"Community can be thought of as both a noun—referring to a specific place or group of people—and a verb—referring to a certain way of collaborating and interacting."

Agents of Possibility: Examining the Intersections of Art, Education, and Activism in Communities

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Some art educators working in communities exemplify an alternative to the more common and stereotypical notion of the artist as autonomous, self-focused, and neutral. They view artmaking and education as vehicles for social justice and, in some cases, for social and political activism. In these broader social functions, the boundaries between art, education, and activism fade. This article examines the motivations, perspectives, development, and experiences of five artist/educator/activists who worked in community-based settings in Tucson, Arizona. Common characteristics, relevant issues, and implications for the field are presented and discussed.
If artists and long-term protestors are similar in their thoughtful creativity and material deprivation, the underlying reason is a sense of moral and personal calling to their work, the fusion of social and individual fulfillment.


To varying degrees, artists and art educators either embrace or struggle against the notion that they are isolated and alienated from society. Exemplary of the modernist era in art, but with roots back to the European Renaissance and the Enlightenment (Anchor [1967] in LaChapelle, 1984; Gablik, 2001), the stereotype of the isolated, alienated artist and his or her accompanying artistic genius has permeated mass media, our schools and institutions, and the general public’s ideas of art and its place in our world. In a sense, “the artist” is an ultimate embodiment of individualism, full of “autonomy and self-sufficiency” (Gablik, 1995, p. 74), notions which are prized in the United States. Generally accompanying this viewpoint is a belief that art is neutral, “created not for moral or practical or social reasons, but to be contemplated and enjoyed” (p. 74).

This version of art and artists, though valid and valuable in its own right, can obscure the more integrated roles that art, artists, and educators can have in community-building, cultural affirmation, and articulating a need for change. In these broader social functions, the boundaries between art, education, and activism fade. The individuals in this study are all three—artist, educator, and activist—at once. In practice, these three roles come in no specific order, and depending on context, one may take precedence over the others. Their intersection leads to something more than the sum of the three parts. And the ongoing manifestation of that sum is rarely static or confined to itself, as it is also influenced by the needs and contexts of a collaborating community or group. Working in communities and dedicated to social change, the role the artist/educator/activist plays is significantly different from artists or teachers as we have experienced and sometimes assumed them to be. They are no less a vital aspect of our conception of what community art education, and indeed, any educator, can be.

F. Graeme Chalmers (1974) writes of the many roles artists can play, including “magician, teacher, mythmaker, sociotherapist, ascriber of status, propagandist, and catalyst for social change” (p. 21). He also sees the arts’ place in social movements, change, and culture, noting that those intersections are not often acknowledged or valued in education. He also addresses community as an important realm for art education: “The community is the primary association about which the integration of art activities and democratic goals should be organized” (pp. 22-23). His is a tantalizing, though vague, perspective born in a time often defined by social movements and challenging the status quo. Today, what do “community” and “activism” mean in relation to art and visual culture education? What are some of characteristics of artist/educator/activists’ backgrounds and identities that might shed light on the role higher education could play in their preparation and support? These questions will be explored here.
Community in Art Education

Today's art education field finds its center solidly within the school setting. Certainly, schools are central to education in the United States, and to the development of art education in this country. But as Giroux (1995) suggests, "Education cannot be reduced to the discourse of schooling" (p. 8). There is a whole range of issues that youth and communities confront which schools cannot fully address or influence, at least not within current school education. Given the complexities of contexts and social structures in which people negotiate their responsibilities, dreams, obstacles, and values, to focus almost solely on schools is to limit the field and potential for art and visual culture education.

