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Learning in third spaces:

Community art studio as storefront university classroom

Janis Timm-Bottos and Rosemary C. Reilly

Concordia University, Montréal

Author Note

Janis Timm-Bottos, Department of Creative Arts Therapies, Concordia University, [www.arthives.org](http://www.arthives.org); Rosemary C. Reilly, Department of Applied Human Sciences, Concordia University.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to: Rosemary C. Reilly, Department of Applied Human Sciences, VE 325.03, Concordia University, 7141 Sherbrooke St., W., Montréal, Québec, Canada H4B 1R6. Email: [rosemary.reilly@concordia.ca](mailto:rosemary.reilly@concordia.ca)

**Abstract**

Third spaces are in-between places where teacher-student scripts intersect, creating the potential for authentic interaction and a shift in what counts as knowledge. This paper describes a unique community-university initiative: a third space storefront classroom for postsecondary students in professional education programs, which also functions as a community art studio for the surrounding neighborhood. This approach to professional education requires an innovative combination of theory, methods, and materials as enacted by the professionals involved and performed by the students. This storefront classroom utilizes collaborative and inclusive instructional practices that promote human and community development. It facilitates the use of innovative instructional strategies including art making and participatory dialogue to create a liminal learning space that reconfigures professional education. In researching the effectiveness of this storefront classroom, we share the voices of students who have participated in this third space as part of their coursework to underscore these principles and practices.

*Keywords:* community art studio, storefront classroom, creative arts therapies, art education, third space, professional education

### **Learning in third spaces:**

#### **Community art studio as storefront university classroom**

Universities are being called upon to meet an ever-increasing list of challenges based on rapidly changing technologies, environmental estrangement and a growing disparity between social and economic classes (Maidment & Macfarlane, 2011). Besides becoming more relevant to the people they serve and the neighborhoods in which they are embedded, universities are being asked to actively partner with communities in order to co-create economic and environmental solutions (Fourie, 2003). There is also a call for social innovation through bridging isolated professional workplaces to an increasing understanding and awareness of the benefits of community (Jones, 2010). For example, at Concordia University, our president has eloquently spoken about opening the university to the community and actively creating community-based hubs of innovation where students can robustly partner with businesses to co-create the future (Shepard, 2013).

Within educational milieus, student cognition and behavior are shaped by the social contexts in which they live and learn (Bruner, 1996). Many professional education programs, which prepare students for occupations that were once bounded by traditional methods and disciplinary boundaries, are being reminded that their “relevance is dependent upon its willingness to meet new challenges and go to places where troubles in the human condition exist” (McNiff, 2005, p. xii). This paper describes an experimental response to these challenges that takes teachers and students out of their comfort zones in order to experience the world first hand. La Ruche d’Art, a storefront classroom situated between the university and the community, serves as a safe space for students in professional education programs, such as community development, studio arts,

creative arts therapies, urban planning, and art education, to experience and reflect on the practices of their vocations. Based on a model of engaged service learning scholarship (Timm-Bottos & Reilly, in press), this initiative utilizes collaborative, nurturing, and inclusive instructional strategies that create liminal learning spaces that reconfigure traditional professional education to be more aligned with new trends of working with communities.

Professional identity, a subjective self-conceptualization, is one area that we address in this inquiry. It is defined as “the attitudes, values, knowledge, beliefs and skills that are shared with others in a professional group” (Adams, Hean, Sturgis, & McLeod Clark, 2006, p. 56).

“Professional identity is not a stable entity; it is complex, personal, and shaped by contextual factors” (Clarke, Hyde, & Drennon, 2012, p. 8). Given that learning, practice, and professional identity are “situated” (Lave & Wenger, 1991), this research attempts to tease out how student learning in professional education is affected when the classroom is positioned between the university and the community in a space that is dynamic, interactive, and promotes opportunities for informal interactions and exchanges between students and members of diverse communities.

### **Rationale for Alternative Instructional Spaces and Methods for Working in Community**

Involvement in community creative arts can, in itself, have a sustained and positive impact on the mental and social wellbeing of participants (Argyle & Bolton, 2005), support the inclusion of marginalized populations (Maidment & Macfarlane, 2011), and be a vehicle for community development and social cohesion (Clover, 2007; Newman, Curtis, & Stephens, 2003). It is, in fact, the central focus of this special issue. However, the use of community arts methods to achieve these aims is not without its critics. Merli (2002) suggests that many community arts interventions suffer from inherent flaws, grounded in their underlying implicit assumptions regarding social change. She contends that most social critics no longer question, criticize or

struggle against the social forces that create inequity and exclusion. This line of thinking suggests that social problems can be forced through top-down social cohesion and integration strategies, somehow automatically resolving these social ills; or that the cultures of intervened-upon communities should be transformed to make them more similar to the intervener's own culture and values. Artists, arts practitioners and/or other professionals working in community are at risk for imposing their own vision, sense of aesthetics, or social agenda on participants, downplaying community interests and needs, undermining authentic community cultural development (Goldbard, 2006). Therefore, it is important for students in professional education programs to cultivate skills that promote collaborative engagement and participatory stances that are grounded in an experience of working in solidarity with community.

