Interim Field Report: Site Visit Group 3

Counter-Narratives and Empowerment Through Art in Community Spaces

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Introduction

When people think of learning, often they picture a classroom, desks, and a teacher with several students. We may also envision it as listening to a lecture and taking notes, studying flashcards for an exam, or writing an essay. These examples reflect our society's conventional understanding of taking in knowledge, as we are used to the process of learning occurring in a formalized school setting and we have been taught specific ways to digest information. However, we know that this traditional model of learning does not work for every student. There are many reasons for why this "one-size-fits-all" conception is harmful; not only does it fail to meet the needs of nontraditional learners, but it also places boundaries on the idea of "knowledge" that leaves out a variety of valuable insights and ways of knowing. Not all knowledge can be shared via lecture or flashcards. With an understanding of the disadvantages to this rigid model of "learning", EDUC 370 – *Learning Across and Within Settings* – explores what and how we learn in non-school spaces through different means. In our group's exploration of our community, we focused on community arts spaces. Art has historically and contemporarily been used as a tool for self-expression, cultural empowerment, and community resistance. As we visited different arts-based sites, we were especially interested in how youth from marginalized communities use these spaces for exploring their identity and culture, and how that is tied into resisting systems of oppression. From music to murals, creative works tell a story and gives deplatformed peoples an outlet to write their own narrative, thereby challenging the status quo and pushing back against marginalization. The existence of community art spaces are particularly important to youth, who benefit from having third spaces (not school, work, or home) that foster creative development, meaningful relationships, and exposure to non-traditional subjects.

Socio-Historical Context

The four locations that our group visited were the Frye Art Museum, the Jack Straw Cultural Center, Coyote Central, and El Centro de la Raza. We selected these sites, as they empower creativity in different forms in our communities; some of these sites also have specific programs offered to youth of color or youth of other marginalized backgrounds. The Frye Art Museum originates from the personal art collection of Emma and Charles Frye – Seattle residents in the early twentieth century who collected fine art sourced from Europe. As prominent patrons of the arts, the couple displayed the art in a gallery setting within their home, where they also hosted and supported music events. Charles left money in his will for a museum to house their collection of 232 paintings, in which he requested they could be viewed free of charge. After the death of Emma and subsequently Charles, the Frye Art Museum was opened in 1952, free for public viewing. Frye's philanthropic contributions to Seattle's art scene were generous to the community. As they have upheld the promise to keep Frye Art Museum free, it has made fine art accessible to the community, housing the historical European collection, as well as multicultural and local contemporary art. This aspect stays true to the history of the Frye's, who welcomed the community into their home so all could access artistic expression. Since the founding of the Frye, it has evolved to showcase the city's changing identities and values. The exhibitions and programs fosters social dialogue around identities and issues in Seattle.

The Jack Straw Cultural Center was founded in 1962 – originally titled the Jack Straw Foundation. The ethnomusicologists and radio producers who founded this center began in an old donut shop, transforming it into one of the nation's first community radio stations – KRAB-FM. This community radio station existed with the main purpose of discussing and presenting science, arts, and public affairs programs. Even after KRAB's frequency was sold in

1984, the foundation continued its focus on community work. The Jack Straw Foundation became Jack Straw Productions and then the Jack Straw Cultural Center, which serves a diverse community with a focus on accessibility and hands-on experience. Through accessibility and hands-on experience, the Jack Straw Cultural Center aims to promote and sustain the cultures of the communities it serves. They help community members create, document, present, and educate about art, culture, and heritage. Through many programs – such as the Artist Support Program, the Jack Straw Writers Program, and the Jack Straw New Media Gallery – this center provides many pathways and opportunities for regional and national artists to create and present their work. The Jack Straw Cultural Center provides classroom, in-studio, and internship programs for both adults and youths, with special outreach efforts focused on people of color, immigrants, and disabled individuals. Accessibility is at the forefront of these programs – monetarily and beyond. Studios are priced affordably; an hourly rate is charged for the first hour, and then the participants are charged in 30 minute intervals, so as to not overcharge for time not used. Language supports, audio descriptions, and other access services are provided as needed. The Jack Straw Cultural Center runs an annual workshop for blind and visually impaired students, known as the Blind Youth Audio Project. During this program, blind and visually impaired students from around the state are housed at the University of Washington for six weeks, participating in job placement programs around Seattle and workshops at Jack Straw's studios. The Jack Straw Cultural Center works with Lowell Elementary School, collaborating with teachers and disabled students to create original songs and poems. Through youth programs, students and musical professionals build relationships, share knowledge, learn new skills from one another, and build off of existing talents. This center began as a radio station, and its commitment to sound has remained prevalent. Through music and audio art, as well as

accessibility and equity, the Jack Straw Cultural Center works to keep art, culture, and heritage vital and alive through sound.