In art education literature, there is little consensus on or critical development of the definition of the term community. It is rarely explicitly defined. Most often, it is thought of as a noun (place and/or people) whose primary importance is in its relationship and potential value to the art classroom. Community art education, as it is used here, refers to art education occurring in non-school settings, with any number and age of people. But this definition of community does not only involve articulating the thing that makes up a community. It is also a way of working. Community can be thought of as both a noun—referring to a specific place or group of people—and a verb—referring to a certain way of collaborating and interacting. The work may be ongoing, such as a program at a nonprofit organization, or emerge more organically from a particular relationship, situation, event, or idea. Either way, it is driven by a particular context, need(s), and/or asset(s), and grounded in articulating some problematic or oppressive status quo, envisioning alternatives, or celebrating a particular aspect of a community. The scope of this conception of community art education does not include school teachers who use the community as a resource or site for learning and exploration in their classrooms, nor does it include educators who do not consider their work to be somehow sociopolitical in nature (for example, recreational community art workshops).

The work of a community-based artist/educator/activist shares many traits with assets-based community development; that is, work which:

1. Is community-inspired and driven, rather than externally imposed and constructed;
2. Centers on local people and assets, particularly social relationships and networks, rather than external power, knowledge, and resources;
3. Grows out of dialogue and collaborative inquiry, rather than external evaluation, determination of needs, and implementation of strategies to address them; and
4. Is participatory in nature, focusing on empowerment and ownership in the process, rather than treating community members as clients or recipients. (Mathie & Cunningham, 2002, online)

This approach is in stark contrast with the common needs- or deficit-based approach to community development (Kretzman & McKnight, 1993), which encourages residents to see themselves as powerless and keeps resources in the hands of service organizations and outsiders, leading to fragmentation in the community, devaluation of community wisdom, and a focus only on maintenance and survival, rather than meaningful change (p.5).2

The artist/educator/activist and assets-based community development also have much in common with critical pedagogy and social justice education. Several art educators seek to expand art education through the inclusion of visual culture based in critical pedagogy theory with the goal of empowering students to be thoughtful, reflective, and active participants in society (see, for example, Eisenhauer,
Multicultural education theory and scholarship is another area which has been powerfully connected to art education theory and practice toward a vision of social justice (see Desai, 2000; Garber, 1995; Stuhr, Pertrovich-Mwaniki, & Wasson, 1992).

Activism in Art Education

Though the term activist is commonly used in art and visual culture education regarding advocacy for art programs in schools, in this case activist is not synonymous with advocate. Nor is it limited to individuals protesting in the streets. Rather, it encompasses a variety of work toward social and political consciousness, empowerment, and change. This version of activism is not one of indoctrination or the masses being led by the few—a potential pitfall as we consider the intersections between educator and activist. Instead, activism focuses on building a democracy (Giroux, 1995) based on critical inquiry and thinking (Freire, 1970/2006), taking risks, and becoming "insurgent citizens in order to challenge those with political and cultural power as well as honor the critical traditions within the dominant culture that make such a critique possible and intelligible..." (Giroux, 1995, p. 9).

Some recent sociological theorists, primarily in Europe, suggest that most contemporary social movements, sometimes called post-citizenship movements (Jasper, 1997), are significantly different than the "citizenship" social movements of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Whereas citizenship movements (including the labor, civil rights, and women's movements) work for inclusion in dominant culture and society, post-citizenship movements focus on dissatisfaction with dominant culture and society. Jasper, a sociologist and student of social movements, cites Melucci and Lofland's argument that much innovation and progress in post-citizenship movements "take place offstage, in apparently quiet periods, as ideas circulate and new forms of living are tried" (1997, p. 65).

The contributions of the arts to social movements, change, and activism have been noted in the sociological study of social movements. If change is conceived as being an ongoing, multi-layered, and complex process, as Melucci and Lofland suggest, then activists' work extends to more subtle, less overt ways of working than the more common notions of activism. The arts' role in activism can include the communication of a movement's or group's worldview, opposition, and vision; facilitation of dialogue towards political and social consciousness for both participants and the broader public; creation and expression of collective identity and solidarity; and working toward "cognitive liberation," a critical transformation from hopeless submission to oppressive conditions to a readiness to change those conditions (see Adams, 2001; Clay, 2006; Eyerman & Jamison, 1995; Freire, 1970; Jasper, 1997; Kester, 2005; McAdam, 1999; Roscigno & Danaher, 2004; Taylor & Raeburn, 1995).