### **Enacting Third Space Theory as an Alternative Instructional Space**

Third space theory (Bhabha, 1994) refers to a co-created space where individuals have the opportunity to take ownership of their learning by engaging in discussions and participate in cultural practices. It is a space where individual curiosities can be played out and where “different identities...remake boundaries within the conception that there is no ‘One’ or the ‘Other’ but an ‘In-between’, a place where both past and future can work together to create a new outlook” (p. 219). Third spaces are complex environments that have transformative potential as sites of rupture, innovation, and change that lead to learning (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejada, 1999). Foucault (1986) called these special sites, heterotopias. He saw them as “something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which...all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted” (p. 24).

Third places (Oldenburg, 1989) are public third spaces on neutral ground- neither home nor work- that allow people to put aside their personal concerns and simply enjoy the company and conversation around them, learning about each other in a safe and playful environment, and creating relationships with diverse others. Examples of various third places are fitness centers, libraries, hair salons or barbershops, cafes, and taverns (Oldenburg, 1989). Third places host regular, voluntary, informal, and highly anticipated gatherings, and root community life in a sense of place, facilitating and fostering creative interactions. They promote social equality by leveling the status of participants, provide a setting for grassroots initiatives, create habits of social association, and offer psychological support. Oldenburg claims that third places are key sites for community building, civil societies, democracy, and civic engagement. Although historically, people have naturally congregated in third places as part of their daily lives, what is new in modern times is the need for people to deliberately seek them out.

A public homeplace (Belenky, Bond, & Weinstock, 1997) is a special type of third place, a protected and safe space, both psychologically and physically, which invites community members to develop their unique voices, express themselves openly, engage with each other, and nurture participants' leadership potential, especially those considered vulnerable and marginalized in their communities. Examples of public homeplaces are settlement houses (institutions in an inner-city area providing educational, recreational, and other social services to the community) and "invisible colleges" (women-led organizations which create spaces for gaining voice and learning) (Belenky, 1996). They are spaces that are committed to fostering the development of people and community organized around metaphors and rhetoric of care, concern, and connection. Public homeplaces are places of constructivist knowing, where active witnessing of and engagement with multiple perspectives contribute to building community

where expression, understanding and vision unfold (Watkins & Shulman, 2008). Participants in public homeplaces develop self-respect, confidence, and a sense of agency through this process.

The creative arts often play a major role in these public homeplaces, which are based on cultural folk practices “that place art making at the center of the daily life of ordinary people” (Belenky, 1996, p. 424). African American cultural workers, for example, have built upon these traditions in developing the public homeplace to foster leadership within their neighborhoods.

As Belenky (1996) notes:

The cultural workers understand that when public dialogue is elevated by an art form a chain of events is likely to begin. The community is likely to broaden its perspective on the world as it is and as it could be, to arrive at a new place of understanding, to find new possibilities for growth and transformation. (p. 424)

La Ruche d’Art is a current example of a public homeplace that enacts theories of third space. It is a free and welcoming heart of creativity that fosters the uses of the creative arts to celebrate differences, explore issues that matter, and to increase empathy for oneself, and each other.

### **La Ruche d’Art as Public Homeplace and Third Space**

La Ruche d’Art, an active community art studio affectionately known as the art hive, is located in St. Henri, a working class community in Montréal located a short distance from Concordia University. It is the fifth studio in a series of similar spaces developed across a twenty-year span of sustained practice research of Janis Timm-Bottos. This particular community art studio marks a new way of partnering with the university, which expands the diversity of funding supporting this project and provides a creative hub of interaction through the arts, benefiting community members as well as university students. In the case of La Ruche, Concordia’s Faculty of Fine Arts pay the annual rent on the space and for the annual cross-listed

course taught there, while local government and private local and national funders support the organizational operations, including two paid postgraduate facilitators, one paid facilitator from the community, and graduate research assistants who also play an important role in the day-to-day running of the space.

La Ruche d'Art, in its fourth year, is open to the public two days per week from 2-7 p.m. for free art making. In this way, the art hive functions as a welcoming third place in the neighborhood. It serves as a weekly gathering spot for isolated seniors, young families, youth, as well as neighborhood artists. Participants come in order to make art and discuss what matters to them. These discussions collaboratively culminate periodically in non-juried community art exhibits, performances and art actions in the community. This past year over 4,500 art contact visits were made to the art hive.

A variety of closed groups based on needs expressed by the community have also emerged, using a public homeplace model. These closed groups allow for members of marginalized populations to develop their unique voices through art making, and express themselves openly and engage with each other through conversation while making art. For example, a weekly seniors art therapy group is very popular and on going, while a primitive skills workshop was short-term, serving a specific request. An intergenerational singing group developed out of research from a music therapy professor. These "closed" groups require a commitment of participation from their members over a specified period of time.

La Ruche d'Art is a public homeplace that also enacts the theories of third space as a storefront classroom embedded within the St. Henri neighborhood. Students meet in this in-between community-university space when the community art studio is closed to the public. As well, students are integrated in all aspects of the art hive: some receive internship hours, others



are paid facilitators, while some students simply attend in order to connect themselves to a warm and welcoming space, a home away from home. In this way, La Ruche is also a public homeplace for students.