Coyote Central was founded in 1986 by two middle school teachers who believed that the key to effective education was tapping into students' curiosity. Originally, Coyote's focus was academic support through home-based lessons taught by gifted educators, including Bill Nye the Science Guy. As their programs developed, they began to hone in on creative fields and implemented programs for photography, computers, architecture, culinary, and more. In 1992, the founders started a program called Hit the Streets, dedicated to large public artwork, including murals at bus stops, park entrances, and different urban vantage points. Coyote founders and staff center equity and accessibility in all their work. They prioritize access to harder-to-reach communities, especially communities of color, immigrant and refugee communities, and low-income communities. Their lens accounts for racial equity, as well as focuses on income, gender, culture, language, ability, and other oppressions. Currently, Coyote Central offers a huge variety of courses in less-traditional fields like welding, bike repair, culinary arts, video game development, fashion, film, woodworking, and more. Their classes are offered during school breaks/summer, they are pay-what-you-can, and there are registration spots specifically reserved for members of marginalized communities. In their mission statement, Coyote acknowledges how the arts are often inaccessible to many communities, and how they tangibly implement equity and accessibility into their structure. This commitment to accessible arts and a pattern of taking in feedback and growing to meet the needs of their communities is why they are such a valuable community space.

El Centro De La Raza is a cultural center that provides social and cultural programs that has supported historically marginalized communities since the 1970s. The occupation of the old

Beacon Hill Elementary School in 1972 marked the formal beginning of the "beloved community" that El Centro continues to foster to this day. The principles of racial equality led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the farmworker strikes pioneered by farmworkers in California and Eastern Washington, and the growing relationship with residents in the nearby "Chinatown" inspired community members to fight for a community center that inspires racial and economic equality. While the name of *El Centro De La Raza* implies an organization that caters to solely Latine communities, El Centro was created through multicultural collaborations and ultimately fueled by the same values of centering the needs and livelihoods of all communities. As the organization has persisted for more than 50 years, El Centro has expanded beyond the original elementary school and into the larger Plaza de Roberto Maestas, which includes affordable housing units, event spaces, early learning centers, and a public community space. In addition to this expansion in space, El Centro has a multitude of programs that cater to varying identities and communities. These services include: Child, Family and Youth Services, Financial Empowerment, Housing Assistance, Workforce Development, Advocacy Support, and many more. Additionally, El Centro hosts cultural events – such as Dia De Los Muertos – and community bondings activities – such as weekly cooking classes. Within the youth programs, students not only receive academic support, but they typically take on artistic advocacy projects that allow them to creatively engage in topics that interest them and their communities. This is seen in the artistic forms of mural projects, radio podcasts, and more. The knowledge and livelihood of participants within El Centro are at the center of the services, programs, and events that are hosted. It is a space where all members of the community are encouraged to participate in their own capacity and creative ways in order to create a genuine, supportive community. One common theme across all of our sites was the emphasis on accessibility, whether financially,

physically, or culturally. The ability to engage in and practice art allows youth of all backgrounds to engage in social and cultural conversations based in their communities and beyond.

Roles and Methods for Forming Ideas

From the beginning, our group noticed we had common interests surrounding creative expression and community resistance. For all of our site visits, at least one person from our group had visited or had heard of it before. We brainstormed a list and referred back to our ideas as we planned each site visit, determining what was plausible in terms of interest, distance, weather, and transportation. One example of the observation methods we used was at the Frye Art Museum, where we took notes as we walked through of how the site was organized in the physical, how people were learning in the space, and how our senses were stimulated, trying to follow the guideline questions of the site memos. We found a place to sit afterwards, debriefing about what we saw in the museum and how it connects to our learning theories. Taking pictures was another prevalent way we took data from the sites. By including these photos in our site memos, we were able to look back and continue our observations even after we had left the site. We were able to see observations from the perspectives of our groupmates' by looking through their pictures, as well.

