure 4 — *Curativity* game board cover

Font: Created by Tracey Rivers.

Figure 5 — *Curativity Muse Card*

Font: Created by Tracey Rivers.

Figure 6 — Curativity Second Opinion Card

Muse Card

Draw something invisible.

Curator: choose the most creative and state why.

Get a second opinion!

Creativity Criteria:	Almost None	A Little Bit	Some	A Lot
Fluency: The artwork has many different ideas	1	2	3	4
Flexibility: The artwork has many different approaches to the problem.	1	2	3	4
Originality: The artwork is unique and shows rare ideas.	1	2	3	4
Elaboration: The artwork has many details.	1	2	3	4

Font: Created by Tracey Rivers.

Many art teachers at elementary and secondary levels have their students offer opinions about each other's artwork in open-ended, group critiques. During these discussions, focus should be on the creative processes of fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration that students engage in that relate to their own lived experiences rather than solely emphasizing the art products that emerge as result. Suggestions from classmates should begin with what is successful and emphasize respect for the individuality of each student's aesthetic products. There also should be an emphasis in these critiques that student artwork is always in process and that it can be revised and transformed by constructive and positive student recommendations. Including visual culture curriculum into art classrooms and other educational environments requires that students are presented with questioning strategies that focus on open-ended problems that facilitate their engagement so they become actively engaged studio practices where emphasis is placed less on formal expertise and technical skill and more on effectively communicating meaning. Teachings and learnings, based on visual culture pedagogies, therefore have power to result in critical examination cultural codes and ideologies that resist social injustices (GAROIAN; GAUDELIUS, 2004).

Connecting ideas

These two reports illustrate ways in which creativity in a design and visual culture environment can contribute to a more inclusive and socially just education. Contemporary visual arts educators and researchers should entertain how creativity research and practice can promote social justice in an age of collaboration and use of new technologies and social media as aids in this process. Critical pedagogy traditions that evolve from notions of social transformation as outlined by Freire (2006/1970) consider human activity to encompass action and reflection that can result in transformation of the world. Many practices evidenced in the work of contemporary artists are embedded in the desire to "inhabit the world in a better way" (BOURRIAD, 2002, p.13). We envision new boundaries in visual arts research and practice where contemporary notions about creativity play a central role in embracing individual learning and growth rooted in social responsibility and committed to the practice of freedom for all. Freire's project of a *liberatory* education that originated in the divided socio-political context of Brazil, provides inspiration for critical pedagogical practices

around the world. We believe that creativity education is connected to the empowering ideas put forth by Freire and the many educators who embrace his philosophy. Teaching and learning, through the intersection of design, visual culture, and creativity, has power, we maintain to transform injustice toward the creation of a networked world of tolerance, support, and equity.

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