Youth Participatory Action Curation:

Learning through student resistance and engagement in urban arts education

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Abstract

This dissertation seeks to understand and address the challenge of student engagement in a traditional secondary school environment that does not typically reflect the realities, cultures or interests of the student body. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of a group of students who took on the role of gallery curators for a gallery space built within their high school as part of a full school transformation to become an urban arts school. The school's urban arts focus, which it maintains post research project, aims to rebuild the traditional school framework to include diverse cultures, aesthetics, and curriculum strategies, empowering and mobilizing youth to access their voices within their own inner and outer school communities. More specifically, graffiti culture was the primary artistic influence of this research and my own implication in the local graffiti context was a focal point for understanding the evolution of the gallery. In their role as decision makers, the students engaged in creating two different exhibits that challenged curricular norms in direct and indirect ways.

This research also develops YPAR traditions and methods to explore the concept of curation as a method of inquiry that can be youth-led, based in resistance and a critical examination of the daily lives and experiences of students. I use the term YPAC to describe this iteration of YPAR. The implications for this research demonstrate tangible ways in which traditional learning environments can be altered through arts-based practices to be increasingly relevant and reflective of the students who attend, resisting traditional approaches to learning in order to be responsive to student needs and interests.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

CONSTRUCTING URBAN ARTS HIGH

Opening

In this dissertation, I examine the potential for student engagement and growth through resistance in a process that I call youth participatory action curation (YPAC): a youth-led curatorial experience. Through YPAC, my research seeks to understand and complicate the concepts of student engagement and student resistance, while also searching for methods to help facilitate the dialogue surrounding both. The research project I will be describing took place within a traditional school setting, what I am calling Urban Arts High (UAH)[1], as part of a credited course in the context of a student-run gallery space, the UAH Gallery. Youth-led curation does not need to be limited to a school environment, or any traditional gallery space, as this kind of research and engagement can easily take place in any available space in which youth are able to curate. However, for the purposes of this research that is where the project took place.

This youth-led gallery curation project was one part of a larger attempt at wider school transformation through a school-community-university partnership, called the Urban Arts Project (UAP), seeking to support the school's shift from a traditional learning context to one inspired by Hip Hop based education and the urban arts more generally. Working within the context of the Quebec Education Program (QEP), but proposing strategies quite different from those generally found in the Quebec education system, the objective of the UAP was to increase student engagement; in my own research this emerged as a complex and contested concept, in tension with and connection to resistance. I am interested in student opinions and experiences that contest school, primarily the content of the curriculum and treatment of students. Facilitated through arts-based research practices and inspired by the counter-cultural nature of graffiti, my

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[1] The name of the school and the gallery have been changed to protect anonymity

dissertation explores a unique attempt to infuse new ways of learning, inspired by youth and arts-culture, into a traditional educational setting.

Introducing the wider research project

UAH is located in a low-income neighbourhood and is the only English high school in the borough. In 2013/2014 (one year before the pilot project took place and two years before the full-school transformation and research began), 65% of the students were either coded or seen as at risk of being coded as having learning disabilities and only 46% of the secondary five classes graduated. These are the lowest graduation rates in its school board, and reflect the strong correlation between poverty and drop-out rates. The majority of the school's population lives in the borough in which the school is located, and there is also a strong presence of intergenerational families who have been living in their areas since the older generations were young, many parents and even grandparents having been UAH alumini themselves. The school's urban arts focus, which it maintains post research project, aims to rebuild the traditional school framework to include diverse cultures, aesthetics, and curriculum strategies, empowering and mobilizing youth to create space for their voices in places where these voices have been oppressed and rendered silent, such as their own inner and outer school communities, including the critical analysis of their roles as cultural producers and consumers (Campbell, 2013; Prier, 2012; Giroux, 1983). The UAP sought to both support and research the creation of a sustainable "urban arts" high school model. Specific objectives included integrating teaching artists in content areas that students would typically struggle with, including math, French and science as well as implementing new teaching tools in arts classes which included a recording studio and an art gallery. The teachers and teaching artists worked together to develop and implent curriculum and teaching tools in various forms. This partnership unites: 1) teachers and administrators at the

school; 2) disciplinary specialists/researchers in arts-integration in the Faculty of Education at McGill University; 3) community artists connected to the Under Pressure Festival, the local YMCA, WORD (Writing Our Rhymes Down), a Hip Hop literacy organization,; and, 4) the High School of the Recording Arts in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Although informed by several years of program and research experience in graffiti and education, as well as other pilot projects and observations at Urban Arts High School done over the course of four years, this dissertation is based on one full school year (September – June 2015-2016) of my participatory action research with one group of students who were invited to run the UAH gallery and voluntarily agreed to take on the job. My role included helping plan and produce gallery shows as well as being involved in many other aspects of daily classroom life such as facilitating discussions, helping students with their work as well as helping the teacher if he required extra supervision or facilitation when working on the project.

Throughout the year, the group I worked with was a class of 12 students, seven boys and five girls, who were between the ages of 15 and 18. There were a couple of changes made to the group early on as one student came into the group and one student left but after that the group remained consistent for the remainder of the year. The students were part of the 15+ program, which has as an objective to help students 15 years or older struggling to complete requirements from secondary one, two and/or three to obtain secondary three accreditation before they are legally eligible to leave school or before they are too old to continue attending high school. In Quebec, with a secondary three accreditation, as of 16 years of age,[2] students are eligible for

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[2] "Persons having earned Secondary III credits in language of instruction, second language and mathematics in the programs of study established by the MEES must continue their general education courses concurrently with their vocational training in order to obtain the credits they are missing in the following areas: Secondary IV credits in language of instruction, second

trade school, so students would then theoretically have the option upon successful completion of 15+ to attend a trade program or (before they turn 18) to continue their education in the regular stream. Not every student in the class provided a consent form and therefore of the 12 students, eight were participants in the research project and six were interviewed. I describe each of the participants who provided an interview in chapter four, including their interest in or resistance towards working in the gallery. These attitudes are important in order to understand the challenges we faced as a group as well as the curricular challenges that came along with attempting to teach through an alternative method.

Dissertation objective and research questions

Throughout this dissertation, borrowing from work done in critical and participatory research method frameworks, using a critical reflexive approach, I pay close attention to my role within the research both as an insider (involved with many of the students outside of the school context) and outsider (not a student in the class) to the project. I also work with both student engagement and student resistance literature to help build an understanding of the way this research project developed. In working with resistance and towards engagement, the project was youth-led and evolved to incorporate elements of Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) methodology, borrowing from its established structure and building on it in order to incorporate the act of youth curation as a method of inquiry. As youth curation became central to my work at the school, I developed the notion of Youth Participatory Action Curation as a methodology; better understanding it is the overarching objective of this dissertation. This project seeks to extend the YPAR literature, but also the writing on critical curation, with curation possibilities becoming increasingly accessible now as researchers continue to locate methods of public

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language and mathematics in the programs of study established by the MEES".Taken from https://www.emsb.qc.ca/emsb/admissions/registration/adult-voc

scholarship, described as "scholarly or creative activity that joins serious intellectual endeavor with a commitment to public practice and public consequence" (Eatman in Butler & Lehrer, 2016 p. 12). Through my research I contend that YPAC situates youth as curators, simultaneously positioning them as knowledge producers and decision makers in their school. Situating my research in this way has helped me create the following research questions that explore what YPAC is:

    1. How can YPAC challenge larger patterns of power relations and exclusionary practices present in school and education?

    2. How might YPAC reframe student experience, student engagement and resistance in school?

Laying the groundwork for the UAH gallery and research project

Incorporating earlier research findings on graffiti at school

    When I first began working at UAH in 2011, I was trying to incorporate the findings from my Masters' thesis, which researched the potential to use graffiti as a tool for positive youth development (Tobey & Jellinghaus, 2012) in the context of an in-class project and an after-school program. The main conclusion I drew from my Masters' thesis was that the most important factor when incorporating graffiti into a school or formal setting was selecting a teaching artist who could accurately represent graffiti culture. This meant having someone who was willing and able to discuss the multilayered culture that challenges the notions of ownership and access to public property, in il/legal ways. Graffiti culture puts artists at great risk both physically and legally, both of which can appeal to the ego of the writer. It is well documented from the earliest days of letter-based graffiti that, in the eyes of the graffiti writers (those who

produce letter-based graffiti), getting your name seen and known is the primary reward for the risks incurred (Mailer, 1974). Carefully explaining this to students of any age requires a strong understanding of the culture and those who participate in it because, as will be explained later in the chapter, there is danger in romanticizing or justifying this desire for fame and need to be known. By inviting in a teaching artist who could fill this role, teachers did not have to search out and teach material they were unfamiliar and often uncomfortable with or attempt to rely on information from textbooks, within the curriculum or found online. The participating teacher was able to embody the notion of collaborative learning and learn material alongside their students.

From graffiti to street art club

In 2010, I approached the high school's community learning center (CLC) with an offer to present a graffiti-based after-school program in partnership with the YMCA. The program I was proposing did not focus on producing a final product but concentrated on developing the process with the students. This involved having the students make as many of the required decisions as possible, such as what the purpose of our club would be (mural on the wall, drawing in sketchbooks only, or any other options the students could think of) and emphasizing the discussions that helped create a cohesive group structure. Every session involved a discussion period. One of the most important components of these projects has always been the discussion period as it gives the students a chance to reflect on their perceptions of public art and space, media language and the perceptions and stereotypes which are created through different types of media. This has at times turned into students bringing in newspaper articles that discuss graffiti and engaging in a discussion surrounding the language used to talk about the artists, the graffiti in question and the larger purpose of the article. We would also often have discussions around identity formation and students' representations of themselves and their peers through graffiti.

Because graffiti is anonymous, this gave us the chance to investigate what students would want

people to think about them, and how those messages could be transmitted. It also created a lot of

discussion around judging others and how students may have experienced that on both ends

(judging and being judged) in ways that may not have been accurate or fair. This resembles what

Gude (2009) has said about the democratic purposes of art education:

> Most significantly, engagement with the arts teaches youth to perceive complexity as
>
> pleasure and possibility, not as irritating uncertainty. Heightened self-awareness is
>
> extended to heightened awareness of others. (p. 9)

The extra-curricular graffiti club took place on Wednesdays, which was the one day when

students finished their day at lunchtime. Sessions would typically last for three hours and our

students would end up leaving at the regular time that school would let out. There is evidence

showing that after-school programs help improve the lives of the young people participating in

them (Eccles & Gootman, 2002) and we felt that students who were willing to stay after school

had finished for three hours were most certainly benefiting in some way, such as, helping to

connect them to their community and seeing their own interests reflected in the lives of adults

who were accessible and relatable to them. Because this program was hosted inside the school, I

also contend that this helped enhance the relationship students had with their school, in that they

were able to recognize the school's willingness to include an activity in the after school

programming that would be meaningful to them.

After two years, the graffiti club evolved into the street art club, which intended to attract

students who may be interested in the concept of public art but may not have the skills, or ability

to develop the skills, in drawing that graffiti requires. The switch created a different atmosphere

in the program for two reasons; we switched from a graffiti-only club to a street art club (which

involves different mediums, such as pixel art, tape art, yarn bombing, green graffiti etc.). We

also moved from experience-based interventions, meaning teaching graffiti based on personal

experience of painting and doing graffiti, to programming that was based on an art education

approach. When the club switched over, so did the facilitator. The new person came in as an art

educator, focusing on giving the students new experiences with different mediums and thinking

critically about how and why these mediums are used in different environments (indoors,

outdoors, public, private etc.) by different artists across the world. While this was distinctly

different from graffiti club, the students were attending in larger numbers than before and

engaging by trying the different mediums and being willing to display their work. The cultural

context had evolved but was still meeting the needs of the students and this gave us incentive to

continue trying larger scale projects.

One of the most labour intensive murals we worked on with this group was in the third

year of the street art club's existence. With a core group of students we embarked on a three

month process to develop a narrative mural in an area where old lockers had been closed up and

boarded over (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Know the Ledge mural

"You got to know the ledge of wise and dumb to understand your culture of freedom"

"All For One"- Brand Nubian)

The mural, pictured above, features the words 'Know The Ledge', a famous quote from Hip Hop artists Brand Nubians, and was done using negative space to bring out the lettering. The letters were first outlined and then over the course of three months the students did small drawings all around the lettering. The drawings were inspired by elements that motivated the students and would be motivators for their fellow students as well. This mural is an excellent example of the evolution of the after-school program, starting out as a socially based gathering revolving around the cultural values of graffiti as it organically developed into a program balanced between the social and aesthetic practices of being an artist. Using style and imagery that the students felt connected to and chose themselves, we were able to facilitate one of the most attended extra-curricular programs the school offered. As the school began its transformation in 2014 towards becoming an urban arts school, these elements of identity and belonging as well as emphasizing student led activities that are relevant to their lives and interests that were important to our after-school program became a pillar within my own research structure.

Graffiti culture in school and the reframing of engagement and resistance

The complexities of graffiti culture connected to schooling

Graffiti is an ideal vehicle for disrupting notions of public normalcy. The culture of graffiti has a complex history and continues to be a visual reminder that all the rules and restrictions surrounding access to public space do not necessarily represent the best interest of all citizens. Graffiti is often blamed for making citizens feel unsafe or ruining the visual landscape of a city (Vanderveen & van Eijk, 2015); however, these cosmetic interactions with the environment are only representations of underlying issues such as poverty, systemic racism and

discrimination existing in urban centers, making it such that some people who inhabit urban spaces are not actually considered to be citizens.

When graffiti first came to the public's attention, as documented in the American mass media in the 1970's and 80's, the people participating in the culture were young, marginalized and mostly racialized Americans who used their ingenuity, creativity and talent to create a space for themselves in a context that often erased them and their worth, declaring their presence in an undeniably bold manner. In a society where they had few or no expressive outlets available and were faced with grim futures of low-paying jobs, unemployment or the probability of ending up involved in street/gang life, graffiti became an outlet (Castleman 1982; Ferrell 1996; Powers 1999; Austin 2001). Graffiti gave these emerging artists and young activists the opportunity to become kings and queens of their own domain and claim or reclaim space without having the economic potential to buy it.

Historically, graffiti culture valued the mentorship of younger writers by the older crew members; respect was something which was earned over time and certain rules of conduct were almost universally followed by those participating in the culture. Graffiti culture, more recently encompassing (and often being overshadowed by) what has become recognized as 'street art', has since changed and evolved under heavy media exposure and the notable support and financial backing from art collectors and marketing companies. However, at the root of what has developed into current graffiti and street art culture are the values and expectations upon which these cultures were founded, such as respect for oneself, other writers and the culture as a whole, often learned by working with mentors. Also, important to the foundations of graffiti are: notions of freedom of expression, creating access in the public sphere, self-confidence, a sense of belonging, personal connections (instilled through relationships to the crew that a writer belongs

to as well as to the culture more generally) and a sense of accomplishment, recognition and pride

in seeing one's name and work appear large-scale in the city as well as on online platforms.

From an education perspective these values and, ultimately, strengths can be linked to relevant

learning tools such as cooperative learning, mentorship and community and indicate the positive

potential outcomes of use in formal education settings.

Debate continues to exist surrounding moves to include graffiti in a traditional school

setting, from both ends---reticent teachers and resistant graffiti writers, both opposing the

inclusion of this art form into a traditional educational context. Artists resist this move as the

structure of traditional school and legal graffiti do not necessarily reflect the values they hold as

individuals. Opposing from a different perspective, schools resist it out of concerns with the

glorification of the illegal subculture and the potential of having increased amounts of

unsanctioned graffiti in the school because of it. Pushback from both ends has meant that graffiti

can often be misrepresented in school and projects will miss the mark about what graffiti and

graffiti culture can and should do.

As discussed, my contention has always been that based on the recognized traits of

graffiti culture as being resistant, rebellious, creative, expressive, often ego-driven but also

collaborative, there is a great deal which can be incorporated into school settings currently

struggling to respond to the needs of the students who often are unable to identify with the

traditional structures. However, in order to attempt this, artists and educators must be careful and

aware to not romanticize graffiti culture into being something more meaningful or resistant than

it generally is (Kindynis, 2017). The potential for graffiti to be used in educational contexts is

becoming increasingly well-documented (Brown, 2015; Ganter, 2013; Jacobs, 2008; Christen,

2003) but there needs to be further exploration of the tensions and possibilities surrounding

graffiti culture in education. This is important due to their complexity, and in order to do justice to those representing the culture as well as the students who are learning about it. It is also important to recognize that including graffiti culture in this way does not respond to the need to change/challenge the overall structure of traditional schooling, which is most-often exclusively representative of the Eurocentric experience/culture. While positive feelings associated to momentary representation within a school setting can be beneficial to individual students in the short-term, the larger structural, oppressive systems present in school remain functional. While I do not believe this negates the positive individual experiences or outcomes had by individual students, I believe it is important to keep reflecting on this reality and attempt to push projects further in their capacity to challenge the systems they functioning within.

Resistance and engagement literature: An underexplored intersection

This research is presented in the context of the established bodies of literature discussing student engagement, juxtaposed with the literature discussing resistance and youth/student resistance more specifically. These bodies of literature work well to support the central objective of this research and larger school transformation, which was to increase student engagement in a school context where there were consistent demonstrations of resistance towards expectations, demands and curriculum content. As will be discussed, while arts-based learning did help to foster engagement and transform resistance into different iterations, the ways that resistance continued to play itself out, even with the urban arts, was unexpected, due in part to the fact that many of the researchers (myself excluded) were newcomers to the school community, working to try something relatively new in education. . A key conceptual framework for this research is the complicated grey area between student engagement and resistance, both presenting layered understandings of student participation, or lack thereof. This not only required a deep

understanding of what engagement can, and did, look like at this particular school, but it also required us to carefully consider the ways in which students actively resisted school. This requires a critical perspective on both engagement and resistance. Parallels between engagement and resistance are made much more evident when we can examine resistance within the context of traditional, exclusionary educational practices and experiences, viewing it as an expected response to the limitations associated to these structures.

This dissertation seeks to understand and address the challenge of student engagement in an environment that does not typically reflect the realities, cultures or interests of the student body. What I often observed while working with a group of students who have systematically experienced failure throughout their academic careers is also described in the literature on some of the primary reasons students express resistance towards school and eventually disengage (Hancock & Zubrick, 2015). These negative experiences can also lead to student self-doubt in their ability to achieve necessary requirement for high school completion; lack of feeling welcomed or wanted at the school; and, increased feelings of being targeted or unfairly punished for behaviours exhibited while at school (Tuck, 2012).

The intersection between engagement and resistance can be the result of students' current and past experiences in school as well as their cultural support network and expectations based on their racial and cultural affiliations. In that optic, it is impossible to have the discussion of student resistance to curricular content or school in general, particularly within this research context, without discussing the impact of racial discrimination and "othering" in the forming of a Canadian national identity in traditional school structures. This discussion of racial discrimination is essential because at this school a significant percentage of the student population are racialized students. In the 15+ class, of the 12 students, seven were racialized,

meaning the majority of the class did not identify as white and therefore were excluded from

what Thobani (2007) has described as the hegemonic "Canadian national identity," which is

understood to be white. Thobani argues that the Canadian National identity is created by defining

those identified as the (racial) other. This identity construction imagines those who continue to

uphold the nation and its values in contrast with who are not or cannot be a part of this group

based on set identifiers: race, ethnicity, gender identity, cultural or religious affiliation etc. Many

of the students at UAH are "othered" in their daily school experience, and those who do fit

within the national identity criteria can ignore the negative and different ways in which racialized

students experience schooling. While the white students from this project may find themselves

disengaged from school, according to my interviews their resistance is based primarily on

personal experiences of feeling bored or not having had any other past experiences of success to

work towards. They were unable or unwilling to recognize racial privilege in their learning (and

in their non-academic lives) because of their whiteness. The existing 'colourblindness'

(DiAngelo, 2018) and postracial rhetoric (Cho, 2008) was echoed in student interviews through

comments that suggested students do not see race, rather they identify everyone as a human

being.   Hanley-Lopez (2014) argues that racism continues to strategically exist in order to

facilitate the power structure established long ago and upon which this capitalist and neo-liberal

world still depend on to function. In this research, we see how the impact of post-racial thinking

enables stratification to exist between students who are all generally recognized as at-risk and

facing academic and personal challenges, but still experience/resist school differently. It

appeared difficult/impossible for white students who were facing primarily, class- and gender-

based oppressions, to recognize that being white still afforded them some privileges. As shown

in chapter six, most white students described themselves as not seeing race, and therefore were

not prepared or educated to understand that their oppressions, while still unjust and deserving of their resistance, were not the same as those of their black peers. While the density of that content exceeds the capacities of this dissertation, I engage with it in the data analysis as a reminder that the critical work to be done within traditional classrooms has an incredible urgency to it, if we are to truly address the inequities of the school experience.

Building on lessons from pilot study

These complex relations between engagement and resistance shaped my previous work with graffiti in education. As documented in an article about an earlier pilot project at the school in the year before the larger school transformation began (Proietti, 2015), one graffiti writer participating in the role of teaching-artist confirmed the potential benefits of including graffiti culture into a school setting. He stated that some of the most relevant elements of graffiti culture to a school context are the feelings of belonging to a group as well as the notion of increasing student identification (to school) and representation (within school), as they are becoming more visibly represented within the school. He also described the importance of students being able to connect aspects of their outside lives, such as seeing graffiti all around the city or even on their walk to school, to the hours they would spend at school. These assertions confirmed what I believed to be true; however throughout the time we spent working on this project we also learned several important lessons about what can negatively impact a project.

This pilot, which was a two-month mural project done with a group of five students selected by their teacher, considered to be able to take on an extra responsibility, demonstrated the ability to engage students by incorporating an element of the urban arts into the learning process. As I discussed in the chapter I had written early on in the process (Proietti, 2015), the students connected to the artist and enjoyed the experience of designing and painting a

mural. However, some of the downfalls were that it was considered extra credit and the timeline

for production meant that we were not able to complete all the work during class time and so we

had to work during after school hours, which was not possible for all the participating

students. The primary issue I had with this project was that the only method of evaluating its

success for the teacher involved was the measurable outcome of increased attendance. This was

inaccurate as we were already working with students who were more likely to attend school than

some of their peers, and given that their participation was not being evaluated for school, the

notion of participating on the mural project to help their success at school was not clear to them.

What I gathered from this experience was that projects needed to be directly and clearly linked to

classroom activity and that attendance itself as an indicator of project success or student

engagement was overly restrictive for the purposes of this research.

Therefore one of the aims in my doctoral study is to move past what scholars Tuck and

Yang (2014) have named as teleological notions of academic success and engagement, in order

to consider new ways of supporting students in their schooling experiences. In this project, this is

done primarily through youth-led projects that are reflective of their interests/lived experiences

and do not rely on traditional indicators of definitions of success such as increased attendance,

grades, graduation rates etc. As I will explain, in order to work towards a student engagement

that would not be considered in teleological terms, the project began with a consideration of the

ways in which students were actively engaging with their classroom, and this was often through

resistance: resistance to the classroom, the school rules, the curriculum etc. Through the

discussions in this dissertation, I present the notion of student resistance in different contexts.

Identifying resistance as a complex behaviour instead of simply a negative one, both students,

and the adult facilitators (teachers, invited artists and community members) are able to create a

more supportive environment that is also increasingly reflective of student interest and identity.

Students are also increasingly able to identify links between their in-school experience and their

out-of-school lives, which makes their learning more relevant and engaging. Living in the

messiness and complexity of resistance theory and graffiti culture meant that measurable

outcomes were unlikely, but rather the experiences students would have and describe throughout

the school year would make this project valuable and would push the boundaries of what is

happening in youth-based research currently. There will be a more in-depth discussion of these

notions in the literature review.

Developing a researcher identity

Through extended participation at this school and in the development of the urban arts

program, I have gone through many ups and downs through the process of understanding the

importance of developing a researcher identity and finding one which fit with who I am as a

person and as a community member. I eventually began to recognize my developing researcher

identity within the definition of insider researcher (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999), and I have since

experienced how this role can provide invaluable insight into, and even greater proximity to the

communities I work with and participate in.

At first it was difficult for me to accept that I needed to develop a researcher identity as I

worried that doing so would create a division between me and the actual work being done as well

as from the students themselves. However, as I was able to continue not only the work I was

doing at the school but also engage in course work through my time as a student I developed

some helpful reflexive instincts that allowed me to see the role (and my role) of researcher in a

different light. I began to feel more comfortable making observations based on the many hats I

wear at different times; understanding the students because I would see them daily at the drop-in

center I ran as my full-time job, understanding the neighborhood realities because I live there,

understanding the school from an administrative perspective as a member of their governing

board and understanding graffiti culture and the artists I have worked with through organizing a

graffiti based event. These observations are useful and insightful; however, they still represent

the perspective of a white, middle-class woman within this context. Grappling with these

different realities gave me a lot to reflect on, and took the pressure off feeling as if I needed to

speak with authority or expertise. It allowed to speak from experience but still gave me the room

to step away from making conclusive remarks about what was taking place.

Through that process of discovery, I simultaneously recognized the importance in

maintaining recognition of the larger picture of post-research impact and the expectations and

limitations of what can and should be accomplished as these are all responsibilities of the insider

researcher. This can be very emotionally challenging and there is often little guidance for those

in these roles. Work such as Tuhiwai-Smith's (1999) offers a starting point and grounding point

to understand the strengths and limitations of one's own unique experiences, while maintaining

that research must always be done rigorously and honestly. As Tuhiwai-Smith makes clear:

> Insider research has to be ethical and respectful, as reflexive and critical, as outsider
>
> research. It also needs to be humble. It needs to be humble because the researchers
>
> belong to the community as a member with a different set of roles and relationships,
>
> status and position…but for a researcher to assume that their own
>
> experience is all that is required is arrogant. (p. 139)

Her words struck me as uniquely important given the responses I have had from some artists

whom I am working with. While graffiti is a small and closed community, I have often been told

that simply by being a part of the community, you have an expertise and access to knowledge not

possible for non-members and that should be sufficient for giving you authority. It has been important for me as I grow and develop my researcher identity that my own position in the community is not where my learning and praxis about graffiti within a formalized setting ends, but rather where it begins.

My relationship to graffiti and street art culture is strongly linked to my role as one of the primary organizers of the Under Pressure graffiti/Hip Hop festival. This festival is a unique gathering of artists from all disciplines in the urban arts, participating in this community event designated to promote dialogue and positive awareness about Hip Hop and graffiti culture between those who participate as producers of the arts and those who are interested in it. This role has given me insight into the culture and connected me to many local and international artists who participate in the festival. This has placed me in a unique position as a non-writer, as it has given me access to a closed community and culture, and welcomed my participation in ways that other non-writers would never be able. My appreciation of the culture has grown and evolved through the many different kinds of interactions I have had within it, including working directly with artists on their own personal projects or with them on school- and community based ones.

My early experiences in education left me unsatisfied with every aspect of the "academic" experience and looking for other ways to learn and to understand the world. My own unique personality and interests were not accepted by most of the teachers I crossed paths with in high school. Often kicked out of class, or encouraged to just put my head down on my desk and stay quiet, I had no interest in what the system was trying to teach me and was constantly told I was not capable of learning it anyway. I knew there was more out in the world but I had no way to access it while I was stuck in school. School became a barrier for me rather than a gateway

and I felt like I was searching for a way to highlight my own identity, resistant of mainstream culture and ideas, in a community that held similar beliefs.

When I first got involved with Under Pressure, this was exactly what I found. Starting simply as a volunteer to hand out t-shirts or check names on entry sheet, I felt like I had I discovered something special. This was a community of people including artists and volunteers who were there to support each other, and keep each other in check. The arts were a way to connect with each other and the audiences, and these people (artists and volunteers) became teachers to interested "outsiders" (like me) without all the judgment and shame I had come to associate with school and learning. These first experiences with the festival were enough to get me hooked. It did not take long for me to increase my involvement with the festival and the artists, inviting the artists as guests to any place I was involved with, be it community centers or after-school programs, to paint and/or talk with kids I was working with.

Later on, during the early stages of my MA, I struggled to find my identity and place as a "grad student". Fatefully, I had one professor attend Under Pressure out of support based on my interest and passion for the event and culture. In the following semester, as I continued to struggle to see myself successfully researching any topic for a thesis, he suggested I write about graffiti. I had not considered it as a possibility as I never imagined graffiti to be considered "serious" enough to study at that level. This was a residual effect of our schooling system, and an example of one of its most damaging outcomes. Students are not taught to see the value in anything that exists outside of the provincial or federal curriculum, which can continue to consciously and subconsciously impact people's identity and feelings of self-worth for years after their "education" has been completed.

Yet, this suggestion, coupled with the support of the artists and Under Pressure community, allowed me to create an academic identity for myself that valued many of the elements I had previously been ostracized for, such as resistance and critical engagement, challenging notions of traditional knowledge and exploring any opportunity to learn. It finally gave me the chance to pose and explore the questions I had about schooling, considering notions of belonging, value and representation, within a context that had a powerful, resistant and resilient past. Graffiti culture does not need to be acknowledged by anyone other than those who participate in it. Graffiti writers do not care whether people think what they do is art or not, or is good or valuable. Their work exists outside of the confines of what most of the general population understands or has been taught to think of as having merit, and that is one of the primary reasons that the culture continues to thrive. It is in this powerful mindset that I continue to strive to make changes in the education system as I see it. Other people do not need to see the merit in the work that is being done, only the youth who are there, growing to understand that their voices, experiences and lives are worthy whether their school community chooses to acknowledge them or not.

Some of the challenges associated with identifying as an insider contribute to the insider/outsider positionality I take on in this research. While being able to speak as a member of the urban arts community and as a resident of the neighborhood where our school is located, I do not share the experience of racialized students, and those living in situations of high poverty, functioning within a systemically oppressive government-generated curriculum serving to privilege the experience of white people. Tuhiwai-Smith describes her experience of being treated differently by the Indigenous people she was researching, due to the fact that in spite of her reality as an Indigenous woman her class positionality created a divide between the roles of

researcher and researched. Because there has been a lot of documentation describing the existing

skepticism around research, particularly done on/with closed and marginalized communities,

acknowledging the outsider part of oneself is critical in being able to work past it.

Based on my own positions within the communities I represent I have been well-

positioned to work with the students to help implement their ideas, reflect on the outcomes of the

projects they have participated in, and alter the content of the curriculum to help better mobilize

the students. Through these experiences I have also learned a lot from the valuable insight

offered by the teacher of the 15+ class, whom I'm calling Nicholas[3]. As the expert in

understanding the QEP, as well as in working with students in the daily setting of a traditional

classroom, Nicholas's knowledge helped me gain a lot of insight into the limitations and

possibilities of the requirements of the current curriculum. This includes an understanding of the

pacing of classroom life, which does not end when a specific unit or objective ends.

From this reflective process, I decided to incorporate a personal narrative component in

this dissertation in the form of narrative vignettes (Erickson, 1985) connected to art pieces from

the exhibits. I believe this to be an effective way of addressing my insider/outsider duality within

the research as well as reflecting on the impact of my roles across the community. I do this in

chapter five, through an arts-based inquiry that included a personal description and connection to

three different art pieces selected for the "Struggle for Black Equality" exhibit as well as three

photographs I took of the students. Each visual narrative vignette has a personal reflection

associated to it, based on my memories of and experience with the visual artwork. This is not a

critique of the artwork but a method for me to reflect on the process of supporting the students

through the steps of this project, working to identify what the 15+ group was experiencing in and

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[3] All names have been changed to protect anonymity

through the gallery as well as what the role of the supporting adult can and should be in a YPAC

project.

Contributions

This dissertation extends the research done in Hip Hop pedagogies by building on the

little that is written about graffiti culture within the school context. Through its close attention to

the student-curated gallery it explores this opportunity for incorporating graffiti culture more

thoroughly and creatively than what has typically been done in the past (eg. group mural projects

or individual name writing activities). Scholars who have researched the development of Hip

Hop culture within an educational setting have focused their attentions mainly on the lyric music

element of the culture, existing either in after-school programs, community centers, or classroom

units (Lamont-Hill, 2009; Hill & Petchauer, 2013; Low, 2011; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade,

2008). Because of this, I believe there is a lot of possibility for expanding on the potential of

other aspects of the culture to be researched in different existing contexts and developed into

meaningful experiences for students. While the focus of this research project became on the act

of curation due to student interest, the framework for understanding the development of the

gallery relies on a knowledge of the resistant and expressive ability of an art form (graffiti) that

is typically connected to urban communities and the youth who inhabit them.

As stated at the onset of this chapter, before the research began I had identified my work

as located on the spectrum of culturally relevant and Hip Hop pedagogies, connected to but not

immersed in the content discussed by those scholars. Once the research itself began, through

reflection on our daily experiences of in-class interactions it became increasingly clear that while

graffiti culture had influenced the early stages of the project it did not remain central to what was

taking place. We quickly noticed that the work itself, of planning and curating art shows,

eclipsed the fact that the art was inspired by graffiti culture. While I was able to draw parallels between what the students were doing and what the early pioneers of graffiti were doing, it did not seem as strong a connection to make because the students did not name it. In fact, the parallels could be drawn between what they were doing and any youth culture, rebellious by nature but expressive, collaborative and resistant. Therefore, this research is a new way of looking at the influence of graffiti culture on traditional schooling particularly through the aspect of mentorship: the ways in which the culture influenced me, which I brought into a classroom, and how the students then transformed these influences and methods to suit their own purposes. Affording students an opportunity to evaluate their interests and talents and create something meaningful around that which they still felt was an expression of themselves and their interests is precisely the flexibility that this culture can offer. So this research not only expands the concept of graffiti within the Hip Hop pedagogy literature, but it also develops the youth-as-researchers model, using relevant art and curation as the link between learning, critical engagement, resistance and graffiti.

As has been mentioned, and will be discussed in the methodology chapter, this research also develops YPAR traditions and methods to explore the concept of curation as a method of inquiry which can be youth-led, based in resistance and a critical examination of the daily lives and experiences of students. In most of its inceptions, YPAR is a method by which youth are able to voice their opinions, and often dissatisfactions, with the ways they are treated in a variety of typically institutional contexts (schools, public spaces etc.). Educational researchers are increasingly involving youth in participatory research processes (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Morrell, 2004) in which they learn research skills and tools to study and offer analysis of their school contexts, in order to effect change. The youth as researcher model infuses youth voices

and perspectives into conversations about schooling, develops youth leaders, and increases youth investment in change processes. The work of curating the gallery space as an entrepreneurial project, arts-based and critical in its inquiry and approach, also centered the importance of amplifying youth voice and having the project be youth led. This research strays from the traditional experience of youth as researchers given that students were only offered to do this work within the confines of a gallery space and were graded on their participation in this project using a traditional grading scheme. Yet, it builds on the potential for youth-led inquiry in different forms, which can fit into a curriculum but still not "feel like school".

As much of my research is concerned with documenting and recording the processes and actions of gallery curation as a method of resistance and act of engagement, I have been able to connect some of my experiences at UAH to the frameworks of art curation in diverse settings. First, in considering the evolving role of the curator in the curation literature, Clifton-Ross, Dale & Newell (2019) state

> In the 21st century, the curator's "competence is relocated from a direct relation with selection and display to an ability to generate narratives and direct a sequence of experiences," according to Francesco Manacorda (2003, p. 11). The subject of the exhibition, or its "raison d'être," as described by Lynne Cooke (2006), is ultimately brought to life by the curator. Exhibition-making in the 21st century therefore "theorizes issues deemed central in contemporary cultural debate" and are "transmitted via various channels" (Cooke, 2006) (p. 3).

This research began with the traditional notion of curation as one associated to display and quickly and organically evolved into the responsibility of creating a counter-narrative to what the conventional school curriculum instructs. Socio-politcal events, which were current at

the time of the exhibits, affected and inspired the students to use the channel that was made

available to them through the construction of a gallery space to bring these issues to the forefront

of the conversations taking place at school. As stated by Butler and Lehrer (2016) "Exhibitions,

it is clear, are also scenes of social and political action and the performance of culture and

community" (p. 5). It is therefore essential for this research to consider the act of curation as

more than assembling and organizing an exhibit, but rather a way to engage in the critical

analysis of decision-making and representation in order not to reproduce the social control

dynamic.

Research using a YPAR approach within an arts-based methodology seems to be

becoming increasingly possible, as the potential for success is diverse and accessible. As noted in

a review of peer-reviewed YPAR literature (Pyne et. Al, 2013) this methodology is only recently

being incorporated in many different kinds of arts-based projects and is rapidly developing

through its evolution. YPAR is explored in this research as a method to support students in

reclaiming their educational experiences using an arts-based approach.

Outline of Chapters

This introductory chapter is a roadmap to understanding the development of this

dissertation within the context of a larger project as well as within the context of my previous

years of research and involvement at the school in question. I position my dissertation within the

research on graffiti culture and education, as well as a critical approach to engagement/resistance

theories. I also introduce the concept of YPAC as methodology, connected to YPAR.

Chapter two positions my work theoretically within critical perspectives on education and

student engagement and resistance theories. Situated within a critical pedagogy framework, this

chapter explores the intersections between engagement and resistance, also working to identify

the role that cultural capital and cultural hegemony play in student experience throughout their years in school.

Chapter three introduces YPAC as a methodology, at the intersection of YPAR and critical curation. I do this in order to create an understanding of how curation emerged as a key concept in this research and as a useful tool for the students in this study, making it both a methodology and a method that emerged throughout the course of the project.

Chapter four describes how I laid the groundwork along with all the necessary steps to take in order to build the gallery, including a survey of the student body and a test run exhibit, and described the development of YPAC. I provide a description of each of the consenting participants in order to create a further connection between the reader and the story, giving more context to the students and our existing (or not) previous relationships.

Following that, the chapter outlines the research method of critical ethnography as a framework for the different approaches to data collection and analysis. As data, I collected field notes, journal entries, individual interviews with students and recorded classroom sessions. I also use photographs I took of artwork and of the students. For data analysis, I used thematic coding of the student interviews and visual analysis of the artworks. I share the ethnographic data and visual analysis in the form of narrative vignettes (Erickson, 1985), which allow me to explore research question one from my perspective as YPAC facilitator. I also describe how my critical researcher identity helps me remain accountable to the communities and participants involved in this research. I engage with the ethical considerations and trustworthiness of the research, outlining how I am able to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability in the findings and their interpretations.

Chapter five explores research question one, "How does student curation reframe larger patterns of power relations and exclusionary practices present in school and education?" To do so, I draw upon my knowledge of and history with the school as well as my ethnographic field notes on the process of developing the gallery and facilitating the students' curation of their first exhibit, "The Struggle for Black Equality." These insights are shared through five narrative vignettes, which unpack revelatory moments in the YPAC process. Each vignette uses a visual (artwork or photograph) as prompt. These seek to immerse the reader in the gallery experience, emphasize the impact of the visual in the meaning-making process, and honour the work done by the artists as well as the experience had by the students. Chronologically this chapter was placed before the one sharing student interview data as it offers a broader portrait of the school's culture, offering context to situate the student experience. My intention in ordering my own reflections first was not to emphasize my own experience, but to highlight the ethnographic element of the research.

Chapter six responds to research question two, "How might YPAC reframe student experience, student engagement and resistance in school?" by exploring the themes that emerged in student interviews about what 'worked' in this project, including how they were able to learn differently, in unexpected and innovative ways, and what did not, including the challenges of fostering critical consciousness. This chapter highlights the students' own surprise at the success and enjoyment in curating the first exhibit and suggests that new knowledge construction that challenged traditional curricular content and ways of knowing outweighed any challenges they faced throughout the project.

Chapter seven is the concluding chapter. It synthesizes what has been said about YPAC so far, as well as offers a deeper understanding of its potential by briefly describing "Skateboard

Matters," the second exhibit hosted by students in the gallery, indicating how the foundations

laid in exhibit were able to support more transformative forms of resistance in exhibit two. This

chapter concludes with suggestions for further research as well as describing how YPAC can

take place in new and different locations, with new and different students, achieving similar

outcomes and furthering the notion that curation is a valuable tool for youth work in a variety of

settings, as well as an important participatory methodology.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND RESISTANCE: UNDERSTANDING

RELATIONS, DEBATES AND COMPLEXITIES

In this chapter, I explore the central elements of my conceptual framework, which rethinks student engagement and resistance through a critical lens. Increasing student engagement was at the heart of the project. Therefore, the engagement literature served as a starting point to understand how research defines and measures engagement in traditional education settings.

