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## Interviewing as a Pedagogical Tool in Arts for Social Justice: A Case Study of an Afterschool Arts Program

- As a pedagogical tool interviewing can help to develop skills as creative agents for social change.
- Interviewing capabilities are useful in creating art.
- Interviewing can be seen as a foundation for artistic visions of the world.

**Purpose:** The rise of out-of-school youth arts organizations, especially those dedicated to addressing social issues with young people, suggests a growing need for spaces in which we prepare young people to creatively and critically shape their communities. While the popularity of these programs is certainly positive, it does little to tell us what pedagogical lessons we might learn from how youth arts organizations approach social justice teaching in the arts. In order to understand what it takes to do social justice art education, our research team investigated the pedagogical strategies used by Center for Urban Pedagogy, an out-of-school youth arts organization.

**Method:** Through qualitative interviews, observations, and document analyses, this case study examined the specific pedagogical strategies used by educators in the Center for Urban Pedagogy's (CUP) Urban Investigations program to engage young people in creating art for social justice aims.

**Findings:** Our initial findings revealed that the process of interviewing is at the center of CUP's approach to both social engagement and art-making. According to our research, interviewing reveals hidden layers of meaning to learners, offers opportunities to visualize personal connections, and provides a means to critically and collaboratively create artwork.

### Keywords:

Art education, ethics, civic literacy, compositional analysis, attitudes

### 1 Introduction

In an office in Astoria Energy in New York City, five teenagers and two educators from the Center for Urban Pedagogy's Urban Investigations program sit around the desk of the Manager; one holds a microphone, another a notepad, and another a video camera. A bit quietly at first, they ask questions: "Why did the city choose to build a power plant here? Where do you get fuel to run the generators?" As the conversation progresses and the young interviewers seem less inhibited and more probing; the Manager responds in kind with complex responses to their increasingly pointed questions. When the camera is finally turned off, they exit the small office and head off for a walking tour of the electricity plant. They

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take photographs as they walk around the plant and continue to ask questions about the various parts of the plant from transformers to generators as they head back to turn their findings into art.

On paper, social justice art education—the pedagogical process that engages young people in creating art to dismantle systems of inequality—sounds promising. As many educators and artists declare, it can be a tremendous means through which youth can develop the critical and creative thinking skills to actively participate in the remaking of our society (Dewhurst, 2014). However, when it comes to what the actual work entails, this emancipatory approach to art education can appear more daunting. What pedagogical tools do educators in social justice arts use in their teaching? And what impact do these strategies have on the young people with whom they work, the artwork they create, and the change they aspire to create? While many school-based arts educators have found successful ways to integrate social justice art-making into their curricula, those working outside of schools often have more leeway to experiment with how best to engage young people in this work. The rise of out-of-school youth arts organizations, especially those dedicated to addressing social justice issues with youth, suggests a growing need for spaces in which we prepare young people to creatively *and* critically shape their communities (Dewhurst, 2014; Smyth & Stevenson, 2003; Seidel, et. al., 2009). While the popularity of these programs is positive, it does little to tell us what pedagogical lessons we might learn from how youth arts organizations approach social justice teaching in the arts.



In an effort to better understand what it takes to *do* social justice art education, our research team set out to investigate the pedagogical strategies used by one out-of-school youth arts organization. Selected as a site based on their stated commitment to using art to engage participants in civic engagement, Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP) has a well-recognized history of working with youth to empower them as agents of change in their own communities. In 2015, CUP's Urban Investigations program was awarded the National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award, the country's highest achievement for quality programming in the arts. Through observations and interviews with educators and youth working in the Urban Investigations program, we applied case study methodology to examine the specific pedagogical strategies used by educators to engage young people in creating art for social justice aims. Our initial findings revealed a complex set of philosophical stances and actual teaching tools, however, upon closer analysis of the data, it became clear that the process of interviewing is at the center of CUP's approach to both social engagement and art-making. Given this finding, this paper focuses on the act of interviewing as a creative and critical strategy in social justice art education. We begin with an overview of how interviewing is used as a pedagogical tool in education and as a means of both research and creation in contemporary art practices today. Shifting to the case study data, we move this analysis of interviewing from the realm of professional artists to that of the youth involved in a social justice art education program. A thorough examination of the nature of the interviewing process at CUP enabled us to determine how interviewing functions as a pedagogical and aesthetic tool for the kind of critical learning, empowering teaching, and socially engaged art-making required of social justice arts education.