### **Employing Alternative Instructional Strategies**

Two significant instructional strategies implemented in this storefront classroom, which promote participation and ongoing reflection, are community-engaged service learning and classroom methods highlighting multiple ways of knowing.

**Community-engaged service learning.** Generally, service learning (SL) endeavors to combine learning goals and community service in ways that can enhance both student growth and the common good. It is a form of experiential education where learning occurs through a cycle of action and reflection as students attempt to achieve real objectives for the community and a deeper understanding and skills for themselves (Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001). Stoecker and Tryon (2009) noted, “A few highly effective service learners can have a profound effect on the organization’s capacity” (p. 11). In the process, students link personal and social development with academic and cognitive development. However, SL also has its share of detractors, who claim it can reinforce the power and status of academics and professionals, disempowering local residents (Angotti, Doble, & Horrigan, 2011). The purpose of SL in the context of La Ruche d’Art’s storefront classroom is to move university curriculum from a position of learning *about* communities to learning *in* partnership with communities. La Ruche uses a unique process in its approach by creating a series of graduated steps. Students undergo a three-phase transition into their SL experience. This will be described below.

**Multiple ways of knowing: Methods that bridge the theory-practice divide.** Experiential learning through creative arts processes in this immersive storefront learning environment levels

the playing field between all of the participants involved: students, instructors, and community members. It begins with a fundamental premise that art making is a basic human behavior (Dissanayake, 1995). Art making can provide a pleasing sensory aesthetic experience of embodied learning, i.e. physicality and gesture act as important catalysts for generating learning (Abrahamson & Lindgren, in press). Experiencing creativity in its many vernacular forms (gardening, cooking, performance, music, mindfulness, and movement) paired with conversation and critical reflection, promote emotional and cognitive transformational learning (Dirkx, 2001; Mezirow, 2000) and provide opportunities for seeing multiple perspectives. The range of ways of knowing used in the storefront classroom include art as a way of knowing (Allen, 1995; 2005), awareness through movement (Feldenkrais, 1981; Timm-Bottos, 2001), women's ways of knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986), aboriginal ways of knowing (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002), and street artists' ways of knowing (Casanova, 1996; Timm-Bottos, 2005, 2011). Each "way of knowing" provides the storefront classroom with concrete methods for developing multiple ways of seeing, thereby reducing the possibility of replicating patterns of social inequity and oppression. These methods were designed to sow seeds of awareness and increase the capacity for compassion for one's self and empathy for each other.

### **Purpose of This Inquiry**

Limited research has been done to explore the creation of a transitional middle ground between the community and university for students learning about the use of creative community arts. The aim of this project was to examine a unique form of community art studio, La Ruche d'Art, as a potential storefront classroom for teaching students how to use the creative arts in

mutual discovery, and how to advance new ways of taking art into their communities. In order to understand the effectiveness of this way of working, we asked the following research questions:

How does this space support whole person (cognitive, emotional, embodied, and ethical) learning strategies?

How do alternate instructional methods shape participants' ideas about working in community and their role in this process?

What impact does this experience have on the participants' professional identity?

In order for professional education programs to align with current practices of working in community (i.e. participatory processes or community-driven initiatives), changes in where the learning happens, what constitutes curriculum, and how that curriculum is carried out must be addressed. We highlight two key approaches underpinning this educational process investigation: the storefront classroom of La Ruche d'Art as a third space and alternative instructional strategies.

### **Research Methodology**

To assess student learning in this alternative university classroom, we selected a case study qualitative methodology (Creswell, 2007), focusing first on the experience of students by bounding the case to the storefront classroom. This approach is conducive to exploring and illuminating the meaning attributed by participants to certain events, actions, or relationships while also identifying unanticipated phenomena (Maxwell, 2013). In addition, since we used a collective case variation (Creswell, 2007), we employed a cross-case comparative approach (Merriam, 1998) as a strategy of inquiry. The strength of this approach is the "likelihood of generating novel theory, because creative insight often arises from the juxtaposition of contradictory or paradoxical evidence" (Eisenhardt, 1989, pg. 546). Each participant was envisioned as a bounded subsystem of the larger environment of La Ruche as a classroom. This strategy was

used since it is flexible and adaptable in describing multiple realities and is transferable to other contexts in order to build a foundation of description. This approach also allowed us to refine our methods and ready ourselves for a future participatory research process with community members as collaborative co-researchers.

### **Research Participants**

Two sections of the course *Community Art Studio: Methods and Materials* were followed. The total number of student participants was thirty-six: fourteen students from one section, eighteen students from another, and four students who had taken the class before the research project began, acted as a triangulating source of data. This included graduate students in creative arts therapies and both graduate and undergraduate students in arts education, community development, urban planning, human relations, political science and other fine arts disciplines, including theater and studio arts. One section was given during the regular university semester (13 weeks at three hours per session), while the second was a summer intensive course given three successive days per week for three weeks for 3.5 hours per session.