Within the engagement framework, the concept of resistance emerged as particularly important, which I then decided to pursue further as a concept that also stands alone. Drawing upon critical pedagogy, I was able to reframe resistance within the context of engagement and to move away from it as strictly an act of defiance or disengagement and move towards framing student action and experience as complex interactions within their daily school experiences. I wanted to explore further the literature detailing student resistance as not only a negative/oppositional reaction towards schooling, or a mechanism of social reproduction, but a method of self-preservation and self-affirmation while in the classroom, discussed throughout this literature review. This framework allows me to set the stage for the arts-based research done within the context of gallery curation at the school, which will be discussed in chapters three and four. These are different fields and areas of research that rarely intersect. The richness of this study comes from the unique and delicate balance of student engagement and resistance through arts-based methods that were participatory and youth-led, discussed in ways that are both personal to the students as well as personal to my own lived experiences.

Critical pedagogical foundations

I bring a critical perspective to this research. Historically, the work of critical theorists creates a space for discourse that challenges traditional and neo-liberal hierarchies that privilege a small group of people while also enabling a power imbalance that permeates most social structures, in ways that are invisible to those operating within them (Arato & Gebhardt, 1982; Gramsci, 1971). Critical theories serve to question traditional structures that can also create space for research that emphasizes the voices and experiences of the participants in the project verses the person identified as the researcher. This destabilizes some traditional notions of power and knowledge validity that were historically prevalent. I am specifically interested in critical pedagogy as I am working in education; while I have been influenced by Paulo Freire in many ways, as an educator as well as a researcher, in this literature review I focus more particularly on the works of Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren, since they theorize engagement and resistance, concepts so central to this dissertation.

In his definition of critical pedagogy, Ford (2014) outlines its historical roots stemming from historical materialism, neo-Marxism, and the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School as well as its practical functions. Ford outlines critical pedagogy as an approach attempting to discover, address, combat, or alleviate systemic oppression and inequality (p.380). In his work, he recognizes the role that educational institutions play in this system of dominance and oppression, and emphasizes the transformative nature of a critical pedagogy approach:

> The idea is that the critical pedagogue, through a dialogical exchange with students, can
> help make visible the operation of power and oppression, and then work towards
> transforming those relations, institutions and cultural forms through which such

operations take place. This type of 'demystification' (Giroux, McLaren) or 'decoding'

(Freire) plays a central role in critical pedagogy.

(Ford, 2014, p. 381-382)

Throughout my research, the notions of demystification and making visible the

operations of power were important as they allowed students the space to challenge their

understanding of self within the workings of their school. These notions were also important

because they made clear the challenges students faced with developing their own criticality

within these institutional and cultural norms. I had envisioned research that would allow me to

guide students through a transformative process in which they would reinvent the spaces they

occupied so that their relationship to schooling was more equitable and balanced. Throughout the

experience I learned that the ways they have come to understand themselves and their peers

within these spaces needs to first be reconstructed in order for the demystification to begin.

The work of Giroux, in particular, influenced my way of seeing and understanding what I

was experiencing in the classroom with students and teachers through his work on radical

pedagogy and resistance theory. In his seminal work, *Theory and Resistance in Education*,

Giroux (1983) criticizes the dominant systems of thinking that inform educational theories and

discusses at length notions of critical ideology and the neoliberal common sense, which he

describes as:

> …a redirection in the function of the state; rather, it has changed both the function and
>
> the idea of the state from one committed to social welfare to one narrowly committed to
>
> regulating the global movement of capital and expanding the policing, punishing, and
>
> militarizing forces of society. (p.13)

Along with these critiques, he emphasizes the importance of dialectical thinking and being able to understand social constructs from varying viewpoints in order for students to engage their criticality and reflexivity. While remaining clear about his position that schools are limited in the effects that they have on the overall structural inequities that exist globally, he does suggest that radical pedagogues need to work together to share resources and ideas and to contest the policies and decision-making practices that unilaterally function to dominate.

Engagement theory and beyond

As noted, student engagement was one of the primary targets for improvement for the school and UAP based on its connection to attendance rates, student participation, and even graduation rates. These assumptions surrounding student characteristics and school behaviours are discussed at length in the engagement literature in what McMahon & Portelli (2004) name conservative or traditional conceptions of engagement whose attributes include improved academic achievement, increased attendance rates etc. Engagement theory, within the context of the education literature, has been introduced as a way of understanding and combating dropout rates (Finn, 1993; Finn & Rock, 1997; Finn & Voelkl, 1992) as scholars early on understood that active student participation is class is required for a successful educational experience. Seen in Appleton, Christenson & Furlong (2008),while attendance can be made mandatory (until a certain age as enforced by provincial legislation), you cannot mandate engagement. Based on that statement, the need to support student engagement lay in the fact that despite mandatory attendance policies, if students are not engaged in what they are learning, their interest and motivation to remain physically and mentally present in school diminishes, if not vanishes completely.

Situating student engagement

Early mentions of engagement emphasize disengagement --- considering and defining

engagement only in terms of its opposite (Natriello, 1984). Defining engagement through

disengagement is a difficult starting point given that understanding the complexities of student

behaviour and how to impact them should come from a deep understanding of their origins, not a

critique based on what teachers do not want students to do. Another identified challenge with the

concept of engagement was describing the possibility of measuring it with consistency and

accuracy as well as creating measurement guidelines and mechanisms for comparison

(Fredericks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004). Within the literature, there is no clear consensus about

the components needed for engagement to be present. Some scholars rely more heavily on

emotional or behavioural traits while other scholars explore other aspects such as the cognitive

and academic. In a review of the literature, Fredericks, Blumenfeld & Paris (2004) identify

engagement as a meta construct, made up of a multitude of components that also span across

disciplines. These authors perceive engagement as having three active factors, behavioural,

emotional, and cognitive, being equally present and vital to students. The study argues that while

many have researched these components separately, these multiple factors need to be interacting

in order for engagement to exist. Research on behavioural engagement relates to student conduct

and on-task behaviour (Karweit, 1989; Peterson, Swing, Stark, & Wass, 1984). Research on

emotional engagement relates to student attitudes (Epstein & McPartland, 1976; Yamamoto,

Thomas, & Karns, 1969) and student interest and values (Eccles et al., 1983). Research on

cognitive engagement relates to motivational goals and self-regulated learning (Boekarts,

Pintrich, & Zeidner, 2000; Zimmerman, 1990). Based on these findings, some scholars suggest

explicitly reserving the term engagement for work where multiple components are present

(Guthrie & Anderson, 1999; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Appleton (2008) adds that further research suggests a four-component model, academic, behavioural, cognitive, and psychological (Reschly & Christenson, 2006a, 2006b), asserting that for engagement to exist several components must be present and interplaying.

Based on these variances in the engagement literature, it is difficult to make concrete statements about engagement that can be argued with any certainty. However, I believe that when students are truly engaged, their teachers and classmates cannot mistake it. During the observation and reflection that took place throughout this project, I saw students engaging with their experience, and it became my sense that if engagement is as open to interpretation as described in the literature, then looking for signs of student engagement at Urban Arts High could be done using a similar open-mindedness. Without a willingness to have a flexible definition of engagement that specifically responds to the realities of the individual involved in research, I feared the dangers were in creating false expectations for educators and impossible standards for students. I will now turn to the critiques of the engagement literature.

Troubling the theory of engagement

On the other side of the discussion, Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris (2004) provide a comprehensive critique of engagement theory, which is generally viewed by the authors as 'messy' (p. 81) as an academic field of research. They state that the overlap of the recognized categories of engagement (cognitive, behavioural and emotional) with other fields of study does not help clarify concepts and does not help prioritize which elements of engagement have more of an impact on overall student success and learning than the others. This crossover can make data collection and analysis difficult given that different types of studies prioritize different types of research data and therefore comparing different components measuring different aspects of

human behavior and methods of thinking makes showing results with any discernible

consistency nearly impossible. This leaves educators at a difficult impasse. Proving to any

governing bodies that one, or multiple, methods to approaching the engagement problem are

consistently reliable and effective is impossible. Therefore, convincing policy and decision-

makers to effect any meaningful change in curriculum, teaching practices or even teacher

training based on the notion of increased engagement becomes nearly impossible. Given that an

understanding of particular students' engagement requires attention be paid both to the location

of the school/students and to the complexities of their daily lives, there is not one strategy that

has been proven to 'work'. This enables some teachers to place the blame of disengagement

entirely on their students rather than examining their own teaching practices as a contributing

factor. Students who are the most vulnerable, not only academically but socially and

emotionally, are often blamed for their disengagement from school, consequently leading them

to being labeled as lazy, apathetic or not having a good work ethic (Seltzer-Kelly, 2012). In this

research, the students participating have often been described as "at-risk", based on their

behaviour, their past academic experiences as well as other indicators such as absences,

frequency of lateness and consistency of disciplinarian actions taken against them etc. In an

attempt to identify protective factors for these students, this research supports the attempts in the

engagement literature to re-examine resistance, and challenge dominant notions of school

disengagement. The objective is to locate alternative understandings and spaces for engagement.

Beginning a dialogue about/with resistance

There are also complications in qualifying and identifying resistance. Some scholars have

identified resistance as a possible unifier of people, typically based on shared experiences of

social inequities in institutional environments such as schools (Willis, 1977). Resistance to social

norms related to literacy and numeracy can create and accentuate academic achievement gaps

between learners from different backgrounds (Bennett et al., 2004). Researchers have also

investigated the role of the teacher in fostering student resistance, particularly when it contributes

to cycles of academic failure or student resilience (McNabb-Spaulding, 1995; Waxman, Gray &

Padron, 2005). Acknowledging and attempting to understand the reasons for the resistance can

help create a better and more equitable relationship between student and teacher, with the

potential to change the current curricular structure (Santoro & Forhani-Arani, 2015). In a school

setting this can take the form of changing the way that content is presented, which content is

presented and whose knowledge is validated, or more simply discussions around these topics to

facilitate a critical engagement with the material or overall school experience, rather than an

unquestioning acceptance of it.

One of the most intricate pieces in theorizing resistance is understanding (and separating)

resistance that serves the resistor versus resistance that ends by supporting and strengthening the

very structures being resisted against. Weiler (2009) posits that an active refusal of dominant

ideology can eventually grow into an empowering experience for students to reflect on their

learning and work to change their circumstance inside and outside school; it can therefore act as

a catalyst for praxis and school transformation. In this research, I explore these concepts of

resistance with a specific focus on how resistance became a type of engagement that seemed to

serve the students, leading to two student-curated gallery shows, in ways that developed from

their own interest or disinterest in their academic lives. The challenge for me was to find a

balance between identifying student resistance as engaged participation in a critique of schooling

(Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Tuck, 2011), while still attempting to find ways to engage

students in non-oppressive ways so that this would not be another experience of academic

failure for them (Low, Lipset & Proietti, 2019).

Cultural Studies' origins of resistance theory

Resistance, and student resistance in particular, was first notably theorized in the

Cultural Studies literature from Britain by scholars affiliated with the Centre for Contemporary

Cultural Studies (CCCS). These studies focused primarily on post-war, primarily white working-

class subcultures such as punk and mod. They detailed these subcultures' semiotic struggles with

ruling ideology through styles (including hair, dress, music, language, etc.), which "express, in

code, a form of resistance to the order which guarantees their continual subordination" (Hebdige,

1979, p. 18). The developing field of cultural studies relied heavily on a Marxist understanding

of the importance of class, and culture being essentially an extension of class and class

reproduction. The importance of culture to youth and their developing identities was documented

by scholars (Hebdige, 1979; McRobbie, 1980) and also discussed as being a place for tension, or

resistance, towards the social norms. These studies played an important role in early discussions

about resistance and resistance movements, particularly in the youth/student population, thinking

about new ways to understand and interpret it, both inside and outside the classroom. In these

early studies, discussions not only emphasized non-conformity in visible behaviour such as

fashion but also in challenging the status quo of social hierarchies by resisting paradigms that

trade compliance for a chance at social mobility (Willis, 1977).

Learning to Labour

The impact that the institution has on student subjectivities is undeniable. However,

in early studies on student resistance and reproduction (Willis, 1977), it is clear that students do

not merely receive social cues and internalize them without thought. They can assert their agency

over the expected scholarly and behavioural norms, in ways, argued early on, that result

unfortunately in reproducing the very systems they are fighting. Based on this dichotomy of

resistance and reproduction I will begin by framing these concepts in relation to Willis' (1977)

seminal work about student resistance and the cultural production of working-class 'lads'. I use

Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs as a starting point given

that it continues to influence scholars studying resistance in present conditions (Tuck & Yang,

2014) who are very influential to this dissertation.

       Willis' study helps us understand and analyze student resistance with a lens that

differs from the mostly teacher-centered and traditional descriptions in early engagement

research (Finn, 1998). While his is a case study of a group of young, white male students in

England in the 1970s, there are overarching themes that have helped my thinking about student

resistance towards school and my research of the urban arts. Willis' research outlines his

experiences with a group of 'lads,' a self-imposed label which this group of young men use as an

identifier in order to differentiate themselves from other students from other class backgrounds,

or those who choose to follow the expected school protocol. This group resists everything about

their schooling experience, from the authority of their female instructor to the notion that there is

merit in completing their schooling based on the promise of increased opportunity in the world.

Their behaviors in school emphasized the importance of 'having a laugh', one of the cultural

expressions they identify with and re-enact. In this work Willis shed new light on the lads'

resistance towards school, arguing that these young men were not passive receptors to their

social class standings but were enacting agency to select this future and reproduce their lived

realities. However, Willis makes clear that while the outcomes of this resistance may have

sustained the 'lads' at an individual level, their rejection of the social class paradigm guaranteed

a cyclical reproduction of their working-class status. The lads' refusal to participate in an education that they deemed a waste of time reinforced the notion that they wanted, and felt they were destined for, the working-class jobs their parents had (and which were becoming increasingly scarce, precarious, and less well compensated). This remains close to a Marxist notion of false consciousness stating that the ideology perpetuated by capitalism reinforces the notion that the social standing held by the working class is fairly attributed, beneficial and desirable. The lads believed their imagined future in working class jobs was suitable for them, rather than seeing the troubling reality preventing working class people like them from improving their living conditions and wages. The lads' lack of critical engagement with social stratification perpetuates the mindset that where someone lands in a social hierarchy is exactly where they should be. Intellectuals, the wealthy elite and social institutions are all complicit in this cyclical pattern, reinforcing class-based norms (Eyerman, 1981) and preventing shifts in social structures and power dynamics. Still, from Willis' study, theorists began to build a notion of student resistance as more complex and complete, able to acknowledge its roots in reproduction theory but also further challenging what the alternatives to reproduction are and where resistance can be conflated with rebellion.

Cultural reproduction in the development of critical theories of resistance in education

Willis makes clear that resistance needs to be understood in relation to culture and cultural reproduction. In the critical education literature, there is also an attention to the different roles that culture plays in maintaining social class and class stratification, including discussions of the role of the students in challenging these norms and using the classroom as a space for contesting them. While Marxist theories of cultural studies already linked the impacts of culture on class reproduction, work from scholars such as Apple (1979), Bowles and Gintis (1976),

Bernstein (1973) and Giroux (1983) documented the role of schooling as a key mechanism for reproducing the classist systems in place. Schools were now being described as sites of social reproduction (reproduction of the social class hierarchies in place) and not transmission (transfer of knowledge) as they had been described in earlier studies.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) paid particular attention to the role that culture plays in this classist reproductive process. They offer a notion of "cultural capital," as the social assets of a person (education, knowledge base, style of speech) that enable their mobility within the social class hierarchy. They infer that if culture is truly an extension of class, we can see how the transfer of culture, and the accessibility of this transfer, plays an important role in reproducing the class system in place. Bourdieu states that for those not born into wealthy and elite families, formal schooling can still offer an opportunity to learn about and access middle to upper-class cultural knowledge. However, this notion creates a hierarchy of cultural capital: the knowledge that is valued in society, composed of Eurocentric, classical culture over the cultural knowledge and experience from non-white and non-European traditions (Yosso, 2005), which are also unacknowledged by the education system. Therefore, a damaging aspect of the notion of cultural capital is that racialized students, primarily, are considered to be lacking valuable cultural information, enabling a deficit approach of thinking towards these students. This assumes that students need help in gaining the knowledge they lack, rather than that society should acknowledge and valorize the knowledge they already have (Valenzuela, 1999).

As will be discussed in the data analysis section of Chapters 5 and 6, there were several overt instances in which challenging the cultural capital valued by the school structure resulted in tensions amongst staff, researchers, and students (see also Low & Proietti, forthcoming). These tensions were never addressed or resolved because, as discussed later, the nature of the school

climate and curriculum reinforce the normalization of Eurocentric culture against which

everything else is measured (Yosso, 2005). Based on these experiences, examining a literature

that could further describe the impacts of cultural capital for racialized students became

important for me to understand the outcomes of this research.

Yosso (2005) gives a comprehensive list of the ways scholars of Critical Race Theory

expand Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital in a variety of ways, which may not be of value

within the traditional school structure, but are relevant and meaningful to the students, families

and communities of those identifying with these components. She lists them as aspirational,

navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital (see Delgado Bernal, 1997, 2001;

Auerbach, 2001; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Faulstich Orellana,

2003) (p.77). She uses these different conceptualizations of capital to trouble the traditional

notion of cultural capital, given that these new notions help to protect and strengthen the

communities and community members excluded and unrecognized by dominant and traditional

structures. This is the kind of reconsideration I have also sought out in the resistance literature,

helping to identify newer and more comprehensive ways of understanding student resistance.

Recent research on student resistance: Deepening understanding of what, why, how

According to Giroux (2015), resistance will develop organically as a response to

sustained oppression coming from within groups or communities of people. This definition

gives the reader an understanding that resistance is a natural human response to oppression;

however, when youth exhibit signs of resistance, particularly in school, they are not often viewed

in this light. Students who resist curriculum or traditional methods of instruction are often

labeled as troublemakers. Resistance is an action, and within that optic student resistance is

actively displayed by students from a cross-section of racial and class backgrounds, across the

highest achieving students through the lowest achieving ones (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2011).

Therefore, the action of resistance cannot necessarily be defined as a behaviour that is associated

with higher chances of dropping out but points to it as a more complicated and even natural

reaction to unresponsive and non-dynamic learning environments, curricular content and

implications for future aspirations. This leads to a deeper inquiry into what the larger purpose of

resistance is/can be and what it can look like (Caygill, 2013), framed by Tuck (2011) as: what

does resistance do, and does it do what we think it does (p. 521)?

Tuck's (2011) research describes school push-out as experiences had by students that

encourage them to leave or drop out of school, without actually forcing them to leave, or where

their reaction to mistreatment in school leads to the school justifying their expulsion. These

students often want to receive their education but are prevented from this, their race or class

status making them undesirable participants in the education system. They are consistently

treated unjustly, challenging their sense of dignity, and so they react with resistance or

opposition towards that treatment. Student response to unjust treatment, that includes lack of

acknowledgment of their identity, race, and culture in their learning, often results in negative

consequences that enable schools to push these students out. Students are suspended or expelled,

punished the student for imagining, or requesting, an equitable learning situation.

Adding complexity to resistance theory

Student oppositional behaviour or just giving up: From opposition to transformative

resistance

Solorzano & Delgado-Bernal (2001) caution that not only do we put students at risk by

celebrating their resistant actions with no further plan for change in their environment but we

also risk celebrating actions which are primarily defiant or oppositional. For them, the difference

between oppositional and resistant behaviour has to do with intention, and a basis in social

justice actions, helping to return to the larger question of why asked earlier on. Basing their

theory on the early work of Giroux (1983), these authors created a grid with four categories (see

Figure 2), depending on student awareness of the conditions of their resistance and whether their

behaviour might contribute to a socially just and equitable learning environment: reactionary

behavior, self-defeating resistance, conformist resistance, and transformational resistance.

Figure 2

Defining the concept of resistance

FIGURE 1   Defining the Concept of Resistance
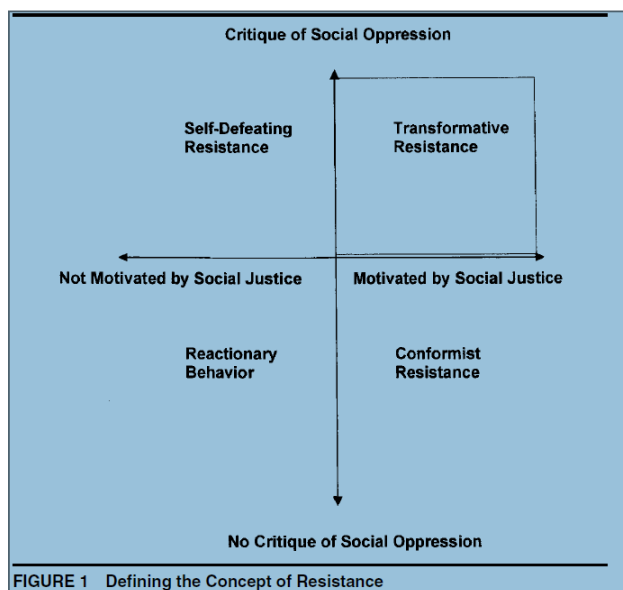
(Solorzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001, p.318)

This grid and system can be problematized as still attempting to contain student

resistance within the confines of the system in place. However, what is of interest is that they

specify that there are some student behaviours that are not resistant and that these need to be

addressed and worked with differently than student resistant behaviours. This is "reactionary

behaviour", which they describe as:

the student who acts out or behaves poorly in class, the schoolyard, or the community and has no critique of the social conditions that may contribute to her or his disruptive behavior. In addition, the student is not motivated by an interest in social justice and may challenge the teacher or other authority figures "just for kicks" or "to see the teacher sweat." (Solorzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001, p. 307).

Solorzano and Delgado-Bernal say that for an action to be a true form of resistance there needs to be some level of awareness of oppression. There are three other types of resistance in this model. Self-defeating resistance is described as the typical understanding of resistance in the research literature. These students have a critique of their social oppression, but exhibit behaviours making them complicit in their domination. They may have opinions of the way school can be harmful but will not participate or attend class resulting in failure or eventual dropping out and the continuation of the cycle of academic failure. Conformist resistance is demonstrated by students who are interested or motivated by social justice however, they have no critique or understanding of the systemic structures which reinforce oppressive and controlling ideologies and methods of operation. These are students who consider immediate solutions to problems (or will take responsibility themselves) without identifying the responsibility of the larger systems in place as a requirement for actual change to take place. Transformative resistance is when students are both motivated by social justice while being able to recognize and critique the social structures in place enabling the cyclical oppression to exist.

While this is challenged by other scholars, as I will discuss in the following section of critiques surrounding resistance, what remains important is that without a conscious acknowledgement, by students and educator, that students are being oppressed within a formal

education setting, actions that oppose this system will continue to be received as oppositional or reactionary.

Working through the resistance literature leads to understanding of the complexities of resistance and can help to categorize and understand oppositional behaviour within this context. Through further investigation of youth experience and the notion of oppositional behavior (Nolan, 2011; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal), we are able to better understand variations in student behaviour, small and larger acts of resistance and opposition, by placing more emphasis on the question of why. Why is this behaviour happening, why are students resisting, and why are they opposed to the rules they are reacting against? Responding to these notions of difference in the understanding of behaviour and outcome, Nolan (2011) states that 'oppositional' activity and attitudes do not necessarily equate to a rejection of schooling. If, as Nolan is stating, students are motivated to succeed on their own terms, challenging the notion of reproduction, as Tuck (2011) stated, is a necessary position for educators and researchers to take.

I believe that, as argued by Scott, the notion that students are complicit in the reproduction of a false consciousness too easily allows educators and researchers not to use their positions to highlight/celebrate student resistance and strategically locate it within a classroom setting, or can go as far as punishing students for creative demonstrations of criticality. This stunts the potential for growth regarding how the education system can (and must) change in order to better serve the needs of students. In order to move past that, or through it, educators must be committed to having an awareness of these different understandings of opposition and resistance in the context of schooling, while also trying to foster awareness within the students about their learning environments. The student resistance literature therefore asks how the role of the educator can and must evolve to respond to the many forms and strategies for student

resistance. Scott's (1989, 1990) celebration of everyday acts of resistance reminds the reader

that small acts of covert resistance are cumulative and can result in large-scale change when

enacted by many. As asserted by Tuck (2011), theories of cultural resistance and everyday

resistance help to reveal the limits of dominance (p.524), and therefore in connection to student

resistance and opposition to their school experiences and identities, a strategic map for change

emerges.

Romanticizing resistance

Upon reflection on her early work on dropouts, Fine (2013) challenges the academic gaze

falling upon these rebellious resistors. She does this in ways that ensure that we remember what

these youth are risking and losing, what their realities will look like after research has ended, and

where the parallels lie between being damaged by staying in oppressive conditions or choosing

to leave them. As Fine (2013) writes,

> Romancing the bad boy and worshiping his/her bold opposition, there was too little
>
> attention to consequence. Although young people's resistance clearly derived from
>
> political, relational, embodied and sometimes quiet intellectual recognition of what was
>
> happening around them, their forms of resistance may have been good for us, but in
>
> deeply material and existential terms, not always good for them. (p. 108)

Returning to the student engagement literature, student resistance is often viewed with a

particularly negative lens and yet, some of the earliest work done around resistance demonstrates

the multi-faceted existence of resistance in terms of both student agency and the development of

student subjectivities. While student resistance may be bewildering, challenging, and often

demotivating for teachers despite best attempts to create meaningful curriculum (McFadden &

Munns, 2002) it is more complicated than individual students simply disengaging from

school. Resistance, like engagement, is complicated and messy. It gets pulled in many different directions, often depending on the needs of the researchers. Whether or not society can accept resistance movements as valuable, their existence has generated a great deal of attention towards topics of accessibility, representation, and equitable treatment.

Kelley (1996) illustrates the importance of everyday acts of resistance and how large (including global) social movements are only a snapshot of all the previous years of acts of resistance, which led up to making the movements possible. This description inspired me to imagine that if, as educators, we embark on the daily work of challenging notions of curriculum and learning by embracing resistance towards these rigid structures, these daily struggles can potentially lead to large-scale change because ultimately, we have to start somewhere. It is also a reminder to not render invisible the everyday acts of resistance that lead to change, as the process to change is often long and difficult and we do a disservice in ignoring all the effort required to effect change.

Teleological and system critique

Theorists make the claim that resistance of youth, specifically marginalized and racialized youth, exists in many forms, but that it must extend beyond the understanding of being purposeful only in the transformation of the colonial systems that punish and humiliate them. The challenge for educators is to reconceive ways of educating to serve their students and recognize where education is failing their students. Therefore, acts of resistance cannot be used as a method to quantify success or failure in this system (Tuck, 2011) but resistance must be understood as fluid and dynamic (Dimitriadis, 2011), a tool for negotiation of educational injustice (Tuck, 2011) without a pre-determined endgame for student success. Through this lens of understanding, scholars have made claims to move beyond the dichotomy of reproduction and

resistance (Tuck, 2011) and complicate these notions depending on the student experience (race, class, gender etc.). Resistance can often exist in forms and practices that the general population may not deem as successful, meaningful or appropriate. However, an outside approval of resistance and acts of resistance are unimportant to those involved in the resistance or to future resistance movements — placing that into the context of student-specific resistance we see resistance in many forms and found in many places. Kelley (2013) reminds us that we must remain vigilant to not frame youth resistance as separate from or lesser than 'adult' resistance, being meaningful, effective and relevant in its own right.

There is an inherent problem in evaluating the benefits or usefulness of resistance to systems through a lens that does not acknowledge the damage these cause. Tuck's teleological critique is a particularly strong caution against theories of student resistance which only deem it as successful if people can move from being uneducated to educated, or from uncivilized to active citizens:

> Teleological theories of resistance and youth resistance …operate (usually without thought or intention) under colonial theories of change that place the Western world and neoliberal, white ideology at the finish line of societal evolution…Such conceptualizations of resistance rely on developmental or progress-oriented theories of change, the same theories that presume the "improvement" from savage to civilized, wild to domesticated, and unschooled to educated… (Tuck forthcoming). (Tuck & Yang, 2012 p. 522).

In this quote, Tuck takes a strong position against the teleological theories of resistance that measure their usefulness or successfulness in terms determined by those being resisted against. This is an essential point as it challenges how subversive actions and behaviours can be

understood and that resistant acts should not use measures for success that are used by other

oppressive structures. Instead, scholars and teachers must exist with discomfort, understanding

that resistant behaviours serve a purpose outside of what it also 'can or should' be doing.

Echoing the need to understand the different conditions under which resistance exists,

particularly in the minds of evaluators and funders, is what Scott (2013) calls system-compatible

resistance and system-incompatible resistance (p. 137-138). Scott states that the former is

resistance viewed as useful to structures such as funding agents, and the latter is driven by the

needs of those leading the struggle who do not have an end goal of creating a structured

movement out of their actions. Fordham (2013) sums up these tensions by comparing resistance

to an umbrella, and the oppressive structures being the rain. While resistance may be an action to

change a personal experience of a storm, it does nothing to stop the rain, and so at what point is it

useful to continue operating under certain conditions when it does nothing to change the larger

structures we are constantly acting against? While this argument has also been made by others

(Camus, 1961) who view resistance as both inevitable as well as consistently unsuccessful, I tend

to agree with Tuck's position as it allows a more complex approach to resistance to be taken,

moving away from judgements of successful or not. However, in understanding resistance this

way, complications of evaluation or analysis in the case of this research arise. An argument

defended by several scholars (Fordham & Tuck, 2015) is that resistance is most valuable when

functioning alongside a theory of change or transformation: a process to reflect upon and discuss

worldviews and philosophies of change, and, a non-linear way to consider what will change as

well as the underlying assumptions around how and why change will happen (Barnett &

Gregorowski, 2013). Resistance itself is not enough to evaluate the outcomes of a project or

program but also cannot be evaluated by standards of success set to ensure the continued

oppression of people to the benefit of others. Therefore, it becomes most useful when understood

as part of a broader spectrum of systemic questioning and change.

Responsibilities of the researcher in practice

What are the implications of these complexities for researchers? Researchers must

rethink research goals and understanding of the outcomes as well as continue to reconsider

structural reform within these specific, school-based contexts. According to Fine (2013),

acknowledging the specificity of the context is an imperative element in conducting research

with, about, or through resistance. In her experience, the 'one-size fits all' method to recreating

successful education projects is one of the most damaging effects of the absorption of social

justice into a neoliberal minded system. When there are attempts to recreate successful, social

justice-based projects, the goals are often not in line with the original intention of the project, and

the entire essence of what was accomplished is lost.

As well, there arises a tension between working to position and value student resistance

while trying to co-create a curriculum that will be used in a traditional learning setting. This is

particularly challenging when the goal is to help students meet requirements to be able to

succeed in these settings: graduate from high school, pass their school year, encourage better

attendance records and behaviour that will result in fewer punishments (detentions, suspensions

etc.). Throughout the data analysis, I attempt to engage with some of these complexities,

particularly in relation to the experience of attending an award ceremony with the students at the

end of their first exhibit. Constant praxis and conversation with the students was one of the ways

I found myself responding to the challenges presented in this literature review.

As well, when conducting critical work around schools, Levinson & Holland (1996)

remind us that schools can be challenging spaces to study because access to information requires

that researchers pass through 'gatekeepers' (p.19) who can give and retract permission for studies throughout the course of research. While this can serve as a protection mechanism from irresponsible research, it can also limit the access to, and understanding of, some of the more complex issues we see existing in school settings. The authors' point seems of particular importance in the case of examining student resistance, and the environment surrounding it, given that the research will most likely involve a critique of the people who are involved, even when they are not the focus of the project. Fine (2013) also cautions against this in the case of her own research. Upon reflection, she discusses the danger in attributing resistance solely to the students and allowing the teachers and administration to be one-dimensional characters blindly enabling the reproductive education system. The complexities of the adults involved are equally crucial to the lives and experiences of the students, and when not given the space to exist as such can result in frustration, anger, and closure towards the work being done in the classroom.

Looking again to my own research, I believe that one of the three factors that Tuck & Yang (2014) describe as being accomplished in Willis' later work has merit for this research as well. What they describe as "refusing tautologies that shut down feelings of responsibility and possibility" (p. 28), I see as being consistently important in the classroom context. It places a responsibility on the teachers and community members (including researchers and academics) to respond to the crippling realities of the neoliberal hierarchy in school and society and not to accept the doom and gloom theories, which state that nothing will change until the system itself is dismantled. Tuck & Yang complete their analysis by stating that Willis encourages us to unlearn what we think we know about youth resistance and relearn it in ways that will help theorize for change. Fine (2013) summarizes the task and helps to guide us forward as the study and understanding of resistance becomes increasingly critical and urgent:

Resistance theorists/researchers/ educators/activists have an obligation to document

spaces that feed our collective capacity for critical inquiry and action, and particularly

within institutions that breed structural violence, legitimate stratification and choke the

much-too-forgiving souls of young people living in poverty and surrounded by racism.

(p. 119)

This is precisely what my research and on-going work at UAH strives to do.

Conclusion

There are many parallels that can and should be drawn between engagement, resistance

and student experience. With the focus consistently remaining on the need to challenge the

structure within which our students function, understanding how to support them through

meaningful learning opportunities has led me to a theoretical framework at an intersection of

engagement and resistance theories. I first situated the research in critical theories and then

examined how all elements of these theories could help to create an understanding of student

experience in and reaction to classrooms that are not responsive to their needs, identities or

realities but that can be modified in ways that would be representative and inclusive. This

demonstrates a return to Fordham & Tuck's (2015) assertion that resistance is understood best

when functioning alongside a theory of change. Understanding the long-term goals of the project

as described above, and working backwards towards those outcomes helps to highlight the ways

in which resistance can be a catalyst for change. Building from cultural production and

reproduction theories, this research asks us to consider what resistance is and how to work within

it, while not co-opting it for the purposes of traditional versions of success. The following

chapter will discuss Youth Participatory Action Curation, which is both a finding and a

methodology of this dissertation. YPAC allows me to explore this terrain of resistance and

engagement, and draws upon Youth Participatory Action Research models while incorporating the arts-based approach of curation, to address the systemic exclusion of any who cannot or do not identify with the provincially mandated, Eurocentric curriculum.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

WHAT IS YPAC? TOWARDS A PROCESS OF YOUTH PARTICIPATORY

ACTION CURATION

Threads and themes emerge across the accounts above, perhaps most salient are those concerning the need for humility, for earnestness and for listening. We can see the importance of not holding on to preconceived notions too preciously and not taking oneself too seriously, not only to ethically engage with youth co-researchers, but for the sake of the quality of concepts and ideas that flow from those collaborations. What seems to cascade across the accounts is a rendering of collectivity itself as a theory of change. (Tuck & Yang, 2013 p. 276)

Humility, earnestness and listening

My research emerged from observations and experiences while working at Urban Arts high school for six years, starting in November 2011, and stems from my desire to help create more meaningful and authentic learning experiences for the students with the hope of redefining and increasing student engagement. This project documents and analyzes my journey with the UAH school community through the creation of the UAH gallery.

Through a year of participant observation, conducting interviews, documenting the curatorial process and through constant analysis and revision of the gallery program, my research demonstrated that the UAH gallery served a dual purpose. The gallery created the context for students to obtain class credit while also presenting an opportunity to practice transformative resistance to their schooling experiences through a counter cultural, student-run arts space. While this may still not be an ideal scenario given the underlying incentive of offering students an

opportunity for success defined in teleological terms (eg. grades and credit), as discussed in chapter two, the teacher found ways through discussion and interaction to emphasize student experience and voice throughout the process, rather than student success in the traditional sense.

As the gallery project developed, I realized that the youth were playing a role that resembled that of youth researchers in the Youth Participatory Action Research work invoked by Fine and Cammarota (2013). In the case of this research, the medium for the youth to self-express, critique, and transform was curation rather than research methods more traditionally conceived. I therefore put forward the concept of Youth Participatory Action Curation (YPAC), an extension of YPAR's recognized methodology that puts youth in the role of decision maker, narrative creator and new knowledge producer, in the context of an art space which they curate. In the case of this research, this took place in a gallery created by the students; however, YPAC could shape any number of different exhibit spaces such as museums or on-line platforms. What becomes the most important factor for the youth participating is that the narrative they are responsible for – the story told by the exhibit they curate -- is one that is truthful to them. The exhibits can be used to speak to their personal experiences both in and out of school, as well as to comment about certain things they would like to see changed in their own lives or larger surroundings. In order to understand YPAC, it is important to describe its origins in both PAR and YPAR. This methodology also draws upon critical curation studies and visual methodologies. YPAC, the innovation I have made by drawing on and cobbling together PAR, YPAR and critical curation studies,both shapes this dissertation's methodology, producing the data that I study, and is also one of its findings, since it is something that emerged during the study. As a result, this chapter begins to respond to the overarching research objective of this dissertation, which is to define and explore YPAC.

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

PAR is a methodology that is inherently political and recognizes the merit of different forms of knowledge. Historically, researchers and participants wondered how participant voice and experience could be (re)located as the central component of research data (Jordan, 2003). PAR seeks to be respectful in the treatment of all involved, putting participants in a leadership role and giving them opportunity to shape the research, develop research questions and analyze the findings so as not to recreate the research hierarchy seen in more traditional models of research, prioritizing the goals of the researcher. PAR has continuously evolved from its early connection to action research (AR) and the work of social psychologist Kurt Lewin in the 1940's and 50's, which is a method generally used in the social sciences seeking transformative change. This happens by simultaneously taking action and doing research, and engaging in continuous critical reflection. The intentions of AR are to represent those who are often rendered invisible in other forms of traditional research; however, the focus of this methodology is very heavily on the researcher, their voice and interpretation. From this, PAR developed through its use within critical, feminist and Marxist research studies, conducted with groups of marginalized and oppressed people, struggling for meaningful and active acknowledgement of the issues of systemic and institutionalized racism, sexism, classism etc. While AR located itself within professional development practices by and for researchers and university professors, developed in Eurocentric nations, PAR veered away from the researcher towards the researched, a method that was developed primarily in the global south by activist researchers (Freire, 1970; Fals Borda, 1977; Swanz, 1970). This means that while this method has been designed by researchers, the research gives place to the researched to be in control of telling their own stories, asking important questions and deciding the most effective ways to create change in their surroundings,

particularly within the developing world. Important figures in the early development of this methodology include critical pedagogue Paolo Freire, a seminal figure in the development of critical inquiry in education. The traditional approach to PAR honours the fact that the researched have invaluable knowledge and experience, but because traditionally the researcher perspective is the primary focus, this knowledge has been downplayed. PAR offered the opportunity for a repositioning of the traditional roles of research subjects (Fals-Borda, 1979; Rahman, 1985; Fine & Torre, 2004; Torre, 2005). Understanding the importance of voice and being able to access it is an essential practice when the goal of the research is to help communities develop their own capacity for representation and to fight against oppressive systems of power. In this body of literature, we see that empowerment requires independence, also reflected in the student motivation and engagement literature, which struck me as important and creates a strong link to the framework for this research.

The use of PAR is widespread in many disciplines across the world, which makes the methodology current and adaptable to needs of different research projects. Useful in succinctly defining and understanding PAR, the Public Science Project (PSP) functioning in the Community University of New York (CUNY) defines PAR within its historical contexts as:

> Based largely on the theory and practice of Latin American activist scholars, PAR scholars draw from neo-Marxist, feminist, queer and critical race theorists (Anzaldua, 1987; Apple, 2001; Crenshaw, 1995; Weis & Fine, 2004; Lykes, 2001; Matsuda, 1995; Williams, 1998) to articulate methods and ethics that have local integrity and stretch topographically to sight/cite global patterns of domination and resistance (Katz, 2004). (Retrieved from http://publicscienceproject.org/about/history/)

As discussed in the literature review, scholarship from critical theorists is the foundation of this research. This is why I have found relevance and usefulness in using a methodology recognized by a cross-section of these scholars. I acknowledge the necessity of ethically working with the local contributors to the research, who are most impacted by the project. I strive to support students in their personal experiences of resistance towards institutional harm in ways that benefit them both in the present and future. With those as my main motivators, I found PAR, and its subset YPAR, to be the methodology aligned most closely to my researcher identity.

