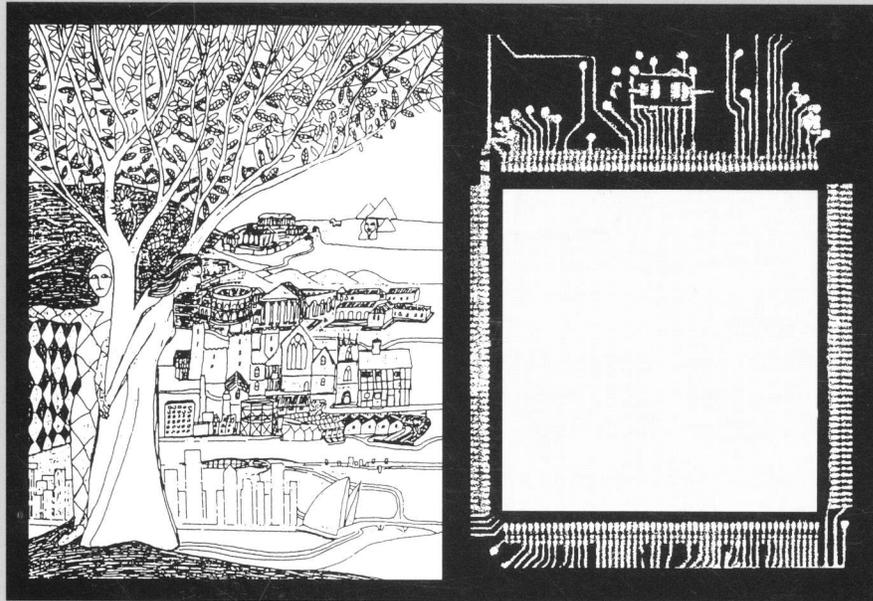


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The Capability Approach and Citizenship Education: What the Arts Have to Offer

[This article explores Nussbaum's notion of the importance of the arts and humanities as they relate to global citizenship and education. Nussbaum proposes three capacities or capabilities that are, above all, 'essential to the cultivation of humanity in today's interlocking world' ---critical thinking, world citizenship and imaginative understanding. The author of this article looks on the one hand at an obsessive concentration on reading and numeracy programmes, and on the other at an L.A. arts education programme '10,000 Kites' which successfully combined a capability focus and social inter-action across cultural faultlines.]

<<This problem [of connecting with others for social change] is part of a bigger challenge: to get involved in our community, most of us need a few things in place. We need some hope and some trust, a minimum of freedom, and access to others who may want to work with us. We may also need more information about the problem we want to solve, stories and ideas from people who have dealt with similar issues, and options for action that make sense to each of us.>> Ami Dar, Director, Actions Without Borders (2007)

Sustained by the belief in the fundamental importance of civic education for democracy,

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educators and policymakers continue to pursue programs aimed at strengthening each through a variety of curricular and pedagogical approaches (Nussbaum 2006; Westheimer & Kahne 2005). However, growing concern about the quality of public education in the United States has driven, instead, numerous educational reform efforts characterized by increased accountability, as exemplified by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) program.[1]

While most individuals will affirm that all children and youth should be afforded equal opportunity for learning, regardless of their socio-economic position in society, these types of reform initiatives tend to focus on preparing children and youth for work beyond high school as measured by proficiency in maths and reading. A *New York Times* article recently noted that schools across the country

<<...are increasing ---in some cases tripling--- the class time that low-proficiency students spend on reading and math.>> (Dillon 2006, p. 2)

Such a curriculum discourages freedom, risk taking, autonomy ---capabilities that allow students to be more flexible and intuitive learners. Even more alarming is the fact that in large urban centers such as New York City, low performing public schools ---the primary target of school reform efforts--- have predominantly higher percentages of youth of colour as well as students eligible for free lunch, a standard measure of family poverty. Increasingly, standardized maths and reading tests have become the educational objectives towards which public schools teach, while the objectives which are more difficult to measure, such as having confidence in one's ability to learn, or being able to make

informed, critical and reflective choices, are downplayed or ignored.