### **Sources of Data**

We drew upon various sources of data in order to capture a more holistic view of the storefront classroom. These included ethnographic classroom observations (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010) of the enacted curriculum in the space by Rosemary Reilly who was not part of the teaching team. She adopted the overt role of participant-observer (Spradley, 1980), positioning herself in proximity to the unfolding events to both observe and write. The immediately written “open jottings” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011) encompassed both descriptive and reflective notes, regarding student interactions with each other, the materials, and/or the space, actual events and activities, the layout and how students entered the space,

expressions of emotion, etc., while attempting to maintain a chronology. Directly after the class, the handwritten notes were transcribed and descriptive details were added to give a fuller richer account.

Additional sources included: photographs as a visual record (Pink, 2007) of the interpersonal interactions and the studio “culture”; lesson plans and post-class instructor reflections (Janis); and student assignments- fieldnotes from SL experiences, reflective responses and final projects. In order to allow participants to ponder their experiences and to illuminate the impact of the storefront classroom, Rosemary conducted additional interviews after the class had concluded and grades were submitted. Interview questions focused on students’ reflections on the instructional strategies used, their insights about the space, their relationships with other students, challenges and limitations to the processes experienced, and how their learning currently shaped their practices. In order to prompt participants’ recall, photo elicitation was used. Photo-elicitation is a qualitative supplementary visual research interview methodology using photos and/or video images to elicit comments (Leavy, 2009). Digital photo collages that spanned the entire semester were created and formed a springboard for the interview process. Strict adherence to the Tri-Council Policy (CIHR, NSERC, & SSHRC, 2010) was followed and ethics clearance was obtained from the University Human Research Ethics Committee.

Participant consent was secured for each source of data.

### **Analysis Procedures**

Rosemary conducted the analysis on an on-going basis (Maxwell, 2013). The ethnographic observations were processed by memoing substantive issues and themes related to the sensitizing concepts (Blumer, 1969; van den Hoonaard, 1997) of third space/third place, public homeplace, and transformative learning, as well as any impressions of emergent motifs. Interview data was

coded using open and axial coding procedures (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Coding was done at the level of units of meaning and a codebook (Ryan & Bernard, 2000) was created. This framework was used consistently across all data sources. Using photo-interviewing analysis (Johnson & Christensen, 2014), participants examined and “analyzed” the visual images through the lens of their own subjective experience. We also subjected the data to various criteria and procedures to ensure coherence and trustworthiness (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985):

Member checks: The data were shared with the participants who were able to review the findings, comment on how well these accounts mirrored their experiences, and delete or revise any material;

Triangulation: Various and different sources of data were used in order to substantiate the findings;

Prolonged engagement and persistent observation: The total amount of time devoted to data collection was approximately 70.5 hours of classroom observation, and approximately 19 hours of interviews;

Thick description (Geertz, 1973): We have attempted to provide an account of La Ruche d’Art that not only describes the art hive and the students’ behavior, but the context as well, so that the storefront classroom becomes meaningful to an outsider;

Reflexive journal: Rosemary kept a personal log to document and incorporate her state of mind, biases, commentaries, questions, and suppositions; and

Independent audit to examine the process and product of the data collection: A colleague who is experienced with qualitative methodology reviewed the data sources and critically examined the codebook.

## Findings

### **The Storefront Classroom as a Third Space / Third Place**

La Ruche d'Art operates as a third place and relationships are created through art making, informal conversations and gardening, which act as stimuli for citizen inquiry (i.e. gathering, reflecting, dialoguing and disseminating community input through arts-based methods). Like most third places, La Ruche has developed a personality that mirrors the working class neighborhood in which it is situated: it is bilingual, a little worn-down, but open, friendly and down-to-earth. As a storefront classroom, La Ruche is a warm and welcoming place for university students to bring life learning to their coursework as well as join with others to co-create community projects. This protected and safe space invites students to meet in a middle ground, between the public and private sphere, in order to develop their own sense of belonging and contribution through an authentic and unique experience in community.

-Insert Figure 1 here-

Kate<sup>1</sup> an art therapy student remarked that having the storefront classroom embedded in the St. Henri neighborhood was central to her learning.

I have taken so many classes in stagnant classrooms...and even if [La Ruche d'Art] was maintained in the same format and put [on campus], I think that the energy would be very different...Even walking from the metro, down through a community and interacting with people on the street...the whole experience of even coming to class was very different.

In her interview, she went on to remark that walking through the neighborhood provided a

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that some of these names are pseudonyms. Other students preferred to use their given names.

transitional space for her to be more receptive, more open, calm, and comfortable in her work at the studio. It helped her to create a community-focused frame of mind. For Dolores, a student in human relations, being in this shared third space with a community brought vitality to her learning. “Here it was different, because there was this energy of the community people coming in, because we could see their art making everywhere around the art hive. It was stimulating.” La Ruche in all of its facets served as a microgeography (Wiles et al., 2009), where the concepts of place, space, belonging and identity combine with nurturing creativity and meaning making (Maidment & Macfarlane, 2011).