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR)

There has been increasing research done, particularly in the past decade, adapting PAR methods to work with youth, developing their capacities as researchers (Powers & Allaman, 2012; Voyce, 2008; Bautista, et al., 2013) instead of being only used as research subjects. Educational researchers are increasingly involving youth in participatory research processes (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Morrell, 2004) in which they learn research skills and tools to study and offer analysis of their research sites, in order to effect change. Research done by Cammarota & Fine (2008) describes the experience of a youth-as-researcher model, including its power to shape and disrupt societal constructs through their research. They name it a formal pedagogy of disruption, engaging youth in transformational resistance (14), which by Cammarota's (2017) definition ("resistances that have the potential to transform young people's subjectivities while allowing them to envision ways of learning to counteract oppressive and reproductive schooling" p.188) is almost identical to Delgado-Bernal's definition of transformative resistance, and the definition I am engaging with in this dissertation. While I do not use those terms interchangeably, as they are not interchangeable in other bodies of literature such as leadership studies, for these authors they indicate the same type of resistance. In most of its inceptions,

YPAR is a methodology through which youth are able to voice their opinions on, and often

dissatisfactions with, the treatment that they receive in a variety of typically institutional contexts

(schools, public spaces etc.). The youth as researcher model infuses youth voices and

perspectives into conversations about schooling, develops youth leaders, and increases youth

investment in change processes.

YPAR inspirations and divergences for this project

While there was some divergence from traditional YPAR methodology, several of its key

elements have directly affected the methodological focus of the curatorial element of this project.

This includes the emphasis on youth voice and having the project be youth led, in collaboration

with adults. The gallery space project is able to support students' right to question their daily

experiences, both in and out of school, and develop their own understandings of how these social

inequalities are reproduced, and how they could contest these practices. Another key element is

YPAR's potential as a tool for social change through research led by youth in spaces that affect

them the most.

I am able to further connect the examples and frameworks of YPAR to this research

through an analysis of the case study by Iwasaki et al. (2014), which was a detailed study by

youth who were participating in research about YPAR, and identifying the attributes they found

to make a YPAR project successful. The youth in their research collectively discussed and found

themes they agreed made projects meaningful and useful to them, and grouped them into

different categories to further explain their relevance (see Figure 2 below). This interestingly

mimics what took place with the UAH students, even without their realizing that they were

conducting research through participating in the project. As shown in Figure 3, a successful

youth-led research project, described in terms of its philosophy/principles, must be empowering,

and present opportunities for the students with actual learning and with community connections.

Intuitively, our project developed in a way that emphasized the importance of these three

themes. This graphic will be revisited in the final chapter, as I review these elements of YPAR

in connection to the development of YPAC through a discussion of the data themes that emerged

through student interviews and observations.

Figure 3

Key components of the framework for youth engagement

FIGURE 1 Relationships among the key components of the framework for youth engagement.
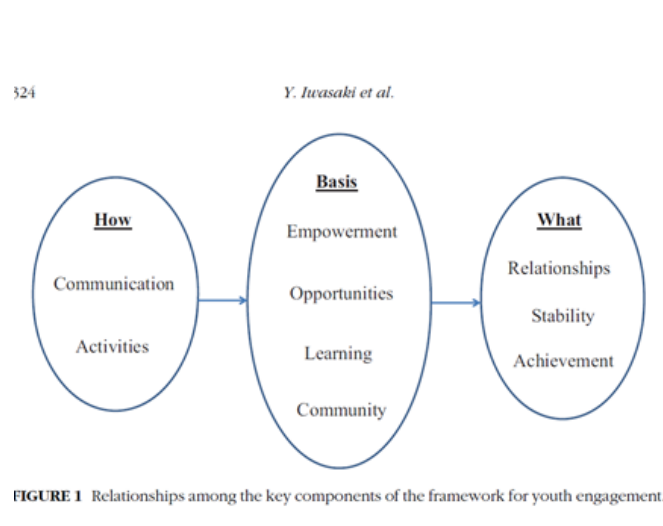
(Iwasaki et al., 2014, p. 324)

There are many complexities surrounding the term participatory and how this will affect

youth involvement in research. Some literature discusses different levels and ways of thinking

about representation, accessibility and decision-making in participatory projects (Low,

Brushwood Rose, Salvio, & Palacios, 2012). In PAR that involves youth, there remains

contention over how much they can actually direct the research, including playing a leadership

role in the project and being actively involved in developing the research questions. Some worry

that in some YPAR projects, youth might be involved as researchers or participants in the

research process in only a tokenized way (Tupuola, 2006). This was a concern for me as I did not

want to reproduce this kind of experience for the students and had to be careful that my own

knowledge and experiences in curation did not overpower their learning processes. This became

a worry early on in the research, as the gallery was not a project the students conceived of

themselves. I proposed it to them and they accepted to take the project on, but did not imagine

the idea themselves as a way to voice their opinions and create new knowledge around their lived

experiences. In fact, I had not imagined the gallery becoming a space for students to challenge

systemic oppression and negligent curriculum construction, but once the project was underway

and I observed it taking place, the possibilities of the space became far greater. Therefore, this

project is a hybrid of an idea I had and the ways in which it transformed to reflect student

interest. As curators, they were able to question and resist traditional norms and the gallery

became a research site, creating new knowledge in a counter-cultural location, by the students as

well as by me.

Another area where this research strays from the ideal model of youth as researchers is

that students were required to participate in this project (Guerrero, Gaztambide-

Fernández, Rosas & Guerrero, 2013), assessed for course credit by the teacher, using a

traditional grading scheme (percentages and a pass/fail system of evaluation). As previously

mentioned, an important challenge at UAH is that students are often not motivated to work when

not receiving credit for their efforts, believing it does not "count" for anything. Yet requiring

students to participate in this project with potential negative repercussions for not doing so is

also counter intuitive and counter to the spirit of YPAR. While the teacher encouraged the

students to self-reflect and self-evaluate based on the work they completed while putting together

the exhibits, they were graded for this on their final report cards and participation was required

as part of the successful completion of the 15+ program. This kind of context requires us to ask

ourselves whether the students would have still chosen to participate had they not 'needed' to. I

still cannot say with any certainty that obtaining the requirements for the 15+ program was not a,

or even the, dominant motivator for them to participate as curators.

Finally, in another area of divergence from some of the core principles of YPAR, the

youth involved in curating the gallery were not involved in the final analysis of the data, or in its

dissemination. The reality of working within this school context is that each year the group of

students in the 15+ program changes, and by the time I had collected all the data, the school year

had ended and the students were mostly unreachable. Despite these limitations, the experience of

the documented year has shown that since the politically based theme of each show was youth

selected, and the conversations that were developed from these themes connected to the students'

personal experiences and lead to change-making moves in the community and school, I believe

the link to YPAR remains undeniably strong.

Critical curation studies

As a result of incorporating arts-based inquiry into this research, the visual is an

important component of this project. While arts-based research and inquiry include all mediums

as possibilities for data (performance, narratives, sound etc.), my research is mainly focused on

the collection of visual data through the curation of the gallery. Visual arts data and research

have been discussed in relation to the many different forms it can encompass, including

everything from the more traditional visual arts (Leavey, 2009), to photo-voice projects

(Mitchell, 2011,) to curation (DeBeer, 2015) and the evolution from visual to multi-sensory art

experiences (Pink, 2011). As noted in Leavey, the visual arts create a space for multiple

meanings to emerge, originating from the artist who created the work but also being constructed

by the public experiencing the work (p. 215).

This project explores the visual in relation to its curation, but not in relation to audience experience or interpretation. I have been able to connect some of my experiences at UAH to the frameworks of critical museology as well as to the more recent work about art curation in diverse settings. Based on the earlier discussion stating that critical theory is not only a school of thought but also a process of critique (Giroux, 1983, p. 8), I have examined literature that understands the act of curation within critical frameworks, such as work done by Delgado (2015) and DeBeer (2015). The latter is of particular interest to me as that research focus is on the experiences of working "at-risk" youth and on how exhibits, if done conscientiously, can transmit powerful messages and redefine lines of communication, similar to what this dissertation aims to explore.

In recent museology, transformative developments towards sharing authority within traditional spaces are becoming more commonplace, and there are communities of people whose stories are now being told through previously unattainable methods (Lehrer & Milton, 2011). This fits well with PAR/YPAR, which challenges the traditional research context by opening up the role of researcher to people who would not previously have had access. Bennett (1995) argues that in both museums and galleries, we can use "culture" as a tool for social management. While this can be a way to maintain the current hierarchy of knowledge/power, it can also be a way to challenge it. Social management does not need to mean social control; rather it can also be a tool to lead people towards new knowledge and understanding. Therefore, in order to be able to challenge the hierarchy that grants authority to traditional galleries and museums, it is essential to engage in critical analysis of curatorial decision-making in order not to reproduce the social control dynamic. This methodology connects directly with the research questions as I work to understand how curation can respond to YPAR in its own unique and effective way, as well as how it can help to reframe both resistance and engagement in a setting

that is supportive and responsive to student needs. Creating a space for student agency to be the priority has helped these questions intersect with one another while also helping me to make sense of the multiple student perspectives represented in the data and understanding my own response to the experience.

The benefits of curation as methodology

The strengths of curatorial work as a valuable methodology have been recognized as simultaneously "embracing research, analysis, cultural representation, creative expression, social intervention and dialogue with broad publics" (Butler & Lehrer, p. 5). These potential outcomes were very appealing based on the needs and interests of the UAH students as well as the early stated desired outcomes for this research project, such as increasing student identification with their school and the curriculum, increasing engagement with curriculum, and discovering new ways to teach current content (including building on the already existing content). This is the reason some basic components of curation and participatory museology shape the research methodology.

The act of curation differs from the act of art production, requiring a different set of skills. The curator must be able to communicate successfully with an audience using art from other artists while emphasizing the importance of the overall visitor experience within the space, including the cohesiveness of the exhibit and the aesthetic appeal to convey specific messages. When planning an exhibit, the curator must take into account: "titles, venues, curatorial goals, theoretical, substantive or museological issues such as ethical considerations, partnership agreements, board level policies and restrictions etc. . . ., and having specific curatorial strategies and processes of exhibition development" (Butler & Lehrer, p.4). While gallery curators do not need to be practicing artists, the impact of their choices of what to display and how can result in

being just as important to audience experience as the actual art itself. This kind of 'behind-the-scenes' work requires a critical thought process and eventual praxis requiring fewer technical skills than art production in some ways, while still offering similar, expressive opportunities. It is one of the reasons it can be more accessible as a type of action for youth. Increased likelihood for critical reflection is possible through a public action such as gallery curation, or even graffiti writing as has been discussed earlier, mainly because it is the youth who are driving the content to diverse audiences.

The individual and the group: Curation as a method for change

Another interesting component of curation as a method of questioning means being able to focus on both the roles of the individuals as well as roles within a group setting, which according to Mitchell (1990) is an important element when working towards implementing change. While the emphasis in school contexts often seems to be on the experience of the individual, the collaborative nature of the 15+ program, in which they often work in small groups to accomplish tasks within the context of a larger project, meant investigating curation done with groups of students. As we see in Mitchell (1990, p. 90):

> Schratz and Walker (1995) argue that a critical feature of various interventions that lend themselves to social change is that they are in fact social in nature in the first place. They involve the group and cannot be managed 'individually and in isolation' (1995: 172). Schratz and Walker go on to explain: 'It [Motivation] requires a collaborative effort and a reassessment of the nature of self in relation to social context, not a submerging of the individual within the collective, but a recognition that the person only exists in the light of significant others' (1995: 172).

This reminds us that within the critical context of pedagogical work, and working towards social change, the experience of the individual within the group is imperative to understand. While collaborative work can be a challenging structure to function within, in this research the group decisions largely reflected the uniqueness of the individuals who made up the group of students working on the curatorial project. This also works in connection with the quote from Tuck and Yang in the epigraph of this chapter; as they name collectivity itself as a theory of change, and we are reminded how important and impactful it is to identify all the individual elements that come together to make up a project outcome. This leads to better planning, in that activities are linked to a detailed understanding of how change actually happens/a program is able to attain its desired outcomes. Therefore, the individual is important as a contributor to the group, but also the group cannot exist without each of the individuals. Because of this, it would make sense that students who struggle to identify with their usual school surroundings would be more willing to engage in an experience that has them working with peers while still being respectful of their individuality. I believe that supporting and highlighting the individual within the collective also can give visibility to identities, stories and causes often ignored in a traditional setting. Fostering this kind of group cohesion can thus be conducive to thinking about social justice issues and is therefore more closely identifiable as a transformative resistant action. Thus the link between critical museology, participatory museum experiences and youth curation is that the space that is created through curation enables discussion and gives visibility to under-examined subjects led by those who live these realities, with an effort to bring about change.

Understanding students as curators

> We should admit… that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it
>
> because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge

directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative

constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and

constitute at the same time power relations. (Rose, p. 136)

Concepts discussed in curation done by and with adults have inspired me to explore the

potential of this methodology combined with a youth informed research lens. As mentioned

above, curation is a unique entry point into art as it requires less technical skill in art production

but still allows for an experience as an art producer. It also gives the curators access to a public

voice, and in the case of alternative and counter cultural art spaces, this is a space for voices

often silenced. Heading in this direction has allowed this research to delve into the world of

curation as a method of storytelling and with the potential for transformative resistance in

participatory and meaningful ways for a group of racialized and non-racialized youth. This

objective has shaped my approach to supporting students as curators, giving the students the

opportunity to open the gates of knowledge production to be more inclusive and representative of

their lives and experiences. A great deal of the curation (and museology) literature focuses on

the curatorial experiences of adults, both as professionals in the arts as well as those who come

from other backgrounds. My intention is to add a new voice to the mix by including student

curators in discussions about what is possible through a curatorial practice. Given this, I believe

that curation, and in this case, youth curation more specifically, is a viable option for teachers

and students to educate and learn within the larger framework of critical pedagogy.

It has been shown that if done conscientiously, art shows can be used in countless

different ways to transmit powerful messages and redefine lines of communication to diverse

audiences near and far (Delgado, 2015). This has led me to believe that examining curation as a

method of redefining the message transmitted in schools about whose story should be told, and

the medium that can be used to challenge these norms, would be helpful in creating new

opportunities we can actually offer our students through critical, arts-based actions. In our

creation of this gallery, the students making curatorial decisions were in a position of power

because they were creating new knowledge. Although the students might not have thought of

themselves as seizing power, as seen in the epigraph, this is part of what was taking place. By

challenging traditional notions of knowledge, the shift in the balance of power was subtle, but as

I reflect on the process and experience, I clearly saw this taking place. However, it is also worth

mentioning that, as will be discussed in the data analysis of chapter five, adults met this power

shift with resistance that took multiple forms, from less overt to very direct.

Curation can be valuable for all students but, I argue, can also specifically respond to the

needs of the students who are expressing or engaging with resistant behaviors, and can be put

into action as a tool which can not only critique the structures of traditional education systems

but can potentially create an opportunity for voice and collaboration within it. This helps address

some of the concerns raised in the resistance literature about the importance of students

participating in school while still finding non-tokenized ways of expressing their concerns about

school and proposing solutions.

The place of the adult facilitator in YPAC

Shaped by my commitments to fostering critical thinking and pedagogy, I believe that

recreating an understanding of the role of the museum/gallery as well as the curator is imperative

in order to not simply reproduce the hierarchy of power that exists in those spaces. Simon (2009)

makes the argument that involving the public in the role of curation does not supersede the need

for those with experience and expertise in the field. What it does do is make the 'platform' of the

museum (or gallery) more accessible, user-friendly, more relatable and inclusive, hopefully

enticing more students to participate, engage, and channel their resistance. The notion that those with experience still have a role to play in a space, which is attempting to put an emphasis on the voice of the 'inexperienced' or non-expert, helped me to further understand and define the role of student curator in relation to their adult (teacher) counterparts. For the adults still need to help guide students to collaboratively give shape to the final theme and outcome of the presented exhibits. This vision respects, without overly emphasizing, the contributing or facilitating adults' experience (and expertise) in putting together art shows.

As discussed earlier, we can see in the YPAR literature that the role of the adult is an important one as a collaborator and scaffolder of youth experience towards completing research goals, answering specific questions and generating new knowledge (Powers & Allaman, 2012). As youth learn how to become researchers, the adults collaborating on the project need to be able to guide this learning without imposing their own views on the research goals and outcomes. In my own experience, this can be complicated to navigate, especially with larger groups of students who do not necessarily all share a unified vision. Navigating difficult decision-making requires experience, however, and students can definitely benefit from having these experiences.

Recently, the potential of working within a curatorial framework has become of interest across disciplines such as African American studies, anthropology, art history, Canadian studies, cultural studies, Latino studies, media studies and museum studies (Butler & Lehrer, p. 4). Through these projects, researchers are increasingly acknowledging not only the transformative potential of the arts, but also the potential for message dissemination, knowledge and historical story sharing through curation in ways which had previously been reserved for an elite group of specialists. As we see this shift take place, I believe it is the perfect time to ensure youth voice is included amongst curators in all types of settings. Imagination and motivation to tell a story are

at the core of where the curatorial journey begins and this can only truly happen if the students are supported through this journey by the facilitators who are helping to guide them through this process. Once we establish this, we must also eventually consider the question of aesthetics and design, given that in the fields of visual and arts-based research, a certain amount of importance is placed on the ability to understand and work within a set of aesthetic guidelines.

Aesthetics and artist involvement

My intention in now briefly mentioning the aesthetic component of arts presentations is to complement the curatorial research stating that in order for the experience to be of value for the youth involved in the process, there must be people who attend the exhibits (Delgado, 2015). In order for our students to have the confidence to present an exhibit publically, they have stated they must believe it looks good (is of high quality), as will be discussed in the data analysis. Responding to the critiques of aesthetic sensibilities surrounding the arts, both Faulkner (2005) and Percer (2002) insist that true arts-based research is performed by practicing artists and not those simply interested in the arts with no substantial background. In spite of how one can interpret this as elitist or exclusive, there is a value to thinking about the experiences and sensibilities of professional artists as essential in enhancing the experience of the student participants as well as exhibit-goers. In the same way that navigating student difficulties requires an expertise from the teacher or community worker, as mentioned earlier, so does creating an art space.

The UAH gallery project includes a commitment to showcasing art made by professional artists alongside student artists. Because several of the exhibiting artists also committed their time to the functioning of the gallery (several artists have helped in the curation process including work selection and installation) then, according to Percer (2002) and Faulkner (2005),

the gallery could be considered a site for conducting arts-based research. Given the involvement

of artists with expertise in both the art world and in a teaching context, the experience of gallery

curation can be evaluated not simply on its professional aesthetic qualities, but for the value of

the overall pedagogical experience for the students and the school community as a whole (Sinner

et al., 2006). As Simon states, there is an important difference between providing a completely

open and unguided experience and providing boundaries that can help lead to both a more

productive and more inclusive outcome for those involved in museum exhibits. Simon (2009)

writes, "It takes a special kind of cook, artist, or scientist to want to support the contributions of

novices. It takes people who want to be educators, not just executors" (blog post, March 2009).

So through all of this we are able to identify and define the role of youth curator as decision

makers and collaborators, engaging in reflexive and critical thinking practices working through

the arts, with guidance from experienced practitioners (teachers and artists) who are able to guide

and consult but not take control ensuring an aesthetically balanced and harmonized

exhibit.

Conclusion

I believe that the documentation of YPAR in an arts-based context such as the gallery is

important for further examining the usefulness of subject matters and approaches to engagement

that are often excluded from traditional learning situations. An arts-based approach can increase

the ability for learners from a variety of backgrounds to participate in meaningful ways

(Poldberg, Trainin, Andrzejczak, 2013; Catterall, Chapleau et. al., 1999). The ability to increase

methods for participation and knowledge expression can mean that youth who struggle with

traditional forms of literacy or learning will have increased opportunities to participate in an

active researcher role and tell their stories. Because the youth in my study were not primarily

creating art works, but instead curated shows that contained works produced by others solicited

through calls for submissions, my methodology that I am calling YPAC therefore exists at the

intersection of the multiple fields I have mentioned.

    This chapter brought together the literatures on PAR, YPAR, and curation, in order to

begin describing what YPAC is, and why it emerged as a key concept in this research and as a

useful tool for the students in this study. Informed by these conversations, I am able to identify

and define the role of youth curators as central decision makers and collaborators, engaging in

reflexive and critical thinking practices while working through the arts, with guidance from

experienced practitioners who are able to guide and consult but not take control, ensuring an

aesthetically engaging and harmonized exhibit. Within this optic, I am situating YPAC at an

intersection between YPAR, visual methodologies and critical curation. This is because this

work involves student participation as curators and as creators of new knowledge while also

being willing to work through and express their own personal narratives using art (any medium)

to express these thoughts and their dissatisfaction with the knowledge presented to them.

    In the next chapter, I share the other elements that constitute my research methodology

and methods: grounded theory, critical ethnography, Rose's visual methods for data analysis, and

narrative vignettes. I also share the story of the development of the gallery as the context for the

study and introduce the research participants.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODS

AN ARTS-INFORMED CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY

This is a story about student engagement in a school initiative, which my personal experiences in the urban arts community of Montreal effect in an important way. Yet since it is my intention for this dissertation to be a critically based reflection on student experience, my voice alone cannot dominate the discourse. It has been essential for me to consistently engage in self-reflexive work, helping me identify the influence I had based on my varying roles throughout the project. While my own story is relevant for understanding the groundwork, what happened in the school's gallery was in the hands of the students.

My aim is to balance the content of this dissertation between these two focal points: 1) analysis of student descriptions of their lived experience curating gallery exhibits, its impact on their school lives and identities as well as in the larger community we are serving, and 2) my description and interpretation of their words, experiences and the artwork and photographs that represent all these elements. The aim of balancing these two accounts is to be transparent about the fact that my interpretations of the data discuss (perceived) student experience within the larger patterns of power relations such as inclusion and exclusion in school, whose voice is central and who is in charge . These factors influenced my selection of methodologies, which intersect in criticality, complementing each other and creating new ways of understanding what took place in the gallery during its first year of existence, and move between student perspectives and my own interpretations.

In the following section, I provide thick descriptions of the process of building the gallery as well as each of the consenting participants. This chapter sets the scene for the following chapters that engage with the data, providing context for the research questions, which center

around student experience, curation, and the larger school context that can be both inclusive and exclusionary in nature. It also offers insight into the processes of YPAC.

Building the UAH gallery

In order to understand how and why the students embarked on this YPAC journey as part of their academic work, and to understand how it challenged existing power dynamics in the curriculum and school, the context of this particular project is important. Without this foundational framework, the reality of what took place is not clearly presented to the reader, and therefore the claims lose their strength and authenticity. This section describes the process of conception and building of the UAH gallery, before the actual curation of the space began. This concretely describes how YPAC developed into existence and became a focal point of this research, furthering our exploration of what YPAC is, including how it is done and who can do.

In order to be able to engage with the research questions from my own perspective, I will first begin by explaining how I have come to experience what curation is, understand what it accomplishes and consider how my involvement with the urban arts has helped me build this understanding. I will also discuss how the UAP generally and the gallery more specifically were proposed to students and built to reflect their interests. This sets the stage for understanding the later emerging themes related to student experience and helps the reader understand why students felt connected to the project and valued it from its onset.

Inspirations

Initially, this space was conceived through my connection to the Fresh Paint gallery in Montreal, which welcomed graffiti writers and street artists, from Montreal and abroad, to transform indoor spaces in ways which defied the 'rules' and expectations of the conventional gallery. Fresh Paint gallery was a not-for-profit, ephemeral space which was volunteer run and

received no funding from any public or private donors. The physical location of the gallery was offered to the coordinating team temporarily, and artists were required to provide all their own materials for production and installation. Fresh Paint allowed artists to paint and install work on ceilings and floors, and use any medium they saw fit, all with the understanding that everything they created was temporary and would disappear after approximately two months of exhibiting. Staying true to the roots of graffiti culture, Fresh Paint was committed to emphasizing the artistic process, including transforming the gallery space by those exhibiting. With a desire to similarly emphasise process over product, when we proposed the idea of building a gallery to the students of UAH, I often cited Fresh Paint as an example of what we could achieve.

Early stages and feasibility

The first step in the process of building a gallery space in the school was to approach the administration with the idea. At this stage, it was important to have the administration's full support of the process as this kind of construction project inside a school is unusual and represented a big change to the library, where the gallery room would be situated. Although the library is often considered underused by staff and students, it still housed an impressive number of old art projects and items teachers and staff had been storing there for decades. Therefore, although students were not physically occupying the space, several staff members opposed the idea of reinventing the space as the room was already occupied with materials they had created with students decades prior to the research.

After establishing the feasibility of building the gallery, the administration and I confirmed we had the same vision for the space: have it be student-run and designated to a particular group of students for in-class work. The concept was first to give the students the responsibility of engaging with the building process, giving them experience in the construction

trade by working with the contractor who had agreed to take on the project. From there the artistic direction of the space would have to grow organically out of student interest. While this made me feel uneasy because of my need for an actual project to emerge from this process for research, I had committed to working within these frameworks and remained determined for this to take place. Without knowing it, this was already an important step towards creating YPAC, because a project needs to be led by students as an essential element of YPAR; their artistic direction of the project allowed it to develop as YPAC.

Initially the plan had been for this to be a project taken on by the WOTP (work orientated training program) students, proposed before the 15+ program came to Urban Arts High. The idea had been that the gallery could potentially complement the significant internship work the students did throughout their year. With the aim of preparing students for the work force, giving them first-hand experiences at being responsible, reliable, developing their 'people skills' and helping them discover things which may interest them, the gallery seemed a possible good fit to enhance those experiences. The only problem with this group was the students were in school three out of five days, giving them limited time to be able to complete their school requirements. In the end, despite the enthusiasm of the WOTP teacher for the project and urban arts more generally, the reality of curating the space was too demanding for these students, resulting in the evolution into a project taken on by the 15+ program.

Arriving at the research project

As discussed by Tilley (2016), it is imperative for those engaging in critically informed research to be asking questions about the logistics and purpose of the study during every part of the research (data collection, analysis, theorizing etc.). Although these questions may not have answers, according to Tilley, asking and reflecting on them is still an important part of the

process of working towards deepening an understanding and a connection to the research at hand

(p. 169). For my own research, this meant that I needed to have a serious discussion with the

administration, as well as with the contractor who had volunteered to build the space, if we

would be able to do the kind of work that needed to take place to be able to construct a gallery

that was dynamic and user-friendly. I also needed to be certain that there would be teachers who

would be prepared to take charge of the gallery as part of their commitment to the urban arts

program. I did not want the gallery to be something that only resonated with me but would

eventually sit empty or unused. Being prepared and asking these questions (without making any

assumptions) was a good gage of both feasibility and sustainability, and while this would not

answer all our questions about long-term funding or accessibility, it allowed me to reflect on

what was emerging as the possible project.

Student consultations

Upon confirming the feasibility of transforming that space, I was able to move on to the

next phase, which included consultations with students and discussions with potential teacher

partners. Given that so much of our proposed project was rooted in theory connected to student

engagement and the cultural attributes associated to Hip Hop and graffiti, it would have been

counter-productive (and intuitive) to make any claims during early discussion with staff about

how the space would be used without first consulting the students.

In order to collect as much student feedback as possible, we proceeded by conducting a

survey with as many of the students in the school as we were able (see Annexe 1). The purpose

of this survey was to collect their responses about what they thought the term urban arts meant,

and how they would like to see it be present in their school. This survey, which was co-

constructed by me, the director of WORD and the PI on the urban arts project, was administered

by the director of the WORD program and myself. It asked students to respond with their

reactions and thoughts about having the urban arts in the classroom, and gauged their interest in

building a recording studio and gallery space to help further develop their skills and interactions

with the arts. While the notion of choice was used in this way, we were still mostly insisting that

students would interact with the urban arts in their classes; therefore, this was still UAP team and

a researcher-driven project, not originating from the students but including them in its

development.

Because the students responded to the survey individually and required written responses,

it posed some challenges for the students who struggle with reading and writing. As this was

administered during class time some teachers took the initiative to read the questions aloud to the

students before we distributed the surveys, and were generally helpful in terms of trying to

encourage the students to reflect on the questions and answering more than either "yes/no," or "I

don't know" or just leaving the questions blank. The experience of administering these surveys,

including observing student response to the experience, collecting their answers and receiving

informal teacher feedback, was an eye-opening learning opportunity for myself in my role as

'researcher'. Given the challenges that the students faced in responding to the survey and how

this directly impacted student ability to engage with the exercise, using this kind of tool

demonstrated that the critical nature of the urban arts initiative could be compromised if we

continued to rely on these types of data collecting methods. It became apparent that this method

of collecting data would not deliver the kind of in-depth reflection critical research relies on

(Tilley, 2016). This was therefore one of my first reflections in terms of the complexities of not

only data collection with youth, but also of the importance of working towards meaningful

interactions with the students that would be inclusive and reflective of them. This is also an

important first reflection about why curation is such a relevant and useable tool in this context in

particular. The elements of curation that we engaged with required little in terms of traditional

literacy skills. Curation did not exclude students before the project even began, and by putting

the emphasis on equitable student participation, we were able to have a deeper engagement with

the students and they were able to have a different kind of engagement with school.

Student feedback: From words to action

The information gathered from the surveys, as well as additional information conducted

during informal information gathering sessions indicated that the students liked the idea of

having a gallery space in their school. Of surprise to me is that they also absolutely wanted it to

resemble the traditional gallery spaces like the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, or the TATE

gallery in London. They chose this, instead of looking like Fresh Paint or any contemporary

installations they were shown (see Figures 4 and 5 of traditional and more experimental gallery

spaces).

Figure 4

Traditional gallery image shown to students

Figure 5

Fresh Paint gallery image shown to students

Taking student statements about their preferences seriously in the creation of the gallery was important to strengthen their confidence in my ability to deliver and in the project's overall potential. This meant producing what they asked without challenging them on the inherent contradictions in their statements and behaviours; while resisting the framework of traditional schooling, the students still associated value with traditional elements of structure in places like a gallery space. They placed value and gave credibility to what they have come to understand a gallery "is supposed" to look like, not understanding that the same traditional values that reinforce this kind of elitism in art and museums is part of the same structure that allows only a Eurocentric curriculum in school. Identifying these conflicting associations and resistances allowed me to consider how students' past experiences are important in understanding their current identities (as was the case with my own researcher identity), and then to imagine the possibilities for potential projects and research.

Knowing the desired outcome was a traditional "white walls and spotlight" space, the contractor had to find a way to transform completely a room which had walls made of grey stone (see Figures 6 and 7). After several logistical discussions, the contractor and I decided to frame the walls with wood and install sheets of drywall to create white walls that would be strong enough to support hanging artwork. This process entailed emptying out the storage spaces in the library and building the actual structure of the space, which took two months to complete (October-November 2015).

Figure 6

Emptying out the space for the gallery

Figure 7

The construction process of creating white walls

Throughout this three-month period (pre and post construction), I worked primarily with the WOTP group, which consisted of seven students, and was able to collect field notes and observations from their in-class discussions as well as during their participation through the different stages of the construction and installation process. Because at that time we had not been able to collect any consent forms I did not conduct any individual interviews with the students or record any of the class sessions. This experience reflects what is stated in the literature documenting the challenges of collecting consent forms (Tilley, 2014), particularly when working with vulnerable populations, and was a trend that was repeated with the 15+ class later on.

The first exhibit

The first exhibit in the gallery, composed of a mix of student and professional artwork, was part of the Hip Hop fair, an initiative organized by the 15+ program. This first exhibit is not part of my actual data for analysis as this was all still in the preliminary stages of building the research project. The show was curated by artist John Bee and myself and was primarily a test of the logistics of working in that space, meaning to be sure the walls were sturdy enough to hang artwork, test the different effects of spotlight placement etc. The entire process was also photo documented (see Annexe 2 for a selection of photos) which has helped me reflect on the stages of the process of installation as well as helping the eventual transition of the responsibility of the gallery from the WOTP group to the 15+ program.

This exhibit was also an exciting opportunity to share the space officially with the students and the staff at the school. While people at the school were aware that we were building something in there, this was the first chance that anyone outside of the WOTP or 15+ programs could visit it. What stood out to me after the opening was that the location (inside a high school)

and the actual space itself were more interesting to the visitors than was the art. For that first

exhibit, the interactions with the art pieces were minimal but the skepticism of what this space

would actually look like disappeared, and both students and staff all responded that the space

looked professional.

   After the Hip Hop fair and the opening of the gallery, in December of 2015, the 15+

teacher, Nicholas, and I discussed the possibility of his students managing the space. Because the

space was functional we reached the conclusion that it should be possible to move ahead with

students running the space in a way that could also reflect the requirements of their curriculum.

This was the final stage of what I consider to be preliminary research process, as the 15+

program took over running the gallery officially in January 2016, from which point on my data

collection became official (I collected permission forms, began conducting interviews, recording

class sessions etc.).

Figure 8

Photo of the first exhibit from December 2015
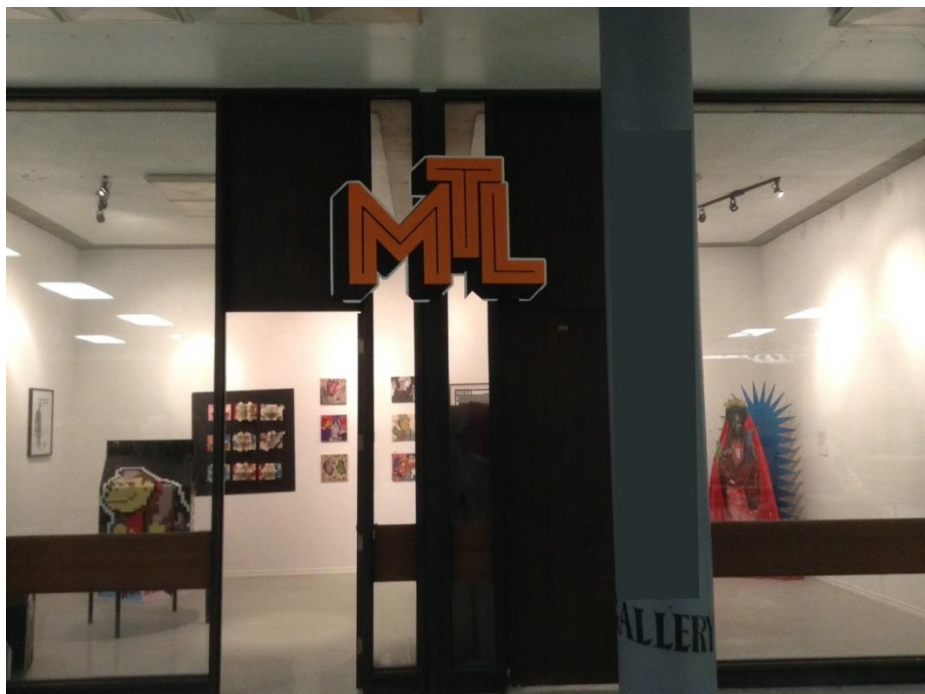
YPAC as method: A journey into the creative process of curation

In order to be able to understand what YPAC is, I have explained the connection to YPAR in detail in chapter three. I will now describe how my experiences with and understandings of curation allowed me to help support the students as they took on this role in their classroom.

As I have discussed, curation is a useful tool in the context of participatory projects and research because it does not require a particular artistic ability or arts-based skill set. In the case of counter cultural arts spaces it is accessible and can give unexpected curators new found agency over their space and their lives. It requires an intention to create something meaningful, and to work collaboratively, which can help to strengthen the bonds of community and build confidence. It also develops skills in decision-making, communication, planning and organization etc. as well as an understanding of how visuals work to create a narrative and capture an audience's attention. Before this project, my only knowledge of curation came from my experiences at the Fresh Paint gallery. Through the time I spent watching that space develop, I grew an understanding that even graffiti or street art reminiscent projects required careful consideration when being placed in an indoor space. Artists have their own vision for their work and the people who run the space in general can have a different (but not always dissimilar) vision for the way a show should be produced based on the realities (limitations) of the space itself. Artists have given life to their pieces and curators know, understand, and give meaning to a space through pieces of art. I was able to ascertain through several years of attending exhibits and working in parallel with the gallery staff that a carefully curated show transmits meaning and messages that work to accentuate and highlight the pieces exhibited. This requires dedication and vision, and makes an equally important contribution to a visitor's experience, telling its own

story in mostly subtle ways. Having a group of students step into that role meant that they would

need both guidance and space to construct a vision and then bring it to life.

The uniqueness of this project meant that not many guidelines existed to help us support

the students through this process. The process of youth curation was new to students and

supporting adults, since, as Bryant (2011) explains, youth curators are somewhat of an anomaly

since a person with expertise in either museology or fine arts traditionally holds the role of

curator. In the initiative Bryant explores, the Young Curators project, youth aged 10-11 worked

in the traditional context of a museum working with children age 10-11. However, in this project,

the youth were not given complete control to make decisions, since these might not reflect the

desired outcomes of the project managers:

> The Young Curators (as we called them) were going to be given as much power as
>
> possible, so the Learning team had to have a contingency plan in case things went wrong.
>
> We would step in and take control of the project at any point, with the children's role
>
> becoming one of consultation rather than doing and decision making, the priority being
>
> for the exhibition to open on time and to adhere to a standard expected from a national
>
> museum (Bryant, p. 390)

I see this concern with standard museum expectations, and the willingness to relegate students to

the role of consultants, threatening to step in at any moment to take over the project if it does not

go well, as setting limitations on the potential of curation as a pedagogical tool. The way the

project is described in this article does not emphasize the act of curation as a creation of

knowledge or research, or even as a way to demonstrate to younger children that art can be used

to send powerful messages to an audience. Therefore, I struggle to identify Young Curators

project as an actual experience in curation, rather than an activity that took place in a museum.

Had we taken this approach with the 15+ students I do not believe we would have had any success. It does not demonstrate confidence in the students' ability to complete the project and it sends the message that adults or experts are always able to do a better job, even when the students are supposedly the decision makers. In our project they were never in danger of being demoted to consultants; the teacher and I made the agreement before the project began that the gallery exhibits needed to be in the hands of the students, and so while we were there to help support them, we were committed to bringing their vision to life and no one else's.

In contrast to the Young Curators, the students in 15+ were given as much power as possible; this was made fairly easy since there were no imposed 'institutional measures of integrity' that we were required to respect. We were fortunate enough that, while some staff may have questioned the content selected by students, the administration did not decide to play a censorship role. The teacher and I did not find ourselves in a position of discussing what would be 'appropriate' art for a school context, as neither the students nor we deemed any of the art submitted offensive in an explicit sense. Some of the staff disagreed with our judgement, however, it simply remained a difference in opinion and not a point of contention needing to involve the administration.

While this may not be the case for every school, content did not present a concern or barrier for our group. As students have discussed in their interviews, the content was interesting because it was new and relevant to them, and the hard work was worth it because they were responsible for the outcome. Neither of those feelings can be possible when the role of decision-maker can be removed at any time. Therefore, this project took a new approach to curation with students and focused not on the role of curator of assigned or pre-determined content but

emphasized the importance of students being in a position of power. This is one of the foundational elements of YPAC.

I have described the process of building the gallery and how we worked to imagine what the role of the students should be and how to best support them in this role. I will now briefly describe the first exhibit curated by the students, which is the context for most of the data analysed in this dissertation.