## 2 Interviewing as a pedagogical tool and guiding philosophy

From the everyday examples of interviewing that we encounter daily—journalists interviewing a witness to an event, researchers interviewing participants, and talk show hosts interviewing celebrities—we know that interviewing generally consists of someone with questions (preferably critical ones), and someone with responses (preferably informed ones). But interviewing viewed through an educational lens takes on a slightly different hue; as a pedagogical tool, interviewing can serve as an important process for fostering inquiry, empowerment, and critical analysis. Because of this, interviewing and other forms of fieldwork have been used as teaching tools in several non-arts settings, including social studies classrooms and media literacy programs (Soep, 2006; Cammarota and Fine, 2008). As founder of the Educational Video Center, a youth media program, Steve Goodman (2003) describes, interviewing allows students to interact with primary sources, evaluate different information sources, and develop their own lines of inquiry:

“At its most basic, the students’ inquiry begins with and spirals out of the act of questioning, as all inquiry does. But for questions to eventually lead to answers—and perhaps new questions—inquirers must learn where and how to gather information. They need to learn how to assess the reliability of the information they obtain, and finally how to interpret and integrate the new data into their existing frameworks of knowledge and experience. This is fundamentally a social and intellectual process.... (p. 48)

Recently, a number of researchers (Cahill, 2007; Cahill, & Hart, 2007; Cammarota & Fine, 2008) have also involved youth in conducting formal interviews as part of participatory action research projects, connecting young people with professional practices of data collection and analysis. Likewise, educators in folk arts education and geography have pointed to the multiple purposes for including interviewing and other forms of fieldwork in K-12 schools (Job, et. al, 1999; Bowman & Hamer, 2011). In these cases, interviewing serves as an engaging teaching strategy to empower youth to participate in the living worlds around them. As one of the teaching artists at CUP states, “it’s learning through experience. So they are actually investigating, rather than reading, like the traditional ways of learning.”<sup>1</sup> In addition to building basic listening, questioning, and research skills, our research highlights that interviewing connects closely to some of the key characteristics of effective social justice art education—both in theory and in practice—to facilitate an emancipatory and critical learning experience for all participants.

## 3 Interviewing and Contemporary Art Practices

Our initial findings of the importance of interviewing in CUP's youth arts programming inspired us to examine similar practices in the professional art world. CUP's pedagogical approach to conduct video interviews with stakeholders in the field as an integral component of their artistic process echoes the work of many contemporary artists who go out into the “field” to collect data—in the form of audio and video recordings, photographs, maps, etc.—to gain a better understanding of a situation or topic. Although such fieldwork is a central component of anthropology, journalism, and sociology, increased attention in recent years has focused on the connection between fieldwork in anthropology and contemporary art (Coles, 2000; Desai, 2002; Foster, 1996; Schneider & Wright, 2010) and more recently to the relationship between journalism and contemporary art (Cramerotti, 2009). Since the 1980s, artists such as Martha Rosler, Haans Haccke, Alfredo Jaar, Trevor Paglan, and Ashely Hunt, have drawn on field-based research to convey “artistic information” (Cramerotti, 2009, p. 30). Their artworks do not simply represent the information they have collected, but instead ask us to question information, thereby igniting the power of pedagogy. In comparison to journalists Cramerotti (2009) indicates, “What artists can do better is to construct a self-reflective medium, which ‘coaches’ its viewers to ask relevant questions by themselves, instead of accepting



(or refusing tout court) representations as they are proposed” (p. 30). In the words of artists, Allora and Calzadilla (2003):

“art has much to offer...in its potential to provoke the public into a space of individual questioning about a particular subject, about preconceived notions of truth, about forms of representation, participation, identification, etc. ... At that point it is up to each individual to decide if this self-questioning will play itself out at a political level, at a union level, at an aesthetic level, at a cultural level, or sexual level, and so on (p. 89).