### **The Storefront Classroom as a Public Homeplace**

It was not uncommon for participants to describe the storefront classroom as a *magical* and *intimate* space that set an informal mood and distinctive tone: *a place of learning not studying*. The visual stimulation afforded by the abundant variety of recycled and repurposed supplies, the displayed art created by community members who visited the studio during the week, and the colours that characterized the space had the effect of inviting involvement and sparking curiosity, creative inspiration and a spirit of play. As Carlee observed, “When you come into a space with art, it makes it so much more lived in and so much more alive...not Ikea art, but real homemade art.” The studio also had an impact on the emotional dimensions of the student: the openness of the space, the *homeness* of the mismatched furniture, and the food that was shared had the effect of welcoming students, nurturing warmth and engagement, energy, and encouragement to take risks. The fact that students sat next to and facing each other around long wooden tables also helped them to form connections and relationships with one another, to be more expressive, and to foster the sense that “we were in this together.” Participants who took the class in the summer attributed a profound effect of the garden space on their learning. Having conversations outside



in the sun amid the herbs and vegetables helped to create a relaxed climate, which facilitated easing into intense and sometimes difficult discussions. Connection with nature supported the building of an emotionally grounded climate for calm contemplation, reflection and safety within this third space, contributing to the openness and flow of the whole learning process. The space also encouraged students to undergo a process of integration. As Carolyn noted, “You're not compartmentalized, like, this is where we do the teaching, and this is where we do our art making. It's all one big setting.”

### **Transformational Learning in Third Spaces / Third Places**

Learning in a third space/third place created “another mode of thinking about space that draws upon the material and mental spaces of the traditional dualism but extends well beyond them in scope, substance, and meaning” (Soja, 1996, p. 11). Within this safe third space and in relationship to other students and members of the St. Henri neighborhood, student imagination was re-activated through the unfolding of an aesthetic sensitivity. Through regular witnessing and experiencing of the re-working of damaged, discarded and recycled fabrics and other materials, which are the majority of the art making materials in the studio, the world began to be seen through an alternate lens; art creations began to mark how people and relations could be transformed. “Lingering in the in-between space, the *and* or/, is an active space for knowledge creation, and particularly, an active space for unfolding aesthetic sensibilities” (Irwin, 2003, p. 64). One student, Carolyn, in art education, reported this experience in her fieldnotes.

I came to La Ruche today with the intention of meeting the coordinators and having a deeper look at the environment, studio space and to experience the interactions, which occur in this neighborhood public space. I stayed for three hours on this calm and comfortable sunny day. I first met Sarah, the studio's facilitator...She introduced me to

a volunteer student, Cathy, who happily sorted fabric scraps by color for future use in art projects. Stephen, another coordinator, arrived, welcomed all of us, and then chatted with two seniors who were setting up for painting and drawing in the garden. The environment was very relaxed, and I offered to help Cathy sort fabric. Sarah explained that I could use the time to create art, or plan for my upcoming session...I discussed my desire to create a weaving project and Sarah showed me how to link strips of fabric by cutting slits in the ends of two pieces and threading one back through the hole to secure them to each other. She also showed me the nest weaving projects, which children had created as samples of weaving styles to explore. As I began classifying strips of fabric scraps by color and pattern, a fellow classmate entered the center and offered to help sort strips for my project...We prepared a good variety of strips in red, blue, purple, earthy brown, patterned black, flashy pink, green and white.

When enough material was prepared, I chose to test out some weaving on the garden fence, which became the ideal loom...My classmate joined-in, and we collaborated again outside, by weaving strips in our personal ways, to liven-up the metal chain-linked fence. Stephen came outside and voiced his excitement in expectation of the final product. Sarah also came into the garden for a look...It was an open-ended process; my classmate had created a blue zigzag pattern by wrapping a terry cloth belt along the diamond shaped mesh, and my weaves went vertically using the blue fabric and in a spiral using light colored strips. Sarah invited Cecelia, a senior who had been inside the studio to share a specific weaving method with us, and I encouraged Cecelia to demonstrate. The finger position for holding the fabric apart was [specific] and my classmate and I both tried the new weave. The result added a long white stitch-like line

of Thule across a four-foot space on the fence. Together for the next hour and a half, the three of us worked to embellish the fence with more color, loosely tied strips and a string of pearls. (Fieldnote #1)

These three individuals created a shared understanding through conversation as they co-created the beginnings of an art installation, which later included fabric weavings from child participants visiting the art hive from a local community center.

Generally students, particularly those in creative arts therapies, felt a deep impact by having the space outside of the university, embedded in the community. Emotions, ways of relating, or frames of mind triggered by the sterility of the typical university classroom or teacher-student authority relations were bypassed; stimuli from the community created a series of alternate prompts that cultivated diverse ways of being and thinking. The very fact that students were in an alternative setting allowed them to divest themselves of preconceptions and put them in a frame of mind to be open to alternative ways of working and learning.

### **Service Learning as a Transformational Learning Practice**

Engaged SL is a central component of this storefront classroom and is designed to support and prepare students for working in community. Students undergo a three-phase transition into their SL experience. The first phase is in the storefront classroom itself. Class is conducted in the studio on a day when the art hive is not open to the public. This allows students to become familiar with the space and materials. But this familiarity goes beyond the physical. The instructor and teaching assistant embody the practice of *being* within a public homeplace. Students are greeted just as community members are greeted when they enter La Ruche. Faculty and students make and share food to further disrupt the traditional classroom hierarchies and promote informal connections. This approach also allows students to experience the socio-

emotional benefits of a public homeplace. Students integrate conceptual elements of the course with their own somatic experiences of those concepts creating embodied cognition (Wilson, 2002). They are encouraged to voice their questions, reflections, insights, and lived experiences as they relate to or diverge from the concepts covered in class, deconstructing the typical hierarchy, status, and authority relations of the conventional university classroom.