On January 16th, 2016, I proposed the gallery idea to the 15+ class as a potential project for credit that could be taken on by some or all of the students. Participants would be responsible for putting together an art exhibit that would then open to the public. All the decisions and steps would be their responsibility, but the teacher and I would also support them as they went through the process. Students were quickly able to confirm their interest and agree on a theme they found relevant for the show, moving the process ahead. Different students took on various leadership roles as the project went on, one student selecting the theme the first day and then convincing her classmates of the focus, and another student coming up with the name for the show, 'The Struggle for Black Equality' later on in the week. As will be discussed in chapter six, the theme for the show did not excite many of the students at first; however, once they began to understand that the curation of a show means deciding on the content to present they became increasingly engaged. Students were interested in an exhibit that would depict Black men and women who they felt were important and often ignored in both traditional celebrations of Black History Month as well as in the curriculum in general.

The Struggle for Black Equality exhibit followed a standard set of procedures. The first step was to send out a call for submissions. This went to artists in schools, including high schools from within the school board of UAH, as well as to multiple English language colleges and

universities as well as to a wider network of artists through the Under Pressure online network of artists (mainly through social media outlets). The class wrote and designed the call for submissions (included as Annexe 3) in a process that took nearly two weeks.

The teacher had suggested early on to the students that it might be helpful to suggest the kinds of people the class wanted to celebrate in this show. As the students had already voiced their frustrations with only learning about Martin Luther King, we were commited to including a balance between athletes, artists and activists and that there would be men and women depicted. The list itself was a complex cross section of people the students already knew and those who the teacher had suggested and had the students research in order to choose from. This kind of direction from the teacher was necessary because the students did not have the background knowledge to suggest an array of people, corroborating the fact that they have really only learned about a few token black historical figures. When it came to including some more contentious artists such as N.W.A., a rap group from the 90's whose lyrics were sexist, violent and could be generally considered offensive, the students were insistent on this selection but also began to prepare a counter argument as to why they should be included in spite of the points just mentioned.

In all, there were 26 pieces making up this first exhibit. These ranged in medium including drawing, painting, collage, wheat paste, sculpture, poetry and audio recorded pieces produced by students at UAH, playing from two computer stations that were set up with headphones as part of the exhibit. Upon receiving all the submissions at the school the 15+ class went through two full classes (100 minutes) of a democratic selection process. Students were shown a piece, told the title and the name/affiliation of the artist who submitted it. At this point students were able to have a dialogue about the piece and then asked to keep score of each of the

pieces on a score sheet the teacher had created (see Annexe 5). The discussions about the

selections varied from an easy consensus of what students liked or did not like based on what

they considered its aesthetic value (some work described as "looking like it was done by an

elementary school student", to not looking like it had enough effort put into it etc.) to more

difficult disagreements showcasing some fundamentally different opinions, which were at times

the cause of rising frustrations in the classroom. I was surprised at some of the harsher

statements that students would make against some of the pieces, knowing that most of the work

had been submitted by other students. However, it also signaled to me the kinds of treatment

students were accustomed to receiving themselves, and that empathy was something that may

need to be worked on throughout the process.The students themselves also lost patience with the

process after a certain amount of time, causing them to lose interest in the process of selection,

making comments like "This is taking forever". This was something which we were able to

improve on in the second exhibit as the sequencing of the artworks was done in small groups and

then discussed in a more efficient manner when the larger group got back together. Overall, the

students seemed to have an idea of what their desired aesthetic was, which veered more towards

realism vs cartoon or abstract pieces. This makes sense considering the choice for a traditional

gallery space and once again highlights the overall impact of the current curriculum and

traditional learning spaces on student development.

　　　　After this selection process, the students contacted the selected artists and asked them to

bring their work to the school for installation. The students were also responsible for contacting

the artists after the exhibit had ended to arrange for the pieces to be picked up. An email was also

drafted, with Nicholas's help, to contact the artists whom had not been selected. Because none of

the pieces had been brought to the school for selection, no artist who had not been selected had

to come and pick up a piece after being rejected.

The opening night of the Struggle for Black Equality exhibit welcomed approximately 75

visitors, including several of the teaching staff, students from UAH as well as friends and family

of all the other participating artists. Because the show had 2/3 participation from outside artists,

this meant that many 'outsiders' to the school came to the opening. The administration remained

present throughout the viewing times, for security purposes. Because the school acts as a hub for

community activities including sporting events and other gatherings, there was no concern about

opening up the school to outsiders.

Television news coverage, radio promotion as well as promotion from within the school

board also impacted the attendance numbers that evening and it was considered a success on all

accounts. There were also three visits planned after the opening, two from local schools whose

students participated and one from a local professional athlete (football) who ran entrepreneurial

programs and organized fundraising events through his foundation to support youth in in

different communities. In all, two local television stations came to cover the opening night, it

was announced on one local radio station, was covered by the school board's monthly

publication, announced in the local newspaper, promoted through the Under Pressure network as

well as through the participating artists' networks and the YMCA's of Quebec network. I am not

including any links to these references as they would compromise the confidentiality of the

school and students. All of the coverage the exhibit received came from the press releases which

were sent out by the students through email and were followed up by the students with

Nicholas's help. The coverage primarily focused on the 'student-led' aspect of the exhibit;

however in the interviews students had the space to discuss their intentions and the content.

Participant description

   In this final section, I will provide a brief description of each participant in the study, outlining some of the traits that stood out most to me based on their participation in the project, as well as my connection to them outside of the research. This is done to help provide greater context for understanding the participants and our connections before the following chapters that discuss their own interpretations of the experience. This research took place working with the cohort of 12 students making up the 15+ class the year this research took place: 2015-2016. All of the students in this class agreed to participate in the process of curating a gallery exhibit and so there was no actual recruitment required other than a verbal request made by me for their participation, and their verbal agreement to do so. However, not everyone had signed consent forms allowing them to participate in the research. Of these 12 students, seven can be considered participants in the research project as they had brought their consent forms signed and were interviewed. While the number of signed forms is greater than the number of unsigned forms, the truth is that the majority of the forms only came back signed after the first gallery show took place, not leaving much time for individual interviews to be recorded. In spite of the fact that after the first show there were still three months left in school, factors that further impeded one on one interviews were student absence rates as well as eventual exam prep, and the second gallery show that we produced directly after the first one. It felt like we were in a constant time crunch and therefore students were only interviewed once on their own, with the exception of one of the students. Given all of this, I will describe the seven research participants who provided a signed consent form and took part in an interview, in order to give context to the data outlined in the following chapters. I do not provide a description of the other students who were not participants in the research project.

Identifying the participants

The 12 students in the class were seven boys and five girls. Seven of the students were racialized while the five others were white.

Connor, white and male presenting, was one of the most enthusiastic participants in the study as he identified as a graffiti writer and a skateboarder. I had known him for several years as he and his younger brothers attended the youth center I ran on a daily basis. Connor was very social and easy going, and although he faced some very real hardships in life, took his responsibility of mentoring his younger brothers very seriously. Connor was very interested in non-conventional jobs and connected well with all the artists who worked with the class that year. Connor turned 18 at a point during the year, meaning that this was his very last opportunity to participate in a high school classroom, after which he would have to attend adult education. Connor openly discussed having been at several other schools before ending up at Urban Arts high in the year prior to him being in the 15+ program. He discussed his positive experience with UAH as compared to the other schools and was definitely a leader in this classroom and in this project.

Katherine, black and female presenting, was often quiet and sometimes reluctant to participate in class activities as she often had issues with her health or other personal matters. She was committed to completing school and had been the one to suggest the first theme for the exhibit. Katherine also had been sent to UAH from another school and often openly discussed her past struggles in her other school. Katherine was less social than some other students, as she was determined not to be influenced by her peers (as she understood and expressed to be in negative ways such as being distracted or disruptive in class), but ended up having quite a bit of influence over the classroom by being so independent.

Michelle, white and female presenting, was new to the school that year, coming from another province. She openly spoke of the differences she noticed between the different schools she had attended and was often surprised by what went on at Urban Arts High (in both good and bad ways). She openly struggled with some mental health issues. She also reliably completed tasks without any convincing required. Michelle was an independent thinker and did not seem influenced by the other students in the class, especially when it came to expressing her opinions about the content or look of the gallery exhibits. When she arrived in the classroom with something on her mind, the classwork would become secondary to her personal preoccupations.

Vanessa, white and female presenting, was new to the school that year coming from a special education center, but had known many of the students previously. Vanessa struggled quite seriously with mental health and other issues, which she spoke about openly, but was extremely engaged with every project the group took on. She was always the first to volunteer to do something that needed to be done, and was happy to be interviewed by the media for the different projects we undertook.

Sandra, black and female presenting, was also a youth from the YMCA who had participated in a youth exchange program I ran, which meant that she and I had already spent a great deal of time together. She was extremely outspoken and happy to engage with active work. While she always did the written work required of her, she was also most often the most vocal about not wanting to do it. Sandra was always prepared to engage in critique, whether it be of school-related items or anything else, and was very reflexive, often able and comfortable in articulating her reflections.

Charles, black and male presenting, was one of the students who had been at the school since his first year, but whom I did not know before this project began. Charles was friendly with

everyone and was a very talented artist, equally interested in music and drawing. He most

appreciated the interactions he had with adults that he considered to be positive and meaningful

and was able to clearly express his thoughts in a critical manner, which also meant he was

always happy to be interviewed for the project.

Victor, white and male presenting, had not been able to attend school for the first half of

the year and so we only met him after the Hip Hop fair. He was very happy to be able to

participate in activities in school that allowed him to be in a social setting. He was one of the

strongest writers in the class. Victor was one of the students who took the longest when

responding to interview questions, as he had a remarkable ability to be introspective and could

self-reflect without much prompting. Victor was able to describe the value of doing education in

a way that is "outside of the box". He could appreciate the value of finishing school as a way to

increase his chances of finding employment as he became an adult, and enjoyed talking about

what looking for work was really like. He was one of the students whom I spent a great deal of

time talking to, just to share information about life in general.

These short descriptions are meant to give a bit of my own perspective on each of the

participants, in order to give the reader an idea of who they are and that we all arrived in that

classroom with our own personalities, needs, interests and backgrounds. Collaboration could be

challenging but the students spent enough time with each other that they found ways to both

support and challenge each other most of the time. The uniqueness of this group is simply a

reminder to me that all groups of people are unique with their own strengths and challenges. This

is important to remember when considering what YPAC is and who it works for. The strength of

a YPAC project is that it allows students to work towards finding commonalities with one

another, and asks them to look beyond their everyday lives and consider bigger issues that affect

them and others in ways they may not even understand. It is a method of entering into an

investigation without needing any experience in either research or the arts. It asks that

participants create a vision for what they want to share; once they can explain their vision they

will know what they are looking for in terms of visual representation. After that, the challenge

becomes to collectively agree on ways on how to structure the exhibit so that the images can best

transmit the messages and emotions to an unknown audience, all while considering ways that

power structures and social conditions impact the decisions being made and the audiences being

reached. YPAC is a tool for critical reflection, knowledge creation and dissemination, which

celebrates different ways of knowing in ways that are accessible to the researchers and the

audience.

Critical ethnography

One of the foundational elements of this dissertation has been the connection to critical

theories and frameworks from multiple perspectives, including critical pedagogy and critical

museology. As suggested by Kinchloe and McLaren (2000), the most persuasive research

method for critical theory is critical ethnography. A critical ethnographic approach is best suited

to meet the objectives of representing the different voices and perspectives represented through

this research both fairly and accurately. Critical ethnography is defined as beginning,

> with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a
>
> particular lived domain, going beneath surface appearances, disrupting the status quo,
>
> and unsettling both neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light
>
> underlying and obscure operations of power and control. (Madison, 2004, p.5)

Because this research has set out to examine the act of curation as a youth-led research model

and potential way of reframing resistance/engagement, engaging with critical ethnography

allows me to examine the outcome of shifting power dynamics in a classroom, while examining the impact of my own power present within the research. Critical ethnography must begin on the ground, with those participating in the research (Thomas, 1993) committing to fieldwork that makes accessible the voices and experiences of the underrepresented. In performing critical research in this way, researchers are reminded to constantly identify and name positionality and have research that reflects the balance in dialogue and conversation, ensuring the researcher's voice does not dominate the discourse.

Engaging with critical ethnography allows me to create a deeper understanding of the social inequities at work in the curriculum, as well as identifying student resistance as a complex response to their lived experiences in school. Being able to reframe resistance in a way that emphasizes student experience, creating space for that reality to be seen, acknowledged and felt by others who, traditionally, hold roles of power, has also allowed me to identify my own participation and engagement with this project and understand the duality of my role.

Creating a critical researcher identity

My role as researcher required me to continuously address my own position of power and privilege within the context of the everyday lives of the students, both throughout the project and then following into the analysis of interview data and field notes. As I have already stated, while I live in the same neighborhood as many of our students, my race and socioeconomic position differentiates us. I have had to rethink some of the ways that I initially positioned the gallery as something that could be useful content for a student's CV or introducing the students to graffiti writers who have turned their passion into a 'successful' career because there is a monetary value associated with their participation in the culture. In my role as a community worker, we are often encouraged to quantify our projects with students in terms of usefulness for future employment,

socially desirable behavior (leadership, financial responsibility etc.), quantity of participants etc. In order for me to realize these ways of thinking were not harmonious with a critical research standpoint on their own, and were actually teleological in nature, I turned to the data. I had to spend time listening to my own interventions in interviews and classroom discussions, reread my stated objectives for this research, and create an awareness around any language which could be counterproductive to critical research goals.

The idea that as researchers our biases influence our interpretation of the data in multiple ways is particularly insightful to me because it identifies one of my primary challenges of being close to the research. As stated by Weston et. al.,

> On one hand, how researchers see data and the meaning attributed to it is what makes data useful, interesting, and a contribution to knowledge. On the other hand, our biases and perspectives influence interpretation throughout analysis—from how codes are developed to how results are interpreted (p.384).

My own commitments and political standpoints have in fact worked to help build the project; therefore the bias is explicit in its contributions to every aspect of this research, from conception to analysis. This bias does not necessarily need to be a negative thing; however, there needs to be a clear acknowledgement that biases will affect data selection, analysis and interpretations, which are only some of many versions of truth that exist. I am mindful that my connection to the students and to the art can (and did) impact my interpretations, however through my own attempts at transparency about my subjectivity I aim to ensure the trustworthiness of this research.

I believe that naming these biases strengthens the analysis by situating methods and methodology within the researcher's particular set of experience and expertise. Being aware of

my positionality has helped me to keep my own role and interpretations in perspective, particularly during data analysis, when the experiences I have had connected to graffiti and gallery curation have influenced the way I approach and interpret the data. It also helped illuminate my researcher identity as it began to form through the construction of the space, and it reinforced my awareness that I would need to use theoretical frameworks that promoted such active and personal connection to the research project. This sustained exploration of my own position within the research development and data analysis appears in detail in chapter five, in which I use arts-informed inquiry as a method of investigation. Described by Butler-Kisber (2010): "arts-informed inquiry uses various forms of art to interpret and portray the focus of the particular study." (p. 8) As will be discussed later on in this chapter, my use of narrative vignettes paired with photographs created a new dimension for reinterpreting the gallery experience and helping me to respond to the research questions in ways which question the power dynamics experienced and responded to by students through their curatorial choices. I have chosen to engage primarily with an arts-informed approach as the art and art making element of this research is not the focal point of investigation. There are no interviews with artists, formal aesthetic analyses, or research done about the process of art creation (Sullivan, 2005). Rather, this research acknowledges the power of the arts to create accessible representations of important and relevant knowledge, and aims to investigate the process of organizing artworks as both an act of creation and, most importantly, and act of knowledge creation.

Critical ethnographic data collection

Identifying critical ethnography as a framework to guide data collection and analysis means that my methods are diverse in order to best represent the participants, avoiding any

claims of objectivity to investigate their lived realities and connect the findings to the research

questions. Critical ethnographic projects must not rely on interview-only data (Cook, 2008) when

participants are in the role of co-researchers. Although the goal of this research was not to have

the students be co-researchers, they ended up becoming a version of this, as described in the

previous chapter (chapter 3), describing the YPAC and its similarities and divergences with

YPAR. To document the process, I collected field notes and wrote journal entries, recorded

classroom planning sessions, conducted individual interviews and photographed different

elements of the process. I will now describe interviewing (including recording classroom

sessions) and observations (including field noted and journal entries) as critical ethnographic

tools. I will then describe my own arts-based inquiry and intervention with the data in the form

of narrative vignettes and photographs.

Field notes and journals

I documented my own reflections and observations in the form of field notes and journal

entries. During classroom discussions that I was not leading, I would take notes about the

conversations and then complete the process by writing full journal entries after classes if I

wanted to write in greater detail. I chose to take notes and not record during sessions that were

not planning sessions as the students would often refer back to the fact that they were being

recorded, creating increasing awareness of their language or participation. While some scholars

have challenged the participatory nature of using field notes (Thompson, 2014), I chose to

engage with the method in order to help my ability to facilitate the "dialogue between

observation and theory" (Burawoy, 2003, p. 669). As suggested by Burkholder (2016), I

intuitively allowed my notes to be public, in that if students wanted to see what I was writing I

would show them. This did not happen many times, however I felt it was important not to make the students feel like I was writing down things I would not want them to see.

I also took notes during the regular planning meetings I had with Nicholas (minimally once a week) and informally we would check in with each other after almost every session with the students in order to discuss the development of the project. During these informal discussions if anything relevant to the project was revealed I would include it in a journal entry. For example on Dec 14th, before we began working on the Black History month show, I went up into the gallery space to see the art that was installed for the Hip Hop fair. One conversation with a student stuck out to me, and became a discussion point with Nicholas after it took place, as chronicled in my field notes:

> The Nina Simone piece got a lot of attention. They liked her because of her afro and the Illuminati symbol on her hand. They thought she was a man and one of the students called her black Jesus. When I asked what that means the student said well it looks like Jesus but black, so I asked but did you think that Jesus could have been black? The student answered no because he's white in all the pictures of him. So we had a discussion about religious depiction in old art pieces and who gets to decide what history looks like. The student thought that white people came from the middle east and that everyone in the middle east was white originally. After discussing this with Nicholas we realized the importance of creating context with the exhibits, being sure pieces were described and understood by the students first and foremost. (Journal entry December 14, 2016)

The interaction with the student was important for several reasons, but one of the most important reasons being that it created an awareness of impact that traditional systems of education have had on the students and their ability and ease to engage with criticality. This is a

challenge that we faced throughout the course of the project and even in identifying this early on, addressing it successfully was not something we were prepared to do.

I had developed these habits of documenting and reflecting in the early stages of data collection through the building of the gallery with the Work Oriented Training Program teacher (who I will discuss briefly in the next chapter pertaining to the building of the gallery). I believe this kind of consistent and open reflection and communication allowed for Nicholas and I to establish the importance of routine of meetings and informal brainstorming/troubleshooting sessions that helped us develop a strong bond and ability to work together. The discussions we had would range from going over task lists and reviewing contact lists and emails sent by students from the group account to more pedagogically inclined discussions around student behaviour and strategies for engaging (and keeping engaged) the group.

Interviews and group sessions

I recorded eight individual interviews conducted with students, two with the teacher, as well as five classroom planning sessions during which time the exhibits were planned and curated. Interviewing is "a conversational practice where knowledge is produced through an interaction between an interviewer and an interviewee, or a group of interviewees" (Brinkmann, 2008, p.470). In my own interview practice, this conversation was semi-structured, as is the case with most qualitative interviews. This is in order to address the areas of interest pertaining to the project, while remaining flexible enough to respond to the emerging narrative (p. 470). I first developed some broad questions with another RA on the project that were guided by the early version of my research questions. It was important that these questions were also flexible enough to allow students to go off on tangents that would be meaningful or relevant to them and allow for important elements of data to emerge on their own.

I arranged with the teacher and the students to conduct interviews during class time to avoid conflicting with students' other academic or extracurricular schedules as well as to strengthen the connection between this research and their participation in class. I interviewed students in a one on one setting, using an old office that had been dedicated to the UAP and was used to store materials and anything the research team deemed relevant to the project. I only conducted these individual interviews with students who had provided me with a signed consent form, as required by the McGill REB and conforming to rules of conducting research with minors. The collection of these consent forms was a challenge and limited the amount of individualized data I was able to collect. I reflect on these challenges in chapter six.

I audio-recorded each of the interviews and then copied the interview into my own password-protected computer as well as sharing it to the Google drive used by the research team. The only people to have access to this Google drive were the two other RA's, myself and the principal investigator. After completing each interview, I would go back and listen in order to verify sound quality. Each interview was transcribed by an outside resource and once I received the transcriptions I listened to the interview and read along with the notes in order to confirm its validity. None of the content was adjusted in terms of grammar or speech, which was important in order to truly reflect the students and their thoughts. However, for clarity's sake, I have removed some of the filler words such as "like," when citing student interview data.

In order to gather the information I would need to revisit throughout the planning stages of the first exhibit, I recorded every planning session and took notes after the students were gone. This content helped research questions evolve around student experience as curators, considering their own past and current experiences within a traditional academic setting and impacting their engagement with school and the project, as well as considering the content they

felt would be meaningful to learn about. After each class was done I would copy the recording of

the session onto my password protected computer as well as to the Google drive (as described

above) and wrote notes about elements that seemed important as well as taking note of how I felt

after the class (excited, discouraged, overwhelmed etc.). This whole process also helped to

represent the voices of the students who were not able to bring back a consent form but had

expressed interest in participating and disappointment with not being able to be interviewed.

Data collection: Visual narrative vignettes

Throughout the YPAC process, I took photos of the artworks selected and their

sequencing for both of the shows and documented the students working; this included the

process of building the space, physically carrying materials up and down the stairs, learning how

to frame materials, learning how to patch holes in drywall and so forth. About one year after the

project ended and after I had engaged with the observation and interview data and identified

themes and sub-themes, I began to look through my photos. At this point in time, I had spoken

about the project to so many different people and presented it at multiple conferences. Therefore

the content still felt familiar but the actual process was starting to feel far away. Looking at these

images brought me back to the day-to-day process of building an exhibit and the amount of effort

the students put in. This evoked a lot of emotion for me and motivated me to examine the codes

and themes that had emerged through the initial interview data analysis phase in relation to

experiences I was remembering through the photos. In comparing the sub-themes with the

selected artworks and images, the ideas described in observation and interview data were

enhanced in visually rich ways, helping me recognize that these visual insights transcended what

had emerged in field notes and journal entries alone. Being that photography is a form of visual

art, and that the photos themselves were depicting art from the exhibit, these led me to arts-

informed inquiry, in which art,

> Informs both the research process and representation for purposes of making
>
> research/knowledge more accessible to diverse audiences including but beyond the
>
> academy… In other words, such research aims to connect the work of the academy with
>
> the life and lives of communities through research that is accessible, evocative,
>
> embodied, empathetic and provocative." (Knowles & Cole, 2008, p. 32-33)

I felt that by sharing the strong emotional experiences and connections I made from looking at

the photos, I would be able to offer a similar experience to the reader. I decided to share selected

photos that held insight into the YPAC process, and describe them in a series of visual narrative

vignettes. Through chapter five's inquiry into my strong personal connection and layered

understanding of the meanings of these photos, I respond to RQ1: How can YPAC challenge

larger patterns of power relations and exclusionary practices present in school and education?

The photos offered me a starting point to reflect on the larger power structures that exist within

the school, that often become invisible in daily operations. The photos allowed me a window to

reconsider some experiences, both indirect and overt, that pointed to larger issues of exclusion,

domination and power relations that existed in the project (among students, staff, administration,

community members, participating artists and researchers). This discussion allowed me to look

at some of the issues on a macro level, identifying broader concepts at work, while the interview

data allowed me to get at the micro level of actual lived student experience. There are important

parallels that exist between the two data sets, and speak to the importance of this research.

Data analysis: Visual narrative vignettes

Narrative vignettes

Erickson (1985) defines a narrative vignette as "a vivid portrayal of the conduct of an event of everyday life in which the sights and sounds of what was being said or done are described in the natural sequence of the occurrence in real time" (p. 102). He justifies the inclusion of narrative vignettes in ethnographic research, stating that they "[give] the reader a sense of being there in the scene" (p. 103). As discussed above, it would be impossible to do justice to the importance of the entire process of creating art exhibits without giving both a written description as well as a visual taken from the gallery or from the process itself. These two elements complement each other and create a different kind of knowledge as described in this dissertation. As described by Metallic (2017) in relation to her use of visual narrative vignettes, sights and sounds can be described in writing but photos enhance the narrative and further contextualize the research setting and findings (p.114). Therefore, it seemed the most effective way would be to match photographs depicting art or student experience with personal reflections, to demonstrate the many sides of the development of this project.

The analytic approach used to create these visual narrative vignettes began by first selecting the images as described above. My selection process for the photos included first looking for image quality and considering which artwork could best be captured in a photograph. I then tried to respond to some guiding questions that would help me tell a complete story that balances the importance of the visual art with the lived experience. These questions were: Does this image alone tell a story? Are there any elements that connect the identified themes with this image? Will this provide an entry point to discuss power relations and inclusive or exclusive pedagogical practices? By responding to these questions, I selected photos offering a narrative

account highlighting the sights and sounds (Erickson & Wilson, 1982) of the gallery and the

classroom.

With this cross section of depictions of art and student experience, I returned to my field

notes to look for any codes or key words that would help me describe the scene. The first

narrative vignette was first written for an article I had submitted to a journal. Having that written

piece helped me to create a starting point for the other images I had selected, understanding that

not only were the images and their stories important, but so was connecting them to a larger

visual discourse analysis that revolves around the process and production of their use (Rose,

2001, p.168). While the content of the image helps to put the reader in the environment where

the story takes place, as described by Erickson (1985) as a main purpose for narrative vignettes,

it also helps to highlight the larger context of the curatorial experience for students; and how

their production of an exhibit influenced their collective experience as well as their audiences.

Therefore, this starting point was a way to consider what the larger context of the picture spoke

to, what the lessons learned from each image could describe and to consider that my analysis of

each of these situations could help also emphasize the uniqueness that infusing the urban arts

into this dialogue brings. This responds to research question one, reflecting my interpretation of

student lived experience and identifying the larger power dynamics affecting this experience. It

also reflects on my impact as a researcher, exploring my positionality as well as identifying my

voice as separate from the students but supportive of their experiences.

Importantly, my approach differs from Erickson's narrative vignettes in one of the five

examples. I chose to include the photo of a painting done by a former student, but it did not

describe one event in great detail. However, the event it is based on points to most of the larger

discussions from earlier chapters, including resistance, engagement and the influence of graffiti

in the lives of the youth who are connected to the school (as well as to the larger research project). This variation on a narrative vignette still attempts to make the audience feel as though they experienced the situation described surrounding the student and the school. I believe this helps to create a greater understanding of who these youth are and the realities they face while attempting to negotiate their existence within the traditional structure of school. I believe it helps bring to life the discussions about resistance as well as further validates the statements made by the students in the following chapter. For this reason, I have altered the structure of the traditional narrative vignette in this particular instance.

The language used in the narrative vignettes is closer to a narrative, written in less formally academic language than other chapters in this dissertation. I believe this is a way to display the duality of my own researcher identity, which is situated in both academic and community contexts. This balance not only works to represent me as a researcher but also works to be more accessible and reach a wider audience, including those who participated in the project. I also quote directly from my fieldnotes in the vignettes, bringing my own subjectivity into the accounts as much as possible. I have realized that the creation of these visual narrative vignettes is its own form of curation, as I share key scenes that help me craft a larger story about YPAC and the process and the outcome of the exhibit. Telling the stories connected to the image was also important because I realized that in looking at the photos the struggles are not visible and, without the context of the lived experience described through the narrative, the honesty of the story is diminished.

The importance of resistance and engagement as well as the capacity that curation has to challenge the traditional school hierarchy, is only truly reflected through creating an understanding of both the strengths and the challenges faced within this project. For example,

something that emerges in two of the themes identified by the students was the dislike for

monotonous work and curricular content and was also reiterated in my journal entries. There

were many mentions of the challenges of engaging the students based on their resistance to

certain kinds of tasks such as sending emails and spending long periods on one task such as

creating the call for submissions and deciding which works to include in the show. The snapshots

are a reminder of our ability to work towards an engaging experience for students and help to tell

the story of how we arrived there, but are not the whole story in and of itself. Therefore, in

engaging with the photos and having them respond to a research question, I describe the

memories and thoughts I had as connected to the image, and tell it in a way that reflects the lived

experience in an honest and open way. This seemed to complete the story by offering a unique

perspective into my own lived experience of working with the students, curating a selection of

images connected to a short narrative vignette to represent it. I contend that this information is

equally as relevant and important as other, more traditional forms of knowledge, and use

narrative vignettes as a way to highlight the value in multiple ways of knowing.

Rose's two types of visual discourse analysis

Since the visual is so integral to the curation project, I am drawing upon Rose's discourse

analysis for visual methodologies. Rose (2011) describes two kinds of discourse analysis in

visual methodologies. The first "tends to pay rather more attention to the notion of discourse as

articulated through various kinds of visual images and verbal texts" (p.140), how images

organize discourse and produce knowledge and how images are given specific meanings (p. 150-

151). The second type of discourse analysis emphasizes the influence of the institution on the

visual rather than the actual images or verbal texts themselves: "It tends to be more explicitly

concerned with issues of power, regimes of truth, institutions and technologies" (Rose, p. 140).

Much of the visual research utilises discourse analysis method two, given the attention to research question two and its focus on institutional power structures and patterns of exclusion; it "shifts attention away from the details of individual images… and towards the processes of their production and use" (Rose, p.167). Discourse analysis two also works in the spirit of critical ethnography. However, in the first narrative vignette I do make use of discourse analysis one, as the image is deconstructed in order to understand the way that an image that celebrates Black strength and greatness was interpreted by staff members as scary or inappropriate. Both forms of Rose's visual discourse analysis give me a framework to engage specifically with the images I am using in my visual narrative vignettes. They allow me to think about how the production of the art exhibits was a process that disrupted traditional power structures in a school and allowed "non-artists" an opportunity to engage with an arts-based process to create powerful imagery depicting student realities. This research regards curation as an arts process in itself.

Students in this research took advantage of the opportunity to expand their interactions with art, building on their ability to create and disseminate meaningful messages (through art) while challenging the norms of the traditional curricular narrative. The collaborative activities that were all a part of the curatorial process became moments for dialogue and reflection in the classroom, which are all components of critical arts-based inquiry (Finley, 2014) supporting the notion of using a visual discourse as a relevant approach in data analysis.

My aim in presenting visual narrative vignettes is to demonstrate the challenge to the power/knowledge dichotomy that happened throughout the course of this research. Whereas traditional knowledge and ways of knowing overpower other, more diverse methods, in this dissertation I represent the challenge to this structure in both visual and text-based ways.

Thematic analysis: Creating codes and identifying themes

   In order to understand the student and teacher interview data and my notes I used a thematic analysis approach called constant comparison. This rigorous approach to data analysis helped me to work my way through individual student and personal reflections and work towards creating a larger contextual understanding of what the data was describing. I engage with the results of this analysis in chapter six, which uses the student and teacher data to respond primarily to research question two: How might YPAC reframe student experience, student engagement and resistance in school? This data presents the project from the students' perspective, highlighting their lived experiences and their reflections and interpretations of the experience with the gallery, based on their relationships to school, learning and the community (in school and out) that surrounds them. Through the process of being interviewed students often discussed the notion of doing school differently, what that means to them and how it can (and was) achieved through their participation in a YPAC project. Throughout the duration of the project, I would systematically return to the data to read over my notes or listen to classroom sessions in order to see if anything was recurring in discussion or observations. For example, as I had noted that students consistently discussed not wanting to write emails, I brought it up to the teacher in one of our informal check ins. He had also identified the students' dislike towards this task and it caused me to investigate potential reasons for this particular element of student resistance. Given the connection this particular form of resistance had to negative school experiences, it helped shape one of the sub themes identified through the coding process, as it helped to contextualize the type of resistance I was observing/experiencing and possible causes/solutions.

Once I was ready to begin the official analysis process I went back to the recordings and created time codes for each interview that lasted anywhere from 20-40 minutes. Once I had created time codes for each interview I then created a mind map to identify recurring words, feelings and experiences discussed by the students. The aim was to consider how students were describing their experience in the project, what resonated with them and where they identified challenged. Creating the mind map allowed me to create a visual representation of several key words and concepts that generally described how and why this experience was different than anything else they had done in school previously. For example, student responses that frequently mentioned their being bored with the curriculum would eventually allow me to create some broader connections to the theoretical concepts of resistance as well as to the notions of cultural capital and the hierarchy of knowledge. After listening to the interviews and creating my mind map, I asked the other RA from this project to do the same and create codes that identified the main points and emerging themes. The process of coding is defined as "Identifying potentially interesting events, features, phrases, behaviours, or stages of a process and distinguishing them with labels" (Benaquisto, 2008 p.85).   Although I did not have any predetermined themes after having gone through the process myself, I did ask the RA to highlight any references to curation, including in relation to their schooling experience. The reason I asked for these elements to be highlighted was to verify if the research questions I had been forming throughout the early stages could be answered through the data I had collected or if I would need to re-evaluate my focus.

After this process was complete, I then compared the two different interpretations and codes representing the data. The purpose of doing this was to work with the codes and further synthesize this information in order to begin identifying categories that represented larger concepts prominent in the student experience.

Categories developed from concepts that were raised at least five times across the interviews. At first, I struggled to name the categories, as the exact wording the students were using had become a focal point instead of trying to identify similarities in the content and context of their discussions. In this early stage, I was individualizing the data, without considering the importance of the collaborative element of the research experience. In order to think about student experience in the bigger picture I had to take what they had said and consider why they were saying it.

I tried to identify categories that were broad enough to investigate for further clustering into themes. As described by Green (2008):

> If one were to think about a micro-, meso-, or macro-level analysis, the coding starts at the micro level, the generation of categories moves the investigator to the meso level and the themes that bear out lessons learned or truths that reflect the findings are indicative of a macro-level analysis (p.71)

I was able to identify that the categories such as 'Student interest" "Student dissatisfaction" "Unique attributes" and "Feeling supported" reflected how students described their experience, the unique elements of the findings, and how my own involvement furthered this experience.

Through this process, I then identified three themes that allowed me to engage with the interview and observation data and were equally as useful in organizing my narrative vignettes associated with the photographs. As Braun and Clarke describe, "A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). These themes are: "Curation as learning new things," "Contrasting with the past" and "Challenges of developing critical consciousness".

While there was reoccurring content from the interviews discussing the racialized student experience at the school, in connection to and separate from the gallery exhibits, I would not consider that as an emerging theme because they responded to directed questions from the interviewers. While some students were able to identify directly with the racial inequity of the school experience, those that expressed more of a post racial discourse were still able to identify problematic experiences within their schooling experiences. While this was helpful in understanding the similarities and divergences in student experience, these discussions of racial inequity were not prevalent in the data. This could be an outcome of not making this a regular discussion topic in class, however whatever the reason is, students needed more prompting to discuss this element in particular.

Gaining perspective on the data by stepping away

Part of the contentions I had as my researcher identity developed and struggled to emerge was that I did not want to focus on 'data collection' as the project emerged and took shape. I was far too invested in the successful student experience to prioritize note-taking, coding or any of the methods I had read about or discussed in my seminars. During class time I was wrapped up in production and once class let out I was busy with other coordination tasks. I systematically refused to try and create themes or make connections between student responses once the students had started to curate the first exhibit as I was too close to what was taking place. It had been valuable earlier on as we sculpted the project and understood what the students were saying in response to their own educational shortcomings, but once the project had begun I no longer found myself able to take the time to work on this aspect of the research.

This means that I only came to data coding and analysis after the project had finished, which presents both strengths and challenges to face. The challenges are clear: it seemed a

difficult task to return to something that felt long ago. An emotional roadblock for me was that one of the most active and outspoken participants through the process had taken her life and so returning to pictures and notes and interviews was painful for me. I was able to confront some of these feelings by eventually reviewing my notes, photos and class recordings; however it has affected the way that I think about the project and its outcome.

On the other hand, the strengths became clear as I re-entered the data. Having a break gave me some distance from the personal connections I had to the project outcomes, which I found facilitated the process of identifying the codes that organized the data. It also gave me some time to examine the claims made about curation in different settings, helping to confirm some of my thoughts by identifying similar outcomes in different settings (Proietti & Sierk, 2019).

Ethical considerations

As previously mentioned this research was done as part of a larger SSHRC research project taking place at the school. Based on this, I was not personally required to apply for ethics approval, as my project fell under the complete project proposal submitted to the school and the school board on behalf of the principal investigator and McGill University.

Once the ethics approval had been granted the research team began working with the administration and teachers to identify ways to collect as many consent forms as possible, as a way to be able to collect as much data as possible. Several strategies were proposed including having RA's be present in the school on the night of parent-teacher interviews, available to talk and answer questions, as well as sending the consent forms home with registration packages that the school requires students to return for legal purposes. Both of these strategies were met with some success and some failure, as consistent parent participation or communication is one of the

identified challenges of working at this school. Therefore, some consent forms were collected

easily, and in the case of my participants, some of them were able to sign for themselves as they

turned 18 at some point during the school year. However, the struggle to collect consent forms

took up more time than I would have liked and presented an obstacle that made the project feel

top rather than down than student-led in some ways.

Trustworthiness

The four established areas of trustworthiness for qualitative research are described as

credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). I assert that

the methods I have chosen to collect and analyse the data, the ways in which I conduct and

present the research and the ways that I have been able to implement these findings in other

settings, allow me to confirm the trustworthiness of the claims made in this dissertation. I will

now describe each of the areas of trustworthiness, as well as how this research conforms to its

requirements.

Credibility is defined as establishing whether or not the research accurately represents the

data drawn directly from the participants and whether the interpretation is accurate. According to

Anney (2015), qualitative researchers can establish credibility by adopting (some of) these

strategies: prolonged and varied field experience, time sampling, reflexivity, triangulation,

member checking, peer examination, interview technique, establishing authority of researcher

and structural coherence (p. 276). I have done this in the following ways: I have a prolonged

relationship to the research site that predates the research project and continues now that the

research is finished. As described, I am a longstanding participant at the school and am

committed to remaining connected to the school in ways that help benefit the students. I also

have used peer examination as described in the coding of the interview data, as a way to help

identify and develop the salient points in the research (Bitsch, 2005) and checked back with the

other RA on the project regularly to discuss findings. I engaged in a multiple method collection

and analysis strategy for this project including collecting interviews, observations and visual

elements using a critical ethnography framework. I also used recognized and reputable data

analysis methods (thematic analysis and visual discourse analysis). I had intended and proposed

to do member checks, however based on the reality of the contact I had with the students in this

research (some social media contact and some unreliable visits to the drop in center), I was never

able to get any feedback from them. After having sent them interview notes and my own

interpretations of the art and the exhibits, I did not receive any response and was forced to rely

on the other methods for credibility.

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results are transferable to other contexts

with other participants. The aim of this research, and qualitative research more generally, is not

to make sweeping claims that will be imposed on different contexts and different participants.

However, according to Bitsch (2005), through thick description and purposeful sampling the

research can be made "generalizable" and the elements that make it unique can serve as a useful

point of departure for transferring the findings into similar settings. I take the time and space

necessary throughout this dissertation to describe every step in the process of building the

gallery, as well as in curating it. Through the use of visual narrative vignettes I make a focused

effort at giving the reader a holistic experience of the shows and of the student experience. This

research was conducted with a very specific, and purposely selected group of students, in which

the flexibility of their academic realities and requirements facilitated an innovative approach to

pedagogy.

Dependability is defined as the stability of the findings over time (Bitsch, 2005). The suggested methods for testing dependability, which have also been discussed in terms of this study's credibility, include peer examination, triangulation, as well as a code-recode strategy, which I discuss in the initial coding phases of this research. This thorough examination strategy of the data helps to establish whether the findings will be relevant in other settings and can be put to use for other researchers or in the case of this study, educators. While I mention that this is a case study, I do posit in my conclusion that the lessons I learned from this experience were relevant and reliable in both similar and different settings.

Confirmability is the degree to which the findings of the research can be confirmed by other researchers and do not represent a fictitious assessment of the project and of the data. I believe that by working as part of a team, and in constant discussion with the cooperating teacher, the other researchers as well as being responsible for presenting ideas and early findings to the school's CLC, administration and governing board, the student experience was well documented and discussed in varying settings. Because I was already a member of the school's governing board I felt accountable to several different levels of the school and had open and honest discussions about the project and how it could continue to improve in the eyes of other stakeholders, such as the parents.