Educating for citizenship, historically one of the primary purposes of education in the United States, has been marginalized through standardized testing in this era of accountability. The critical and imaginative capacities of children and youth, capabilities many argue are necessary for an informed, empathetic and empowered citizenry, are being neglected (Nussbaum 2006). If, as Horace Mann once stated, public education is <<...the great equalizer of the conditions of [people] —the balance wheel of social machinery>> what kinds of citizens are our urban public schools producing?

Children and youth in the 21st century need to develop the capabilities that enable them to deal with difference, while at the same time empower them to participate in democratic societies.

This article explores Nussbaum's (2002; 2006) notion of the importance of the arts and humanities, as they relate to global citizenship and education. She proposes three capacities or capabilities that are, above all,

<<...essential to the cultivation of humanity in today's interlocking world ---critical thinking, world citizenship and imaginative understanding.>> (Nussbaum 2002, p. 293)[2]. Given the emerging education reform landscape and current socio-political and cultural realities in an increasingly networked world, outlining the capabilities necessary for democratic citizenship is critical.

Nussbaum's work provides a platform for establishing global norms, in regard to global citizenship, much like movements over the last two decades to establish international human rights. However, broad arguments may get lost in translation at the local level.

Moreover, much of Nussbaum's writing is aimed at post-secondary educational systems and includes examples grounded in disciplines outside of visual arts education. This article explores three of Nussbaum's capabilities anchored in the field of arts education[3], as a means to support her position regarding the role of the arts in fostering capabilities for citizenship.

The first section briefly outlines the capability approach as it relates to education. The second section addresses the history of arts education, followed by an analysis of a specific arts education project that fosters the capabilities of critical thinking, world citizenship and imaginative understanding.

The goal of the analysis is to provide a means of illustrating how a social justice art education (SJAE) program is an ideal space to provide for individual flourishing and collective solidarities, elements integral to notions of citizenship and the capability approach.

The Capability Approach and Education

Melanie Walker (2005) defines the capability approach as being:

<<...about freedom and the development of an environment suitable for human flourishing.

Capability refers to what people are actually able to be and do, rather than to [only] what resources they have access to. It focuses on developing people's capabilities to choose a life that they have reason to value>> (p. 103). Capabilities are potential functionings (or outcomes) that emerge only where there are both the freedoms (access, information, acceptance) to take up opportunities, and the human agency and motivation to do so. Functionings range from the basic (having basic literacy) to the more complex (being

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able critically to analyze a piece of literature). The difference between a capability and a functioning is like one between an opportunity to achieve, and the actual achievement, between potential and outcome (Walker, 2005). Choice also plays a critical role in the capability approach. Choice is understood as the space where, in the case of education, a student having the requisite set of capabilities exercises her choice from a range of options and alternatives, such that the choices she makes benefit her well-being (Walker, 2005). Both Sen and Nussbaum argue that being educated is a basic capability (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2002).

Hoffman (2006), however, states that <<...from the point of view of the Capability Approach, one can also argue that learning that stops at the level of providing only basic reading and writing skills would be insufficient to advance sustainable.>>

The same argument can be made in the context of U.S. public education system's focus on equating learning with proficiency in maths and reading, as measured by standardized test scores.

<<A more complete perspective>>, says Hoffman (2006), <<would be the concept of equitable access to an education that specifically enhances capability>> (p. 2). Education must account for the <<...inter-relatedness of teaching, learning and human development>> as well as quality to foster the capabilities that enable children and adolescents to, for example,

<<...think critically and creatively, solve problems, make informed decisions, cope with and manage new situations, and communicate effectively>> (p. 2).

Walker (2004) writes that Nussbaum, as a philosopher and university teacher, is

concerned not only with providing her students with the necessary knowledge and analytical skills to become educated citizens, but also to assist them with

<<...learning how to be a human being capable of love and imagination>> (Nussbaum 2002, p. 301).