The second phase in the students' transition is to spend a portion of their time at La Ruche d'Art when the studio is open to the public. Postgraduates, who have experience working with the public homeplace methodology, co-facilitate the five-hour studio. These role models play an orienting, facilitating, and supportive role to the community members working in the studio, the students engaged in SL, as well as attending to their own art making projects. It is not unusual for the instructor and/or teaching assistant to be in the studio as individuals outside of their academic roles, with their families, making art, conversing with people, or working in the garden. During Hailey's first experience she noticed

Some boys...seemed to need direction, as they weren't doing a lot of art making. I found myself wondering if [they] needed help and wanted to comment on what they were doing and ask them questions. I wanted to go and get them some materials, but I watched how Stephen casually suggested art making ideas and then let it go, and I modeled myself after him. (Fieldnote #1)

The third phase is to venture out to other community art studios. This phase extends the students' frames of reference regarding the distinctive "personalities" of communities and their art hives and builds student responsiveness to the uniqueness of communities, avoids stereotyping, and crafts additional opportunities for students to put theory into practice. At the same time they are able to expand, revise and possibly abandon set notions, prepared plans and

proscribed roles.

Students are required to write fieldnotes at the end of each SL session. These fieldnotes permit them to preserve tracings of their cognitive, somatic, ethical, and socio-emotional learnings, and integrate them; they also may serve to provoke and revise thinking about alternate ways of working within communities. As Aisha reflected

[This] experiential learning experience...being out in the field instead of just stuck in a classroom...reading theories and writing theories...we are actually out there and meeting with the community members... And so what was really good about this experience is that I now know where I'm headed... because I now know what community is.

By incorporating a dimension of SL as a course requirement, the boundaries of the four walls of this storefront classroom were expanded through a process of gradual transition, which supported continuing growth in student professional practices and identity. Students: 1) became aware of new ways of being with others through participation in the storefront classroom; 2) learned how to step back rather than control activities within the studio by observing interactions during the open studio hours; and 3) observed and experienced how to create safe spaces for emergent processes coming from community members. SL experiences gave students additional opportunities to observe, embody, and integrate the principles of the community art studio and public homeplace. They witnessed and lived relationships that were empowering, approaches that supported the emergence of knowledge from community members, and the healing and community-building powers of art. Changes in cognition and mental models about community were also dominant themes. These changes led to shifts in identity, directly shaping how these students interacted with community members in other settings, whether it was their field

experiences in other classes or in their paid work.

### **Multiple Ways of Knowing Trigger Student Learning**

The sustained use of multiple ways of knowing, especially art making, as instructional strategies shaped the students' ability to be present and open. Art as a way of knowing helped students to let go of a kind of rigidity in their thinking and responding to others. Mary, an independent MA student, echoed the words of Belenky (1996) when she wrote, "Making art loosens my mind and opens my heart, enabling me to express my thoughts and feelings in unexpected and enjoyable ways." It facilitated ideas and personal vulnerability, different approaches to interact with one another and a way of connecting and collaborating through art and creation. Students also commented on how these practices helped them to access deep reflections and allowed them to express themselves as they have never done before. As Georgina observed, "It was an amazing journey...I witnessed participants coming out of their shells and expressing themselves like never before." As well, many students commented on how even though they were in programs focused on art, little time in class was devoted to art making. Doing this on a regular basis functioned as a touchstone for them, re-instilling in them the therapeutic and/or community-building power of art. As Daniel, an art therapy student observed, art making "taught me about the sacredness of a personal image and about the connectivity and collaboration that can emerge."

While examining a photo collage of herself engaging in the various ways of knowing, Mary made sense of and revealed the following meanings about her experiences (Harrison, 2002).

When I look at these images I see myself engaged in processes of active growth and discovery. I am confronting, revealing, trusting, experiencing, discussing, making, listening, pursuing, pushing, observing, holding, releasing, creating, trying,

surrendering, enjoying. In addition to helping me learn about the workings of a community art studio, these processes helped me learn about myself and others. The discoveries I made were not always easy for me to process.

These multiple ways of knowing used as instructional strategies in this transitional liminal space invited students to reshape their ideas of working in community, their notions about members of diverse communities, and their thinking about the role of artists, creative arts therapists, art educators, teachers, community organizers, or other professionals in community-building. Recounting her own experience, Ayla, shared this reflection.

*Each one, teach one* [one of Casanova's street artists' way of knowing] brings...a group together in a way that levels out the playing field...in a way that I don't even want to call it leveling out, but in a sense that everyone gets the light and then, shares it. And then it just keeps rotating. No one knows something more or less than the other. And especially working in community, you want that opportunity, to let everyone come up and share something...I just found it really magical.