James Jasper (1997) draws a metaphorical parallel between the artist and the protestor, suggesting that they are "key articulators" of alternative lifestyles, and of new ways of seeing, judging, feeling, and thinking about the world. As such, protestors and artists are "moral innovators" building on and rethinking "existing traditions in order to criticize portions [of those traditions] and experiment with alternatives for the future" (p. 65). Sociologist Eyerman (2006) brings many of these ideas together when he suggests that art be viewed as an "experiential space," seen as a form of social activity through which new kinds of identities and practices emerge... as a cognitive praxis, art is a space for individual and collective creation that can provide society with ideas, identities, and ideals... like a social movement, art opens space for experimentation, social and political as well as aesthetic. (p. 19)
Increasingly, the arts and artists are being considered in much broader contexts than the art world, with more emphasis placed on identity and ideology formation and affirmation in communities and society. "At issue is the necessity for cultural workers to develop a collective vision in which traditional binarisms of margin/center, unity/difference, local/national, public/private can be reconstituted through more complex representations of identification, belonging, and community" (Giroux, 1995, p. 13).

If the arts are increasingly being viewed as a component of community work and change, is the field of art and visual culture education prepared to include these approaches to and reasons for artmaking? As the field works to define its relationship with community work, an increasing number of university and college art education programs are offering a community track.

Artist and critic Suzanne Lacy (1995a) notes that the skills and knowledge necessary for community-based art education focused on change are diverse and interdisciplinary. She writes, "artists have drawn on models outside the arts to reinterpret their roles" (p. 39), and emphasizes the great difference, even opposition, there is between traditional, modernist notions of the artist and the artist working collaboratively toward change: "in seeking to become catalysts for change, artists reposition themselves as citizen-activists. Diametrically opposed to the aesthetic practices of the isolated artist, consensus building inevitably entails developing a set of skills not commonly associated with art making" (p. 177). A basic notion in the field of art education is that being an art educator is not the equivalent of just being a good artist. In addition to artistic skill, there are certain pedagogical skills, knowledge, and philosophies which are ideally developed in order to teach art in a classroom. Further, Flores and Day (2006) find that the three main influences on teacher identity formation are prior influences, initial teacher training and teaching practice, and the contexts of teaching (p. 224). Further, they found personal biography to play a key role in "mediating the making sense of teachers' practices and their beliefs about themselves as teachers" (p. 230).

Working from the understanding that community art education is different from teaching art in a classroom, and that skills in addition to artmaking are integral to the work, what is important in the background and identity formation of a community-based art educator? And how can community art educator preparation programs provide the skills and training necessary to be successful in this area?

**Methodology**

Drawing on perspectives from community art education, sociology, art criticism, critical pedagogy, and social justice education, two questions guided this research: (1) What leads an individual to work in non-school settings with a focus on using art in educational community work towards social or political change? and (2) What are the key aspects or characteristics of these individuals' identities, backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives on their place in society and role in education, art, and change? Three criteria were used to select five participants in the Tucson, Arizona, area. The primary one was how closely each individual fits the roles of artist, activist, and educator, as defined by the researcher (both in their own estimation and based on what I knew about their work). The second criterion was the goal of including the experiences of a diverse group of people (with regard to gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and age). The final goal was to examine this work within a range of art forms.

Case studies were constructed from a 2- to 3-hour interview with each participant. The interviews were semi-structured and conversational, guided by interview questions. The interviews were digitally recorded, and the transcripts were analyzed in detail to select histori-
cal facts, quotations, perspectives, metaphors, and anecdotes which illustrate the connection of the individual's motivations, experiences, history, and surroundings to his or her work. These were then woven into an instrumental case study (Creswell 1998), and a member check was conducted with participants.