Invoking a more participatory approach to viewing artwork, these works of art serve as avenues for learning and active engagement with information—a far cry from more conventional passive art viewing.

One example of such fieldwork-based artworks is the video, *Under Discussion* (2005) by Allora and Calzadilla, where conducting interviews serve as the material and medium that the artists employ in their art practice. Seeing that the discussion about the future of the island of Vieques (Puerto Rico) was deadlocked due to different interests of various constituencies, Allora and Calzadilla decided to open a space for discussion, dialogue, and debate through their artwork. The one voice that was not even part of the formal discussion regarding the future of Vieques was that of the local people who had been directly affected by decades of U.S. militarization. Literally turning a table over and attaching a motor, thus making it into a functional boat, the artists hired a local boatman to take them along the coast of Vieques to interview both fisherman and local people living on this island about the changes they had experienced since the U.S. took over the island as a military base as well as what they envision for their land and communities. The video is not only a visual representation of their journey along the coast, but by drawing on the metaphor of the discussion table as a place to bring various people to the table to talk, their art project in both form and content offered a pedagogical space for questioning and thinking about who makes decisions for whom.

Rachel Wetzler (2012) suggests that the move by many contemporary artists to engage in “artistic fieldwork” allows them to “investigat[e] aspects of their lives and interests by merging the apparent objectivity of documentary forms and anthropological research with a plainly subjective, flexible approach, drawing on multiple methodologies and discourses” (para # 3). Viewed from a different angle, fieldwork as a practice is a form of art—akin to the kinds of social practices popular today. Requiring face-to-face contact with people, this embodied experience warrants learning how to read body language, therefore allowing for different ways of knowing that are connected to physical and social modes of communication (Taussig, 2008). Moving beyond conventional art materials and techniques, this move in social practice art includes a wider spectrum of ways of making art.

“Aesthetic journalism” provides another lens to analyze and discuss the use of interviews as both artistic medium and artistic process. Aesthetic journalism involves “artistic practices in the form of investigations of social, cultural or political circumstances” (Cramerotti, 2009, p. 21). Cramerotti writes “it is rather the capacity of an art form to put our sensibility in motion, and convert what we feel about nature and the human race into concrete (visual, oral, bodily) experience” (p. 21) that makes it relevant for journalism. Although journalism and art have always had a relationship as journalists use photographs, videos, and graphic images to convey information and as a form of witnessing, images tend to be presented as objective truths and neutral knowledge. Today we know that all information conveyed through the documentary format is always mediated. Artists can then deliberately play with the ways they mediate the information they collect from fieldwork. Contemporary artists using investigative methods in their practice disrupt traditional journalism’s use of mimetic aesthetic traditions as a mark of objectivity and its privileging of the visual as neutral or unbiased information. In doing so, these artists create works that challenge viewers to question the status quo and their role within it.

Interviewing—and other forms of fieldwork—as a medium for making art, aligns with practices in social justice art education which require critical engagement with real life issues. The pursuit and organization of information that interviewing allows for makes it a prime tool for interrogating issues of inequality in ways that reveal the underlying structures of injustice. Combined with creative expression, this use of interviewing can serve as a potent strategy for social justice art. Just as professional artists have drawn on interviews to develop the critical nature of their artwork, our research revealed that young people at CUP used similar tactics to create their art.

### 3 Research overview

Working with a small research team, we—the primary investigators and authors—conducted a qualitative study of the pedagogical strategies used to create works of social justice artwork with small groups of youth involved in out-of-school programs. Comprised of two university professors with expertise in social justice art education, youth development, and contemporary art practices and one research assistant with experience as an art teacher both in and out of school settings, our research team brought a critical insider eye to the analysis of the data on learning in the Urban Investigations. Through a series of interviews and observations, our research sought to identify the specific teaching and learning tools required of social justice art education.