Simangele, an exchange student from South Africa, found that these alternate methods drew her out from her usual way of constructing knowledge, connecting her to others with the additional socio-emotional benefits connection entails.

Although I'm outgoing, I usually liked to process things by myself with my earphones on but once I spotted someone creating with the same colored wool...I was knitting...I had an amazing conversation with one of the ladies in the community. The simple act of sharing our stories over knitting was calming to the soul.

For Nicole, a student art therapist, this experience “opened new doors for me in thinking about community development, in very personal and meaningful ways. I am unlearning some of the language of community development that I picked up in my previous studies.”

Learning in this storefront classroom, using alternative instructional methods, softened the boundaries between fixed roles, thereby challenging university instructors to think outside the box of the academic status quo. These multiple ways of knowing created opportunities for students to share authority, power, and responsibility regarding course content, demonstrating democratic processes of socially-constructed knowledge- knowledge produced, negotiated, transformed and realized in the interaction between the teacher, the learner, and the knowledge itself (Kenway & Modra, 1992 as cited in Irwin, 1997). Emergent processes encouraged students to engage, not simply with course content, but with the “processes of knowledge production...asking questions about the nature of the knowledge [needed] in order to engage with and practice the discipline” (Parker, 2002, pp. 381-382). Respecting students and their subjective knowledge acquired through life experience (McNiff, 1993) provided the grounding for respecting their ability to learn in ways that educators may not have envisioned; this is, in and of itself, a robust tool for cultivating student empowerment (Irwin, 1997). It also sets an important alternative standard for future practices that support knowledge sharing in more distributed and equitable ways. Diane, an art education student commented on how this approach shaped her work in community.

[This] makes me more aware...And so at times it will make me pause and step back and be, “Okay, just let this happen. Let this person teach me. Let me absorb and understand where they’re coming from or what they’re doing, and then how can I relate back to them that way.”



Cate, an art therapy student, remarked that she carried this experience forward.

I remember feeling a great sense of respect and admiration for my classmates, instructors and guests. A sense that everyone had something to provide in teaching and supporting the classroom environment and how that can be carried over to a community setting.

### **Impact on Student Practices and Identity**

One of the most striking findings from our investigation was the depth of the experience for students and how it served to shape/reshape their professional identity. Maxine Greene argues that learning “is a process of identity development...it is about choosing yourself, making deeply personal choices about who you are and who you will become” (1981, p. 12). Learning to become a professional is an identity process that involves moments of tension and struggle (Bakhtin, 1981) that are best supported in community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Learning within this third space, students understood and internalized their identities through arts-based processes of self-awareness, interaction, and reflection, community-engaged SL, and multiple ways of knowing. Students were able to choose, stretch, or revise their identity in La Ruche’s safe environment through collaboration with other students and community members, sustained and varied action in the art hive, critical reflection on the ruptures experienced, and interweaving social interaction processes with individual or collective art making and dialogue. While learning in the storefront classroom, Audrey questioned her professional role “default” of directing, and the motivations behind this stance.

Which brings me back again to my role in the activity. The community setting has really opened up my idea about the role of an art therapist. I was frustrated with my own reaction of giving them a theme for their collage. I wanted the activity to be as free as

possible, but I caved by giving them a theme. As the words came out of my mouth, I regretted it. Why did I suggest a theme? Was it my own doubts and insecurity?

(Fieldnote #4)

Students were also able to explore sensitive areas of their identity by interrogating the power processes these professional roles represent. Connie, an art therapy student, was able to ask herself tough questions as she reflected on her SL experience.

Now to the implications of being the only white person in the art room... It seems that I had unwillingly recreated a social model where I, the white person, held power over an ethnic minority through my role of mentor and facilitator. Watkins and Shulman might refer to this as reproduction of colonialism structure; I was proposing a method I had learnt and experienced in my white culture, from my white teachers and referencing white authors. Was this method important to me or to them? Was I being a missionary of this white practice? Was saving this less-privileged community part of my white hegemonic cultural baggage? (Fieldnote #2)

Wrestling with these questions is crucial for students in order to illuminate the impact of their social and cultural histories on their future work with people in community.

Changes in cognition and mental models about community was also a dominant theme across all the interview participants, and this change led to shifts in identity, directly shaping how these students interacted with community members in other settings, whether it was their field experiences in other classes or in their paid work. Feliz, an artist, observed that this experience in the art hive allowed her to make sense of previous educational experiences.

My first year drawing professor handed out John Cage's "10 rules for students and teachers" and #1 on the list said, "Find a place you trust, and then, try trusting it for a

while." While everything else on that list made sense, for some reason it was this one rule that baffled me. Nearing the end of this class, I stumbled upon this list from years ago, crumpled along side other past notes and realized that I no longer feel estranged to this, as if La Ruche had shown me what those words meant. Up until now, my work has been very individualistic... This class has shown me the strength of numbers, a concept so simple but powerful... a concept that has inherently shifted my world view to the point where I can no longer approach things as I once did. La Ruche informed me of an approach that didn't exist in my life, which was allowing others to help you and reciprocate it. It informed me of a sort of vulnerability, liminality, and courage that is altogether absent in society... It allowed me to see things on a broader scale, to see the validity and strength of collaboration, and learn to find a place I trust and then try trusting it for a while.