Participants

These artist/educator/activists have diverse personal and artistic identities and backgrounds. In 2007, at the time of this study, G.E. Washington was a 39-year-old African American, gay male performance artist (G.E. Washington, personal interview, July 30, 2007). Josh Schachter was a 37-year-old White male photographer (J. Schachter, personal interview, November 14, 2007). Kimi Eisele was a 36-year-old White female writer and dancer (K. Eisele, personal interview, September 25, 2007). Jason Gallegos was a 27-year-old Chicano male media and film artist (J. Gallegos, personal interview, December 12, 2007). Kristen Suagee-Beauduy was a 23-year-old mixed-ethnicity female mixed-media artist and aspiring artist/educator/activist (K. Suagee-Beauduy, personal interview, November 11, 2007).

Shared Characteristics

The artist/educator/activists interviewed for this study have traveled very different paths in their lives and work. Each individual's chosen artistic medium is different; their histories and family backgrounds vary; educational paths diverge; and details of their educational work involving art in communities are distinct. Yet a common theme in each is that their evolving notions of their roles as agents of change are intimately tied to their personal experiences, strong feelings, and perceptions about problems with the status quo. Individual and societal experiences and understandings intersect in formative ways. And the weaving of artist, activist, and educator produces some shared characteristics which define and illustrate their work and lives. While no broad and general conclusions about artist/educator/activists can be drawn from a study of this scale, these shared characteristics in the way that they think and talk about their work are worth noting as a possible starting point for further research regarding preparation and evaluation criteria for community artist/educator/activists.

Experience as outsider and interest in larger structural issues as they relate to individual experience.

One striking characteristic shared by all five artist/educator/activists is the experience of being an outsider at some time in their lives. This experience as outsider has significantly influenced the formation of their identities, leading each to value multiple perspectives and work toward perceiving structural inequalities and hierarchies. For some, these experiences as outsider are related to aspects of the individual's identity which are not part of the dominant culture in the United States. For example, Washington's race, sexuality, and experiences with class; and Gallegos's and Suagee-Beauduy's ethnicity and class. Eisele and Schachter grew up, in many ways, with the privileges of the dominant culture, but had significant experiences as outsiders through work and foreign travel. Whether present since birth or acquired later in life, this position outside dominant mainstream culture has provided a lens which highlights difference and power inequities.

Connected with this, these five individuals spoke of a strong interest in larger structural conditions of our society, such as systems, power, resources, and inequity. These were focal points of some participants' college and graduate studies, such as Gallegos's undergraduate sociology double-major, Eisele's master's degree in geography, Schachter's master's concentration in social ecology, and Suagee-Beauduy's building of interdisciplinary social justice undergraduate studies. But their focus on larger systems is not just textbook-based and theoretical; each artist/educator/activist's interest is in
the way larger systems affect and influence individual situations, perspectives, and experience. For them, societal, institutional, and individual experiences and conditions are interdependent. They all speak of an attention to larger structures and their influence on individuals. In turn, this fuels both their creative work and their educational work as responses to inequities they have perceived or experienced. The result is work grounded in goals of social justice.

For example, Gallegos's films and his digital storytelling with youth are responses to stratification and under-representation. He notes that I always had the desire to work with youth. And again, going back to underrepresented populations, and if I really think about it, it goes back to the environment that I grew up in and the people I grew up around.

Schachter's photographic eye and community- and other-centered approach to collaborative projects responds to his global perspective on the complexities of human interaction and development:

I think largely the way I've become a photographer, in many ways, is because of my training in a totally different field, which is in social ecology. Because I basically was trained in observation... learning to see things, and systems, and learning to understand relationships between things, has played a huge role in how I photograph, and the sort of social commentary I try to express through my work.

Washington's performances and teaching methodologies are responses to silence and assumptions that both grow out of and nourish structural inequalities. As he states,

A large part of what I do is a response to the shutting down of other people... culturally, socially, politically, individually... I think artists can be a site for sowing the seeds of change, or for plowing... I turn up ideas, and... churn up the group.

Eisele's collaborative community projects and improvisational movement and dance respond to privilege, disparities in development, and democracy. Finally, Suagee-Beauduy's search for ways to combine activism and art are a response to hidden and visible oppression, hierarchies, and inequity in our society.