In these first sections, I have included a complete description of the methods employed to collect and analyse various forms of data. I have discussed both thematic analysis as well as arts-based inquiry to create a solid and reliable framework to present the data and findings. I have also described the trustworthiness of this research, as a qualitative case study that describes student experience as curators, challenging notions of power and representation in student-run gallery space. Using these different approaches to data collection and analysis, I am able to

maintain my focus on the need to challenge the structure within which our students function in order to make it more equitable and inviting.

Conclusion

In this section I have given a detailed description of the process of conceptualizing, building and opening the UAH gallery, which were all steps required to be completed before the work of curation with the 15+ class could begin. I have sought to create an understanding of the way the project emerged, to reflect the realities of the school and interests of the students. I have described the Fresh Paint gallery as my only reference point for opening and operating a gallery space and describe the ways in which this kind of project is a new way of approaching education, at this school in particular but also in terms of made this curatorial experience unique from other youth curation projects. I consider the ways that curation, as a unique tool for artists and non-artists alike, fosters critical reflexivity and enables any participant to question not only their own social positioning and lived experience but also think outside their own daily lives to consider larger and more complex social issues. I concluded this section by introducing each of the consenting participants, bringing to light some information that stands out to me as valuable in terms of the relationships that we had and the personalities that were present.

All of these different elements are brought together to help respond to the dissertation's overarching purpose to explore what is YPAC. Now that the stage has been properly set, the following chapters analyze the different components of the data collected throughout this research. Chapter five presents my own visual narrative vignettes as a way to display the data and connect the reader to my own experience and understanding of what the students were doing and accomplishing during our time together.

CHAPTER 5

THROUGH THE LENS OF VISUAL NARRATIVE VIGNETTES: YPAC AND POWER

RELATIONS IN SCHOOL

In this chapter, I will be using visual narrative vignettes to deepen an understanding of

YPAC, with particular attention to the first question: "How can YPAC challenge larger patterns

of power relations and exclusionary practices present in school and education?" I use a

combination of visual elements (photographs) and written stories in order to engage with an arts-

based inquiry discussing the process of YPAC, and reflect on my impressions of student

participation, connecting the experiences that took place throughout the research process. My use

of visual narrative vignettes seeks to offer the reader a well-rounded experience of the data, and

helps to validate my interpretation of the experience, drawing from my fieldnotes, which I cite

from directly. My fieldnotes and reflections are grounded in many years of experience with both

the student and artistic communities involved, illustrating the context of a long and intentional

journey. This chapter includes five visual narrative vignettes, curated to tell the story of the UAH

gallery from my perspective. As will be shown, each visual narrative vignette tells a bigger story

about student experience at UAH, allowing me to consider what YPAC is, why it is important

and why and how it worked for these students.

Marcus Banks (2001) recommends that researchers distinguish between the form and the

content of the visual image. Viewers read images externally and internally. The external reading

refers to the form, or what the image shows. The internal reading considers the content or the

message communicated in the image (Baruchel, et al. 2006). The visual narrative vignettes work

to facilitate both an external and internal reading of the images, supporting Rose's visual

discourse analysis type one, concerned primarily with the content of the image itself and the

discourse produced by displaying the images publically. These vignette include a description of the images for clarity followed by a comprehensive discussion of the personal meaning I have attached to or discerned from each image. I also engage with Rose's discourse analysis two, focusing on the context of the images, rather than just on the images themselves, and engaging with their meaning in the broader social realm, and in particular, in the context of the power relations and patterns of exclusion at the school.

Listing the vignettes

In this chapter, I have included five vignettes illustrating different aspects of student experience in relation to the school's patterns of inclusion and exclusion. Whereas, in the interviews the students were not always able to define their own actions in relation to power relations and structures in their school, my interpretations of their participation keep this larger context in mind.

The first vignette is the "Story of Nina Simone," which describes the initial experience of bringing artwork depicting a black female artist into the school that was received with resistance and disapproval from the staff. This helps to set the stage for understanding student feelings of unease and disconnection to their school based on the school's dominant politics of representation and identity, by demonstrating an instance of overt exclusion of black representation within the school. It points to the challenges of attempting to shift the power balance connected to decision-making about representation and the impact this has on students

The second vignette is "Notorious," which describes a painting of rapper Biggie Smalls, which was selected for the first exhibit "Struggle for Black Equality" and was done by a student expelled from the school prior to the research beginning. This vignette examines the importance and the challenges of supporting students as well as a beginning towards understand the capacity

of the UAH gallery as a space that can be used to resist exclusionary practices used in school. The curatorial process facilitated some important discussions about the exclusion and expulsion of students, including how those experiences impact the students who are being excluded as well as the students who witness it.

The third vignette is "Work It," which describes my own process of creating an art piece to be considered for selection in the "The Struggle for Black Equality" exhibit. It details the importance of the relationship building process and how participating with the students in a non-dominant way helped to strengthen the bonds between us, creating room for my voice to exist within the research and highlighting the role of the adult facilitator in YPAC. This vignette is an example of the ways in which traditional hierarchies can be challenged and partly undone, increasing the ability of the adult to be responsive and aware of student interest and experience while also being aware that this shift can present its own set of challenges in terms of student expectation and classroom environment.

The fourth vignette is, "I think we all have empathy. We may not have enough courage to display it-Maya Angelou," which describes a photograph of two students giving a tour of the exhibit to a visiting group from an education center for adults with special needs. While the discussion in this dissertation remains focused on addressing the needs of the UAH students, this photo is a strong example of students contesting the exclusionary nature of schooling, taking the opportunity to create their own more inclusive environment in order to welcome and personalize the learning for other students who have also experienced exclusion from traditional schooling.

The fifth vignette is "All in a days' work: Student experience and collaboration" and uses two photographs I took of the students from the day of the award ceremony for their work on the Struggle for Black Equality exhibit. One of the photos depicts the emotions that students rarely

let the adults see, working to display and discuss the importance of bonding with the students, and placing value on the role of the adult in YPAC. The other photo helps to demonstrate the value placed on the exhibit by people from outside the school, acknowledging the effort and the importance of the students work. While this is still a teleological version of success, it helps to highlight the ways that YPAC can help students successfully reach wider audiences in order visually demonstrate the ways in which students want to experience their education, and want to share their knowledge and experience with larger audiences.

Vignette One: The story of Nina Simone

Figure 9

Nina Simone from artist Miss Me

In what feels like a complicated intersection between arts-based research, YPAR and critical ethnographic research, my shifting identity has sometimes confused, but often deepened, my ability to reflect on the situations I have encountered throughout the research. According to Dowling (2008), this places me in the post-positivist end of a reflexivity continuum. Understanding the importance of my connection to the different communities I participate in has been essential in helping me effectively reflect and journal my way through some controversial experiences. This vignette explores what I consider the most controversial of my personal experiences in this research, perhaps because it happened early on or perhaps because it was my first experience with the kind of treatment students often described as harsh and unfair. This situation revolves around a donated art piece depicting Nina Simone created by Montreal street artist Miss Me and the reactions it received (for an analysis of this vignette through the lens of Rancière's "dissensus", see Low & Proietti, forthcoming).

The donation

This story begins with a very simple and supportive gesture -- the donation of multiple pieces of art from several different artists affiliated to the Fresh Paint gallery. This was an attempt to help develop the emerging urban arts curriculum, and more specifically the newly built gallery space at the high school. In this context, one of the pieces brought into the school was a six-foot wooden structure of internationally renowned jazz singer and civil rights activist Nina Simone. Simone was known for using her music and artistic talents as social commentary to support the civil rights movement and black nationalism, denouncing racism and the unequal treatment of black people, specifically in the United States. The piece, which has a portrait of the singer pasted onto the wood as well as three dimensional components such as beads around the crown which sits on her head, and a satin red cape, was a part of the Saints of Soul exhibit done

by Miss Me in 2014. (See Annexe 3 for description of Saints of Soul exhibit). In this piece,

Simone is adorned with different items linked to traditional religious iconography, often used to

depict saints and martyrs in classical works from the Catholic faith. She wears a long red, satin

cape and her hands are in a form reminiscent of a blessing gesture often seen in Christian art. On

one of her hands rests an exotic bird, as birds were used not only as decorative features but also

as elements of symbolism. Typically, the birds were doves, peacocks and the phoenix but here,

Miss Me's use of a parrot allows us to reflect on the exoticism and fetishism that are associated

with black women and particularly black women performing in the arts. Simone's other hand

draws our attention to where we would typically see the sacred or immaculate hearts in paintings

of Jesus and Mary. In place of the heart, Simone has a fist, one used to symbolize the black

power movement and revolutionary movements more generally. This striking piece is a critical

comment on the many institutions which have and continue to enable structural discrimination to

dominate and subordinate the lives (and art) of so many people considered to be ground breakers

today.

The delivery and disappearance

The day I delivered all the art to the school, I placed the Nina Simone figure in the front

entrance near the office, where student art had recently started decorating the walls. I thought the

front entrance was an appropriate place for such a striking piece. I found this piece to be

accessible (because of the use of religious imagery which is familiar to different generations

based on the notion of Eurocentric cultural capital) but more importantly, culturally relevant

(Gay, 2000) street art. Although Simone was not familiar to most of the students in the school, I

thought it was important to share an art work depicting a black woman, who was an artist and an

activist, having strength and presence. This would be a rare representation of blackness in the

school. The statuesque rendition of Simone was placed out of the way of the front doors, but would have been impossible to miss as the height of the piece, the colours used and the satin red cape adorning the figure were quite a contrast to the beige and burgundy trimmed walls of the entrance.

When I came back to the school the day after the delivery, I was surprised to find her turned around, so that the back of her red cape faced the doors making it look as though a pile of something had been covered with shiny red fabric. I thought it was a bit strange, since the students at the school have been consistently respectful of the art we have created and presented to them, and nothing had ever been damaged or vandalized. I turned the figure to face the front again and went about my day. After leaving the school for the day I was quite surprised to receive a phone call from a colleague to let me know the statue had been turned around once again. It was now confirmed that it had been done by staff at the school. I was disappointed to think that before anyone had approached me about the piece they had felt entitled to express discontent with the art by physically manipulating it and altering the visual experience.

It seemed important that what I saw as a disrespectful gesture, towards not only the piece, but the artist who created it and the urban arts community as a whole, needed to be addressed. I felt it was probably important to explore why this was happening as well as to see if this was indicative of a critique of the urban arts project as a whole, bubbling below the surface. I thought an appropriate way would be to encourage reflection and offer a potential for critique, which according to Hetland (2013) are some of the most important components of visual arts education. I imagined that giving people (staff) the opportunity to explore their resistance towards the piece could offer a clearer idea of what they found so difficult to accept about it. I wrote up a summary of the art piece, including information about Nina Simone, and Miss Me, the artist who created

the piece and her values and inspiration behind the show, which I thought would give the piece more context. Since the piece seemed to be upsetting some of the staff my intention was to distribute the write-up to each teacher personally. I hoped that addressing it in a non-confrontational but personalized manner would be the best way to open a dialogue about the experience people were having with the figure. However, when I showed up at the school the next day, I walked in to find that Nina Simone was gone. She had just vanished from her spot in the entrance, as if she had never been there.

I was shocked and furious, though I attempted to remain professional. How could someone have been so bold as to move a piece of art without even telling anyone where it had been moved? Not one staff member seemed to know where it went or who had moved it; the Nina Simone statue seemed to have grown working legs and walked away. With a colleague, we searched the school top to bottom, including the garbage dumpsters outside, to locate the missing piece. Finally, after nearly 45 mins of searching we were let into the locked staff room by the custodian to find the six-foot cut-out tucked away in a corner, hidden from immediate view. No one ever took responsibility for moving the statue, even though most of the staff were aware of what had happened. I had a few teachers approach me and tell me whom they either suspected or believed they could confirm did it, however nothing was ever said or done about it by the administration. When the statue was found I believe the message was received loud and clear, and the administrations' lack of leadership in helping to locate the missing art, secure it or even address the situation with the staff demonstrated that the priority of challenging institutional boundaries that exclude so many students was lower than what we had been told at the onset of this project. While there could have been many reasons the administration did not address the situation as it was unfolding, the inaction on their behalf served only to propagate the injustice of

rendering this statue invisible and dismissing the value of its representation, making all parties complicit.

Discouraged and frustrated in that one instant I found myself giving up any hope of trying to legitimately introduce the visual urban arts into the school. Even as a member of this strong and vibrant culture built on the foundation of claiming existence in places and ways that society has tried to repress or ignore, I found myself unable to see any opportunity for growth or dialogue growing out of this situation. The reaction to this one piece of art made me feel like the administration's desire to enrich the urban arts offerings at the school was perhaps premature. The concept of what can be accomplished by working through graffiti and street art had perhaps not been thoroughly explored with the staff; when the art work was physically installed in their daily work environment, the art was not met with open minds and hearts, but with the same resistance the culture faces in the media, and the same resistance the students often show their teachers in the classroom.

Reflections on urban art and the traditional school structure

I took some time to reflect on the parallels between the customary critiques of the visual urban arts compared to the response this piece received. These critiques are often based on the notion that graffiti is bad because it makes people feel uncomfortable or unsafe; they cannot read it or distinguish the letters and are uncomfortable knowing it is done illegally. Since the artists are unknown (Ferrell, 1993; Austin 2001) there can be no accountability for pieces that simply appear in unexpected spaces at undetermined times. With little access to who is doing it or how to work with the culture, the media has become comfortable publicly shaming those implicated in it, making claims which are emotional and reactionary, rarely based in fact, but which also cannot easily be disproven. It was this kind of hostile response that I perceived as being

replicated in the school. Without a word exchanged about the Nina Simone piece, the communication was loud and clear; this arts culture is only welcome as far as people are comfortable with it, meaning that it can exist, but not disrupt the normal expected representations in school. There was still a distinct but invisible line of acceptability that is not easily crossed in an institutional setting. Closely examining this experience it becomes quite clear that while the appearance of the art work may have been what triggered an act of resistance, relegating the piece to a place of invisibility speaks to a more prevalent and less comfortable contention amongst the staff members about acceptable (normalized) versions of racial representation. Why is the depiction of a black woman as powerful and spiritual an acceptable piece of art to react against while no other piece of art was ever challenged in this way? I suspect that had the person depicted been a white male, it would have gone untouched to this very day. As Gaztambide-Fernández et al. (2018) argue 'because racism is foundational to Eurocentric understandings of culture and cultural production, it is always implicit in how the arts and artists are recognized and valued' (p. 2). The equation of the (white) arts with goodness relies on a binary opposition which understands 'black (non-white) bodies and cultural practices as abject, threatening, and the Other' (pp. 16-17). Thus, in removing the statue from view, the staff members eliminated the threat of displaying blackness in a way that would challenge the cultural capital with value and power in a school setting. Whoever moved the statue, whether acting alone or with other colleagues, made the decision for the rest of the school community that the story the Nina Simone statue told was not relevant or worthy of space in the traditional school curriculum. For more analysis of the resistance to this piece, see Low and Proietti (in process).

      Art is subjective, therefore it is understandable that certain pieces are met with resistance and are subject to critique. Through examining this instance, I had a definitive example of

institutional expectations affecting the notion of acceptable representation within a school. The politics of representation within a traditional school structure are far more complex than what I had initially imagined, or had come to understand as a white woman. This situation was a clear example of the functioning power hierarchy in the school and the ease with which this structure systematically excludes the representation of non-white figures. While the gallery was eventually able to function as a space for diversity in representation, there was a clear limitation set on where this diversity was acceptable and where it did not belong. Challenging these unspoken norms meant I was openly questioning who should and should not be depicted in school, who should and should not be challenged about these representations and who has the final say in this ongoing struggle. The swift and clear response this piece of art received demonstrate what students often describe as the rigidity of the school system, found both inside the classroom and out. The dialogue about how easily this rendition of Nina Simone was discarded was silent, but spoke volumes about the challenge of shifting the value of traditional cultural capital (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; McClaren, 1989) which is so engrained in traditional educational institutions.

In a final reflection on this experience I found myself questioning what kind of repercussions a student would have faced had one of them been responsible for hiding the statue. What kind of intervention would they have had to sit through, in order to discuss what behaviours are acceptable at school, when it comes to property that surrounds them but they often can't claim ownership over. If adult discomfort is honoured but student resistance is punished, can we ever truly support student resistance in meaningful ways?

Vignette Two: Notorious: Biggie Smalls

Figure 10

Painting of rapper Biggie Smalls by former UAH student

The (invisible) history behind this painting is what makes it important to me, particularly

within the larger context of this exhibit. What wouldn't be known by a viewer is that this black

and white painting representing Biggie Smalls was done by a former UAH student, and one of

the first (and most active) participants in the original cohort of the graffiti club from 2011. The

painting itself is a portrait of renowned rapper Biggie Smalls done in black, white and grey. This

painting is only of the rapper's face, a famous close up that requires no other clue as to his

identity if you identify with Hip Hop culture. This demonstrates the student's knowledge of

whom he suspected would be his primary audience (UAH students), and emphasizes his ability

as a portrait artist, which is important as most of his former schoolmates knew him as a graffiti

writer. The selection of the rapper is important, as will be discussed later on in this vignette. The

rapper himself was an icon in 90's Hip Hop, and is still considered to be one of the best rappers

of all time. He was known for his involvement with drugs and weapons, which figured in his

lyrics. His talent and persona continue to remain relevant, even after his untimely murder in

1997.

The painting also displays his prominent signature that takes up a significant amount of

space across the bottom of the canvas. I mention this aspect of the image to attend to the ways

images convey messages to the public and create meanings that reinforce or challenge social

norms (Rose's discourse analysis one). I then engage with the signature as a way of commenting

on the institution and student experience, thinking more about the ways that the institution of

school influenced both the production of the painting as well as the production of the exhibit

(Rose's discourse analysis two). This signature is what connects the two types of discourse

analysis together.

In my interpretation, the signature is an important piece of image because it displays the

pride that this artist took in his work and the recognition he sought. My interpretation of the

significance of the signature that follow is based on my privileged insight into the lives of some

of the students at this school; I had a number of conversations with the student about submitting his work and the anxiety associated with his decision making process. It helped me reflect on my own positioning, as my history with the graffiti program had already taught me how the school can function in ways that either respond to or silence the needs of the students and what I was and was not able to do about this in my role as club facilitator. Further thought about the graffiti club also helped me realize that through the club I was able to begin developing student trust and confidence that carried over to other students and other projects in the school, leading to greater student buy-in every time I suggested or piloted a project. Before building the UAH gallery I had already been a part of many successful and interesting urban arts projects at the school, and the artist of this painting was one of the primary catalysts for almost all of them.

The artist and his academic journey

In his time at UAH the artist, whom I call James, experienced several years of highs and lows in school, including behavioral and academic success like making honor roll and moving ahead in grades, to behavioral and academic challenges like regular detentions, suspensions and strained relationships with some staff members. The school eventually expelled him, but his impact on me as a facilitator and educator lasted long after he left the school. When we first met he was in his first few months of grade seven (his first year of high school), and he was not yet tall but made up for any lack of height with huge amounts of energy and personality. From these first few moments the one thing he wanted my graffiti club co-facilitator and I to know was that he loved graffiti and he did it.

Generally, the people who are the most interested and active in graffiti will never tell strangers about it, especially adults, and especially adults at their school. For obvious reasons (illegality) and not so obvious reasons (subversive or underground status), graffiti resembles the

Fight Club (Palahniuk, 1996): The first rule about fight club is you don't talk about fight club. For all other students it would often take weeks for the buy-in to concretize and for them to come to their own conclusions about whether we were 'legit' and whether they felt like taking something they did in their free time and allowing their school community access to this aspect of their identity/private life. Not this student though. From day one he would openly tag things, show us his black book, and ask my co-facilitator to take him to paint trains etc. He also did things that were unmistakable attempts for attention such as copying other writers' tags, which is a definite faux pas in the world of graffiti. The world of graffiti was very attractive to him and he wanted nothing more than to be a part of it; the funny thing was, he was a very talented artist and could have easily accessed the culture if he wanted. He did not need to copy other writers' tags, he was good enough on his own. But, for James, at an age (12 at that time) when self-confidence is generally precarious, his life experiences had meant that he wasn't willing to depend on his own talent for attention. He wanted access to the insider world of the graffiti community for a sense of belonging and for validation, which is typically what graffiti crews offer their participants, but he was not confident enough to go and get it.

In spite of James's heightened need for attention (negative or positive), my co-facilitator and I both appreciated his enthusiasm for life in general, his talent, his charisma and his kindness. Many of the teachers felt the same way, but they were not able to handle his energy levels and need for attention along with the rest of the students in his classes. James was often suspended or put into detention and his reputation as a troublemaker began to precede him. By the time James reached grade nine he had been held back once and before the year was half over the principal decided to expel him from the school. What I always found interesting about James was that he was not angry about the decision (that many teachers questioned), and after leaving

he remained determined to graduate from high school, regardless of which school would confer him his diploma. He went on to an alternative school in a neighboring community and, flourishing in that setting, he graduated as class president three years later. I kept close contact with James and he started to feel more like a younger sibling than anything else. James never ceased to impress me and I always enjoyed the opportunity to reconnect with him, but his painting in the show exemplifies a larger point I saw emerging in this research.

Something to prove

When I sent James the call for submissions he was determined to paint something and hoped very much the students would select it. Not only did he want his painting selected for an exhibit, as it would be the first time his solo work would appear in an exhibit, but he still felt as though he had something to prove. He had told me that he wanted the school (teachers and administrators) to know that he was not only doing better as a student but that he was also still doing art. This comment was a starting point for my reflection about the prominence of his signature. He took ownership over his art and the identity of being an artist. Despite the treatment he received (being expelled in a situation that could be described as contestable), he did not want the same people who sent him out to think badly about him. He believed he still had something to prove because they did not believe in his ability to succeed and through his art was able to confidently display his existence.

James had several protective factors in his life, including supportive family and community as well as being a white student. Yet he was still vulnerable with elevated learning needs, struggling to develop an identity within this particular school setting. The unfortunate reality is that teachers' frustrations with his behaviour resulted in continuous detentions suspensions and finally expulsion, sending the message that UAH was not the place for him.

I found it distressing that a student still felt the need to prove himself to people who would not support him when he was under their supervision. Many types of teacher-student interaction can heighten student resistance (McNabb-Spaulding, 1995; Waxman, Gray & Padron, 2005), enabling teachers to continuously blame students for their shortfalls (Seltzer-Kelly, 2001). UAH has often relied on a harsh discipline approach, although they have publically stated their apparent interest and commitment to serve vulnerable students. I believe this expulsion is indicative of some students' experience at the school, in that students who have challenges in terms of their learning abilities, in-school behavior, or simply do not fit with Thobani's (2007) description of "Canadian National Identity" as discussed in chapter one, will eventually end up excluded from their own education. While James was not impacted by the exclusionary nature of the Canadian national identity, his experience points to larger problem of expulsion based on disciplinary measures that primarily serve to maintain the hegemonic nature of schooling.

For the artwork itself, I was not surprised that he chose to paint his idol, rapper Biggie. James loves Biggie because he identifies with him as an artist and idolizes him as a bad boy. For James, both the subject matter and the opportunity for recognition in his former school were appealing outcomes of submitting artwork. One element I had not considered was how other students would interpret his participation in the show, based on his expulsion from the school. Because the school itself is small, and the community is close-knit, many students were aware of what had happened, and were more curious about whether he was allowed to be included in the show. Leading up to the exhibit I was asked by several different students if it was true that James had a painting in the gallery, which was often followed by asking if that was allowed given he no longer attended the school, ending with a discussion of what a talented artist he is.

Discussing his student status with other current students could foster understanding that his expulsion from school did not change anything about him as a person and certainly did not affect his skill level as an artist. I realized that these were important moments to explore with remaining students the outcome of student expulsion and reminders that success can be achieved in many different ways, including outside of school. As a wider network (which can include the neighborhood as well as the arts communities) we have a responsibility to continue supporting each other, even when school cannot. We see this reflected in the engagement literature in relation to the important role that teachers can play in the community (Klem & Connell, 2004) as well as the role that the community plays in building student identity while in school.

The artist is welcomed back: Challenging exclusionary practices through YPAC

I will now briefly shift the focus away from James and his painting to discuss the larger implications of having his artwork in the exhibit, using Rose's visual methodology discourse analysis method two which attends to the influence of the institution on the visual rather than the actual images or verbal texts themselves: "It tends to be more explicitly concerned with issues of power, regimes of truth, institutions and technologies" (Rose, 140). I am choosing to use this as a strategy for analyzing the curatorial choices made by the students because thinking not only about what the painting was, but who painted it and why, we were able to discuss the larger implications of student experience within the traditional framework of school, helping me to respond to research question one throughout this vignette. Hosting art that was relatable in multiple different ways for students meant that the conversation around the work was varied and often complex. The content of the image was not the focus of the conversation surrounding this painting, but the image itself helped facilitate discussions surrounding other realities the students faced, both in and out of school. I wrote about this in a journal entry on February 11, 2016 after

the selection process surrounding this painting. I noted that one student in particular was opposed to including the painting in the show because she did not feel the quality was good enough. I felt like that was a bit harsh, especially given that her assessment of its quality was debatable, however this did open the class up to a discussion of the piece. Other students responded that they liked it, which led them to ask if we would be allowed to have the painting in the show based on the fact that the artist had been expelled from the school. Questioning them as to whether or not they thought this (being expelled) was important led us to thinking about what the students wanted out of the gallery space: did they want it to be accessible to everyone or not? I was happy that the students were ready to challenge the norms of success in the school space and chose to showcase the talent of a student rather than give in to the negative stigma associated with being expelled. Although they had a harder time with a conversation about how these norms can or should be changed, the overall opinion was that it would not be fair to not include art that was good based on the school's reaction to a student.

Where a student-driven YPAC project can potentially be more impactful than a school-wide, adult-led, initiative, is that students are able to make the choice to recognize the talents and abilities of their peers and can support these students publically in spite of the failure to do so by the staff. This then challenges the dominant voice of who is a part of a school community and gives students more opportunity to experience some kind of success or recognition in the school where they did not previously.

Reflecting on this painting was an important step in my own realization of what is possible when working through the arts, and curation more specifically in this case. It was also a confirmation of how privileged I consider myself to be, to have been able to get to know and work with some very exceptional young people. Finally, it was a reminder that the strengths of a

program are limited by those who put the program into place and that the identity building

capacities, the sense of confidence and accomplishment as well as of collaboration linked to

graffiti are limited in their capacities of existence in a school if the staff does not adopt a similar

mentality. I was fortunate that we did not have to ask permission from the administration to

include this student's painting, because the students had made the decision to do so, but I am also

aware this will not be the reality for every school. While this dissertation focuses on the student

experience in the singular ecosystem of the 15+ program, I am reminded that the larger

capacities of alternative programming are limited when the markers of success and failure are

primarily decided by the authority of adults who are upholding a system working to penalize

students who are the racial, cultural and class "other". In this project we can see the impact of a

selected group of students with (some) agency to challenge exclusionary practices frequently

used in traditional school settings. This leads me to question ways that all students would be

able to affect changes to the larger structure of their school, and work to co-create learning

environments that were responsive, meaningful, respectful and inclusive of the individual, while

also fostering collaboration. How many students would be able to avoid expulsion or other

disciplinary measures if these aspects of learning were emphasized?

Vignette Three: Work it: Missy Elliott

Figure 11

Glass mosaic co-contructed by me and students

Although I have been involved in the arts for a long time, I do not make art. I have

participated in many mural projects by simply painting inside the lines designated by an artist,

but that is where my artistic talents stop. In addition, while I believe my interest and support for

the arts is quite clear and honest, this has not lead to an increase in my artistic ability or

creativity. Thus, the idea of producing a piece for the exhibit would have been inconceivable had

it not been for the collaborative nature of the production. Therefore this narrative vignette is my

own 'production text' (Fiske, 1991), a description of the production process of my art piece as I

shift positionality from a participant-researcher to a participant-art producer. This vignette is also

useful in terms of examining the different methods of engaging with the visual and arts-based

methodologies, described in Mitchell (2011) as representation, dissemination and

inquiry. Finally, this is vignette continues to help identify what the role of the adult facilitator in

a YPAC project can be. Through the different lenses just described, the observations in this

narrative vignette help to display the ways that YPAC can challenge the exclusionary nature of

schooling, primarily by pushing back against the typical power relations upheld in schools. By

working collaboratively with the students I was included in their first-hand experience of YPAC

and fostered a more equitable working relationship in which we were interdependent on one

another to achieve the goal we set out to accomplish.

The importance of collaboration

The importance of collaboration to this project has been essential in making any progress

throughout the projects and this piece was no exception. The person who came up with the idea

for the piece and got me started was Crystal, the second facilitator for the after school street art

program and the person who introduced the concept of street art into the programming as an

extension of the graffiti club. As discussed in history of street art programming at UAH, when

we opened up the activity to be inclusive of other art forms we saw a completely new

participation from the students, changing the way the program grew and attracted student

interest. It also allowed me to value these different kinds of art in a way that I had not before; I

had been so focused on graffiti culture that I failed to see the benefits of working with different

mediums that were more inclusive and more accessible to different students. This Missy Elliott

piece represents my growth, my appreciation for variety across the arts and across education, my

commitment to collaborative work as well as my admiration for the women who have built Hip

Hop culture and who not only inspire me, but the youth as well.

The piece is a traditional mosaic done with pieces of mirror from miniature disco balls,

cut into a variety of random shapes and affixed with wood glue on the box frame to fill in the

design. Missy Elliott's extravagant persona is the inspiration for this image and the flashy, eye-

catching effect of mirrors was a way to declare her presence while giving the image a near 3D

effect. The mosaic appears on a wooden box frame, painted red; a statement of importance,

passion, energy and love that I believe are traits from all the people who were included in the call

for submissions. I had previously never seen a mosaic that I particularly liked or found very

visually interesting. When Crystal proposed the idea I had suggested she complete the project

and submit it herself. However, with her work schedule, the pieces she already planned to submit

and the time that is required to complete a mosaic it did not seem feasible. As a fan of the artist,

and wanting to be involved in the show in a significant way I decided to try my hand at mosaic

making. This was also a way for me to put my own words into action, as I always encourage the

students to try new things and not be afraid to fail. While I had no idea if I would actually be able

to complete this project or not I felt that if I did not even try, I could no longer be telling the

students they should be. I believe that leading by example makes up an important part of my

educator persona. I also believe that the importance of mirroring the actions you expect out of

the participants in your programs or classrooms is teaching with integrity while fostering spaces

that are respectful and based on equity, seen so often across literatures that incorporate critical

pedagogies.

For an entire week, I peeled mirror pieces off from miniature disco balls and snipped

them into different size pieces that would fit into the outline Crystal had already drawn onto the

box. At first, it seemed quite easy, although progress was very slow. Then as I needed to cut the

pieces into smaller or more awkward shapes, I began to cut my fingers on the small shards from

the mirrors. While this may seem unimportant as a detail of the creation, the frustration of

constantly cutting my fingertips began to make me feel like I was crazy for spending all my free

time engaged in this project, but also made me realize the piece represented something more

important than that. I wanted to have something I completed to show the students; I wanted not

only to be a part of the show but I wanted to be a part of their success as they battled the

vicissitudes of the stages of curation. I could now empathize with their frustrations as well as

their perseverance. So, I continued to cut and glue glass pieces and I continued to cut my

fingertips in the process.

I proposed the piece to the class during the selection process by showing the students a

photo of the work in progress and they all agreed they wanted to include it in the show. This

validation from the students was important for me because it showed they could recognize the

work that I was putting in and, like they did with submissions from their peers in the class,

accepted the piece without any criticism. I do not think this was a reflection of their amazement

with my artistic abilities or love for the piece, but as the selection process demonstrated, they

were all supportive of one another's work, both the music and visual, in a way that they were not

always for other people. They willingly accepted my piece, before I could even show it to them

completed, and I truly felt as though we were all in this together; equal ownership, commitment

and engagement to putting on the exhibit.

On the day of the vernissage, I showed up at the school with a mosaic ¾ finished and a

to-do list a mile long. Not wanting to disappoint or not fulfill the duty I had taken on, the piece

became even more collaborative as I entrusted the mirrors, cutters and glue to two students from

the class who agreed to finish the piece as we worked to hang the show. At first I felt bad, like I

would disappoint the students by showing them I wasn't able to get everything done as I had

promised I would. However, being honest with them about my personal limitations seemed to

only evoke their empathy for me, as they made comments like "It's ok, miss you have already

done a lot" and "You did that? It looks good the way it is". It also meant they were willing to

help me finish, as it would benefit everyone involved in the project.

Dorothy, one of the RAs whom the students also knew well, was the one to suggest that

they work towards finishing the piece while the rest of the art was being installed and the

students agreed to it immediately. When I asked hesitantly: "Are you sure? The glass is sharp, it

is pretty dangerous…", I was reassured that with Dorothy's supervision the students wanted to

complete the project. After an hour the process was complete and the piece was presented to me.

"Is this ok?" one of the students asked "Did we do it right?" I was grateful not only for their

willingness to engage but their desire for it to be done well. We had gotten to the point where

they were not doing something for the sake of doing it, but doing it because they had created

some personal connection to the process and therefore, had a connection to the outcome.

The final piece hung in the show and stood as a reminder of the connection between the

students and me as well as between the students and the show. I also decided to give the piece to

the student who did most of the work on completing it. She seemed shocked when I asked her if

she would like to keep it once the show came down. "Really? Are you sure?" she had asked. I

thought it was because she was happy but at the end of the school year, the art teacher found it

left behind in the students' locker. My immediate reaction was a feeling of disappointment,

imagining that she did not really like it after all. I did not want to ask her about it, given that if

she had forgotten it by accident or on purpose, she would feel badly if I pointed it out the

following school year. While I cannot say with any certainty the reason she did not take it, there

could have been many reasons, one being it was not her design to begin with and that she also

may not have had anywhere to hang it. Through reflecting on the whole experience it is clear that

what was important was the process of creating everything that encompassed the exhibits in the

gallery. Once the show was over the experience was essentially over and the accomplishments

were not connected to one piece of work, but rather included every step of the process. The final

product was the show, not the individual works, and this was what meant the most to the students

in our group. I cannot think of a more appropriate way to conclude this experience of

collaboratively completing and submitting a piece to the show. It is a personal challenge to

remind myself that what is meaningful to the students must always remain the most important

outcome. I also have to recognize where my ego was a factor and try to diminish the importance

of recognizing myself in the outcomes of this project; instead, I need to recognize where the

students locate themselves in this project.

Vignette Four: "I think we all have empathy. We may not have enough courage to display it"-Maya Angelou

Figure 12

Photograph in the gallery: Two UAH students giving a tour of the exhibit

I have chosen this photo as one of the most visually rich and descriptive examples of student participation and experience in curation. This photo demonstrates both the ownership the students took over the space and the exhibit as well as their dedication to challenging the exclusionary methods that exist in the traditional institutional framework of school .In considering the ways in which YPAC enabled students to challenge exclusionary norms and traditional power structures in school it was first important to identify that exclusion can

sometimes be overt but is often times invisible and experienced by marginalized students consistently throughout their academic careers. I believe that this fits Gramsci's description of hegemony as "predominance by consent" (Ramos, 1982, n.p.) as students end up complicit in their oppression, required by law to attend schools which are not representative of their lives, interests or experiences and then punished for their resistance until they submit or disengage. However, if an opportunity arises for students to discover their agency in schools, they are more likely to acknowledge and celebrate their strengths and achievements as well as recognize the institutional boundaries that exclude them as well as many other students. This can help them recognize that they experienced this same exclusion and, potentially, have the desire to work towards a change they believe in.

Tour of UAH gallery

In this photo, we see two students from the 15+ program giving a tour of the exhibit to a student who had come with his adult education program from another school. His class had submitted a piece that was included as part of the SFBE exhibit and so his class came to take a tour of the exhibit after the opening night. While several of the students had been present on opening night, their teacher felt it was important for everyone to come to the gallery together as they had all participated in making the piece but weren't all able to attend the opening.

Interestingly, their teacher had come to speak to the students in the 15+ program before her students came, as they are students who have different abilities, physically or intellectually. She wanted to be sure that the UAH students were prepared to meet her students and would feel comfortable socializing with them. Her goal was to help ensure all the UAH students felt at ease addressing the group and prepared for the different kinds of interactions they may have. Discussing these abilities openly meant that there was no surprise about the students

the day the group showed up for the tour. While the UAH students may not have been

completely at ease, they were empathetic and engaging with the group (it is also worth noting

that any group of students who came to tour the gallery made the UAH students slightly uneasy

so this reaction could be expected and was not insensitive, based on previous experiences).

After a series of icebreakers that had been prepared in advance, the students all went into

the gallery together, in an unstructured time to allow the students' time to experience the show

and be by themselves. What quickly happened was that two students from UAH (shown in the

photo) realized that since one of the visiting students was visually impaired, he would not be able

to experience the show as everyone else was. They took it upon themselves to ask the student if

he would like a tour of the exhibit and went one piece at a time, giving a visual description,

naming the artist and explaining why the piece had been included in the show. Both of the

teachers (and I) were amazed at the fact the students had taken this on themselves, showing not

only their ability to be empathetic but also showing how important the exhibit was to them. I was

also somewhat surprised at how accurately they were able to describe the experience of the

selection process as well as giving a visual analysis of each of the pieces. This discourse was

almost more informative than the formal interviews in terms of the description of and connection

to the process of curation (however in an attempt to allow students the space to be autonomous I

did not follow them around to record their discussions).

Describing the exhibit

Their descriptive language of each piece demonstrated their understanding and memory

of the process of sequencing the art works as a way to elicit create certain emotions in the

viewer. And their descriptions were clear and vivid, pointing to the most important aspects of a

piece, such as "This is a collage and there is red paint on top of the newspaper clippings which

looks like blood." As their tour went along their descriptions became richer, such as saying

"This statue is a famous jazz singer who fought for civil rights. She has a long red cape that is

shiny satin and attached to her silhouette. It makes her seem more intense because she is painted

in black and white. It also makes her look like one of those old religious paintings. The artist

wanted to make her look that way because of what she stood for." (field notes, March 23, 2016)

This unsolicited tour of the gallery speaks to the overall experience of student curation in

ways that demonstrate the importance of the process of selection and sequencing aspects of

curation. Students' decision-making power and experience enhances their ownership of the

project, and once the exhibit was open to the public, welcoming an audience to see the work

enhanced this feeling. This is because they were expected to justify their curatorial choices, not

only in terms of aesthetic but in terms of content as well.

What I believe is important to remark is that the opportunity to create their own space

meant that many norms of traditional school spaces were challenged, including particular

practices, disciplines, rules and spectator expectations of the UAH gallery. These seemed to

challenge what students were not normally able to do, show interest in, or say with confidence. If

this photograph is any indication of what is possible in terms of human and personal connection

through the creation of a counter-cultural space/location, I believe this research can be a first step

towards fostering thoughtful practices that are inclusive and representative of all students.

Vignette Five: All in a days' work: Student experience and collaboration

Figure 13

Photographs taken the day of an awards ceremony

These two pictures are effective visual aids in describing the student experience of curating the exhibits in the UAH gallery. In the first photo, the viewer can see a group of the students seated on swings, playing in a park outdoors on a beautiful sunny day. There are several students who are in mid-swing, the energy that is emitted from this motion gives the viewer a sense of the liveliness of the students in that particular moment. The student whose swing is in the air is clearly laughing out loud and looking towards the peer to her left. The students were not aware that I was taking the picture, mainly because they were having too much fun to notice me, until they began asking me and Nicholas to push them. This unstaged photograph clearly conveys their emotions, and the release felt by the students as they let go and take advantage of a day to celebrate their success.