#### 3.1 Participants

Based in Brooklyn, New York, The Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP) uses art and design as tools to facilitate civic engagement and impact public policy. Specifically, CUP states that their projects seek to “demystify the urban policy and planning issues that impact our communities, so that more individuals can better participate in



shaping them” ([welcometocup.org/About](http://welcometocup.org/About)). CUP’s *Urban Investigations* programs match small groups of teens with a teaching artist to examine a real life issue about how the city works from multiple perspectives in order to create a work of art for the public. Previous *Urban Investigation* programs have explored issues such as food distribution, high school application processes, waste treatment systems, and internet ownership ([welcome tocup.org/Projects/ UrbanInvestigations](http://welcometocup.org/Projects/UrbanInvestigations)). Each multi-week investigation begins with a key question, for example, “Where does our water come from?” “Where does our garbage go?” Students and teachers together launch their exploration of the key questions first by reading both academic and popular articles that provide a foundational understanding of the issue at hand. Through discussions and art-making activities, youth participants and adult staff generate a list of potential stakeholders to interview for additional information. Equipped with professional recording equipment and basic training in interviewing techniques that covers developing questions, asking follow-up questions, and active listening, youth participants conduct interviews of policy makers, local government officials, community leaders, and engaged citizens. Youth then work closely with the teaching artists to turn the content and experiences of their interviews into works of art for public distribution. These investigations have resulted in short videos, posters, and websites for distribution across the city (and beyond).

Our research project focused on two separate Urban Investigations that took place over three months during the summer of 2011: one investigation focused on learning about the infrastructure of electricity in the city and the second focused on the NYC Fair Share policy. Youth participants for the *Power Trip* project that investigated the infrastructure of electricity in NYC included four high school aged youth, one adult lead teaching artist and one adult assistant teaching artist. As they researched how energy flows through the city, participants in this Urban Investigation met with officials at a local utility company headquarters, an upstate transmission monitoring center, and visited several power plants. Prioritizing primary source data collection over today’s typical turn to the internet enables youth to develop public speaking, inquiry, contextualizing, and professional communication skills. In addition, these experiences put youth in direct conversation with the real life decision makers that are connected to their own urban communities—a move that engages young people directly with those in power. Youth and the adult facilitators then used information gathered during these interactions to create a multi-lingual poster and book that has been distributed by local libraries, at several formal presentations throughout the city, and received special mention from a professional design association (CUP *Power Trip* website, 2015). Following a similar trajectory, participants in the *Share, Where?* project included ten high school aged youth from the Bronx, one adult lead teaching artist, and one adult assistant teaching artist who “teamed up to find out how New York

City decides where to put the burdensome, smelly, and dangerous facilities that make the city run—but nobody wants in their backyards,” (CUP *Share, Where?* website, 2015). Over the course of the *Share, Where?* project participants met with sanitation workers, environmental justice advocates, an anti-waste facility neighborhood group, and policymakers behind the Fair Share legislation. Drawing on their research with these primary sources, the team of youth and teaching artists created a visually-rich book that has been distributed and used by local community groups to educate people about the Fair Share policy. Resulting creative design products from each Urban Investigation continue to be shared through CUP’s ongoing community-building and policy education programs.

### 3.2 Data Collection & Analysis

The qualitative methods of interviews, participant observations, and document analysis enabled us to collect significant data about the pedagogical strategies at play in the two *Urban Investigations*. The collected data included interviews with each educator, assistant educator, and almost all of the youth participants, observations of the working sessions, and document analysis of the training guides, artwork produced, and CUP’s program literature. This rich array of data allowed us to triangulate our findings as we compared the responses of the teaching artists with those of the youth participants and the documents and artwork that emerged from their process. To analyze this data, we drew upon grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to use an iterative coding strategy in which we elicited emic codes from the data and then layered in etic coding to compare the data with dominant literature in social justice art education. The findings that emerged from this qualitative process highlight the important role of interviewing at CUP. The following discussion of these findings points to the many ways in which interviewing can be used as an effective pedagogical and philosophical tool in social justice art education.