Lacy's (1995a) concept of new genre public art describes what happens when art, activism, and education intersect, portraying one alternative to the isolated artist. She explains that this special, relatively recent genre of art resembles [p]olitical and social activity but is distinguished by its aesthetic sensibility.... an art whose public strategies of engagement are an important part of its aesthetic language. The source of these artworks' structure is... an internal necessity perceived by the artist in collaboration with his or her audience. (p. 19)

She suggests that this art's roots are grounded in the development of various groups and movements, including feminism, ethnic identity politics, and Marxism. This type of art and these various groups "have a common interest in leftist politics, social activism, redefining audiences, relevance for communities (particularly marginalized ones), and collaborative methodology" (p. 25).

Giroux (1995) emphasizes that an educator must be reflective about his or her relationship to complex power networks and how that influences the ways we interact with students or community members, as well as what we teach. Virtually any space can be pedagogical, and all education is political. As such, he holds that artists and other cultural workers must see their work as political and pedagogical:

Critical pedagogy as a theory and practice does not legitimize a romanticized notion of the cultural worker as one who can only function on the margins of society,
nor does it refer to a notion of teaching/performance/cultural production in which formalism or the fetish of method erases the historical, semiotic, and social dimensions of pedagogy as the active construction of responsible and risk-taking citizens. (p. 9)

Educators and educational spaces are not outside or immune to the complex network within which identity, community, and power are created and conceptualized. As such, educators and community developers must constantly critically evaluate and renegotiate how, what, and why we educate and work toward collaborative and participatory change.

Self-Reflection, -criticality, and -modification.

I think that the job of a person of consciousness is to always be reexamining what they're doing... I think it would be easy to... say, "I'm doing this food and dance project, and here's what I want to get out of it, and here's what I want the community to get out of it." And I mean, I do have some of that agenda, obviously... But I think also that the deeper truth is that... I examine my role in even asking those questions. (Eisele)

Experience as an outsider does not automatically result in critical thinking and reflection, however. As illustrated in Eisele's words, an important complement to the outsider experience in these artist/educator/activists is that they distill their experiences into reflective observations and assessments of their own work, collaborations, and efficacy. Each artist/educator/activist is reflective about what his or her unique perspective reveals regarding privilege, inequity, and power. Many of them regularly evaluate themselves in relation to larger structures. In doing so, they also seek to respond to these evaluations by modifying and developing new strategies for their work in different contexts.

Washington suggests that a primary role of the artist/educator/activist in society is "to raise questions and to point out interesting juxtapositions that were taken for granted," with the aim of expanding perspectives and challenging assumptions. Significantly, these artist/educator/activists ask these questions not only of society and other individuals, but also of themselves. The following are some of the questions asked by the interviewees over the course of the research interviews.

- What actually constitutes change and success?
- What does [equality] mean? Does equality mean, make you more like me? 'Cuz I have had opportunities? Does equality make you into who you want to be?
- If I'm gonna reject [the status quo], what am I going to put in its place?
- How do [community members] want to approach [the project], and what are the... long-term implications?
- Where is that belief [that I can make a difference] coming from? Is that reacting to the dominant structures? Like, can I make a difference because I'm White and educated?
- Why am I here? Can I really make a difference? Why do I think I can make a difference? Why should I even try making a difference?
- What are your motivations for wanting to work in the community?
- What is truth? How does our own experience and background affect how we interpret information?
- If we're going to work with young people and have them think about the environment, how can we do that without knowing where they're coming from in the first place?
- How do you stay true to what the youth wanted to say, and [ensure that] other people's agendas don't overtake them?

These questions illustrate the engaged digging that these artist/educator/activists...
undertake as part of their work. This reflection and questioning aligns with critical pedagogy, where a complex view of relationships, between individuals, community, and the world is key. With this complex view comes the necessity of constant reflection on and dialogue about those relationships, as well as the hidden curricula embedded in society and institutions which help keep power structures in place. This requires educators to look at fundamental issues of power and their relationship to greater societal forces that affect educational settings. “Critical pedagogy asks how and why knowledge gets constructed the way it does, and how and why some constructions of reality are legitimated and celebrated by the dominant culture while others clearly are not” (McLaren, 1989/1998, p. 169). This is also a foundational concept in assets-based community development and contemporary activist work.