In the second picture, the students are standing on the stage after receiving their award. As opposed to the first photo this picture is staged, meaning the students were asked to pose and were aware they were having their picture taken. The host of the day is somewhat obstructing the students and while I understand that hosts need to be lively and entertaining as part of their job, it somewhat distracts from the students themselves. Mostly, the body language conveys a somewhat uncomfortable energy, that can be read as usual behaviours for most teenagers, and for these students in particular the kind attention they are receiving (positive based on academic achievement) is most likely not something they are completely at ease with and not accustomed to. There is an arm crossing a body, hands deeply placed into pockets, hair covering a face and some students who are only partially visible. This is a celebratory picture, and there is no doubt the students (and the teacher) were proud of their accomplishment, but there is an important difference between the two photos, specifically in terms of understanding this group of students. The students in photo 1 are displaying an emotional response to an enjoyable moment. This

demonstration of joy can be a vulnerability and is not present in photo two. Whereas photo two would be an expected time to smile and show happiness, the students appear to be uncomfortable doing so. As will be discussed in the following chapter, students name positive emotions such as pride and amazement in relation to their experience curating a successful exhibit. This is visible in photo one, where it is "just us"; however, displaying it for other people is still not something they became comfortable with. This range of positive emotions can be rendered invisible inside a traditional school setting and adults are likely to forget students have these emotions on their spectrum.

The contradictory nature of a school structure rewarding students for engaging in academic work that was critical of the exclusionary nature of the curriculum resulting in students feeling ostracized or ignored in their past schooling experiences does not escape me. At no point during the awards ceremony, or in any information released about the winners, was there context given describing the exhibit's inspirations, including offering a more engaging and contemporary version of Black History Month than typically seen at the school. The award did not also seem to have fostered discussion of how to improve the current school structures and curriculum to lessen student alienation or isolation. I worried about students receiving recognition for conformity, but I also realized that external recognition and affirmation is important, as will be discussed in the following chapter in the "Being Noticed" sub-theme. Validation was relatively unusual for our students based on their past student success rates and relationships with school. Finding the balance between extrinsic and intrinsic reward was challenging, but I was satisfied knowing that the students were still being rewarded for doing school on their own terms, whether it was stated directly in the ceremony or not.

Both of these photos are from the same day after the first exhibit had ended and before the second one had gone up. They are not a visual representation of how the students changed nor are they a linear visual example of student personal growth throughout the year or an ending to this first group experience. I believe these photos are a representation of the successes achieved by our students, not only in officially recognized ways, such as photograph two, but also in their willingness to engage in ways they found enjoyable allowing them to be comfortable with themselves and their peers as seen in photograph one. Allowing themselves to enjoy the success they earned displays their level of comfort with their peers and the adults involved as well as showing the ownership they took over the project, understanding they had something to celebrate and taking advantage of that moment.

During the ceremony

The lead up to receiving the award involved some demonstrations of anxiety that I linked to the student's past negative experiences with institutions as well as a lingering self-doubt that still existed in spite of their developing student identities. Taken from my journal entry from that day is a reflection about the experience of sitting through the ceremony with the students and realizing how strong our relationship had become based on the trust and respect they showed me as we waited. The teacher was not actually sitting with the group throughout the ceremony because he was presenting an award that day and therefore sat in the front. Given this, I sat with our students and went through emotional ups and downs with them while they waited to receive their award. As their award was given out last (which would have been good to know in advance) we sat through over an hour of presentations to other groups of students, being awarded for their academic work, all done in French. Had this taken place in another context, or earlier in the year, I am doubtful that all the students would have actually stayed because as each award

passed they grew increasingly certain there had been a mistake and they had not won anything at all. As I wrote,

> They all had a phone and I said I thought it was fine if they were on their phones during the presentations until it would be our turn. They appreciated my flexibility, and promised they would put their phones away and take out their earbuds when I asked them to. I could tell they were nervous because I had to take two girls (at separate times) to the bathroom, which was right next to our seats. They normally would have been fine to go on their own but they both asked if I could please go with them, to which I was not going to say no.

In my notes, I go on to describe the waiting process as we weren't sure which award the students were winning; there were 11 being handed out and they were nominated for two awards. At the first award nomination we all got very excited, the students put their phones away right away, took jackets off, sat straight and were smiling. However, they did not win the first award, which worried me. Connor and Alice both asked what if Nicholas got it wrong and perhaps they had not won anything after all. After this the students put their earphones back in. Connor kept his out and I could see he was making an effort to stay in a good mood by making jokes about the other winners. It seemed their confidence levels were diminishing, so I made jokes with him, trying not to insult the other winners but allowing him the space to express himself. As I noted:

> Vanessa started in with him, expressing "our idea was so much better than that. I mean we actually changed things, what are these people doing?" (the idea was for a book holder to hang off students' chairs). So we talked a bit about how important their show was and how much of a difference it made for the school and that we didn't need an award to know that.

Finally, the very last award to be handed out (by Nicholas) was theirs and they all got up smiling to collect their award on stage. Vanessa agreed to speak on behalf of the group and spoke about the gallery and the show for Black History Month as a way to show the struggle faced by Black people and that we thought it was important to put the spotlight on that by showing people who are not usually visible during BHM celebrations. As I took pictures of the group, Connor and Alice told me to come in the picture as well. When I said no its ok and they insisted. Connor said 'No come on you should be here too' so I eventually got in the photos with them as well.

The connection between the students and I, as described above, is an important outcome of this project because the strength of the relationship and the importance of the role of adults and teachers in the lives of students is a key element in this vignette. When examining the ways in which different power relations can be challenged in schools, starting with the role of the teacher was effective as a test of how shifting power dynamics can actually work. The students in this research were in-charge of making the decisions about the exhibit and because of it took ownership over their responsibilities, becoming increasingly self-reliant and reliable as the project went on. Moving away from others having power over decisions about what they would learn and how they would learn it, they gained control over their learning. They were also willing to share their experiences with the adults who worked alongside them in a supportive role rather than a dominating one. This is demonstrated through the students' insistence that I (and Nicholas) be in the award photo with them. We worked as a team, which held value to them as an inclusive and equitable learning experience.

Furthering the discussion about power relations, it is clear from the students' remark about 'actually changing things' that the work done for the show was both meaningful and important to them and they understood this was a unique accomplishment. Being able to identify

that a change was made is an important realization that students do not have to be complicit in an

education system that is not representative of their lived realities or respectful of their needs and

interests.

My connection to the students can also be understood as a demonstration of the link

between the different kinds of engagement described in the research, being cognitive, emotional

and behavioral. While the categories may still remain debated in the literature I observed that the

emotional well-being of the students had a direct impact on their behaviour and cognitive

connections. Had the emotional insecurities been too overwhelming for them, the capacities for

discussion and personal growth would diminish. This is clear in the example of the exchange I

had with the students as they sat and waited for their award. While all physical signs indicated an

important level of anxiety and self-doubt, they chose to remain through the ceremony and found

ways of coping with their nerves through dialogue amongst our group.

One element of student experience that I retain as important and representative of the

building blocks of challenging power relations through equitable and respectful classrooms is the

time invested in relationship building between the adults and the students, and I believe it is

demonstrated through both of these photographs as well as the discussions that surround them.

This relationship building began early on in the project and was beneficial, and required, in the

long-term outcomes. These bonds allowed us, as a group, to work through struggles with self-

confidence and attempt to find ways to channel resistance towards school or curriculum in ways

that could be transformative. The challenges of working to maintain consistent engagement in

the classroom meant that the power dynamics between the adults and students could easily shift

and that the adults would be in a decision-making role. While this may have facilitated some of

the work, and would happen occasionally when students disengaged from certain tasks like

selecting artwork, it would have had negative implications for the overall student experience with the project had it happened continuously. This demonstrates some of the ways that the adult role in YPAC can be complicated, which I will discuss further in the final chapter (seven).

Visually identifying student experience as rewarding and offering students a chance to slowly feel more comfortable and confident with their developing student identity meant that we were able to see a side of these students that was more playful and creative and fostered emotions of excitement and confidence as the year went on. I believe that this is displayed in the photos depicted above and is imperative to discuss as a positive potential outcome when considering this kind of research.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I use visual narrative vignettes to discuss my own perspective and experience of building this project with the students, and describe the importance of the relationships facilitating the process of having this research take place. I use the visual to help enhance understanding of the discussion in a way that words alone cannot accomplish. Seeing the artwork that was part of the exhibits as well as seeing photographs of the students works to give the reader as close to a first-hand experience as possible. Throughout each of the narrative vignettes I have sought to deepen our understanding of YPAC and investigate question one that asks how student curation responds to and disrupts power relations and exclusionary practices in traditional schooling.

In the first vignette, I use the staff response to the Nina Simone statue as a way to illustrate the climate at the school prior to starting the project, as well as to demonstrate the resistance towards art that works to challenge the norms of racial representation in the school. This response shows how swiftly a challenge to the school's power structure was handled, and

that those who feel they have the authority to decide who will be represented in the school, where that can happen and how it should look, are making decisions based on the traditional Euro-centric 'normal'. This vignette helps to illustrate why YPAC is needed, as a response mechanism for students to challenge the hierarchy of representation in their own environments and the systematic exclusion they face in this environment on a daily basis.

In the second vignette, I use a painting done by a former student to illustrate some of the ways in which exclusion typically functions in school settings, including the impacts of practices like expulsion on both the student receiving the punishment as well as the students who witness it. This helps further the conversation of how curation can help foster complex conversations around treatment (exclusion) of students, and who can and should have access to a space in the school when the students are in the decision-making position. My ability to reflect on student response to this one piece and this student has allowed me to investigate some larger, institutional limitations.

In the third vignette, I use a piece of art that I created in order to investigate the different roles of the adult facilitator in YPAC, and the ways in which this functions to challenge the existing power relations between students and adults in schools. This vignette describes a bonding experience that was unique as I engaged with an art making practice to help support the students in their role of curator as well as to put myself in a position where the students had decision-making authority over my inclusion in the project. When considering what YPAC is, and how it responds or disrupts traditional and exclusionary schooling practices, this is an example of ways that the adults involved in the project can conscientiously shift traditional power dynamics present in classrooms, and ensure that the students can now make decisions about inclusion or exclusion in their environments.

In the fourth vignette, I use a photograph that demonstrates what YPAC is, in multiple ways. YPAC enables students to challenge social and traditional educational norms by putting students in the role of decision maker, as well as in the role of location (gallery) manager. The students took ownership over both the content they created and disseminated, as well as the ways by which other students experienced the exhibit. I believe this best illustrates the positive possible outcomes of YPAC, as students engaging with the content they created show their interest as well as their empathy for students experiencing systematic exclusion.

In the fifth vignette, I conclude this selection of data with photographs of the students after a ceremony officially recognizing the exhibit as a pedagogical success. This is a two-sided success, as in some ways it is recognition of teleological success, without acknowledging the content or reasons for engaging with curation as a pedagogical practice and act of transformative resistance. However, it also worked to recognize the efforts of the students in a way that was unexpected to them. This helps to highlight the potential for YPAC to disrupt the norms of traditional schooling, in that it can reach a wider audience than expected, and it can open up a discussion about what content is meaningful for students and why that is not officially part of any curriculum. Yet, it also demonstrates that these more challenging elements can also be ignored or overlooked in the interests of defining success in a traditional sense, which is counterproductive to the desired outcomes of a YPAC project.

I believe that every vignette leading up to this section allows the reader to understand the importance of the photo depicting the students enjoying themselves on the swings. This vignette helps to close the discussion of YPAC, as it shows how the action of curation can lead to many different and unexpected successes from students, including creating stronger bonds with one

another and their adult facilitators, and enjoying the different successes this experience can

bring.

I will now move on to focus on the student experience, primarily through an investigation

of their perspectives on the experience of curating the "Struggle for Black Equality" exhibit,

responding to the second question: How might YPAC reframe student experience, student

engagement and student resistance in school? It also continues to respond to the overarching

objective of better understanding YPAC, shifting the focus from my interpretation of the activity

based on my fieldnotes and visual data to the students' interpretations and reflections on the

experience from interviews with me.

CHAPTER SIX

YPAC: AN OPPORTUNITY TO DO SCHOOL DIFFERENTLY

It shows other schools and, I guess, just the public in general, like, it shows, like, that our

school isn't just a normal school, it's an awesome school and people can do things that

other people can't do (Connor)

This chapter explores the students' participation in the UAH gallery, more specifically

their experiences with the first exhibit, Struggle for Black Equality (SFBE), in light of the

theories of engagement and resistance developed in chapter two. This chapter responds to the

overarching objective of better understanding YPAC by focusing on research question two,

"How might YPAC reframe student experience, student engagement and student resistance in

school?" This chapter is based primarily on interview data from the students, in which they

describe their experience with the project, and spends some time examining the 15+ teacher

Nicholas's reflections as a way to further contextualize the students' experiences. I aim to

examine the participatory nature of the gallery, as one that helped students enact their learning in

different ways that were significant to them.

Through the analysis of the student data, what the participants all echo is that YPAC

works for them because it means doing school differently. Every stage of YPAC, including

choosing a theme, creating a call for submissions and sending it out widely, creating a press

release and contacting the media, receiving and selecting artwork and finally sequencing and

helping to hang the exhibit allowed students to engage with a learning experience that was in

some way meaningful to them. It permitted them (and others) to recognize their abilities as

learners and as producers of valuable knowledge while still in a traditional school setting. As

discussed in chapter three, youth participatory action curation emerged as a methodology as the

project progressed, and became one of the project's outcomes. The emerging multimodal

construction of what curation could mean evolved into the students curating not only gallery

shows but also components of the curriculum they felt were more interesting, new, relevant and

important to them.

The students described their experience of curating exhibits in the gallery as engaging

and meaningful. They described it as an experience that made them feel safe and confident in

participating. These feelings of ease and confidence are described by Zander (2007) as expected

and desired outcomes of fostering narrative based art education, finding different ways of

incorporating the narrative into different aspects of the art classroom. I consider this relevant to

this study because of the narrative the students created through curating the exhibit. As will be

highlighted in this chapter, based on student experience from their perspective, the students

created a narrative that highlighted people they were interested in, found relevant or inspiring.

Zander describes the narrative as

> …understood as an expression of social activity and identity and includes a variety of
>
> storytelling formats. These would include stories we tell others and ourselves, myths and
>
> stories which transmit information about events or cultural values, and the stories within
>
> a culture that affect the relationships and beliefs of individuals, groups and cultures" (p.
>
> 190)

This idea of transmitting and receiving information about ourselves is particularly useful

in ways that help to make sense of how we experience and understand the world, in forming self-

awareness and in turn communicating this information to others. Rethinking the narrative in

YPAC means ensuring students are the ones who are telling the story they want to tell; asking

and answering the questions they believe will create the context to tell the story they are

engaging with

In this chapter, I will discuss student experience as related to distinct themes that

emerged from the data as well as their sub-themes pictured in Figure 14:

Figure 14

Themes and sub-themes

```
┌─────────────────────┐
│   Challenges of     │
│ developing critical │
│    consciouness     │
└─────────────────────┘
         │
         │   ┌──────────────────┐
         ├───│ I see everyone as│
         │   │  a human being   │
         │   └──────────────────┘
         │
         │   ┌──────────────────┐
         ├───│ Lack of languages│
         │   │   for exploring  │
         │   │  racist histories│
         │   └──────────────────┘
         │
         │   ┌──────────────────┐
         ├───│ Black history as │
         │   │mostly significant│
         │   │    for black     │
         │   │    students      │
         │   └──────────────────┘
         │
         │   ┌──────────────────┐
         └───│ I'm already more │
             │ mature than you  │
             └──────────────────┘
```
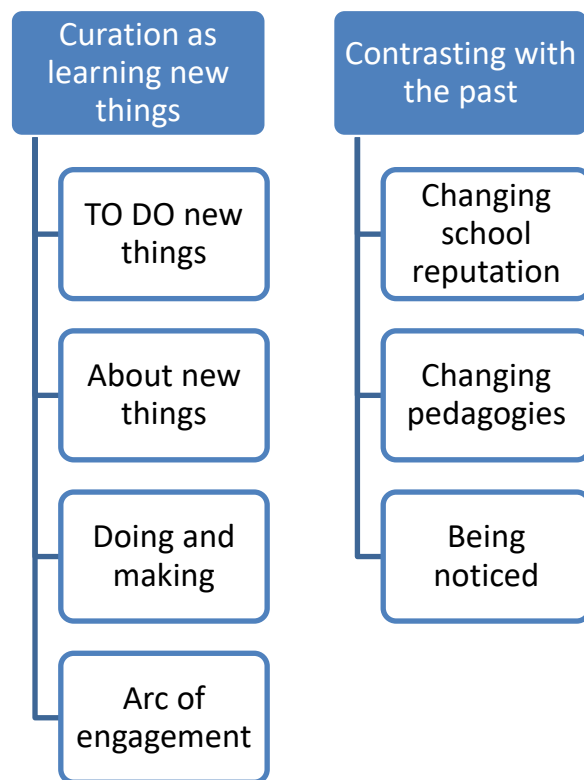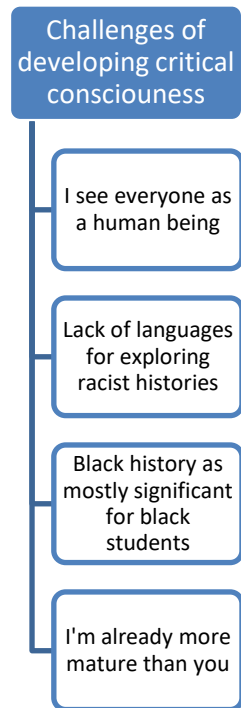
Curation as learning new things

The theme emerged through student responses that identified curation and their participation in the gallery project as valuable because of the new skills and knowledge they were acquiring. Working towards identifying ways that student engagement and resistance can be reframed, the discussions in this section highlight that resistance towards material that is repetitive should be considered a constructive response, helping teachers identify where the curriculum should be updated. Students like acquiring new skills, they enjoy receiving new information to learn and they ultimately are seeking out these experiences for a more dynamic schooling experience.

TO DO new things

Students described participating in the 15+ class as being useful and engaging based on the skills they were learning, and the opportunities they had to practice them. When asked about what their experience of being in the class was, students immediately reflected on what tangible

skills they learned. These skills are defined broadly as "working skills and contacting skills",

which can refer to many of the different tasks student worked on throughout the school year and

which are most often associated to the workplace, including writing emails and press releases,

making telephone calls to media partners, keeping a calendar for organizational purposes and can

even include skills like punctuality and attitude. As Sandra described:

> No, I find like I really benefit like got like a lot of benefits from this class cause like
>
> when I came to this class like when I was put in the programme I didn't have no clue
>
> what it was …So like I was really happy that like I got to like be a part of this class and
>
> learn working skills and contacting skills and that. So like when I need to use them later
>
> on I know what to do and everything.

As Sandra mentioned, the skills that are taught in 15+ range from broader social skills like

collaborative work to hands-on work skills like computer work on communications and

exploring career opportunities. These are valuable skills and opportunities, according to Sandra.

What also stood out to me was Sandra's choice to describe her experience as being put in the

program. Some students are required to be part of the 15+ program as a way of catching up with

the skills required to be in secondary four, while other students (and their parents) seek out this

program as a way to get job skills not offered in the regular stream. There are negative stigmas

connected to being a participant in the program, because it is out of the regular stream. However,

many students found value in what they accomplished that year, with the gallery and in the

classroom more broadly speaking. For instance, Katherine identified that the social aspect of the

class helped her and identifies the bigger picture of her experience. She also names

communication as a particular skill she felt that she was able to work on, which can also be

considered a hard skill as well:

It helped me open up to more people and communicate with more people and make more

friends, have more support. Cause I feel like if I wasn't here and I would have probably

dropped out of high school already

As discussed in the literature review, dropping out of school, or being 'pushed out', is something

that happens as a cumulative response to many years of negative experiences in school. Altering

that experience by focusing on the needs of the students can have a counter-balancing effect that

is required to help students find value in themselves as learners as well as in the experience of

their learning.

Connor described the skills he learned through YPAC in relation to his ability to express

himself through art, notably through learning new art techniques and tips, which were of

particular interest to him, because he was an artist. Importantly, he expresses that this learning

was unexpected, which I interpret as him not having very high expectations about schooling in

general:

Well, I mean I learned a lot more about art and techniques and tips and, like I said, so I

learned a lot more than what I expected and I learned a lot more than what I knew before.

He also learned to understand the urban arts differently, referring to the negative stereotypes

associated with Hip Hop and graffiti, as he mentions later on in the interview. Learning through

different kinds of experiences opened up a new understanding of what is possible through the

arts, and particularly in a school setting for Connor:

Because I've never seen a school have an art gallery before, and I've never participated in

an art gallery before and I haven't participated with anybody that was trying to, like,

make one or do something, kind of, like that...

For Sandra, learning the new tasks associated with curating was an adjustment process. As she shared:

I know, like after a while we'd get like tired because we have to like send like emails like twenty people in a day and like afterwards it gets tiring, especially for students and kids because like they're not like used to that, like it's all new to them. Like I know I didn't like, I use like email, but I wouldn't email like five, twenty people a day and that, so it was something I had to like process throughout the year and like get used to because like at the beginning I get tired, but then after a while I'd be like, okay I have to volunteer and everything and step up.

The sentiment here is important because while doing something new is appealing students are not accustomed to the kind of work that is being asked of them. Her description reminds that the role of the adult here is also very important as it requires a balance between motivating students to complete the work on their own, while also not letting them get overly discouraged and giving up. If this balance is struck it can help students push themselves to work in ways they are not used to, and expect more of themselves in the process. The challenge, as discussed in the previous chapter (five) is in not taking over task completion, especially when time limitations are a factor.

In this following reflection, Victor clearly states that what the students were doing with the gallery was not only new but was also very creative and 'hype', which also means exciting and cool:

I don't think or I haven't heard of, like, a school doing an art show for Black History Month and, you know, it was very, like, new and cool and, like, I don't know, I just thought it was, you know, very, like, very new and creative and very, you know, hype. I

mean, like, you know, like, instead of, like, oh, doing, like, worksheets, you, like, make

an art show for, you know, a good cause. So it's pretty cool.

Here, Victor focuses on how different this experience was from what happens in other schools.

The students are learning to do new things, which also allow them to be creative and engages

different skill sets that they may never knew they had or never would have worked on otherwise.

Whereas students would exhibit resistance towards traditional academics, like worksheets or

lectures, participation in this project gave them the opportunity to reinvent schooling for

themselves as individuals as well as establish or strengthen a bond to a larger community

(through socially aware exhibit themes).

Broadly then, students identified that the skills they were acquiring were unique,

interesting and useful. They had never been presented with these kinds of learning opportunities

before and all found their own ways of identifying what was the most useful or interesting to

them, making the learning both individualistic as well as collaborative. These kinds of 'hard'

skills students named as working skills, contacting skills, communication, art techniques and tips

and creativity. While creativity is not necessarily a hard skill, it alludes to being able to perform

skills students already had experience with in new and different ways. The emphasis on

creativity connects well to the following sub theme, which is learning 'ABOUT new things', as

students were able to think creatively about who they would want to learn about and present to

an audience.

ABOUT new things

The new things that students learned through YPAC were not only "hard" skills

mentioned above, but also the content. The students placed a significant amount of value on

being able to learn new things, particularly within the context of black history. One of the

highlights of producing the SFBE exhibit was that the people who ended up selected to appear on

the call for submissions (Annexe 4) were all 'new' figures to the students: Missy Elliott, Lauryn

Hill, N.W.A., Tupac Shakur, Nina Simone, PK Subban, Lebron James, Mohammed Ali, Jackie

Robinson, Nora Zeale Hurston, Maya Angelou, Alice Walker and Langston Hughes. This aspect

of their learning is one of the most salient elements of YPAC, as students are in the role of

decision-makers, choosing what new material and new learning experiences to engage. As

Connor reflected on his initial impressions of the first exhibit's theme, it is clear that he

felt resentment towards always learning about the same historical figures during Black History

Month. He shared:

> Yeah. I was absent for one day and then I came back and then the theme was the struggle
>
> for black equality and I was, like, "Well, this isn't fun." You know, I thought it would be
>
> like no graffiti, no crazy, cool art. You know, I thought it was all going to be on, like,
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> Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks and whatever. I thought it was just going to be all
>
> that stuff that I've already heard from, like, so many different schools that I went to and,
>
> like, so many other teachers and other people, that I thought it was just going to be, like, a
>
> rerun of, like, everything that I've already done, so I thought it was going to be really
>
> boring.

This kind of repetition of content devalues black history and does not challenge students

to engage with critical thinking or creativity. This can be particularly disengaging for students

who have been forced to change schools multiple times, such as Connor had, as it can exacerbate

the feeling that school is always teacher-centered and not a place where their needs will be met

or their interests will be respected or represented. It can also potentially create an assumption that

there are only several black people who should be valued as history makers and for that reason

the curriculum is justified in not representing anything other than the white history makers of

Canada. I believe that, returning to Yosso's (2006) discussion of cultural capital in chapter two,

the knowledge valued in society is composed of Eurocentric culture over the cultural knowledge

and experience from non-white and non-European traditions; this helps explain why students are

only learning about a select few "acceptable" black historical figures. The outcome is clearly

damaging and frustrating for black and white students alike.

Several other comments made by other students echo both the concern that Connor

describes feeling when the theme was selected, particularly in connection to their past

experiences in school, leading them to carry these feelings of frustration and dread in learning

about the same historical figures repetitively. In the following quote from Charles, a black

student, a whole new level of disengagement is apparent based on his comments about Terry Fox

in the context of BHM:

> Like, no, you don't know how, like, annoyed I was because every Black History Month
>
> will have the Terry Fox race and then I had to learn about this guy, like, for six times. Six
>
> times I had to learn about the exact same thing I already knew, so that got like really
>
> annoying.

There are several elements of this quote that need to be considered, the most important ones

being that Terry Fox was not black, and the Terry Fox run is never held in February. There are

many reasons these errors could exist in the mind of this student, but this signals a larger and

more frustrating issue, particularly for black students; they are being subjected to an almost

exclusively white curriculum, and this can permeate their interpretations of, and responses to,

everything they have been and are being taught. This response can be a signal of a greater

frustration towards the exclusionary nature and content of schooling, as it clearly remains at the

forefront of Charles' mind, and finds a way into the conversation, even when aimed at discussing something different. Another issue raised by this comment is that all the meaning BHM is meant to hold has been lost on students who are subjected to repetitive content that is not reflective of their lives or their interests. It also demonstrates the lack of care that BHM can be treated with and the impact that this has on students. This ultimate disengagement is counterbalanced for this student by the opportunity to learn about different people through YPAC. As well as identifying what was problematic about past learning experiences, Charles also identified how planning the gallery exhibit created a different learning opportunity that was more engaging:

> Like, talking about the newer black people and what they did was interesting, since I had no clue about them… because doing the same people or the same thing every time gets really repetitive.

Aside from their own heightened learning experiences, Connor also identified the exhibit as something that would be beneficial to other students based on the experience they could have touring the exhibit versus what the students are usually presented with. He shared that:

> Yeah, I think they learned a lot and there was more to Black History Month than there usually is. Usually it's just have an assembly, talk about it and then that's it, you know.

What is interesting in this quote is that even in a positive reflection of the situation, what comes across is how what has been done for BHM in the past falls short, bringing together a description of resistance with a new engagement.

Another perspective on learning new things that highlights resistance as well as engagement is Charles's sense that the BHM show "brings everyone together in a good way… We got away from that actual learning like the government wants us to learn." His experience with YPAC is one that brought students together in order to get away from standardized

curricular content. His description of bringing people together in a good way is interesting because it highlights the fact that the way students are brought together for generalized education is not necessarily a good thing, or respectful of the diversity of the students in the classroom. What he considers as getting away from the government curriculum means being able to learn about people and things he had never had the opportunity to learn about before, and not being forced to learn content that he has already been taught. Here he is showing an awareness of the injustices of education (critique of the oppressive nature of schooling) and that he is also willing to engage in actions that will challenge this oppression (motivated by social justice). I consider this a form of resistance that is close to Solorzano & Delgado-Bernal's (2001) notion of transformational resistance, which is motivated by social justice and able to recognize and critique the social structures in place enabling the cyclical oppression to exist. Based on these comments, the experience of being taught the same content, year after year and school after school is something that stood out to the students as negative, and was where the experience with the gallery and with YPAC offered a sense of relief as well as a sense of excitement. Taking charge of their own learning, getting away from provincially mandated curriculum, was not something that seemed likely or possible in school, therefore the exhibits in the gallery were what made school different.

A number of students also reflected on the impact that doing school differently in terms of learning new and relevant content has on their peers in class, as well as school-wide. For instance, Michelle also reflected on the importance of putting on a public exhibit, in ways that she hoped could result in changes made in the future. She shared that, "It makes people think about it [the history of racism against Black people in North America] more instead of just

forgetting about it because if we forget we just are going to end up repeating what's happened in the past."

When students are not given these kinds of diverse, educational opportunities, the result is often a disengagement from the classroom, from their teacher and even from their peers. YPAC has helped create an attainable way of reframing student experience as a way that values the learning and doing of new things. As is shown in the student quotes, typical teacher selected curricular content, specifically pertaining to Black History Month, does little to introduce students to new concepts or current events. This kind of learning limits their critical capacities that would help to create a greater understanding of systemic racism or oppression, which becomes a point of discussion in the "Challenges of developing critical consciousness" theme. In order to engage students with important content in ways that resonate with them, school has to be different. As seen in Vallée and Ruglis (2017), disengagement is individual and context dependent, meaning students' relationships to others, to their schoolwork, to the institution of school etc. all impact their connection to school. The relevance of these emotional and behavioural responses to schooling helps to emphasize the significance of student comments seen in this theme specifically, stating that their engagement levels were consistently affected by the newness of their learning. Vallée and Ruglis' statement about the need to consider both the context as well as the individual becomes extremely relevant, as boredom and passivity/withdrawal from class is no longer simply a student problem but a strong signal that updates to the current school structure are needed.

Curation as doing and making

As described above, the opportunity to learn new skills is important to students, and the opportunity to practice them is equally important. What became apparent through the post-

exhibit interviews was that the learning experience was enhanced because it was not only theoretical, but instead provided opportunities for doing and making. The opportunities to build and complete a project were memorable and valuable to the students, and validating in confirming their beliefs that art is a worthy use of their time. This theme emphasizes that the newness of what they were able to experience through this YPAC project was one of the most important elements of the experience, and this sub-theme demonstrates students' appreciation of being able to participate in an experience that requires they put their new skills and knowledge to use.

For instance, Victor contrasted "doing" learning, which he finds interesting, with what he sees as the more passive task of writing:

> Because it's, like, boring. I don't know. Like, it's just very boring, like, writing your own responses. I think it's, kind of, hard for me. Well, not hard but, like, just tedious because, like, I can just say it. But, like, we're just doing it. And when we're doing, it's way, way more interesting than writing down.

In Victor's mind, the opposite of doing is writing, or some forms of writing such as responses more specifically. This can represent a challenge to a teacher, because students need to be able to write in coherent and organized ways in order to succeed in school, and most if not all educators can agree that writing is a skill that will help to fulfill people in their lives, as a method of communication and connection. Students who resist writing because of the academic pressures and requirements surrounding it are at risk of having a strained relationship to writing for the rest of their lives.However, based on my observations and interactions with Victor, he was willing to complete the writing portion of the class because he was also able to do so many other things he found more concrete in the context of the 15+ program. The writing required for the class was

also more functional than what he is describing above; writing emails may seem less tedious than writing a response because it may seem more like 'doing', in its goal to accomplish a task.Working to create a greater balance for students can also help to reframe their experience with school and their ideas of what learning is supposed to be.

Even less attractive tasks can become meaningful, however, when tied to getting a project done. While Michelle also highlights her struggle with writing in the form of sending emails, she can see the value in the work based on the direct result of the final show:

> We got to see different people's art stuff, that's what I liked the most. But like the emailing and stuff like that wasn't that great, but it was still like kind of like worth the time because if we never did it then we wouldn't really have the people that we got to view it.

This comment is important because Michelle considers the effort as worth her time, which not all schoolwork is. As we see in the engagement literature, the importance of tasks being relevant and meaningful can be a determining factor in student engagement. As Willms et al. (2009) described, "The work students undertake also needs to be relevant, meaningful, and authentic – in other words, it needs to be worthy of their time and attention" (p. 34). So, while emails may not have been considered 'that great', they were not viewed as busy work because they served a specific purpose, whose impact was evident.

Sandra also sees the curation process as engaging and valuable because it is hands-on, but also because it is useful, providing her with skills she can draw upon as she heads towards adulthood:

Like I find like I can't speak for other students but I find that like in my point of view that

seeing the art like gets me more engaged because I see the people doing it hands on, and

like I see the techniques they use and how much work they put in and everything…

Well, it motivates me to come to school knowing that like I have opportunities at school

to do different things and that's like, I like coming to school because like the 15+

programme gave me like opportunities to do and to just like show me that like I'm not a

child but I'm not an adult yet, I'm in between there. So like it gave me like different work

skills that like I can do them.

This phase of life, between childhood and adulthood, is a time for adolescents to work on

identity development, and it was interesting to hear Sandra name this phase of development

specifically. She is clearly discovering elements of herself in connection to her schooling

experiences, and in the following quote, she juxtaposes this engaged version of herself with the

disengaged version of herself. She speaks about the benefits of YPAC being connected to doing

the work herself, similar to what Connor had said about the difference between him working on

the gallery project and him falling asleep in other classes:

But like they benefit well because like the projects we done, it's like hands on projects so

like we have to like go into like do interviews, chose different things, calls, do press

releases, emails and everything, so we have to like really like work instead of just sitting

in like a class and like looking at a board and whatever.

This seems to come down to the difference between listening to a teacher explain something and

having the opportunity to do it making the difference.

The data supports the connections to engagement theory through demonstrating student

interest in class work that they believe is useful to them. Providing them opportunities to engage

with a project that had a tangible outcome was one of the most beneficial components of working

as student curators. Similarly, the success of putting together an art show that received positive

media and community attention was validating and motivating for student feelings of

accomplishment, satisfaction and self-confidence. Working through the arts gave this project its

uniqueness, liberating students from the tediousness of traditional learning methods and allowing

them to be the curators of their own learning as well as of the gallery exhibit.

The arc of engagement

The final sub-theme explores the changes that I noticed across student interviews over the

course of the project, specifically the slow and steady increase in engagement and interest with

the process/project. While a number of students described an initial disinterest or questioning,

this then slowly turned into engagement, growing over the course of the term. For instance,

Michelle describes the experience she had planning the first event (the Hip Hop fair) as

uninteresting until the event took place:

> When I first started like during the Hip-Hop fair I was like I don't really want to do this,
>
> like you know stuff, I don't really think it was interesting like when is this going to be
>
> done. And like I was kind of like impatient but like once we finished it all we got to the
>
> end it was really fun. It was worth the while kind of thing and same with the art gallery.

Reflecting on these experiences (the Hip Hop fair and the gallery exhibits) she realized that in

spite of her initial lack of interest she ended up enjoying the experience.

As has been discussed throughout the theme, one aspect of this YPAC project that

seemed to help students engage was having a tangible goal to work towards. This meant that the

closer we got to the opening of the exhibit, the more the students seemed ready, and motivated,

to work on the tasks they had assigned to each other. As is stated by Victor, there was both a

sense of relief as well as accomplishment with producing the exhibit:

> Then once we were done with that, I was, like, "Man, we're done, finally," because there's
>
> a lot of preparation that, like, I found it took a very long time to do it, so it was, like - you
>
> know, but there weren't problems. Like, when it was done, like, the final product came
>
> out, that was rewarding. You know, like, we were finally done.

This is another illustration of the process the students went through as the project went on. Given

the different tasks they had to complete and the amount of time it took, it is clear from both

Michelle and Victor that the beginning of the project was harder for them because they were not

excited about it and found themselves working on something they were not yet motivated by.

Being that they are both white students this most likely also signals their previous disconnection

and disinterest in learning about BHM. While this shifted throughout the process, their

engagement was highly influenced by their involvement with a dynamic project and not learning

for the sake of equity of promoting social justice, However, because the exhibit offered them an

opportunity to experience success in different ways (public appreciation, final product they were

proud of, memorable experiences), they deem the hard work as worth their time and they are also

willing to engage in a new project (a second exhibit).

These elements of engagement respond to the ways that YPAC can reframe student

engagement and resistance in clear ways. Students in this class have vocally described their

struggle to identify with school and the content that is presented to them. Curation is a job that

requires many steps and conscientious design, meaning that the effort level is high, but worth it if

the experience was rewarding. This shows a personal engagement with the experience and

an understanding that the project has a beginning and end, providing a sense of completion,

accomplishment, and closure. Therefore, YPAC was successful at identifying student resistance

towards traditional school methods of instructions and content, as well as towards school itself,

and channeling it into engagement in an experience that worked to alter those elements. While

student intention was not always clearly focused on making improvements for their own learning

conditions or awareness levels, their participation in the project still brought them into a

classroom that valued their efforts, their interests and the inclusion of important social issues –

the "struggle for black equality" -- into the curriculum. YPAC can offer students an opportunity

to experience success and to feel rewarded by the outcome, in a concrete way that is different

from anything they have experienced in school before.

The interview with Nicholas helped me to understand this in terms of what he called the

"arc of engagement", a term that helps to make sense of all the different experiences described

by the students in the above quotes. As Nicholas explained, presenting students with new

experiences can be challenging at first because the concept is unknown to the students.

And they, I mean there's the classic like ark of like starting less engaged with any new

project because it's more abstract and then becoming more and more engaged as it gets

going,.. I think it's actually a really natural arc and it's an arc that works really for the

students level of engagement.

While many of the students commented that learning something new was one of the highlights of

the project, the newness of the process also helps explain initial student resistance towards

YPAC, as the first exhibit was a hard concept to imagine for the students. The challenge of the

new is important for educators or adult facilitators using YPAC to know, as the early parts of the

process can be challenging, especially the first exhibit for any group. Using YPAC, one aspect

that helps move the project from abstract to concrete is the process of receiving artwork. In our

project, as the pieces came in for submission through email, and then the ones accepted were physically delivered to the school we moved from ideas, to digital images of art to the "real thing".

One element I have found to be missing from the student engagement literature is the discussion of the time required to have students adapt to new learning styles and to move beyond the negative past learning experiences that impact their willingness to engage as well as their confidence as learners. For this reason, I believe it is important to understand the movement from resistance to engagement as a process, and that resistance can be an initial form of engagement. Developing teaching practices that acknowledge this may be an effective way of combining understandings of what resistance and engagement are with the goal of working towards the desired outcome of giving youth agency over their education.

Contrasting with the past

Changing school reputation

I was surprised to hear from several students in these interviews that they considered their school a good school based on the experiences they had in the gallery and in the 15+ program that year. This is in stark contrast to what I have often heard the students express to their peers when discussing UAH. The difference in opinion when asked about the school generally or the school as related to their experience with the YPAC project is illustrated perfectly by juxtaposing Charles, Victor and Connor's responses here:

> Yeah, for me, the teachers are more matured than students here because this school is
> pretty ghetto.
> Interviewer: What do you mean by ghetto?
> Charles: Really? Do you even have to? It's UAH here. Come on. Do you even have to?

In this comment, Charles says a lot about his general feelings towards the school, by not saying anything at all. Asking the interviewer if they "even have to" (ask what he means by "ghetto") can imply several things, none of which are positive. It implies that the researcher should be aware of the negative elements he is referring to when he says ghetto, based on the amount of time the researcher has spent at the school. Referring to the school by its name is also implying that the school's reputation is so negative that his comment about the school being "ghetto" should not need any further explanation, as everyone already knows; if you have ever heard of UAH, or have ended up as a student there, you have heard about the negative stigmas associated to the school.

In contrast, Victor acknowledges the negative ideas about the school that are common, but chooses to state that those perceptions could be changing because of the influence of the art initiatives:

> It was just like a school that, like, no one didn't really want to, like, go to because, like, before, it, kind of, had, like, a bad rep but I think the reputation of the school is now getting better with more things that we're doing with art and more, like, you know.

While he has no way to gauge the changing reputation on a large scale, his sense that the students' personal opinions might be changing in such a significant way speaks to his faith that the impacts of the new arts programming are being felt in a wider way.