This educational philosophy is consistent with her expanded version of the capability approach, with its concern for what people are actually able to do, and to be, informed by the idea that all human beings deserve to be treated with dignity. (Nussbaum 2001).

Citizenship education as conceived in this paper is also aligned with the notion of human dignity. Without, for example, <<...the ability to appear in public without shame>> (Smith quoted in Sen, 1999 p.73) our ability to consider our

<<...individual conceptions of justice and propriety, which influence the specific uses [we] make of [our] freedoms>> become circumscribed (Sen 1999, p. 31). These conceptions, as Sen points out, <<...depend on social associations – particularly on the interactive formation of public perceptions and on collaborative comprehension of problems and remedies>> (p. 31).

Democratic participation is dependent upon a citizenry that is able to enter into, and participate in, public dialogue and action. Yet the barriers to democratic participation are the greatest challenge, particularly for youth of colour (Ginwright & James 2002). Art education purposefully constructed to engage students in critical reflection, dialogue, and action, regarding social justice issues, can provide multiple opportunities for the development of capabilities necessary for democratic citizenship.

Art Education and Social Justice

Citizenship and democracy education are themes taken up by arts educators over the past 50 years. In the 1960s and 70s, arts educators began to recognize the increasing allure of the visual and new media, and the need for a critical approach towards both in art education (Chalmers 2005).[4] In his *Essays in Art Education*, Vincent Lanier (1976, p. 61) wrote:

<<What we need – and here I will speak only of the teaching of art – are new conceptions of modes of artistic behavior, new ideas of what might constitute the curricula of the art class. These new curricula must be meaningful and relevant to pupils – to disadvantaged pupils and, by extension, to all pupils. These new ideas must engage the ‘guts and hopes’ of youngsters and through these excitements provoke intellectual effort and growth. These new ideas must give the art class a share in the process of exploring social relationships and developing alternative models of human behavior in a quickly changing and, at this point in time, quickly worsening social environment.>>

What Lanier recognized in the 1970s is applicable to arts education today. He understood the need to look beyond the classroom for the content of art education, as well as the power of the arts as a language for critically examining and acting upon contemporary society.

Moreover, while Lanier emphatically believed in the teaching of art

<<...as a vehicle for effecting social change>> (Lanier 1976, p. 63),

he also made clear that *<<...the direction and the particulars of change>>* (p. 63)

should not be pre-defined. Indeed, the aim was to have young people

collectively develop their ideas, a position echoed in Sen's argument that all members of a society should be able actively to participate in deciding what capabilities to preserve, and which to let go of—in this paper, capabilities for justice oriented citizenship.

The art educators of the 60s and 70s recognized early on the need for student centered arts education, that dealt with, and incorporated a wide range of visual, cultural, social and political literacy as a means of effecting social change.

Today a large segment of the arts education community understands the wide range of sociopolitical and economic issues generated by the impact of contemporary imagery, and the values inherent in such representations (Freedman, 2003). It is also understood that such imagery can profoundly influence *<<...student identity, notions of citizenship, [and] beliefs about democracy>>* (Freedman 2003, p. 94).

SJAE consciously focuses on these issues through a curriculum and pedagogy that aims to promote a deeper understanding of one's self, as well as the social and cultural landscape we live in. An array of art education approaches including multicultural, social reconstruction, visual culture, and community-based art education, fall under the rubric of social justice art education (Garber 2005).

SJAE seeks to decenter

<<...student identities in order to allow students the opportunity to reexamine and (hopefully) reconstruct their notions of selfhood and assumptions of practice>> (Butin 2005, p. 10).

As Butin notes, such a process is neither direct or nor easy. Deliberate preparation, intensive discussions, and reflections, are integral to the process, as is a willingness to

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let go of <<...total control over what our students learn>> (p. 10).

Regarding curriculum, linear progress is rejected, the separation of fine arts from craft and popular culture is breached, and normative ideas regarding identity, race, class and gender are often challenged (Efland, et al 1996). Furthermore, links between local communities, national concerns, and international issues are explored and established (Delacruz 2005; Zimmerman 2002), providing the ground for children and youth to recognize their ties to

<<...fellow citizens who live at a distance, or who look different from ourselves>> (Nussbaum 2002, p. 296).