Empathy and awareness of others support focus on collaboration.

An important prerequisite for meaningful self-reflection and evaluation is empathy and awareness of others: being able both to relate to and see oneself in relation to other people and groups. These two qualities are also key to collaborative work towards change, in which empathy and awareness of others is both a motivator and guide in facilitation of a project. Schachter’s words highlight the importance of these qualities:

I believe neighborhoods and communities are the best experts of their own lives... so if I go in with humility, knowing that I don’t know everything about what the issues are in their community, then it’s going to be, usually, a somewhat successful project. Because I’m respecting the fact that they have a huge amount of knowledge and expertise, even though we don’t often look at communities necessarily that way. It’s always about deficits.

As indicated in the way these five artist/educator/activists speak of their work, empathy is not a surface embrace or acknowledgment of difference. Rather, it is a constant attempt to understand and see from another’s perspective. This, in turn, leads to reflection and questioning of one’s own place in relationship to others. Another key concept in critical pedagogy is the postmodern understanding that reality and knowledge are not fixed and absolute, but rather dependent on one’s experiences, ways of interpreting those experiences, and subject to transformative actions based on those interpretations. As such, educators must acknowledge their position of authority, and relinquish the position of “truth providers” for that of “facilitators of student inquiry and problem posing” (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 17). Emphasis is on dialogue, investigation, and inquiry as methods, rather than one-way transfer of pre-determined knowledge from teacher to student, or outside community developer to community member. Process is highly important. This contrasts starkly with the banking or transmission model of education, a term which Freire (1970/2006) uses to describe an educational environment in which knowledge is “deposited” by teachers in students, and the extent of student involvement is “receiving, filing, and storing the deposits” (p. 72). Freire holds that the attitudes and practices of the banking model of education “mirror oppressive society as a whole” (p. 73).

Eisele connects awareness and response inherent in improvisational movement to democracy:

If you’re interested in creating something larger, or shaping a new society, then, I think, by necessity, you need to pay attention to what other people are doing. So in improv work, you know, you pay attention to... what your choices are, and what your body wants to do, but you’re always trying to expand your awareness and pay attention to what other people are doing... [and] also notice what you’re
not noticing... the process of making work in this way is sort of inherently democratic because everybody's responsible for everything that's happening at any given point... and in that way it's subversive, you know, in terms of the society that we live in.

They are constantly evaluating and re-evaluating different aspects of a project, often focusing on the dynamics of the relationships, and how he or she is influencing or interacting with others.

Empathy and awareness of others help form the foundation of collaboration, a significant aspect of many of these artist/educator/activists' work. Their descriptions of their approaches to collaboration share a few common traits. For example, they aim to facilitate participant- and community-driven projects. Their focus is not on their own work or art-product, but on facilitating others' creation or dialogue. They seek to move away from the center of the group. And they genuinely value knowledge, perspectives, and contributions other than their own:

Depending on what kind of stories emerge from participants, and what participants step forward as wanting to take a continuing role, that will then shape the pieces that we create... I don't know quite how it's going to work but [I will] really tak[e] a large view and see what emerges. (Eisele)

This is a distinct break from conventional top-down approaches to conceptualizing knowledge and education, which codify and rank knowledge and skills, and focus on individual development in those areas, leaving little room for community and local knowledge or collaborative skills.

Interdisciplinary backgrounds; Little formal training in arts disciplines or education.

That's how I've approached the arts, in that I don't want to be JUST a dancer or just a writer, but I want to be a good human being. And being a good human being, for me, was also knowing about other things beyond just craft. So the craft could incorporate geographic knowledge, for instance, or political information. (Eisele)

Rather than art being a sole or primary focus, many of these artist/educator/activists employ art alongside other disciplines, as Eisele's words describe, resulting in an interdisciplinary approach to their work toward change. Possibly one reason for these artist/educator/activists' relatively easy departure from common methods and goals of artmaking and education is that four of the five participants have relatively little formal training in the arts. Though all were involved in the arts as young people, four of the five majored in something other than the arts in college and graduate school, ranging from biology to sociology to forestry and social ecology to interdisciplinary studies. Only Gallegos majored in the arts, with a degree in Media Arts; yet he also had a double major in sociology. Further, as an artist/educator/activist, Gallegos found that pursuing a MFA put him in a community of artists whose intent and reasons for making art were different from his own:

A lot of people are concerned with making art that doesn't speak about any of this other [political and social] stuff. At all. And a lot of people are not sure why you would want to do that... sometimes I feel like, again, maybe [art school] isn't where I should be, maybe I should be back, you know, on the streets doing what I do, instead of being part of this population of people.

In addition to having differing and limited levels of formal education in their art forms, most also have limited formal training in pedagogy and community development (only Washington has studied education at a higher level). Regardless of their education background, and perhaps because of it, they have strongly adopted and gravitated toward pedagogical approaches that align with specific education theories, such as critical pedagogy and social justice education.
Process-orientation and different reasons and criteria for creativity.

"Somebody who has a background in the arts and is using it to get communities talking, engaging them in dialogue, that's what I wanted to be" (Suagee-Beauduy). As suggested earlier, these artist/educator/activists do not consider the production of "fine art" an important goal for their collaborative work. Instead, their descriptions of their work echo contemporary sociological notions of activism, as discussed previously, where the arts and creative process are tools, or vehicles, to achieving other goals, such as dialogue, sharing individual experiences, gaining and developing voice, envisioning alternatives to the status quo, and revealing hidden assumptions and prejudices. While a quality art product is one aspect of successfully using art to these ends, it is not the primary end goal of the artist/educator/activist's work. The process, developments, and revelations along the way are the focus of these artist/educator/activists.

Motivation consistently other than financial compensation and job security.

These five artists/educators/activists are not driven by typical extrinsic motivation and influences, such as employment opportunities, job security, and money (Flores & Day, 2006). In fact, if these factors can be said to have any influence on one's choice to become an artist/educator/activist, it would be negative. All participants in this study, in some way, cite job insecurity and financial considerations as challenges in their work. However, each artist/educator/activist possesses strong internal motivation, which is generally stronger than the lack of these extrinsic benefits. This echoes sociologist Fendrich's (1977) findings that interest-based politics alone will not sustain long-term commitment to a radical leftist movement, but that a strong, "other-oriented humanism" and ideological commitment are necessary, as well as a commitment to pursue one's career based on motivation other than extrinsic rewards. Lacy (1995a) also emphasizes that this type of work comes from a deeply internalized motivation and perspective on one's place in the world and as relative to other people:

The transition from a model of individual authorship to one of collective relationship suggested in this work is not undertaken simply as an exercise in political correctness. A longing for the Other runs as a deep stream through most of these artists' works. (p. 36)

This work is not just a job; it is, often, an extension and manifestation of the way the individual would like to live and would like the world to be.

Conclusion

The characteristics outlined in this study raise a number of issues and questions for the field of art and visual culture education regarding institutional inclusion, preparation, and understanding of artist/educator/activists.

One issue with implications for the preparation of community art educators is that the skills necessary for collaborative, democratic work in communities are different from the solitary artist or classroom teacher's needs. In collaborative community work, the locus of activity shifts away from the artist or student to the group. Interaction is a vital part of creation. Students are not often assigned; if involvement is to continue, relationships with participants must be built on trust and interest. The creation is not fully under the artist's control, and the product is shared. Not only does this challenge our conventional notions of authorship in the arts, it also demands skills that are not commonly associated with artist or teacher training, including dialogue facilitation as part of the artmaking process, coordinating meaningful collaboration, and inclusion of multiple voices in the artmaking process and product.

Further, the artist/educator/activists in this study have significant interdisciplinary backgrounds. This influences their artmaking and approach to thinking about and working with
communities. If this truly reflects the needs of community arts educators, how might this element of preparation be incorporated into college and graduate-level programs?