This process entailed re-defining identity in accordance with present and future vocational visions. Caitlin, a student in drama therapy, reported an unexpected outcome of the course.

This has a huge influence on the work I am doing... And it has reawakened an excitement in me about working with people. I feel as though I have reconnected to some of my initial beliefs about drama and art, and what it is to heal. More specifically, the communal approach to learning, healing, and growth is one that I feel fits better with me than an approach involving more rigid roles of "therapist and client" or "teacher and student."

### **Boundaries of This Inquiry and Future Directions**

Since this inquiry occurred in a particular time and place, under particular circumstances with unique individuals (Wolcott, 1990), the emergent themes and dynamics should be

viewed as atypical. However, given our description of the processes and approaches used at La Ruche d'Art, and their impact as articulated by the participants, limited transferability by the reader may be warranted. At the very least, this inquiry expands and enriches our knowledge about professional education in third spaces with university students. Certain trends, especially regarding art making and multiple ways of knowing as effective instructional approaches in professional education, could be tested in other educational milieus (see Reilly, forthcoming). The impact of learning in third spaces on professional identity, and the implications for future practices, need to be formulated into working hypotheses in additional research projects, and investigated in multiple varied settings (Donmoyer, 1990). These research projects carried out by other investigators in different contexts could assess the degree of fit these findings might have in other environments with different constituents. Future research must tease out the influence of a skilled and caring instructor from the inherent power of the multiple ways of knowing and of third spaces, as well as the impact of the characteristics of these particular students attracted to a community arts course from other professional education students. One particular dimension that needs further investigation would be how persistent these transformations to practice are. There was no long-term follow-up with participants. One might question how deep and transformative these learnings really are, how long they last once these students graduate work with people in community, or if they are just the product of an enjoyable classroom experience.

One future research goal of the Art Hive Movement ([www.arthives.org](http://www.arthives.org)) is to document this model as enacted in communities across Canada, facilitated by different individuals using the methodologies described herein. Most remarkably, four students from this course

have developed art hives in their own communities, two in other regions across Canada, indicating that this way of learning may also promote an awareness of the importance of the community arts studio as a viable new career option. This mode of learning offers sufficient practical skills and a sense of personal agency that permits students to take concrete steps to initiate their own collaborative sites for third space engagement. These sister art hives can also be a testing ground for the robustness of the claims made in this paper.

Our next research steps at La Ruche will be to expand the inquiry to include community participants. Beginning our research with qualitative techniques involving students allowed us to refine our methods and ready ourselves for a participatory action research project with community members as collaborative co-researchers. We wanted to establish an open community arts studio with a history and a tradition of participatory processes. In working with communities, it is important to first create a space where the voices of its members can be articulated before advancing a research agenda. As Belenky has demonstrated in her work (Belenky et al., 1997; Belenky et al., 1986) the development of a public voice (a commitment to the common good and a critical stance towards social arrangements that keep people silenced and isolated) takes time and care. The development of a public voice that can shape a research agenda is possible when individuals work “together on many projects to improve life in their local communities—something a very short-term effort...could scarcely attempt” (Belenky et al., 1997, p. 9). This ongoing research requires building a strong base of trust and a track record of meaningful collaboration over time, as well as a community needs assessment to understand the benefits to the community of this type of research.

### **Conclusion**

The success of community arts initiatives are often dependent upon implementing actions in a manner that involves and includes local people as equal or leading partners (Carey & Sutton, 2004). Therefore, it is crucial for students in professional education programs to develop skills that promote inclusion and partnership. Students also need opportunities to experience these skills in action in order to foster their own creative ways of working that support people in community. Professional programs conducted in third space storefront classrooms can provide openings for students to critically reflect on their understandings of community and the challenges community members face, especially regarding issues of power, inclusion, exclusion, development, and engagement. As evidenced by this qualitative study, creative arts processes and multiple ways of knowing implemented in a public homeplace can be powerful tools that can alter the learning terrain, slowly expanding participants' dialogical capacities, self awareness, subjectivities, and responsiveness to others by being able to hold in dialogue a multitude of interpretations, feelings, and points of view with self, and between self/other.

While community engagement is often reflected in university mission statements and strategic plans, compared to the other goals of the university, community-engaged scholarship continues to receive little attention or reward (Inman & Schuetze, 2010). The benefits to students, however, are significant and this alone should create a willingness to explore third spaces and the instructional strategies community-university spaces evoke. As Malcolm Miles (1997) stated, "Perhaps it will be in the spaces between disciplines that alternative frameworks will emerge, and perhaps these will be nurtured by the imagination to which the creative arts lay claim, but which is not their exclusive property" (p. 2). As can be seen from this inquiry, student identities and praxes can be profoundly shaped by the

educational processes they experience and the learning spaces they inhabit. The use of empowering third spaces and multiple ways of knowing can rebalance notions of authority, knowledge creation, and power and provide the medium that simultaneously promotes relevant, well-rounded, deep, and meaningful personal and professional educational experiences with the potential to go on to use the arts to promote healthy communities.

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Figure 1. La Ruche d'Art