Grant Kester's (2002, 2004) concept of dialogical aesthetics, provides an ideal model of how such teaching and learning is enacted. Kester's (2004) concept of dialogical art practice is derived from Russian literary theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin. According to Kester, Bakhtin argued <<...that [a] work of art can be viewed as a kind of conversation – a locus of differing meanings, interpretations, and points of view>> (p. 10). In such an approach, the interactive character of projects is emphasized, replacing <<...the conventional, 'banking' style of art...in which the artist deposits an expressive content into a physical object, to be withdrawn later by the viewer>> (p. 10).

In dialogical aesthetics, the process of dialogue and collaboration comes to the fore. Through the creative facilitation of dialogue and exchange in the art making process, as well as willingness on the artist's part for <<...active listening and empathetic identification>> meaning occurs and is developed <<...in the exchange between the artist and viewers, ultimately affecting the

identities of both>> (Garber 2005, p.4). The emphasis in this model is on the character of the interaction between artist and subject/community –

<<...not the physical or formal integrity of a given artifact or the artist's experience producing it.>> (Kester 2004, p. 10)

SJAE works within an expanded dialogical aesthetic model. Firstly, in SJAE classrooms the art teacher acts as a facilitator and co-creator with students, as they individually and collectively take on the role of the artist. Notions of individual identity, and how these identities intersect with the group dynamic, play an integral role from art concept to finished product.

Secondly, the value of an interaction between the student and community is enhanced when attention is paid to both the quality of the art making and the individual student's experience creating the work.

Thirdly, the arts experience from concept to finished product and/or event is further enhanced and grounded through reflective practices. Dialogical aesthetics, like the capability approach, is concerned with <<...freedom and the development of an environment suitable for human flourishing>> (Walker 2005, p. 103), in this case, through the arts. The following example of a project produced in a SJAE program illustrates how dialogical aesthetics can provide a framework for the creation of the freedoms and opportunities for fostering the capabilities Nussbaum argues as critical for democratic citizenship.

10,000 Kites

The lesson I describe below was conducted through a program located at Loyola Marymount University (LMU) in Los

Angeles, California. LMU ARTSmart is a service-learning[5] program with the stated mission:

<<To provide underserved young people with access to an education in the visual arts that will provide both the instrumental and intrinsic benefits necessary to becoming a well-rounded, productive member of a rapidly changing society.>> (ARTSmart brochure, 2006).

Each semester, students from across the campus volunteer or participate in service-learning to provide arts education to local low-income K-8 schools with student bodies composed primarily of children and youth of colour.

The goal of fostering citizenship is clearly implied by the program's mission, but the kinds of citizenship capabilities this program aims to foster, revolve around a central theme of social justice and provide 'illustrations' of fostering the capabilities associated with democratic citizenship —critical thinking, world citizenship, and the imaginative understanding.

In the spring of 2005, the LMU ARTSmart and Marital and Family Therapy programs facilitated Kindergarten-8th grade student participation in the '10,000 Kites' project. 10,000 Kites was initiated by Israeli artist Adi Yekutieli and Palestinian artist, George Nustas. In this project Israeli and Palestinian children and families set aside differences, and gathered together to fly kites in a public display of their desire to end the regional conflict. Children from around the world were invited to participate in their own communities as a show of solidarity.

The LMU programs hosted the 10,000 Kites program with two K-8 schools from different neighborhoods in Los Angeles.

Initial Presentation

Meetings between an Israeli graduate student, a Palestinian professor and the art education and therapy program faculty and students were used to create the initial interactive presentations about the conflict in the Middle East and its impact on children and youth. These presentations were given to two groups of students ---kindergarten through grade 3 and grades 4 through 8.