Further, our observations were influenced by the stories and experiences shared by the members of the community in each of the spaces we visited. For example, when we visited Jack Straw and El Centro De La Raza, we were guided through the space by a staff member. Through these interactions, we gained a lot of insight into how the organization centers art and creativity in multiple programs; we were offered a much more in-depth exploration of the space than if we were to have observed on our own. These tours allowed us to hear how the staff within the organization engages and reaches out to the community in their designated roles, as well as how

their own identities and experiences have led them to commit to these spaces. Through these formal interactions, we could grasp the multiple ways that the organization facilitated learning through various creative forms.

Lastly, we shared and collected data through drawing. Some of us took notes at the site and represented our observations through sketches and imagery. This was a form of media we were able to share with each other to help us see from the perspectives of others in our group. After taking images at the sites, it was helpful to look back at them to reflect upon our experiences and pick up on things we may have missed. Analyzing the photos by sketching on them or creating related drawings aided in our understanding of the experience, primarily of the physical objects and their positioning within the spaces. Being able to apply these images and annotations to our information gave us a sense of interaction and deep connection to the project. Additionally, drawing a sketch of the space from memory after the experience was another practice utilized – a form of embodied learning. This practice of embodiment lends itself to the development of our perception of ourselves within this space, as well as offering insight into the diverse ways in which we all experience a space differently.

Explanation of Learning Theories

Embodied Learning

One learning theory prevalent in both our site visits and the sustenance of culture through art is embodiment; going hand-in-hand with embodiment is learning on the move. Embodiment is a physical form of learning, focused on bodily sensations and one's connectedness to people and places. Movement and learning are heavily intertwined, despite what western teaching may propose. Taylor and Hall (2013) explain how the "interface where residents' embodied

experiences in place meet planners' more abstract representations of space is a rich interactional space… with potential for change." They position this interface as a thirdspace – "a discursive and imaginary place for finding and producing new ways of thinking and acting in communities, but also as a means for changing relations between public activity and the built environment" (Taylor and Hall, 2013). The ways that cognition is related to physicality and interaction with the environment is embodied cognition (Howard, 2024). Embodiment is learning through the sensory systems of the body, as well as through experiences, activities, and the environment. Bodies play incredible roles in the development of conceptual understandings through the use of different senses and interactions with the environment. Embodied learning is social, cultural, and relational; it relies on the experiences of individuals and their interactions with others. People experience "historically shaped forms of assistance" differently, meaning that individual backgrounds funnel the way that embodied learning is experienced (Howard, 2024). Embodied learning is also policial, historical, and ethical. Politicized and historically marginalized identities are housed in the bodies of individuals; they are lived experiences that shape the ways in which individuals interact with the environment and those around them (Cruz, 2001; Nasir et al, 2006). Rose (2018) explains that "everyday gestures of justice" – such as a teacher waiting back to trust and respect a child's next move in a workspace – are involved in embodied learning. Learning on the move is embodied learning in action. This style of learning happens in everyday life, prioritizing the lived experiences of individuals; this involves being in relationship with a place and the history it holds (Howard, 2024). Different forms of mobility and the utilization of different senses, in relation to the experiences that these senses and movements hold, mediate one's learning experience. Movement contributes heavily to learning, as it organizes attention, memory, stories, and conceptions of place (Howard, 2024). In embodiment and learning on the

move, one's lived experience fuels their learning experience, utilizing different forms of mobility and connection to shift perspectives and understand the nuances of the world.

Learning by Observing and Pitching In

Another learning theory that was prevalent across multiple sites was the practice of learning by observing and pitching in. Learning by observing and pitching in can be simplified into a type of learning that is informal but is done with intent and active participation (Paradise & Rogoff, 2009). This learning typically happens in family and community settings because it incorporates youth into activities that are done collaboratively, where they observe the actions of others and contribute to the practice through their forming capacity. Learning by observing and pitching in is a learning style that allows one to simultaneously engage with the "social and cultural realities" of the community and to participate in those activities taking on mutual roles (Paradise & Rogoff, 2009). This is quite the opposite of the learning that happens in schools, where youth are routinely *told* the material, content, and knowledge rather than learning through collaborative and relational methods. Learning by observing and pitching in allows for youth to not only grow cognitive skills but to also develop "social and emotional participation and involvement," which can further impact their understanding of their identities, culture, values, and communities (Paradise & Rogoff, 2009). This is an important concept to identify throughout our visits because it is a form of learning that happens frequently but informally. Like other theories, learning by observing and pitching in is one method of relational learning that is heavily influenced by the interactions between youth, families, and the values of their community.