### 4 Findings

Throughout our analysis of the nature of social justice art education at CUP, the process of interviewing rose again and again as a core pedagogical strategy. A closer analysis of this tool reveals that it functions as both as a specific teaching and learning tool and as a philosophical guide to shape the very curriculum at CUP. In our research, it became clear that interviewing is a far more complex arts learning activity than first assumed, contributing to the criticality and shifting power dynamics required of effective social justice art education. To better understand the multifaceted role that interviewing plays at CUP and, potentially in social justice art education broadly, we identify the key contributions it fostered among youth and adult participants.



#### 4.1 Revealing what is real (but often hidden) in the world

Including fieldwork as part of the artistic process allows students to contextualize the knowledge they are learning and connect it to the real world (Fuller, 2006). In the case of social justice based art education it helps students to understand how our society is structured and who makes decisions that impact our daily lives, but also to question how and who created these structures. As described above, CUP's *Urban Investigations* prioritize interviewing as a tool for conducting primary source research as much of the experience is based on what one teaching artist described as "doing actually *real* investigation." This real-world connection is a vital component of the process. As one teaching artist explains,

"they are learning how to ask the questions and they are feeling empowered that way. ... It's like ok, this is information that we actually got, it's not in a textbook. You know we've read a few things and we are actually going and asking these questions. I think that's the really exciting thing that the CUP program does.... I read this in a textbook, but now we are actually going, you know to this place that it talked about. We are going to actually experience this and then report back on our views of this experience.

The emphasis on "actually" throughout this reflection highlights how unique and transformative it is to have direct engagement with information for both youth and teaching artists.

As they directly interact with information through their interviews, youth are participating in a form of experiential education, a kind of learning with a constructivist view of knowledge. Experiential learning calls for an understanding of knowledge as a fluid process that requires negotiation, flexibility, learning and unlearning, and is always subjective (Duckworth, 1987; Dewey, 1980). As one of the teaching artists indicates, "most of the things we learn together when we are in interviews talking to people in the field and we learn things that we might not have thought of before and this may lead us to change our ideas." This fluidity echoes the process of making art in which artists reiterate ideas until they are satisfied with a final product. In this way, the interviewing process and the art-making process provide parallel avenues to revisit and re-interpret information as youth deepen their understanding of the topic under study. As this teaching artist continued,

"it's challenging because they are not used to doing things like [CUP] do[es]....So we are thinking differently, we are doing these puppets or we are doing this drawing or these collages and they make sense to whatever we are doing but, you know, it's, you taking information in a different way.

The interviews in the *Urban Investigations*, much like the work of contemporary artists, provide young artists with opportunities for direct engagement with primary source information. Similarly, these interviews open up spaces to navigate the messiness and often-shifting nature of

information about civic and social issues. In doing so, they expose the complex reality of the structures that shape our society—particularly those structures that are hidden or opaque to casual observation. As a tool of making art, interviews serve as an important tactic to give realistic shape to the artwork that young people seek to create.

#### 4.2 Visualizing personal connections

As both education scholarship (Duckworth, 1987) and practical experience tell us, to truly understand a concept, it is useful to experience it firsthand. Such primary experiences enable learners to forge their own connections to the topic at hand, thereby connecting the topic to their own lives. In other words, by experiencing something directly, learners can, as one teaching artist noted, "make it their own." At CUP, the process of interviewing connects youth directly to the civic structures they are exploring. It is an opportunity for youth to experience—in a physical, temporal, spatial, and affective manner—environments and conversations that may have been previously off-limits. For example, it is only because the youth were investigating how we get our electricity that they were allowed to visit the power stations and substations in New York City. This rare access provided an immediate experience that made real the connections between the different stakeholders involved in delivering the city's electricity.

When we make systems of power personally relevant, they become easier to identify and address. Through the interview process, the youth participants learned about the social and economic dimensions of power and power usage across social class lines and connected it to their own lives. One youth participant asked the follow up question, "What you're describing, would my family be able to benefit from an energy program like this?" Another youth made an important observation about where power plants are located in the city in terms of social class: "Well, it's mostly in poor neighborhoods, like Hunt's Point, where there's power plants, sewage treatment and people there are getting sick." A youth videotaping the interview, immediately agreed, "Yeah I live in Hunt's Point, there's 15,000 trucks that frequent the area [for deliveries and shipping]". Writing about the importance of situated learning where education starts "from the students' situation," social justice education scholar, Ira Shor (1992) asserts that this "increases their ability to participate [as active learners], because they can begin critical reflection in their own context and their own words" (p. 45).