A poem by Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai [6] was read aloud as an entry point into the discussion, utilizing a tool Nussbaum argues as being effective for cultivating

<<...insight into the experience of another>>, an aspect of the capability of imaginative understanding (Nussbaum 2002, p. 391).

Following the reading of the poem, students engaged in a facilitated dialogue regarding the current conflict, and its impact on Israeli and Palestinian children and youth using the following questions:

- o what does culture mean?
- o what does diversity mean?
- o how do you honor and respect the traditions of others?

In order to engage in dialogue and deliberation across cultural and political boundaries, students also need to be able critically to examine their own lives and traditions (Nussbaum 2006). To foster this capability of critical thinking, students were asked to consider these questions within the context of their lives in Los Angeles, as well as to think about a time in the past where they felt disenfranchised, due to their ethnicities, belief systems, first language, etc. They also reflected upon and reported out about people they perceived as the 'other' in their lives. Their responses ranged from direct, intimate experiences ---youth in their school who were

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from a different neighborhood to broad responses— an uncle in the military fighting ‘terrorists’ in Iraq. The mentors then helped students link these personal experiences back to the larger issues addressed by the 10,000 Kites project. Engagement in this type of discussion and critical analysis provided students with the opportunity to see themselves

<<...as not simply citizens of some local region or group, but also...as human beings bound to...other human beings by ties of recognition and concern>> (Nussbaum 2006, p. 389). These collective dialogues, debates and discussions regarding conflict and tolerance were further embodied through the art making process.

Kite Making

Each student made a kite that addressed, through text and symbol, the following question: what could they, as children and youth in the United States, say to other children and youth to facilitate a dialogue across the real and imagined boundaries of conflict? Next, students were asked to collaborate with other students in the class that they did not know well. These groups were charged with creating one large kite to be hung in the art department courtyard at LMU. Throughout this process, students were engaged in

<<...active listening and empathetic identification>> (Garber 2005, p.4)

within a shared model of discourse and decision-making, an ideal space for fostering critical thinking skills and imaginative understanding. This was evidenced through their willingness to share ideas, negotiate taking turns working on the kites, as well as

their ability to come to consensus on the final design.

Kite Flying Ceremony

On the day of the kite-flying event, the two K-8 schools went to the LMU campus to participate in opening ceremonies and kite flying. The day began with a greeting from the Dean of the school, followed by an official procession to the field to kick off the event. For four hours, students and LMU faculty, staff and students flew the kites. The anxiety of the LMU mentors —would the kites fly, would the different children, youth and adults get along— were allayed once the event started. There was no obvious animosity, as students and adults of all ages, many who had never met each other outside the workshop, worked collaboratively to get the kites up and flying, spite of numerous logistical and engineering problems.

In fact, as the day progressed, more and more people found their way to the field to fly a kite, as word got out about the event. As Nussbaum points out, the joy that can be generated by participating in the arts in connection with acts of political and cultural criticism, can often

<<...produce an endurable and even attractive dialogue with the prejudices of the past>> (Nussbaum 2006, p. 392). Such embodied activities allow us to move beyond fear and defensiveness, in ways that often fall short in more traditional classroom settings.

By working through a dialogical aesthetics model, everyone involved in the kite-flying event accepted a position of dependence upon and vulnerability relative to one another, allowing for the possibility of individual and collective transformation (Kester 2004).

Reflection Activity

The following day, the LMU mentors met with the students to facilitate a reflection exercise through book-making projects and group discussions. Building this type of reflective activity into a curriculum is not easy given the current emphasis on assessment through standardized testing. Yet, reflection as a pedagogical tool provides structured opportunities for both teachers and students to assist in making the connections, if any, between the lesson and the broader social issues addressed.

For this project, such critical reflection helped to <<...establish a meaningful basis for further self-and/or community development>> (Kenny et al 2000, p. 115). One first grader wanted her kite to signal her wish to be acknowledged by the people on the <<other side of the wall>>, writing <<I want people to know me. My name is Stacie>>.