Learning in Community Spaces

Community spaces have long served as a ground for cultivating learning outside of the traditional desks-in-rows school system. With a reputation for disrupting systems of inequality,

community-based educational spaces (CBES) are a crucial component for enriching education (Baldridge et al., 2017, 381). Commonly seen in the form of afterschool programs run by community based youth organizations, community-based education spaces strive to foster an environment that challenges the deficiency paradigm towards youth of color, have more flexible learning freedom, and serve as educational spaces that support and work towards healing and redemption (Baldridge et al., 2017, 384). With programming that is able to be adapted to each student, CBES can encourage and cultivate the students' strengths and passions, as well as provide extra support in areas of growth. These opportunities for growth also come with the bonus of genuine, stable, and consistent relationships with trusted adults as allies who can take on mentorship roles in students' lives (Baldridge et al., 2017, 388). According to research, CBES are unique in that they serve as spaces where students collaborate in more culturally relevant ways with adults and peers to intersect and enact change in social issues (Baldridge et al., 2017, 389). As another educational theory heavily focused on relationships, connectedness is a high value and resource for learning.

Practice-Linked Identity

Practice-linked identity refers to the way an individual develops a sense of identity in the context of a certain activity or practice, describing how their role in an activity can act as an integral part of their self-perception. These identities are formed through engagement in the practice over time, highlighting how individuals perceive themselves within the context of the activity, including the roles they play and goals they set for themselves. The identities are tied in with the values, behaviors, and skills associated with the practice. The identities can be formed within these settings through material, relational, or ideational resources (Nassir & Cooks, 2009). As described by Nassir & Cooks (2009), material resources describe the physical artifacts that

relate to the practice, which allows access to learning within the material domain. Relational resources describe the relationships and connection within the community, which foster social belonging and validation of skills. Positive experiences and encouragement within the practice can reinforce these identities. Ideational resources describe self-perception and self-value within a setting, which can be bolstered by positive influences and progress over time. Practice-linked identities give context to placement in figured worlds – a socially produced and reinforced realm where individuals share identities based on participation in specific activities and relation to one another (Urrieta, 2012). Practice-linked identities come from the ongoing engagement in activities, in which people negotiate and develop a sense of identity within figured worlds.

Interpreting Experiences

At the Jack Straw Cultural Center, something we observed was the islands of expertise theory in practice. The staff member who gave us a tour told us about how she came to be in the job she has at the Center, and her story exemplified this learning theory. She described how she always enjoyed singing and engaging with music when she was growing up; it was a great passion of hers. She wanted to be a singer, and went on to study music in college. She knew the music industry is difficult to break into as a performer, but she didn't want to give up her passion, so she decided to explore audio engineering as a pathway instead. Taking relevant courses in college led her to find an internship with the Jack Straw Cultural Center, and after she graduated college, she began to work there full-time. Something we found interesting was how her knowledge of audio engineering, while supplemented by college courses, was truly developed through her experience working with the technology and equipment. In other words, she learned by pitching in and through embodiment. This story stuck with us, as this woman's

childhood love of singing was not just a phase, but was an island of expertise that still shapes her life today.

At the Jack Straw Cultural Center, we also noticed embodiment through sound. Heritage and culture are communicated through mediums apart from language – art, audio, relations with one another, trust, and music. In this community space, individuals work with one another to sustain and share their backgrounds and cultures. With the publication of student creations, the support from peers and mentors, and the connection to one's roots through artistic forms of sound, a deeper sense of identity and belonging is created among individuals. Learning extends the boundaries of physical space at Jack Straw, entering realms of sound, senses, and creation. Not only does learning extend to the senses, but it extends to interpersonal relationships and the formation of deep bonds. In this community space, sound is curated to tell stories – creating an environment of collective learning and liberation.

At Coyote Central, practice-linked identities and identity empowerment is exemplified through the power of counter-narratives and youth taking agency. The role of history and identity shaping the learning experience and continuing the learning experience is prevalent here – connecting back to embodiment being social, cultural, political, relational, and historical. While collective learning happens at Jack Straw through sound, collective learning happens at Coyote Central through visual arts and narratives led by the youth. The learning of culture and the sustaining of culture do not only exist through youth agency and youth accessibility to art, but through reciprocal youth and adult relationships, as well as youth to youth relationships. In building these relational resources in community spaces that have been created to uplift and share youth identities, the youth are empowered in who they are. When they take agency and

learn from others in the space, they learn more about themselves, their passions, and their capabilities.