Connor also speaks very positively about the value of doing urban arts at the school: "Like, we have more opportunities here, I guess, to do cool things that we want to do, and I guess it showed people that there's a lot more in art than everybody thinks there is." He seems to recognize that the arts are often undervalued, particularly in comparison to the emphasis put on courses like Math and Science, and the opportunity to participate in projects that

are arts-based impressed him and gave him the sense that he had more opportunities at UAH then

at any of the other schools he had attended. Connor then went on to discuss why working on the

project, from start until finish, and doing it himself was a validating experience for him, saying,

"'I did that,' and I can show my friends and my family that I did that and no one else did. You

know, like no one can take it away from you, I guess. And you can have the satisfaction, yeah,

the satisfaction of you doing it, you know." For the students in this class, being able to produce a

project they were proud of held a lot of meaning and value to them. They were proud of the

content as well as the visual elements, demonstrating the importance of their role as decision-

makers and product producers, throughout the project. Had they produced an exhibit about a

theme or people they were not excited about, the production experience would also not have

been as memorable for them.

Given that this student made a point of saying that by doing and completing the work,

and then putting it on display publicly, it can never be taken away from him, I believe this hints

that other successful experiences at school have never been something that he could take full

ownership of. This is one of the ways that YPAC challenges traditional learning experiences: it

can offer new student experiences that give them an opportunity to take full ownership over

their work.

Changing pedagogies

A number of students contrasted their sense of satisfaction with the gallery project with

previous classroom experiences at the school, describing these in very negative terms. As Victor

describes,

> a few years ago, you know, like, it was just, like, kind of, just worksheets and you were
>
> doing this and that, and (now) most of my classes are just, you know, like, doing

activities or make your own skateboard or make music or create art shows, create this,

create that, instead of, like, I'm doing, you know, worksheets…, I guess it's like finding

your own career. I don't know, it's very more interesting. Like, I like it. Like, I wish this

was like in every class.

 In an earlier citation, Victor also contrasted the worksheets with aspects of learning that are

"creative "and "hype." It seems that for Victor, his time as a curator as well as his other classes

that are increasingly offering him hands-on, creative learning opportunities, is being well spent

compared to his past experiences

Connor also compared his experience during the year and with the gallery in particular to

the experiences he had at other schools in several of his reflections. While many students often

complain about having ended up at UAH after not succeeding in other schools, for Connor, the

YPAC project was something that made him happy to have ended up at UAH. He shared that,

Because any other school that I went to, we never had anything like this and I find that

it's a lot better here than at any other school that I've been to and I wasn't really expecting

all of this to happen. But it's awesome… I'm just sitting there and I'm, like, falling asleep

but now that I actually have a class that I can do something that I want to do, that I can

actually put my work into and concentrate, it's really cool.

 His overall satisfaction with the project has helped him build a positive self-identity as a

student, and feel that his time and effort is well used in the gallery. This is primarily because it

gives him the opportunity to participate in a project that is of interest to him, and lets him

concentrate on doing the work.

Being noticed

Putting on an art exhibit that was open to the public meant that there would be an audience to experience the students' work. There are not many opportunities in traditional school settings in which outsiders are invited to come observe and take part in something that students are producing. Outside participation is almost exclusively limited to extra-curricular events such as teacher-directed school plays and science fairs or sporting events, so this was something the students had never experienced before. Overall, the students responded that having outside participation, including artists, media coverage or attendees, was validating and exciting while also being unexpected. Showing students that they have support from communities beyond their classmates and teachers was one way that YPAC reframed student experience in school, showing the students that many people are interested in what interests them, and support student voice being at the forefront of curriculum. Several students discussed this outsider involvement in positive ways that they also associate with positive emotions such as happiness, excitement or the validation of having other people listen.

Connor highlighted a few key elements of the importance of audience for the success of YPAC, saying,

> Well, I mean we have our own ideas and we have all of our art, but then if you get other people from different schools or colleges or universities, which did happen, they sent in art and it was cool to see what other people could do and not just what we can do. And it's cool to let other people in with what we're doing. So, I guess it can make them happy too.

Seeing other peoples' art was a way of communicating and connecting with other people that the students had never met before. It opened their eyes to the realities of others, which is effectively

done through arts-based research. Nicholas built a grid for the students to see all the submitted

work (Annexe 5), and score the submissions as a part of the selection process. This was an

effective way to demonstrate both the interest in the exhibit and the support for the students'

work. Connor's final sentence is one I find particularly interesting and important, as he states

that participating in the exhibit could make outsiders happy too. This indicates that not only is

the experience enough to make the YPAC students happy, but they understand that reaching out

to a larger community and making connections with other artists, can also bring joy to others.

Sandra also described the excitement of an audience: "I feel like, actually feel like

excited because I do think people are listening because I seen people come to see like how we're

putting it together and everything and that." She and her peers are validated by the show of

support, attentiveness or listening from outsiders.

In this sub-theme's final quote, Michelle names her excitement as directly connected to

the attendance at the exhibit, including the media coverage the students received:

We were like super excited and I know I was. I was like super excited to see everybody

there and it was just like this is like amazed kind of thing. And then also people talked to

me, and then the news thing, and I was like, wow. Yeah, so it was really good. I really

liked it.

She describes the feeling as amazement, which helps to explain why the audience is such

an important aspect of YPAC. Also mentioned by Sandra, the idea that *people are listening*

would indicate that the students previously thought that people were not listening. This

experience of connecting with outside artists and community members changed their perspective

on other peoples' interest in them and had affected them enough to use very positive emotions to

describe their experience.

In all three quotes from this sub-theme, the students have named positive emotional responses to having an audience attend the exhibit including happiness, excitement and amazement. This project has demonstrated the importance of being able to foster learning experiences as well as positive emotional experiences and personal connections. Helping to support students as they have these experiences and then give them an opportunity to reflect on them is one important part of YPAC that helps to reframe student experience in school. It disrupts previously held notions that no one listening to them, or paying attention to what they do. Through this kind of experience students can begin to understand their value as learners and knowledge creators, and as stated by Connor in the opening quote, can also help them to extend their experience to others who can benefit.

For instance, both Connor and Michelle discuss the positive impact of having so many other people attend the exhibit. Michelle also makes the point of mentioning that she was pleased the students from the adult education center came, which is interesting because she is the student who appears in the photograph in the visual narrative vignettes giving the tour of the exhibit to the student who is visually impaired. Michelle is also the same student who had also reflected (see Curation as Doing/Making) that while the work of sending out emails to so many different potential partners was hard, it was worth it because otherwise there would not have been any people to attend the show. Bringing the photograph and her other quote into context with the one below, helps to solidify the idea that having an audience was one of the most important elements of this project, and is an element that is feasible through YPAC:

> I think it's cool that we got everybody from all over the schools to come and join us. It
> was nice. I mean we also got the students from adult ed to come see it and they were like
> super excited.

In his reflection on the outcome, Connor continues to use language that describes the outcome as a positive and emotionally fulfilling experience:

I was really, really happy that a lot of people came and a lot of people liked it because, you know, we did some art and we got to put everything together. We got to paint, we got to set up the whole gallery and everything, so seeing other people look at it like it was professionally done, I guess, was pretty cool because it was run by a bunch of kids, I guess. So it was really cool.

While his choice of emphasizing his happiness correlates with how the other students have used to describe their experiences and stories, what is particularly interesting is that he follows this up by giving him and his peers a backhanded compliment, stating that the audience would perceive it to be done by professionals whereas they are just a group of kids.

There is a clear and consistent expression of pleasure from the students about the work they put in and the responses the work elicited from the public. They also repeatedly expressed some form of surprise about the audience reception, using words like 'amazed' and 'actually listening'. This is important because it highlights the fact that although students felt validated in the support they received from the audience, there are still signs of their lack of confidence in their roles as curators and the skills they have learned. This helps to serve as a reminder that after many years of negative experiences with school, and being undervalued and dismissed as youth, primarily from situations of marginalization, undoing these kinds of harmful ideas engrained in them to rebuild self-confidence in this context is a long process for students.

Following those more subtle remarks connecting to surprise, in the following quote Victor expresses his shock at the number of people who attended the exhibit opening. He chooses to use the word surreal to describe the experience, which really emphasizes how out of

the ordinary having outside support and interest in these students' academic endeavours is for them. This works to strengthen the claim that having an audience present is one of the key factors for success. This is an element that could vary depending on the context, but I believe that for students who have experienced a great deal of failure at school and a loss of confidence in their role at the school, the outside support is what solidified the experience as worthwhile to the students.

> It was very, like, surreal, you know, like, [chuckles] I honestly didn't think people from outside the school were going to come in and, like, you know, look at it. I was, like, very surprised when CTV and, you know, these news broadcasters came in and, you know, started paying attention to it. You know, like, I don't know, it was very surreal. Like, yeah, it was nice.

Feelings of surprise with the turnout for the exhibit work to highlight student insecurity, while also demonstrating the ways that YPAC can help to reframe these insecurities and help build a better vision of self as a student.

Audience was not something that I had considered throughout the course of this research, however the student reaction to having an audience be present for the exhibits indicates that they were naturally responding to the notion that the artworks' meaning is made by the artist who created the production as well as by the audience, as discussed by Rose (p. 188). What strikes me in this research is that the students seem less concerned with the audience response to the art exhibit and more concerned with the audience response to them. Feeling like they were being listened to, that the experience was "surreal," and that people would be surprised because it was just a group of kids who produced the exhibit, indicates that the power of the audience here serves to validate the students as producers and as active members of the school community.

This support and encouragement reframes student experience and places the student in a role of power as well as places them in a position to receive positive feedback from the community and in various forms.

Challenges of developing critical consciousness

Through careful review and consideration of the data, the difficulty in fostering critical consciousness emerged as one of the challenges we faced in leading this project. There are many reasons that this was the case but it should be noted that the difference in discussing and describing the racism that exists in the world cannot be understood using the same lens for both the white and black students. The complexity of understanding the resistance and engagement dichotomy requires a consideration of the hegemonic nature of schooling, and how students are taught to understand and categorize their lived experiences in ways that are digestible for those who are not othered by their identities. My own researcher subjectivity impacts the way that I was able to understand and analyze the complexities of student responses, specifically given the difference in our race and class backgrounds. My knowledge of the students, and closeness to them, helped me understand that what they said during their interviews represents a version of the reality that they live, and it points to a failure of the school system to provide them with a vocabulary and framework to describe this reality with honesty and criticality. That being said, I attempt to engage with my perceptions of what they have said, in some cases what they are not saying, and the different ways it can be approached, with the goal of affirming the importance and value of student insight.

The sub-themes that could identify areas where criticality was lacking were clear: post-racial/colourblind subjectivities and the ways students repeatedly judged each other.

I see everyone as a human being

As the students became increasingly engaged through the YPAC process, the challenge became attempting to foster a kind of critical awareness in students who regularly engaged in a post-racial discourse, which, according to Cho (2009) means three elements are at work: the centrality of race and racism in society are obscured, there is a consensus about the value of a retreat from race-based remedies based on the notion that racial eras of the past have been and should be transcended, and finally, there is a return to white normativity (p. 1593). In student interview responses, some of these elements are more overt, particularly the first one, while the last one seems less prevalent directly in discourse but more omnipresent, as can also be heard in Charles's previous comment confusing or critiquing Terry Fox in the context of discussion about BHM. When Nicholas and I did try to start conversations about comments which could be construed as racist, students frequently shut these down with remarks or justifications such as "It's ok to say that, I have black friends" or "I'm black, it doesn't bother me". These kinds of statements were also apparent in their interviews, which helped give a snapshot of what their classroom language was like, as well as helping to demonstrate why building opportunities for critical consciousness development should become a priority, especially when using a method like YPAC to reframe schooling.

Students regularly participated in a post-racial discourse. The following quote from Sandra is a good demonstration of this, particularly as expressed by a black student who has adopted this rhetoric as one which not only makes sense but is also hopeful for her.

> Well like the story I got out of it like, all these like black people they went through
> something through their lifetime, or not even them, it could be that their ancestors like
> our ancestors and that, and so like it was just showing like how like black people evolved.

Like they had like some really old slaves there and then we had like the new time like

rappers and that and it showed like how they got from like cleaning and working in fields

to like selling tracks and everything. So like it shows like that like no matter who you are

like it may be rough, but then like a door will open and like you get opportunities and

that.

In my perception of Sandra's words I return to the three elements identified by Cho, as in this

quote we see that the centrality of race and racism is obscured by stating that no matter who you

are a door can open. While this may demonstrate a sense of hopefulness in the student, I still see

a lost opportunity to deconstruct the idea of opportunity being equitably available to everyone. I

am certain that she is aware of the oppression she faces as a black woman; however I also

believe her education has taught her to express and alter her understandings of her lived

experience in ways that identify with a (Eurocentric) curriculum promoting the concept of

meritocracy. I believe some of her language demonstrates a return to white normativity, as she

names the experience as the 'evolution of black people', and I see the word evolution signifying

that the onus is on the black people to somehow adapt and survive their environment, still

making them the "other" in this story. This could also be understood as identifying the history

and trajectory of black lives, yet the language used raises a red flag for me, and could have been

another opportunity to dig deeper into the vocabulary this student uses, and understand its

context and development within her own educational experiences.

What is apparent in her quote is a lack of any kind of consideration for the larger and

structural forces of oppression that would have impacted the "evolution" of black people, as she

describes it. I do not attribute that necessarily to a lack of awareness; instead, it might be that her

ability to articulate a history different from what is taught in school has not been supported or

developed. This presented an unexpected point of view from students who were simultaneously attracted to figures who were modern activists in the black community and icons for taking personal and professional stances against social injustices, yet seemingly lacked the ability to express their doubts or concerns with the content they were being taught. It also leads me to believe that students, and particularly the black students in this class, have an interest in as well as a different and more complex understanding of the issues raised by the art exhibit; however their level of comfort, ease and confidence with approaching and discussing these topics in a formal capacity was still emerging.

Another reason these comments surprised me was the political nature of the pieces the students chose to include in the exhibit (see Annexe 5). The exhibit itself showcased a significant amount of critical content, including quotes from NWA ("The police think they have the authority to kill a minority") Tupac ("They have the money for war but not to feed the poor") and Nina Simone ("Jazz is a white term to define Black people. My music is black classical music") showcasing a range of representations of excellence, artistry and resistance. While some of the quotes they selected could be identified as post-racial rhetoric (PK Subban – "We're role models to a lot of kids, not just black kids, but all the kids out there, and that's what we want to be known for"), overall the content of this exhibit was strongly influenced by the Black Lives Matter movement and provided a range of experiences and emotions to engage with. Therefore, through my own attempts to understand and deconstruct the comments made by black students that seem to oversimplfy or downplay the violence experienced by black people throughout the history they are taught, I also am aware that all of these interviews were conducted by white researchers, which has most likely impacted the responses given. I am also aware that there are

many ways to hear students and that careful consideration needs to be given to how things are said and why.

Through all the classroom discussions and interviews, not one student was able to verbalize the notion that equal opportunities do not exist for black people (in Canada or the US) and that the history of the North American slave trade continues to have a devastating impact to this day. One example of an attempt at leading this discussion/reflection was during an interview with Connor. When asked what he thought about the theme for the exhibit, he responded:

Connor: Everybody has all equal rights, I can say, I guess.

Interviewer: Everybody does?

Connor: Everybody does. Everybody does, yeah.

Interviewer: Or everybody should?

Connor: Everybody should. Does. Should. No, I don't know.

Responding as a white male in the context of a BHM themed exhibit, Connor is not able to identify with the lived experiences of his black peers and this impacts his ability to grow in his understanding of systemic oppression. Another lack in criticality resulting in post-racial rhetoric emerged in another comment from Connor in which he suggested that other students learned a lot more than he did and that it was helpful to them to be more comfortable with the topic of race (whereas it was not necessary for him):

 Maybe but I think some students might have learned a lot more and think a lot more about, I guess, different races in general. And I think it did help some of the kids, so now they're not as, like, iffy about races and fighting over different stuff like that. So I guess it, kind of, taught them to like everybody.

It becomes clear through this kind of comment that even in a politically driven show like the

SFBE, we were not able to address the role that all white people play in maintaining an unjust

system. Through the reflections of a white student we can see that issues surrounding race still

center around racialized people, and not the white treatment of non-white people.We clearly

failed to move past the notion of everyone just needing to get along in order for racism to be

eliminated and that these personal experiences and approaches to understanding racism still

seemed to represent a viable solution, without addressing any of the larger structural issues.

Alongside the notion of everyone just getting along, and shifting responsibility for

identifying and combating racism to other people who need it more, another idea expressed by

Victor demonstrates a different form of commonly used rhetoric, that of "colourblindness."

While less of these students engaged in this kind of "colourblindness" dialogue, this is a widely

expressed way that white people avoid engaging with or taking responsibility for racism. Simply

explained by DiAngelo (2018) "If we pretend not to notice race, then there can be no racism" (p.

41). Victor expressed them when he said:

> Like, when I look at, like, a person with a darker skin, I don't see them as a person with a
>
> darker skin, I see them as a human being. You know, like, so it didn't really, like, impact
>
> me with, like, the other race but it impacted me with a normal, like, all this in, like, you
>
> know, helping, you know, and getting them like that, like, saying - like, getting out a
>
> statement, really.

Again, here Victor does not acknowledge that the content of an art exhibit challenging

typical black representation in the school curriculum as well as demonstrating a different side of

black history could be beneficial to him because he does not "see race". Unlike Sandra Victor is

engaging a "colourblindness" rhetoric, which Cho (2009) argues is an older version of a post-racial rhetoric:

> ...while the ideology of colorblindness shares many features and objectives with the
> ideology of post-racialism detailed below, post-racialism is yet distinct as a descriptive
> matter, in that it signals a racially transcendent event that authorizes the retreat from race.
> (p. 1597-1598)

Cho states that the colourblind rhetoric may have become less appealing to youth than the post-racial rhetoric, which I believe is on display in several of the student quotes. Thus, as educators while we were attempting to encourage their participation in this curatorial journey as a way to heighten their awareness of and engagement with the political context of subjects they wanted to explore we still fell short in enhancing their ability to recognize and discuss the actual social problems they were engaging with. This is an important shortfall of this particular project, as the danger is that not only is school not reframed in this way, but some ideologies that are harmful are perpetuating through the engagement with this content.

Lack of language for exploring racist histories

Students demonstrated a lack of criticality in a few other ways. For example, another reflection from Michelle specifically demonstrates the challenges faced by Nicholas (and I) to engage with student opinion and language use. Here, she vocalizes a desire, willingness and interest to learn and estimates that participating in the project helped develop an interest about black equality. However, I believe that because of the time limitations of the project, even after participating, her language makes evident a lack of understanding of the gravity of the enslavement of African American and Canadian people. Michelle refers to the historical events

discussed throughout the course of the project as 'the whole slave thing', which is similar to the

term Sandra used in her reflection: 'really old slaves':

> Yeah. I mean like it was super fun to do it and like it showed me more that I care a lot for
>
> black equality also and like I didn't think I cared. I thought it was just like kind of like
>
> another thing and like I didn't really see it as a big deal because I didn't know much
>
> about it. I don't know, I pay attention more with the things that happen like the whole
>
> like slave thing.

This quote not only highlights a failure on the part of the education system to convey the

importance of these horrific historical events, but it also shows that if any improvements were

made in terms of understanding, they were not deep enough to have an impact on language use.

That statement is not meant as a critique of the student, who takes ownership over her own

learning and attitude; however if part of YPAC is expecting students to be able to speak to the

social issues they feel connected to, or develop a connection to through its investigation, then a

more conscientious effort needs to be put towards developing a complete understanding and

vocabulary around them. If not, the students are at risk of experiencing failure or embarrassment

when questioned about their projects.

Black history as mostly significant for black students

When asked about the how the theme of the exhibit was selected and how he felt about it,

Connor responded:

> …so she thought it would be a good idea to put that theme, and I wasn't really interested
>
> in that but she was really into it. So, I guess she got to express a lot of what she wanted to
>
> say and do, so I guess that was good for her.

In this statement, Connor identifies that Katherine, a black student, selected the theme, and that this was important for her but not himself. This resonates with the "I see everyone as a human being" sub-theme, pertaining to post-racial discourse, used as a way of avoiding responsibility for the continual subjugation of black people and as a way of eliminating race from the students' personal reflections about the experience. This reflection gives the impression that Connor felt like this student was being given an opportunity to do something that would be meaningful for her as a black student, rather than emphasizing the content was important for all the reasons mentioned in the 'Learning about new things theme'. Even after naming all the positive aspects of the project and the unique learning opportunity it provided him with, the lack of critical reflexivity meant that Connor still could not verbalize that it was more than just one student expressing what was important to her.

In Katherine's reflection on the process, including selecting the theme, she also describes her investment in the project, noting that she worked the hardest and her classmates were less focused:

> But no one else, everyone else wasn't like focusing with it. I put more effort, I think, than anyone else because I was actually interested into it and I wanted like some people to come. Even like cause I had my friends tell me at the end of the day, they're like oh it was so whack. Me I personally didn't care, to me it was successful because it's what I wanted to, what I enjoyed doing.

Katherine's response is indicative of the general lack of support for any kind of participation in school related activities amongst the students at UAH, even amongst friends.

Both Connor and Katherine's reflections about the theme and the experience highlight the different ways in which blackness is systematically undervalued in schools and therefore a

celebration of it is too easily downplayed or even ridiculed by the students who experienced it. The shortfall in our ability as educators to build on the socially driven nature of the content of the show meant that we lost an important opportunity to create a meaningful critical learning experience; while fostering critical consciousness was meant to be happening through a challenge to the curriculum, the post-racial and non-critical rhetoric persists. So, while YPAC can reframe student engagement in ways that put them in the role of decision maker, we were not able to completely transform their learning experience.

I'm already more mature than you

One of the other challenges of developing critical consciousness with the students was addressing and altering their reflex to be critical of their peers. While they were often quick to judge they rarely, if ever, considered the impact of the larger social context as an influence on their peers' typically 'bad' behaviours (disengagement from class, not listening to the teacher, arriving late etc.). This theme highlights the ways in which students were quick to criticize or judge their peers, but had no judgement of the larger social structures in place, fitting with Solorzano & Delgado-Bernal's (2001) description of conformist resistance, as understanding a need for social justice but lacking a critique of the oppressive systems, and even participating in them.

Critical consciousness is developed as individuals learn to perceive the contradictions and inequalities in different aspects of social and economic practices, in their own lives as well as in the larger global context.   I believe this would have been an important skill to start working on with the students as it is clear in the following quotes, students' opinions of themselves and each other are heavily influenced by social and cultural norms, in mostly negative ways. For example, Connor deems participation in this project as beneficial to the other students in his class, in a way

that is both judgemental as well as a reflection of the stereotypes that exist surrounding young

people, particularly those who live in situations of marginalization.

> Well, I mean, if they weren't in the gallery, they could have been out doing something
>
> stupid but, I guess, it keeps kids out of trouble in some way, and in other ways it teaches
>
> kids about art and about different races, I guess.

The idea that the gallery project was working to "keep kids out of trouble" is interesting because

that is a turn of phrase I have heard the students use often, and is mostly used to indicate that the

activity is productive for the students in some way. However, what it does not take into

consideration is why students are getting into so much trouble to begin with, and whether that is

a reflection of the way they choose to spend their time or if it points to some larger, systemic

inequities. This is a good example of an area where developing critical consciousness would be

important in order to truly reframe students' experiences in school and in the larger community.

In the following reflection about her peers' classroom behaviour, Michelle vented her

frustrations at the behaviours towards their teacher, which she deems as immature.

> All the students were being rude and not listening and everything, it was like I got super
>
> upset about it and like people told me stop being so mad, I'm like no, they're being
>
> disrespectful like, like I'm already more mature than you are to understand that, like it's
>
> practically how it seemed. Some like, some other people like (names a student) he always
>
> had his headphones in, he won't take off his sweater. Like there's just so many things the
>
> students don't listen to… Like he's shown us a lot and the students don't really show it,
>
> like for gratitude kinda thing.

Her frustrations are not unfounded; classroom management is one of the more challenging

aspects of daily life at UAH, based on my observations and experiences throughout the time I

spent there. What Michelle is describing in these two quotes are the kinds of resistance that

Solorzano & Delgado-Bernal describe as opposition which is reactionary behaviour. These are

actions which are neither motivated by social justice nor a critique of social oppression.

Michelle's frustration is understandable; her academic experience is altered by students who are

resisting classroom policies, and she clearly does not identify herself as a student who engages in

resistance behaviours. She also exhibits empathy towards the teacher, who attempts to create an

inclusive and engaging classroom for all students, thereby separating herself from the students

and not displaying the same empathy towards them.

Michelle followed this with a reflection on the art selection, the most collaborative aspect

of the YPAC process, and again considered her peers' behaviours as negative, even though she

also identifies the ways in which this is inevitable in a group/classroom scenario. She noted that,

> there were people that were stubborn and rude and I didn't like that. Like Sandra, she
>
> always says something and then like she just kind of be stubborn about it and it was like,
>
> you know, fine… Nobody thinks the same way, everyone's different in their own ways so
>
> it's kind of hard to stop it from happening and plus if nobody gave their honest opinion
>
> we wouldn't go anywhere. Nothing would change, everything would be very plain and
>
> like similar, very similar in ways. So it wouldn't work out'

In this quote, there is already a slight shift in her critique as she begins by emphasizing the

negative (rude and stubborn) but ends by acknowledging that difficulty in decision-making is

inevitable in large groups. It is important for students to understand the larger context they are

working within, and the social structures that can contribute to any kind of behaviour that they

deem to be negative or unacceptable. In this particular quote, she understands the context of

working in a group as a larger structure. In her earlier quotes there is a lack of reflexivity towards

a larger context that could be impacting her peers behaviours and how this context is also affecting her as a student.

While the four types of resistance (reactionary, self-defeating, conformist and transformational) all appear at some point throughout this research, consistently at UAH we see reactionary and conformist forms emerging (Low, Lipset & Proietti, 2019). In retrospect, this could have been a good opportunity to discuss the call-out culture that exists amongst students at the school, and how reactionary behaviours should be understood as a symptom of a school system failing to meet the needs of its students (Low, Lipset & Proietti, 2019). It is impossible to reconstruct a school culture and experience when students are engaging in forms of stratification amongst themselves, creating distinctions between "good" or "mature" students modeling school sanctioned behaviour and "bad" students who are not. Returning to what Fine (2013) stated as the researchers' responsibility to document spaces that feed our collective capacity for critical inquiry and action (p. 119), I believe that more time needs to be spent making students accountable to each other, as collaborative work is even more challenging when the students do not respect each other or their respective work ethic. This effort would need to take place not only to address the frustrations of the students not exhibiting reactionary behaviour, but also to give the students who are exhibiting this behaviour an opportunity to express resistance in ways that can be more meaningful and beneficial to these students in the long term. In making students accountable to themselves and each other, I believe that it would be important to also foster an understanding of why school elicits such negative reactions from some students and how past experiences and government requirements (attendance, language requirements etc.) can impact student behaviours in a classroom.

YPAC as strategy: Curation has benefits, but is not the cure-all

Eisner (1992) states,

The arts teach that goals need to be flexible and that surprise counts; …that being open to

the unanticipated opportunities that inevitably emerge in the context of action increases

insight; and that purposeful flexibility rather than rigid adherence to prior plans is more

likely to yield something of value (p. 594) .

In the spirit of the importance and power in a flexible approach the teacher, Nicholas and I were

able to identify curation as a method that enabled the students to engage in hands-on, student

centered learning that mobilised student resistance—to an outdated and repetitive Black History

Month curriculum, and past pedagogies---to give them agency in their school lives. The

purposeful flexibility in the approach meant that the students came away with a positive outlook

on their experience with the gallery, as they were able to focus on what was of interest and not be

forced into participating in activities that held little to no value for them. This demonstrated the

value of placing youth in the role of curators, regardless of lack of previous experience, and with

little guidance from 'experts', and meant that the students were essentially in control of making

decisions in ways which were new to them.

Overall, students spoke very favorably about the experience of curating a gallery exhibit

as a method for knowledge creation. They all found ways to participate in the process, some

which they were comfortable with and some which put them outside of their personal comfort

zones. These responses lead me to state that working through student resistance to traditional

learning methods and content meant that as a group we were able to find new ways to engage

students in schoolwork making them accountable to themselves. This accountability also gave

them space to reconceptualise what learning can be when it is not predetermined by people who

do not live the same experiences as the students. As mentioned in the 'Developing critical

consciousness' theme, where this particular project lacked was in the ability to hold students

accountable to their peers, which I believe could have fostered a more productive in-class

dialogue amongst the students.

While the two shows they curated were inherently political in nature, during interview

sessions student reflection regarding the political nature of their exhibits was virtually non-

existent in their dialogue. In my opinion, this points to the fact that these students had little, if

any, experience with or vocabulary for critical thinking. This experience placed them in a

situation where their lives, interests and experiences were valued which was completely different

for them, and they hadn't yet had the time or support to develop critical understandings of them.

These challenges in supporting the development of critical consciousness suggest that more work

is needed to prepare both the teachers and the students in engaging with politically driven

content. The timeline of my research project did not allow for conscientious curriculum building

towards critical action and reflection. Preparing students for socially engaged work requires

training for the educators beforehand and then time to prepare the students to understand what

socially engaged work is, what can be accomplished through it, why it is important and how it

can be done.

Based on student response during their interviews, YPAC helped them to do school

differently. The things that made curation different from their other learning experiences

were the opportunity to learn new things, and then put that learning into action. Students were

able to identify themselves as active in their education because the skills they were being given

were useful both in and out of the classroom. Also powerful was having an audience, which

prompted surprise, pride, and excitement. The show of support from the community, including

artists and local media, countered some of the jaded or negative feelings students had towards school and emphasized the importance of what they had accomplished, resulting in newfound feelings of confidence. The show of support from these external sources became an important factor in their definitions of a successful and worthy project, and seemed to hold more importance than any traditional measures of success such as grades or awards, as will be discussed in the final chapter.

Finally, the "arc of engagement" sub-theme helps to summarize the data in this chapter and respond to the ways that student experience, resistance and engagement can be reframed through YPAC. All the ways that students describe their experiences in school, in both positive and negative ways, show the importance of working with students to understand their past experiences, and that they take agency over their learning. The arc visual helped me to frame what the students were describing as an experience that responded to their needs and gave them tools they felt were useful. As each experience built on their new knowledge and they worked towards a final project, they became increasingly excited and engaged with the process. The final product gave them something to be proud of and was also a clear signal that the project had ended; they had succeeded.

The group of students who make up a classroom will affect the methods of implementation of any kind of critical pedagogy, as teachers need to be responsive to their students' personal histories, knowledges and experiences if they are committed to having the greatest impact as educators. In the case of this research, the students enrolled in the 15+ program were, by the teachers' admission, more politically engaged than the students were in subsequent years, meaning that their prior knowledges and personal interests and experiences allowed us to commit to exploring social issues that students felt strongly about. For the

purposes of this research I focus on the experiences of this group as a unique entity, however it is

imperative to understand that students in later years had different levels of interest and

engagement based on the group dynamic, and responded differently to the curatorial duties

associated with running the gallery. The teacher reflected on this in a post-project interview.

> I would say I mean just first of all like the nature of the students, the first year students
>
> were probably more engaged between the two years. And they, I mean there's the classic
>
> like ark of like starting less engaged with any new project because it's more abstract and
>
> then becoming more and more engaged as it gets going, but definitely like I had some
>
> very engaged present students in that year.

It is therefore necessary to state that the action of curation was a useful method to encourage

engagement with students who were already more inclined to being involved in community

building events as well as interested in identifying content that would be more interesting and

relevant to them and their peers. As those are both factors identified in the engagement literature

as required (Ramaley & Zia, 2005) in order for students to engage, I believe it is clear the cohort

researched for this project arrived more engaged which facilitated the project. It is not the action

of curation alone that engaged the students; it was a method that allowed students to experience a

hands-on way of creating their own learning parameters while also achieving a tangible goal,

unlike any other educational experience they could recall. Therefore, building a student-centered

learning environment meant that the topics would, with this group, naturally be more inclined to

be political and resistant, whereas in subsequent years the primary focus remained on the

individuals in the class and their immediate needs. While curation was still useful with those

students, the outcome differed in its politically resistant capacities, while still allowing students a

hands on learning experience based on their interests.

In the final chapter, I will summarize what I have learned about YPAC in general, and in relation to the two RQs. In order to say more about the potential of YPAC, I also describe the second exhibit this group curated, "Skateboarding Matters" in order to demonstrate how it built upon the foundations lain by the Struggle for Black Equality exhibit. I will then go on to describe the ways in which YPAC has been used in different circumstances, exploring its flexibility to respond to diverse needs and learners in different levels of schooling, in Canada and in the US.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

LIFE AFTER THE EXHIBIT

In this dissertation, I have offered a description and analysis of YPAC, and explored two specific RQs about YPAC, by examining my own experiences as well as student experiences relating to gallery curation as a new learning tool for students. In chapter five, I responded to the first question: "How does student curation respond to/disrupt larger patterns of power relations and exclusionary practices present in school and education?" In order to respond to this question I curated a series of visual narrative vignettes that tell the story of how gallery curation became part of the learning landscape for the students of the 15+ class at UAH. It underlines the challenges they faced when pushing back against the power structures that shaped their learning and daily school experience. It also demonstrates several examples of the exclusionary nature of traditional schooling, including resistance towards the representation of blackness and culture in a place of prominence in the school as well as the process of excluding students from their own learning environment through punitive actions such as suspensions and expulsion. The chapter also worked to highlight the successes they experienced through their experiences with YPAC, and how the role of the adult will fluctuate throughout the process, particularly as power roles shift and students take on leadership roles. The adult facilitators ideally work to support students in the role of decision makers, however there are also challenges associated with this shift in traditional classroom hierarchies, which can impact the expectations of both the adults as well as the students. Students tend to expect the adults in charge to uphold a certain level of discipline in the classroom, and when this does not happen frustrations can rise, identified by the students in this research. Adults can also feel pressured to produce a result and take over decision making, as was described in the Young Curators project. The balance between not enough authority and too

much power is one element that challenges both students and teachers and requires strong

communication as well as constant reflection.

YPAC was an unexpected outcome of the project; through the process of gallery curation,

we learned how to build a responsive curriculum, which is quite different from what the students

have come to expect out of school. YPAC has evolved into a method that could be placed within

the YPAR family; a youth-led project that works to create an opportunity for students to

challenge traditional learning styles and content, and tell their own story through artwork they

have selected, in this case inspired by their resistance to the outdated curriculum and

exclusionary practices of traditional schooling.

In chapter six, I responded to question two: "How might YPAC reframe student

experience, student engagement and resistance in school? I did this by engaging with student

interview data, and identifying three emerging themes: "Curating as learning new things,"

"Contrasting with the past" and "Challenges of developing critical consciousness". The students

talked about their experiences with the YPAC project in ways that emphasized the importance of

their being able to learn and do new things that they deem as useful and relevant. Another aspect

the students highlighted was the importance of having an audience to validate their efforts.

Reflecting on the importance of this after the first exhibit had opened also helped the students

identify that they have agency, and people are listening to them. The two other emerging themes

focus on the project as a whole. The challenges of developing critical consciousness were

apparent in the ways that students talked about their peers as well as their discussion of larger

social issues, notably racism. It is clear in the data that the difficulties in developing (and

fostering) critical consciousness are different for each student, and require that the research

highlight the differences in the lived experiences of black and white students. Working with

students to identify and challenge some of the deeply ingrained reflexes they have towards

understanding themselves and their peers within society takes more time and conscientious effort

than what we were able to offer through the project. Creating awareness around social issues,

and students' positions within them, is a first step, and the challenge identified was that working

past awareness into deeper understanding takes more time and preparation. Throughout the

course of the project, students were able to learn and do new things with a purpose; there was a

tangible goal to work towards, helping increase their connection and motivation to complete the

project. Their slow and steady increase in engagement follows a natural progression, described

as an arc, and requires the adults working in supporting roles to give the students the time and

space to situate themselves in the project in order to work their way along the arc. It also requires

a common goal to work towards, and in the case of this project the goal was made even more

impactful because there was an audience present to witness and appreciate the outcome.

In the rest of this concluding chapter, I synthesize and seek to deepen the understandings

developed in chapters five and six of YPAC's potential for disrupting power relations in schools

and supporting student engagement and possibilities for transformative resistance. I do this, by

describing the second exhibit curated by the students, in relation to what has been described

about the first exhibit, drawing out some key elements of YPAC in the process. This exhibit was

not researched in the same way as the BHM one, because of time constraints, as the exhibit

opened at the end of school year and we were often denied access to the gallery space to work as

exams were being held in the library. This complicated the scheduling process and led to less

time for student interviews. However, I decided to still include it, describing it more anecdotally,

since it offers insight into how some of the key elements identified as making up YPAC evolved

in the school. After demonstrating this, I go on to discuss the limitations of the project and the

study. I then conclude by imagining YPAC futures, in relation to my own work since this project

took place, as well as the implications for future research.

The second exhibit: Skateboarding matters (SBM)

The second exhibit deepened my understanding of YPAC in a number of ways. The

Struggle for Black Equality exhibit gave the students not only a desire to produce a second show,

but to go further with the implications and possible outcomes of producing a show. Their

confidence levels increased, and they became more aware of the importance of and their ability

to question social structures critically through themes and ideas in their curatorial process. Their

decision-making skills evolved from being primarily individualistic to now being increasingly

collaborative, less defensive, demonstrating more willingness to compromise. I believe that in

order to achieve this we had to build up to it, given that using YPAR and the emergence of

YPAC was mostly an unexpected outcome of the first curation experience.

The second exhibit produced by the 15+ class was an idea proposed by the school's art

teacher, while the students were working on the first exhibit. She had been doing skateboard art

with all the secondary three students (including the students in the 15+ program) and both she

and the 15+ students thought that putting on an exhibit with the painted skateboards would be a

good way to exhibit student art in the space. The project itself was inspired by skateboard art, as

many current artists use this medium to produce art pieces. Skateboard art is part of

skateboarding culture as well as urban culture and arts more generally. The audience most

typically attracted by it is mainly younger and interested in counter-culture, which is one reason

this was an appealing project for the students.

Because the students in the 15+ program were ultimately the ones making the decisions

regarding the gallery the art teacher proposed the idea directly to them for their feedback. This is

significant because she did not go to the teacher first. Unsurprisingly, the feedback was

overwhelmingly positive (every student agreed to this as the next exhibit) and so once the

students reached their decision, we began discussing what the focus of the exhibit would be

(title, theme etc.).

As stated by Danto (1998), "An exhibition [is] a combination of art works that support an

idea" (p. 92). In the first exhibit, the students identified the theme first and then had the challenge

to find artworks that supported this idea, which Burton (2006) describes as a deductive approach

to curation. In the second exhibit, the students did the opposite; using an inductive approach,

they had the artworks first and then set out to organize a theme around the content. Through a

classroom discussion, the students identified that through exhibiting skateboards they also had an

opportunity to transmit a message to their audience about skateboarding, and more specifically

the lack of access to a skatepark in the neighborhood. This was an important message for one

student in particular (Connor), and the other students rallied behind him. Similar to the SFBE

show, one student chose the theme (Katherine) and the other students supported the decision.

One notable difference was that the primary goal for this exhibit was a commentary on and direct

challenge to authority figures, in this case municipal politicians and policy makers, regarding the

lack of a safe place to skateboard in the neighborhood. There was a direct link between the theme

of the second exhibit and an injustice in the community they wanted to challenge. This differed

from the first exhibit in which students identified what they wanted to learn based on what they

did not want to learn about again. The aim of the SBM exhibit was not to challenge a

misrepresentation in the curriculum but rather to be socially active about an issue that affected

their community.

Curation as empowered activism: Socially driven content aimed at government officials

Based on the overarching message the students were trying to transmit (the borough needs a skatepark) they engaged in two new forms of media creation that were different from what had been done in the first exhibit, in an attempt to reach a larger audience. With the help of a video production program offered at the school, run by a local youth media organization, which supported students in creating participatory videos for credit. The students created a short documentary that included interviews with students, administration and city elected officials. This documentary presented reasons and potential benefits of having a skate park in a neighborhood. By presenting this information in the format of a documentary, the students were able to voice their opinion for the need for a skate park by getting statements and testimonials from credible people that corroborated what they were proposing: a skate park in the neighbourhood, within proximity to the school would improve quality of life for youth in the neighborhood.