There are also practical considerations: As several of these participants indicated, financial survival can be a challenge. Given the patchy infrastructure for permanent long-term employment with one employer, survival skills are also necessary. Business, communication, and grantsmanship skills, as well as an understanding of the nonprofit and government sectors, are important to long-term survival and success in this arena.

Another issue regarding this work is that there are no set standards or methods of evaluation for the work of artist/educator/activists. Assessing and measuring outcomes in this work is challenging. Lacy (1995a, 1995b) highlights the need for a language, and more importantly, criteria by which to address, analyze, and evaluate collaborative, participatory, change-oriented art practices as “an integrative critical language through which values, ethics, and social responsibility can be discussed in terms of art” (1995a, p. 43). This approach to artmaking even challenges art as we know it, redefining it “as a process of value finding, a set of philosophies, an ethical action, and an aspect of a larger sociocultural agenda” (1995a, p. 46).

Artist/educator/activists develop and adapt projects based on the context, situation, and partners. Each participant in this study spoke of clear philosophies and principles, including collaboration, participant- and community-centered focus, empathy, development of voice, and questioning the status quo. Their reflective and flexible approaches have a symbiotic relationship with the individual’s identity: as the artist/educator/activist evolves, so does his or her collaborative work; and collaborative creation leads to new insights and perspectives that change the individual. Given this, how is such work described, compared, analyzed, and evaluated? Each individual conducts informal and intuitive assessments. Schachter, in particular, spoke of a need to agree on basic standards or goals among photographic storytelling facilitators so that inappropriate criteria and approaches are not grafted onto this way of working. As he stated:

There needs to be some agreement about how you work in a community, particularly if you’re not part of that community... there are certain things... like humility, and thinking about your assumptions, and all these things that people aren’t aware of. They just think, “Oh, I’m gonna give some kids cameras, and they’re going to take amazing pictures, and we’ll have an exhibit and it will be great, and everyone will be empowered.” But you know, that’s not what the work is about. It’s about all those things that are between, that happen in the process.

How might the field of art and visual culture education construct meaningful and appropriate conceptual language and frameworks, as well as methods of assessment and evaluation of this work and its impact? What bridges and relationships can be built to help us understand and share about this multi-faceted work?

These artist/educator/activists personify many vital facets of contemporary work in communities, the arts, education, and activism. Their ways of conceptualizing themselves, their work, and their roles in society reveal a version of the artist and educator that is an agent of possibility which departs from the “recycled” versions of old (Gude, 2000) in significant ways. Not only is this community art education work a revealing site for art and visual culture educators researching critical pedagogy and social justice education, it also informs a little-understood but increasingly popular strain of art and visual culture education preparation programs and offers a wealth of potential for further critical research.
REFERENCES
Kretzmann, N., & McKnight, J. (1993). Communities from the inside out: A path toward finding and mobilizing a community's assets. Chicago, IL: ACTA Publications.


**ENDNOTES**

1 Marche (1998) makes a useful distinction between different notions of community, outlining three general approaches to conceptualizing community in art education from a school-based perspective: “looking from,” “learning about,” and “acting upon.”

2 This echoes Friere’s (1970) critique of the “banking model” approach in education.

3 Many of the roles the arts have played in activism have close ties to key concepts in social justice education and critical pedagogy.

4 This is a limitation on this study, as the definitions of the three components of an artist/educator/activist were pre-defined and used to select the participants. At the time of the study, I was a White, politically liberal, straight, middle-class, college-educated 29-year-old American woman. I brought, and continue to bring, a certain perspective and set of beliefs and assumptions to this study. I tried to remain constantly aware of this as I searched for and interacted with participants, conducted interviews, and analyzed and interpreted the data. Yet as true to the participants, their words, and experiences as I have tried to be, the study contains the marks of my values, beliefs, vision, weaknesses, and perspectives throughout.

5 This term is the closest I have found to the concept of community art education as applied in this article.

6 The extent to and ways in which these questions translate into pedagogical and artistic action and interaction with different groups is not within the bounds of this study. However, this could be an important area for further research, with implications for all educators who value the reflective process.

7 Nevertheless, most of these participants also sometimes make art more for art’s sake.