During our visit to Coyote Central, we participated in the *All-Ages Valentines Day Making Pop-Up* event. When first entering the building, it is impossible to miss the bright and colorful artworks posted all across the main room. We noticed the different art mediums and how each piece was labeled by the name of the young creator and the name of the work. As we looked around, we noticed a back kitchen where the teens from the Youth Advisory Board were selling baked goods; there were also two tables filled with kids and their families participating in the pop-up event. Our group jumped into the craft by cutting papers, placing stickers, and sketching out our drawings. While we were invested in our own little cards, we also noticed that there was a young child with their parents at the end of the table. They would look around at the tools and ideas of everyone's projects before adding more to their own card. This reminded us of the concept of learning by observing and pitching in, as they would observe how others around the room or their parents were using the tools to decorate the paper and trying out a few methods on their own. As this space is designed to engage young people in creative projects, students are shown the technical parts of the craft (the observation part) while still having the ability to express themselves freely (the pitching in part). This is an important way that many youth can explore their own identities, values, and relationships amongst their community of creatives.

At El Centro de la Raza, a clear example of learning in community spaces was the bilingual after school program. We entered a classroom that looked far more beautiful and homey than any other classroom we had been in; decorated for Valentines' Day, the walls were filled with evidence of the kids who collaborated there every week. It was a gift to get to listen to the teacher who runs the bilingual after school program, hearing her perspective and experience on

how she tries to bring the kids together while still engaging different age groups at the appropriate level. One activity she mentioned was learning about the Titanic. For the younger kids, hearing about the boat and participating in art assignments around it was very exciting. The older kids were able to delve deeper, questioning the concept of classes on the ship – how most people in lower classes were trapped below, while the richer people escaped in lifeboats. In this community-based education space, kids design projects together, go on field trips, and stay in the program for often 10+ years. We were told stories of students who had graduated years prior that brought their own kids to the program. In this type of community, longevity is expected and people are able to grow close and cultivate strong community relationships between peers and adult allies.

The Frye Art Museum offers a variety of learning opportunities within a community centered and accessible environment. The museum's commitment to free admission fosters inclusivity and diverse community interactions, forming unique worlds of artists and art consumers. Participation in the figured world of art appreciation was represented by the visitors' adherence to the cultural norms of quiet voices and respectful participation. Those who value the arts engage in practice-linked identities through engagement with creative expression and cultural representations, shaping identities as cultural consumers and art appreciators. Visitors interact with the art, mediated by text and historical context, which helps them to form their own interpretations and aesthetic preferences. Audio recordings accompanying the instrument exhibits, as well as interaction and discussion of thoughts and interpretations with peers, stuck out to us as meaningful mediated learning experiences. During our visit, we noticed three older women chatting while sitting on a bench in front of the historical Frye collection. This experience stood out to us, revealing the strategic placement of the large bench as a tool to

encourage deep observation and connection with others. It also highlighted the ongoing nature of learning despite age, and the value of hearing perspectives of others to enrich our own understanding.

Implications and Conclusions

Overall, our group used each of the site visits to help us understand what it means to visit community spaces and see how they build a connection to place, self, culture, and peers. From the Frye Museum in Capitol Hill, the Jack Straw Cultural Center in U-District, Coyote Central on Cherry St., and El Centro De La Raza in Beacon Hill, it is evident that learning outside of the classroom allows communities to be brought together and identities to be uplifted. The Frye Art Museum centers not just the art, but accessibility to the art and an understanding of community. The Jack Straw Cultural Center utilizes music to share and sustain individual identities and community identities. At Coyote Central, accessible programs foster youth agency in creativity, exposure to different skills, and a more positive sense of self. El Centro De La Raza provides a community space that supports the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of its participants, as well as the needs and desires of the students it serves. In doing so, culture, place, self, and peers are more intimately intertwined and informed. These sites provide spaces for communities to resist deficiency-narratives through counter-narratives and artistic expression. In providing accessible, equitable art spaces to communities, the identities, heritages, and senses of belonging of individuals can be further discovered and sustained.

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