Another student wrote about how the project, not only taught her about the lives of children and youth in another part of the world, but that the kite flying event made her feel connected to them, in a way that she had never felt before. While these moments might seem small in the larger context of these children's lives and the broader conflicts both here and in the Middle East, it is no small act to engage children and youth in thoughtful behavior and action. One of the schools involved in the project had experienced over a fifty percent faculty and administrative turnover in the last two years, and at the time of this project, there were marked increases in student conflicts inside and outside of the classrooms; issues of safety were often brought up in student artwork.

Many of our urban public schools struggle under similar adverse conditions. Yet throughout this project, the students from these schools engaged in critical, reflective debate and dialogue, flew kites, helped other students fly their kites, and in general engaged in productive, non-confrontational play and reflection.

Conclusion

According to Greene (1997, p. xxxvi) social justice education needs to

<<...create situations that allow for many modes of meaning-making, many modes of 'seeing' and 'saying' moving outward from the self-interest and individualism that still define liberalism into a wide moral, political and social domain>>.

Such an education is currently being denied to many of our urban public school children and youth. We need to ask ourselves, where in the current educational system do we create the space for fostering the capabilities for children and youth to begin to think about, and consider, the kinds of lives they wish to lead, lives that they have reason to value?

Working within an dialogical aesthetics framework, students in this project were asked to identify for themselves the differences that make understanding difficult between groups and nations, as well as the opportunity to identify the needs and interests shared with each other and children and youth impacted by conflict. Children and youth in the 21st century need to develop the capabilities that enable them to deal with difference, while at the same time empower them to participate in democratic societies. The 10,000 Kites project was intended to engender in these children and youth the

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capabilities necessary for crossing the real and imaginary boundaries that are set up in the name of religion, culture and national identity—capabilities crucial to the formation of democratic citizenship. While we strive for the rights and privileges of democracy to be made available for all, in citizenship education and by extension, SJAE, we realize that such privileges and rights are not available to all people. It is through examination and engagement, with both the ideals of democracy, and the gaps where it falls short, that SJAE is concerned. Within these gaps or spaces, alternative possibilities can be envisioned, and capabilities fostered that can lead to social action and transformation: for the arts are a physical as well as psychic location,

<<...a place in the mind where one allows for a recombination of experiences, a suspension of the rules that govern daily life>> (Becker 1994, p. 117).

If it is possible to experience alternative realities, perceptions or beliefs in the process of making and viewing art, then it becomes feasible to conceive of such moments in the reality of our daily lives. The capabilities of critical thinking, world citizenship, and imaginative understanding provide children and youth with the freedoms and tools that make civic participation possible in a democratic society.

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NOTES

[1] NCLB is The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Public Law 107-110), commonly known as NCLB, is a United States federal law signed on January 8, 2002 that reauthorizes a number of federal programs aiming to improve the

performance of U.S. primary and secondary schools by increasing the standards of accountability for states, school districts and schools, as well as providing parents more flexibility in choosing which schools their children will attend.

The NCLB Act requires that all children be assessed each year in order to show adequate yearly progress in reading and mathematics. Schools must test at least ninety-five percent of the various subgroups of children.

[2] In 'Education for Citizenship in an Era of Global Connection', Nussbaum refers to critical thinking, world citizenship and imaginative understanding as 'capabilities'. (Nussbaum, 2002, p. 293). In later articles, she argues for the cultivation of similar capacities through the arts, only now she refers to these capacities as 'abilities' (2006) or 'capabilities' (2006). It appears that her use of the term capacities in the 2002 article is interchangeable with capabilities as presented in this article.

[3] Arts education in this article refers to contemporary visual arts education that works across a plethora of materials and methods in the process and production of art.

[4] See Vincent Lanier, June McFee King, Sister Corita Kent.

[5] Service-learning is <<...a form of experiential education in which students' engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structural opportunities intentionally designed to promote service-learning and development. Reflection and reciprocity are key concepts of service-learning>> (Jacoby 2003, p. 5).

[6] Jerusalem by Yehuda Amichai. ||<http://www.10000kites.org/newsletter.htm>

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