The opportunity to produce this documentary was serendipitous in that the goals for the community video creation program were directly in line with the goals we set out for the gallery and held the same values in terms of recognizing student experience and knowledge while attempting to engage students in non-traditional ways of learning. I make this assertion based on the video production's mandate, taken directly from their website:

> With the goal of offering youth technical and social skills to help them find a meaningful place in society, we produce professional quality documentary videos whereby youth are empowered by sharing their experiences and encouraged to develop their talents as well as the values of respect and tolerance.

 Through the course of collecting interviews for the video one person suggested the students write a letter to the mayor of the borough voicing their concerns and request to go along with the creation of the documentary. Based on the students' previous general reactions towards the task of writing it was unclear as to whether or not they would take this advice. However, after discussing it as a class and being strongly encouraged to consider the idea, the students agreed to take it on. This willingness speaks to their engagement with the project, as well as their desire to see the change they were suggesting take place and their sense that they could help make this change happen. I do not believe that if the issue were not important to them, they would go to multiple lengths to have their voice heard. I also do not believe that if they had not felt empowered through their first curatorial experience, that they would feel motivated or willing to try and enact change to benefit their community. Identifying the power of an audience, as discussed in chapter six, the students became increasingly proactive knowing that people in the community were listening to them. This move towards social change through activism also connects to the transformative quadrant of resistance discussed in the literature review. Solorzano and Delgado-Bernal (2001) define transformative resistance as when "the student holds some level of awareness and critique of her or his oppressive conditions and structures of domination and must be at least somewhat motivated by a sense of social justice" (p. 319). The students were very aware that the poverty in the area meant that improvements in the neighborhood were not a priority. They felt this was unfair, and did not feel they should have to travel to other neighborhoods in order to use a skate park. They felt that the city had an obligation towards its citizens, not only to be fair but also to help keep youth safe. Knowing students would go and skate on the street for lack of a better place to go, they felt they could advocate for their community in order for a change to take place.

The students gradually shifted towards using their curatorial skills as a tool for activism and social change. Through their first experience with the gallery they had come to feel as though they had a voice and people were listening to them through their art shows. We came to learn, through their reflections, that they felt compelled to identify different elements of their lived experiences (both in school and out of school) that they were dissatisfied with and felt validated with the response they received when voicing this dissatisfaction. Offering the students a space in the school also provided them with some element of control over their educational experience, as they became decision makers and were able to work towards change in that space. The SFBE exhibit set the stage for another socially motivated show, tackling issues the students could identify and could also imagine being changed. Because of the confidence built in that first experience students were not only empowered to demand change directly from their municipal representatives, they also expected to be listened to through their production of a short documentary and a letter directed at the mayor of the borough. This is an important element of the research, in that the experience the students had with YPAC led them to become increasingly independent as activists and highlights that this method engages students to investigate issues that are important to them and then to work towards change.

Curation as collaborative community work: Speaking to the audience and speaking to each other

Collaborative work requires strong communication skills; people working together need to find ways to be able to voice their opinions, concerns etc. in ways that they feel valued and respected. YPAC is collaborative work, and requires that the participants engaging in the project communicate openly with their peers as they work towards accomplishing their goal. As noted in chapter six, the students participating in this project had varying levels of patience for their peers

and for themselves. This resulted in the classroom environment sometimes being strained and

other times being joyful and fun. Based on the notion of the arc of engagement, and the time it

takes for students to become engaged with their work, it also makes sense that the capacity for

students to collaborate with one another would follow a similar trajectory. As explained by

Sandra, the participation in the various aspects of each project made it that the students actually

got to know one another better and found it easier to work with each other:

> At the beginning of the year we were like all new. Some of us knew each other but we
>
> were just like separate but after doing like all the shows together it started bringing us
>
> closer and closer. So now everybody just like understands what everybody... we get
>
> along, we talk to everybody, so it's not like how it was months ago. And so I think like
>
> doing the show, and preparations, and calling and interviews, and everything together, it
>
> just like brought us closer together and now we feel comfortable with each other.

This newfound closeness and comfort is important to emphasize, as student participation in a

YPAC project helped them establish a community amongst themselves, learn how to work

together and become better communicators with their peers, as well as with outsiders. As Sandra

discusses, making calls and doing interviews all involves communication with people who the

students did not know. Becoming more comfortable with each other and with their new skills

throughout the process also helped increase their confidence, leading them to face new

challenges as a collective. The timeline required for these bonds to develop work well with the

concept of the arc of engagement, as students also became more engaged with the project as they

were more willing and able to work collectively together. Based on Sandra's comment, the

experience of completing the SFBE exhibit was something that helped knit their student

community together, and therefore going in to work on the second exhibit they already had

bonds and trust established. This also helps to further explain the importance of the validation they received from their audience, as they appreciate and thrive on outside support to help motivate them as individuals. Establishing a collaborative community inside their classroom meant that they were able to experience this kind of motivation regularly and the production of high quality exhibits meant they were able to experience this validation in new ways.

The community that was able to be established within the classroom also extended outside of the classroom, which became apparent in the second exhibit. In the actual process of selecting and curating the work in the SBM exhibit, the curators emphasized the larger notion of community to all the prospective artists. In the end, the students decided to exhibit all the skateboards, unless they were not completed. They seemed aware that not selecting a board may be a discouraging experience for a student, especially since the only art they were choosing from had been submitted by secondary three students. As discussed by Burton (2006), it can be traumatizing for a student not to have their work selected for an exhibit, which is why he advocates for teachers to incorporate several different strategies to avoid this. It was interesting to see the students seemed aware that not being selected could be a traumatic experience and therefore made a decision they believed was best for their peers, not necessarily what would look the best, which was one of the decision making factors in the first exhibit. Through engaging with YPAC the students were able to further challenge the exclusionary nature of schooling by choosing to include all the students who had completed a piece of art. This helps to further respond to question one, highlighting how YPAC can challenge the exclusionary nature of traditional school experiences, by building and strengthening the bonds between students, establishing a community outside of adult influence. This is of particular importance because this notion had been developed in the first exhibit, highlighted by the vignette "We all have

empathy," where this move towards inclusivity happened organically through the tour of the exhibit offered by the UAH students. In the second exhibit it is possible to see the different elements of collaboration and community building present.

Another important aspect of YPAC is the message transmitted through the art/exhibit to the public. Because of the theme and title of the show, the students had agreed that the letter to the mayor, described earlier, should be in a frame and part of the exhibit. The reasons were clear to the students: they wanted the larger message about the borough needing a skate park to be prominent in the exhibit. They did not want it to be only an art show, but were very interested in the potential impact for social change in their community. The placement of the letter required some discussion as some students felt it would be best placed at the entrance, to clearly define the purpose of the exhibit while others felt it should be on the walls. Given that the gallery door frame is in metal, we decided putting the letter there would be logistically difficult and not visible enough. The students then decided it should be in the middle of the main wall, facing exhibit goers upon their entrance. By doing that, the audience would understand the importance of the letter based on its prominent placement and would take the time to read it either first, or at some point during their tour. The increased ability to communicate amongst themselves as well as with other people signifies that the students had gained confidence and built a connection to the project and to each other. Openly making a request to the borough to improve their environment showcases their growing connection to their community, as well as a willingness to work towards change with others in their network. YPAC facilitated this process and this experience for them. Because one of the elected officials at the city level had already come to their class and been interviewed for their video, the students felt as though their requests were being heard and being taken seriously. While they did not receive an official response from the

city regarding their request, this did not seem to affect their overall experience with the project. This could have been because the exhibit opened so late in the school year and that the students were more concerned about exams, employment or other personal matters, as is often the case with students at the end of the school year. Whatever the reason, I felt the students efforts were somewhat dimished by the lack of immediate responsiveness however, both the CLC coordinator and me were invited to a community consultation process as the borough began its first steps in reconstructing the area around the school (which is still underway). So, while the request was never responded to directly, it had been received, and the student motivation to suggest improvements in the neighborhood had been retained by the borough's administration. Unfortunately, by the time the community consultation process began the new school year had already begun, meaning most of the students were no longer at UAH, and not able to attend the consultation, however I did communicate to the students I was still in contact with that the process had not stopped completely.

Curation as student leadership: Empowered curators manage opening night

Another element of YPAC, emerging in the first exhibit and enforced through the production of the second, was student leadership. It was on prominent display the opening night of the SBM show, where there were two showings, as we had done with the Struggle for Black Equality exhibit. We had students stay for both of the time slots to be sure everything ran smoothly, such as ensuring people who entered the school from the front entrance would be able to find the library on the second floor or answering questions, making sure the video was playing etc. The students were extremely self-reliant and knew what to do, giving me the impression that they were more comfortable in their roles of authority figures over the space and decision makers regarding the exhibit this second time around. This highlights their confidence and self-

established roles as leaders of the project, which clearly developed through the process of taking ownership over the space and running it collectively.

The students seemed less surprised by the successful outcome of the show; however, they were slightly disappointed with the low attendance in the second showing, from 6pm – 8pm. Several authors discuss the importance of having exhibit openings be well-attended (Burton, 2006; Delgado, 2015; Gardener & Heller, 1960) and this represents another area that could be improved. The art selected was meaningful, it told a story and informed the visitors of the students' intention to voice their opinion about the importance of building a local skate park; however their voices were less heard as a result of an under attended opening. There is the dangerous possibility that an under attended exhibit could affect the feelings of empowerment the students had developed over the course of the year. However, this did not seem to be the case with the students in the 15+ class.

The students took on a leadership role not only in curating the exhibit but also in inviting the community to attend. However, while the students did a good amount of advertising, putting up posters, contacting the media etc. there is only so much they are able to do. I believe the school itself could have played a bigger role in inviting parents, other schools, and partners etc. to attend and could have also placed more emphasis on the importance of staff attending at least one of the showings to support the students. While the first show was contentious among the staff because of one piece in particular that was not deemed appropriate, the content of the art in this show was far less edgy and contained only student work. While more staff attended this show than the first one, there were still not even 50% of them in attendance. This is problematic as it is a visual reminder to the students of what teachers value, reflected in their participation in the interests and lives of students outside of the classroom.

The leadership role of the students was visible in their presence at the opening of the second exhibit as well as their overall attitudes towards the project even after the disappointment of the second showing. This demonstrates leadership because in the face of a negative experience they were able to balance that with the other positive elements of the experience, which included more local media coverage and overall student satisfaction (as expressed by other participating artists and viewers). They understood the contributing factors to having low attendance at the second show and even suggested alternate possibilities for following years in a classroom debrief. These included starting the opening earlier so that classes could visit during school hours and not having two different time blocks as that seemed to be confusing. This also suggests that increased feelings of self-confidence and empowerment were not adversely affected by the low turnout, as they were still willing to engage with ideas of how to improve the structure rather than disengage from the space and have no feelings of hope or possibility for the future.

The leadership element emerged more in the second exhibit but I believe it was building itself up through the first. I believe that opening a critique of their schooling experiences demonstrates leadership, particularly amongst their peers, as many other students at the school have disengaged from academics in its current form. While the resistance literature used in this dissertation works to explain the nature of disengagement for different students, in order to address it as educators, the students must be willing and prepared to critically analyze the source of their disengagement. In the first exhibit the students in the class took on that responsibility and became leaders in a push for a broader, more relevant and more reflective learning experience. This may be considered a subtle form of leadership, as much of this action took place in the classroom, and was not visible to a larger public. However, in those first steps we did observe the willingness for students to step outside of their own comfort zone, and think critically about what

they had been learning and what they wanted to learn. Being the catalysts for this critical

dialogue led them to the second exhibit, which amplified their collective drive and voice, setting

a strong example of what is possible in terms of student agency and leadership in school.

Connections between YPAR and YPAC

YPAR works to frame the curatorial approach we took, as the students were not the

subjects of research but were able to conduct their own research in informal ways, understood in

terms that led to asking questions about representation and access. It resulted in the creation of

new knowledge in that a gallery space was a viable option as a location for students to take space

and question that, which is of importance to them. Through this process, we discovered that

YPAC could be a valuable experience for students to conduct arts-based research in ways that

are meaningful and representative of them.

There are many commonalities between YPAC and YPAR, as described by Iwasaki et. al.

(2014) (see Figure 3 in chapter three), who argues that the basis for a successful youth-led

project, described as its philosophy/principles, is that it be empowering, present opportunities

for learning new things (content and skills) that are meaningful to the students, allow them to

apply them, and provide opportunities for community connections, primarily outside of the

school community. As we saw in the previous chapter, the 15+ students identified similar

elements in their experiences with YPAC, as discussed in the last chapter (six). For instance,

'learning' appeared in two of the themes. And several UAH students discussed the school and

project as being one that provides them with opportunities they would not have had otherwise.

Finally, students also demonstrated higher levels of self-confidence after producing both

exhibits, which is associated with feelings of empowerment, also identified by Iwasaki as a key

element in YPAR. Finally, we see the notion of community identified by Iwasaki in the 'Power

of an audience' theme, as it demonstrates the importance of supportive networks that validate the students and their efforts. It also reappears in the context of the SBM exhibit, both in terms of the classroom community and the extended community that the activist work engaged.

The importance of praxis in YPAR projects is foundational (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). Through continual praxis, one of the challenges identified in this project and discussed within the 'Challenges to developing critical consciousness' theme, is that the deeper, systemic issues addressed in the gallery shows became secondary to a discussion of the overall finished product and successful experience. Understanding this sentiment held by the students, made me have an important realization. For these projects to be true iterations of YPAR, work needs to be done to ensure the focus of the project is on the content as well as the feeling of accomplishment. I mention this because according to Cammarota & Fine, within PAR/YPAR frameworks projects, the knowledge created "should be critical in nature, meaning they should point to historic and contemporary moves of power and towards progressive changes improving social conditions within the situation studied" (p. 6). While some of the content in the BHM exhibit was critical, a number of the students' reflections on it were not. While I believe that the second exhibit was able to do more of this critical work, I also believe that more effort would have been required to prepare the students for critical engagement/reflection rather than waiting to see if it would be present in post-exhibit interview.

Alongside the claims I am making about the potentials of YPAC, I am also making claims about the importance of understanding the complexities and functions of youth resistance. In doing this I aim to ensure that my description of this project has avoided an oversimplification of the youth who participated, their relationships to school and one another. I believe this project was successful in demonstrating the urgent need to attempt new approaches to pedagogy that

responds to the exclusionary nature of traditional schooling and opens the doors to important discussions that are youth-driven, honest and insightful.

As Creswell (2013a) states in his discussion around transformation and a transformative worldview, PAR belongs in the transformative framework in qualitative inquiry, where research should "contain an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of participants, the institutions in which they live and work, or even the researchers' lives" (p. 26). As seen in Caraballo et. al (2017) in a review of YPAR literature, many YPAR researchers identify the importance of research participants and methods which are increasingly representative of and attentive to communities living in situations of marginalization (Mira, Garcia & Morrell, 2015). In the case of this research, I believe this is what took place, as the methods used were able to be responsive to and representative of the students, primarily living in situations of marginalization.

Working with, instead of against, students' resistance towards school meant that we (as a group) were able to value their interests, ideas and experiences as knowledge worth sharing and wanted to do so in ways that encouraged accessibility and dialogue. Once this work had been started they were far more self-motivated to produce a new show, to stay on task with things they did not like doing (emails), and were more comfortable with the collaborative curation process. This is not to say there were no difficulties throughout this process; however, in the second show it felt more familiar and took less time to complete tasks. This development is important to note as it links closely to what Morrell (2004) describes as an outcome of conducting critical research with youth. He describes the identities of his students developing and adopting a critical perspective as they seek out ways to act upon and create change in their environment. Through the process of building the first exhibit I believe the students began to understand the potential of interacting critically with their surroundings which led to them envisioning a new exhibit that

was not only critically motivated but also had direct methods of communicating their ideas and concerns to people in decision-making positions. The students did this with an expectation to be both heard and listened to, which were not expectations they previously had, as can be heard from their interviews. This demonstrates how the outcomes of the first exhibit allowed the second exhibit not only to take place but also to be more politically engaged and more transformationally resistant than the first. This also helps to demonstrate how the arc of engagement continued to work after the first exhibit had ended. The students were at the height of their engagement at the end of SFBE, and instead of restarting their engagement process at the bottom of the arc for the new project, they started the second project at the peak of engagement from the first.

Enhancing the curation literature

This study supports the claim that curation can be a political act working to challenge the dominance of certain voices, particularly in designated spaces, by valuing the knowledge held by those who are often silenced or rendered invisible (Butler & Lehrer, 2016). As curation is examined by research and gallerists alike, research on curation now often focuses on the role of the curator to engage in a participatory manner with the audiences, rather than simply focusing on the selection and display of content. As stated by Butler & Lehrer (2016) "curating is an opportunity to propose solutions to problems we identify through our own research" (p. 9) and in the case of this dissertation the problems students identify through their own lived experiences. The students organically engaged in a process of responding to their own lived realities and academic needs by proposing themes and presenting art work that would respond to the overall message of the exhibit. The students in this study are being put in the role of curator, taken from their usual role as audience members, within the context of their school. The lack of

participatory, or engaging content presented to them in their classrooms meant that they chose to curate a learning experience that felt more interesting and honest to them. Flipped from audience to decision-maker, the students presented content valuable not only for those who saw the exhibits, but to all those interested in what students feel is missing from their schooling experiences, and in what they can and should be learning differently as a method of validation and self-affirmation. The unique responsibilities of a curator allows students to see themselves as the experts and the architects of their own education, challenging the dominant discourse held by experts in the field of education and housed in every school adhering to the provincial curriculum.

This dissertation has aimed to extend these claims in order to emphasize the importance of youth voices, highlighted through curatorial projects that are, primarily, constructed and led by them. As discussed in chapter four, the opportunity for youth to be step into the role of curator is somewhat of an anomaly (Bryant, 2011) and when it is offered, often relegates them to low-stakes participants and decision-makers. This study proposes that the boundaries of the youth as curator model continue to be expanded to emphasize the importance of the participatory element of curation, and its ability to pose and respond to new kinds of research questions that highlight relevant and lived experiences of diverse student populations. This is done with the aim to create more dynamic and relevant learning opportunities for students, that require them to (learn how to) think critically about their own positionality in society, how that relates to their learning experience, and how that can be challenged to be increasingly inclusive and representative.

Project and research study limitations

This concluding section will now discuss some of the study limitations that were faced throughout the research process and will go on to discuss post research projects that I have been involved with that make use of the YPAC framework, as well as the potential for building other YPAC projects in the future. I do this as a way to demonstrate the usability of YPAC in a variety of settings. The implications this research has for future use in other settings point to new and unexplored ways that YPAR can evolve into more arts-based approaches that serve to continue work aimed at promoting social justice and youth-driven conversations.

The work done on this dissertation is a snapshot of one project with one group of students at one school. Every setting will be unique. I am also cognisant that my own unique experiences with graffiti and street art culture impacted my ability to co-facilitate this kind of project and gave me access to a network of artists who would be willing to support the students in their efforts. While this perspective has helped me build an understanding of how all traditional institutions can and should be challenged and altered to function as tools towards change I, again, am aware that this is not something any teacher can easily access or understand. My positionality made the experience possible; however, it also means that if any other youth, educators or researchers were to use YPAC for their own purposes, they would need to adapt their approach based on their realities.

As has been discussed in earlier chapters, there were many challenges facing this project from the onset. The time constraints and lack of professional development for me and the teacher are two of the primary ways in which this project could have been easily improved. I believe that because we were underprepared to support a critical praxis amongst the students, there were lost opportunities to challenge the judgemental/critical conformist resistance, and post-racial discourse held by many of the students in the group. I firmly believe that with better preparation

and a clear intention to facilitate these kinds of conversations, not only would we as the adults involved in the project feel more productive, I also believe that the shift into transformative resistance would have happened earlier.

We also did not make critical reflection a priority and lost an important opportunity to dig deeper into the impact of creating the gallery in a traditional learning space, not only for the students, but for the staff and those who attended the shows as well. By this, I am specifically referring to increased data collection in the form of post-gallery visit interviews or comment cards, as well as increased amounts of student self-reflexive work and self-evaluation opportunities. By increasing the amount of perspectives in the research, it would give an increasingly well-rounded view of how the work that was done inside the gallery and the impact on the rest of the student body or the community in broader terms. While my positionality meant that I was able to discuss some of these elements with the students during hours outside of school time, these were informal conversations that helped to strengthen our bond while in class but could not count as actual research data. In order to be able to collect the various forms of data described above a formal plan would need to be in place before the work began and tasks would also have to be designated early on.

Finally, as I alluded to in the introduction, the research presented in this dissertation was only able to analyze the experience of one group of students over the course of one school year, with interview data from only the first of two exhibits. While the claims I am making based on student experience here were not able to be researched and replicated in the same context in following years at the school, I was able to take the essence of this project (YPAC) and use it in two other situations with both similar and different students. What this means is the research in this dissertation has given me some very useful guidelines in terms of what elements of curation

and urban-arts inspired projects seem to function effectively when working with youth and young adults as a method to help them express what they believe should be discussed in the context of formal learning environments. I also believe YPAC would be a useful research tool for those working in community contexts and informal learning spaces; however, I have not had the opportunity to experiment with these other learning environments at this time.

YPAC Futures

Two curatorial projects at a US university

The final section of this dissertation discusses the two other instances in which I have helped students use curation as a method of resisting traditional curricular content and to explore topics they believe to be relevant and meaningful. The first one was a project, which paired students from a grade nine high school class (who would produce the art) with a group of teacher education students (who would curate the exhibit). This partnership took place in a small rural town in upstate NY and while much of what was discussed here was different in context, the outcomes were very similar. The second one was a course I taught about curation at the same university in upstate NY with first year university students. The context of this project shared no similarities with the research described in this dissertation and yet still, through youth-led curation, the outcomes were again very similar.

The first project was particularly challenging as there were two groups of students who were participating vs my previous experience of only working with one group of students. This meant that there were two different arcs of engagement that were taking place, because each group was connecting to the project in different ways at different times. Much like the UAH students, the group curating really began to engage with the process when they visited the high school and saw the students working on their art projects. The teacher education students also

needed to learn how to work collaboratively, and motivate each other to go through all the

planning phases involved in curating an exhibit. This meant that the learning for the teacher

education students was two-fold, and something I had not counted on. They learned how to work

collaboratively together as well as how to help support younger students in their attempts at

expression, which was also a professional development experience for them.

Through the act of curation, prospective teachers were able to experience the importance

of emphasizing student voice in order to increase student engagement with content, also

demonstrating the importance of creating bridges between the 'adults in charge' and the students

in the class. While curation can take on many forms, particularly depending on the space, the

essential elements of the success of this project meant a focus always directed to emphasizing

student voice and experience: both the high schoolers and the teacher education students. In

closing this section, I will share one of the artist statements written by one of the groups of

students describing their art piece as a reaction towards the pressures of school.

> Our art project represents the struggles and pressures of school. The hand is painted grey
>
> to symbolize the darkness of stress and anxiety. The textbooks are meant to be heavy and
>
> weighing the hand down because school is a struggle for many people. The failing grades
>
> represent the reality of school and how people have a hard time and can't pass every test.
>
> The project is meant to be messy because people's heads are a mess in school because of
>
> anxiety. The broken pencils show frustration after something goes wrong. The crumpled
>
> paper shows shame, embarrassment and disappointment. This project shows how school
>
> pressures weigh students down.

This was one example of an artist statement with a depth and perspective that surprised the teacher education students, but also left them with the sense of the importance of their futures in education.

After the experience described above I built and taught a university course to first year students called 'Curation for change'. This course presented me with a unique opportunity to test the use of YPAC in a new and very different setting. As with UAH, there were important divergences from some elements of YPAR, including the fact that students had to participate in the project; students received grades for their participation, and they were required to produce a visual arts exhibit in a traditional gallery space. While students could have dropped the class if this had not been an appealing experience for them, the purpose of their attendance was to curate an exhibit. In addition, as the instructor one of my responsibilities was to facilitate a discussion and decision-making process that would help them identify an issue that was important to all of them, rather than the idea coming from them to begin with. Other important differences were the racial and class representations of the students in the class (and the university), as well as a very different connection to and experiences with school. These differences made it so these students were not as surprised by the successful outcome of the project when it was finished, but still experienced a different kind of learning as what they were used to.

The differences between these two projects in particular are important to mention, mainly because the outcomes themselves cannot be compared, but I believe the experience itself can. That these two projects are so different helps to illustrate my point that YPAC is a usable research method that can help to enhance the learning experience of many different kinds of students. YPAC can give students a unique opportunity to make decisions about their own learning and assume responsibility for the content and the outcomes of their projects. It can help

to highlight resistance in ways that are helpful for the students; it can help visually represent

people and issues often ignored in the traditional learning structures of school; it can create a

successful learning experience in school with implications for future learning and it can help to

create connections between the students participating and their audiences in ways that validate

the knowledge of the students and the feelings of the wider community while challenging the

traditional power relations that exist in school.

Implications for further research

Audience participation is something that is discussed in the curation literature, extending

to audience studies (Dimaggio, Useem & Brown, 1978) as well as exhibition studies (Lee & Lee,

2014). It was unfortunately missing from this study. As previously stated, curation has evolved

to highlight voices of entire communities rather than emphasizing the voice of the person/people

in charge of exhibit design. It has come to be a tool for the facilitation of knowledge and

discussion. In order to consistently and accurately achieve this there needs to be considerable

attention directed towards audience participation and experience. As stated by Clifton-Ross, Dale

& Newell (2019), in-gallery research conducted by Pekarik & Mogel (2010), proposes that

exhibit-makers should deliberately create displays that "appeal to one of the three preferences:

Idea, Object, or People" (Pekarik & Mogel, 2010, p. 473) and can also work to "flip" audience

interest or attraction to a different element, to enhance overall experience. This suggests that the

focus of a curator should be on audience experience and participation, trying to attract audiences

with an element they are already interested in and increase their knowledge and engagement

through the use of this strategy. In Interpretive Planning for Museums: Integrating Visitor

Perspectives in Decision Making, the authors define interpretive planning as "a deliberate and

systematic process for thinking about, deciding on, and recording in a written format or plan

educational and interpretive initiatives for the purpose of facilitating meaningful and effective

experiences for visitors, learning institutions, and communities" (Wells, Butler, & Koke, 2013, p.

36). This informs the reader that the process of curation, as stated earlier, goes far beyond

decisions about theme and display. The process must name an end goal and then create a

pathway which considers all elements of accessibility to ensure equity in learning. Knowing

whether the exhibit is successfully achieving these goals requires getting feedback about the

experience, including ways to constantly improve the participatory experience. Therefore, these

elements need to be an imperative part of the planning process.

Because of the nature in which this project evolved, the role of the curator was focused

on the student/curator experience, in order to empower them in their own educational settings as

identities as learners. In order to be able to build their level of engagement with the role, and

work to understand how their resistance could also be used we did not have the time or reflex to

place any importance on audience experience or engagement, or to think about how to research

it. Based on the emphasis of audience experience in the curation literature, one possible

implication for further research would be to ensure that a YPAC project would include planning

for the consideration of audience participation as well as gathering audience feedback. I believe

this focus would end up being beneficial to students, as the support of community was a theme

that emerged as important and meaningful to their experience. Preparing students to receive

feedback would mean creating a method of receiving constructive criticism as well as positive

feedback. This could help broaden the potential for research questions that would investigate the

ability of the exhibit's message to reach the audience and be interpreted in its intended way. It

would also give an opportunity to gather feedback about enhancing the exhibit-goer's

experience, the overall impression of the gallery space itself and any ideas for other content that

students would also feel inspired by, thereby further strengthening community relations and networks.

Conclusion

I believe that my experiences with the students in the 15+ class at UAH have shaped me as an educator and have revived my understanding of the power and potential of youth-led projects, particularly when using art as a catalyst. I continue to learn how to engage with students as they go through the process of questioning and learning in order to help facilitate thinking and forming concrete ideas surrounding their perceptions of education and living situations. It is through my continual use and investigation of curation as a method of working with youth and young adults that I can confidently declare YPAC is well situated in a critical pedagogy framework, as I believe it addresses what Freire describes as the student-teacher contradiction. Freire contends, "Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students" (1970, p. 72). Youth-driven curatorial projects allow me to both share my knowledge and experience with students while also learning first-hand what they consider to be important and worthy of discussion and learning. By using this approach, the classroom turns into a dialogical place for exchange, where multiple forms of knowledge are understood as relevant and not placed in a hierarchical order but rather function as a way to level the playing field in traditional learning environments.

Annexe 1

STUDENT SURVEY

1) Are the arts part of your life? What and how? (Could be any form, or type of involvement, including being a listener or viewer).

2) What do you think of when you hear about "urban arts"?

3) Have you taken part in any of the urban arts after school or in class projects?

   If yes: What could be done to improve these programs?

   If no: Would you like to try urban arts projects? What kind of project would this be for you?

4) Can you suggest any of the urban arts which you have not seen at the school but you would like to try? (This can include anything from different kinds of music, art and sports!)

5) _____ is building a recording studio. Any ideas of what you would like to see happen there?

5) _____ is building an art gallery. Any ideas for what you would like to see happen there?

Annexe 2
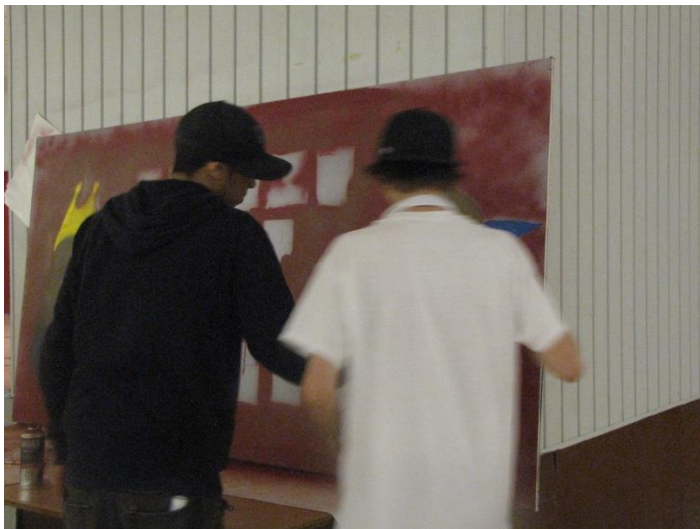
Annexe 3

Saints of Soul-Beauty Through Hardship
Nina Simone by Miss Me

In her exhibit Saints of Soul – Beauty Through Hardship, Miss Me depicted a group of recognized genius musicians into saint. Each one of the Saints of Soul in her exhibition were people she recognized as having lived through extremely difficult realities but made something beautiful and lasting out of those experiences.
Other saints depicted in the original exhibit were: Billie Holliday, Tupac Shakur, George Gershwin, Marvin Gaye and Michael Jackson

This immortalized jazz giant stares with the fierce dignity that Miss Me depicts in all of her subjects. In each of the "Saints" featured in this exhibit, each a black musician that has shaped the history of art and song, Miss Me translated their music into a visual representation that is both beautiful and powerful raising these geniuses-musicians into saints, as hallowed icons becoming guides, lights in our daily lives

But in a world where influential black women rarely receive the recognition they deserve, this exhibit is in fact an act of rebellion. In this figure we see the High Priestess of Soul; Nina Simone elevated to a godly state.

Simone was recognized as one of the greats of her time, and not only was she musically gifted, she also was an activist. A civil rights message was standard in Simone's recording repertoire, becoming a part of her live performances. Simone performed and spoke at many civil rights meetings, such as at the Selma to Montgomery marches. Simone was at the forefront of the few performers willing to use music as a vehicle for social commentary and change. Such risks were seldom taken by artists during that time of such dramatic civil upheaval.
In this series Miss Me celebrates these musicians for the contributions they made to the world of music through their strong will and action for change.

Annexe 4

The Struggle for Black Equality

Call for Submissions

Deadline: Tuesday, February 16th

[blank] l is accepting submissions for our black history month show, entitled "The Struggle for Black Equality". This multimedia show will open on Thursday, February 25th and will celebrate the lives of heroic men and women of music, sport and literature. Artists and musicians will use portraiture, sound samples, written word (quotes are provided) and any other kind of artistic representation to pay tribute to our heroes. Please choose one or more of the following important people and use them as inspiration for your visual artwork and/or song:

Missy Elliott—"When it comes to size, most people don't want to see themselves looking bigger than what they are."

Lauryn Hill—"Reality is easy. It's deception that's the hard work."

N.W.A.—"The police think they have the authority to kill a minority."

Tupac Shakur—"They have money for war, but can't feed the poor."

Nina Simone—"Jazz is a white term to define black people. My music is black classical music."

P.K. Subban—"We're role models to a lot of kids, not just black kids, but all kids out there and that's what we want to be known for."

Lebron James—on wearing an "I can't breathe" t-shirt in warm-up: "We have to be better for one another. It doesn't matter what race you are."

Muhammad Ali—"Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on earth."

Jackie Robinson—"A life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives."

**Zora Neale Hurston**—"I do not weep at the world I am too busy sharpening my oyster knife."

Maya Angelou—"Prejudice is a burden that confuses the past, threatens the future and renders the present inaccessible."

Alice Walker—"Activism is my rent for living on this planet."

Langston Hughes—"I tire so of hearing people say, let things take their course. Tomorrow is another day. I do not need my freedom when I'm dead. I cannot live on tomorrow's bread."
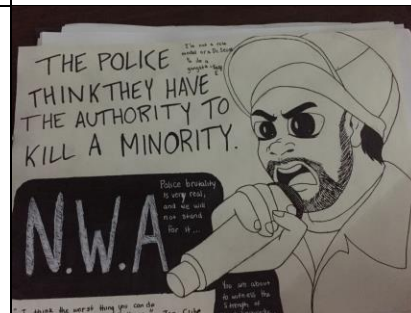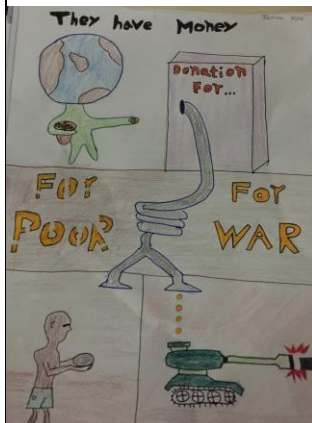
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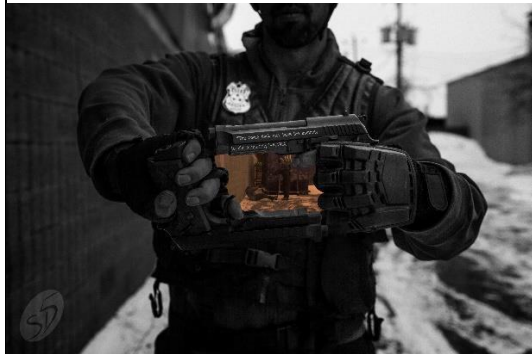
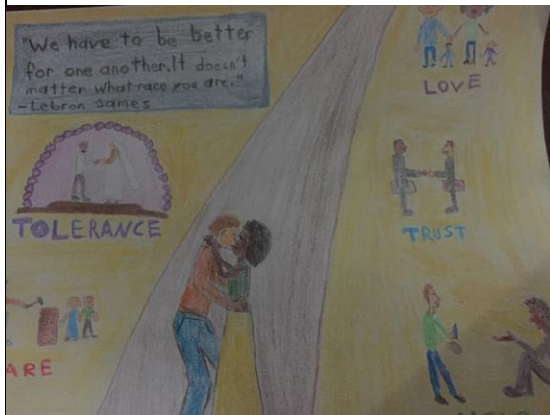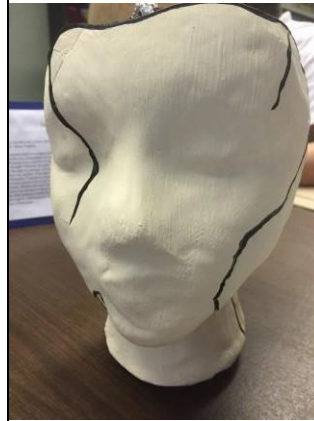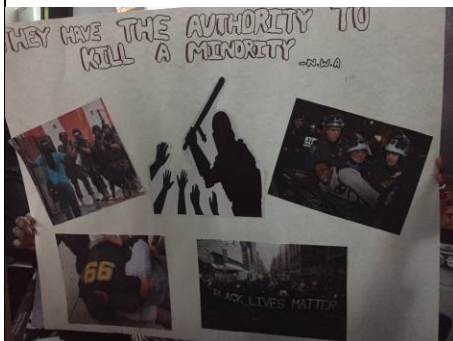|	
 NWA –	 **Lauryn Hill –**
Greed and Eulogies Dark and twisted, but so terribly gifted I feel clinically insane, a picture painted so vivid I envy the dead, as I pity the living For the dead are free, and the living must breathe **Poem for Tupac Shakur –**	 **NWA –**
 Tupac Shakur –	 **Lebron James –**

Lebron James –

Maya Angelou –

Civil Rights –

Missy Elliott? –

NWA –
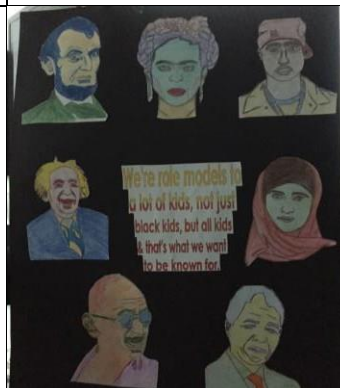
P.K. Subban
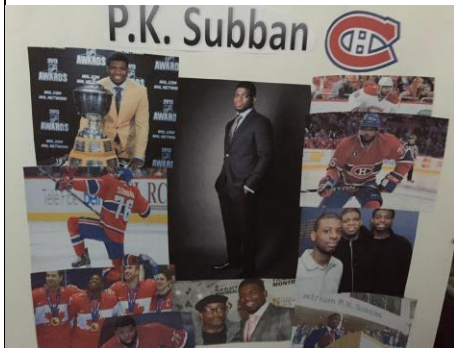
P.K. Subban –
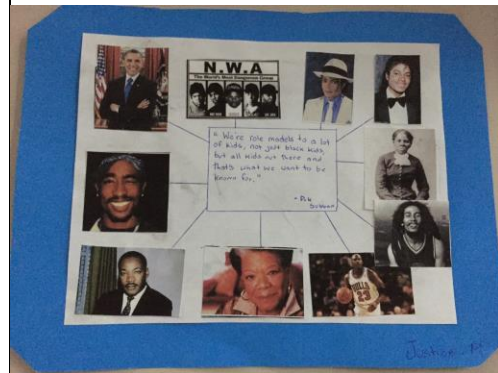
P.K. Subban –

Alice Walker -
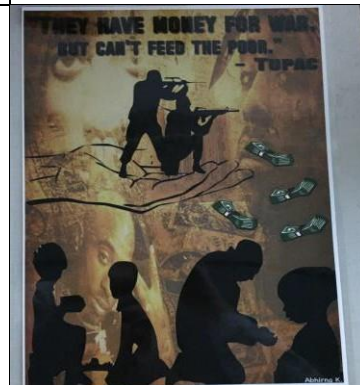
Tupac Shakur -

Lauryn Hill? –

P.K. Subban –

Lebron James –

NWA –

P.K. Subban –

Their Fight, Their Words
After trying for weeks,
And having written many verses
Today, on the last day
It has come to my attention
Spoken Word – Black Equality –

Tupac Shakur –

Tupac Shakur –

 Tupac Shakur –	**Muddy Waters Audio**
Crow Dance Audio **Zora Neale Hurston –**	**Audio – Tupac Shakur**
Audio **Jackie Robinson –**	**Audio – Lebron James**

Audio **Lauryn Hill –**	**Nina Simone – Miss Me**
Tupac Shakur – Miss Me	**Biggie Portrait –**
P.K. Subban – **Hockey Puck Portrait**	**Lebron James –**

P.K. Subban – Hockey Tape Portrait	Muhammad Ali
Missy Elliott – Mirror Portrait	

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