Based on what they had learned from the interviews at the power plant students then began to create a visual map of how power reaches our homes from the power plants. They worked collectively on this mapping, each one taking a different section to make legible through images the invisible structure of power in our city. Conceptual mapping, commonly known as brainstorming has been used in education to illustrate complex connections between ideas (Powell, 2010). Visual mapping is a way to locate ourselves not only physically, but psychologically,

culturally, and socially. Contemporary artists have pushed the boundaries of mapping to capture these other dimensions, such as emotions, memory, and the body, in what Powell (2010) calls the “metaphorical powers of maps” that allow for a multisensory experience (p.539). Social justice education, as scholars have emphasized, needs to begin where students are and with what they know (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994; Shor, 1992). To do so, educators need to provide the tools to visualize how these structures of inequity relate to their students (and their own) lives. From this space of personal understanding educators can then move students to think critically about the systemic nature of these inequities and how institutions can play a role in maintaining, managing, and also changing these inequities.

#### 4.3 Thinking critically, creating critically

Interviewing in the field allows students to learn about and appreciate different perspectives on a topic, which in turn allows them to think out their own values. “Field-work enables students to develop their understanding of different perspectives on social, political or ecological issues, enabling them to clarify and justify their own values whilst learning to acknowledge and respect other people’s values” (Job, Day, & Smith, 1999). As one of the teaching artists explained, peeling back to uncover injustice is important as many of the people interviewed at the power plant spoke to the connection between low income neighborhoods, poverty, and racism but in different ways, which provided a more complex picture of the issues:

“I’m just saying for example, in this project where the, the idea that when facilities were dumped into poor neighborhoods and minority, like Polish neighborhoods or here in the Bronx or in Brooklyn or Queens, whatever there is racism involved in those decisions but also well, you know the land is cheaper there and there are other things that makes it more complex than just on the surface. So I try to bring those issues to the table too so the students can think about that too. So it’s not like hey, these people are bad, you know what I mean. So it’s not one sided and too flat of an argument. So I try to bring the more complexity to it. Which is the hard thing. But yeah, that is one of the challenges.

One of the reasons CUP uses interviews is to unearth the social structures and processes that are invisible in our daily lives but play a major role in shaping our daily life. (i.e., where does power come from?). By investigating these invisible structures and then reporting back what they have learned through artworks, youth shift to become advocates. They move from learning how to ask questions in order to elicit information about social structures and policies to analyzing the information they have collected from the interviews to create artworks that serve as education tools. The final design products—be they posters, short videos, or visually-rich books—teach the public about complex structures that are typically invisible and how these structures can affect our lives. As one youth participant recalls,

“we went to this power plant and we’ve never been to a power plant and we didn’t really know what it did, we weren’t even exactly sure what we were looking for. But after the first three interviews we were able to kind of understand that our question was actually like, what is this power plant and who are the people involved in making these decisions in terms of this (plant). And I’m not even sure if that is something that we could of like figured out in the beginning, like, how to narrow down the question or how to make it more successful.”

Through conducting and translating interview data into visual forms, youth participants managed to convey complicated information in more easy-to-access formats. Just as the interviews themselves revealed the complexity of city systems, the artwork that resulted from these interviews extended that knowledge to a wider audience.

#### 4.4 Making art collaboratively

Collaborative learning, where the teacher and student learn together is a key element of any form of social justice education (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994). Such non-hierarchical learning creates opportunities for teachers and students to learn from each other, to take turns as the expert, and to change the conventional lines of power that tend to hold the teacher or adult in a position of greater authority and agency. Found often in out-of-school youth arts programs, collaboration requires flexibility and willingness to allow a project to unfold organically. As Goodman (2003) writes, “To effectively teach students across the field of their experiences, educators must sometimes follow, sometimes lead, and sometimes work with them side by side. No lesson plan can fully map this out” (p. 54). As a platform for collaborative learning, interviewing is unique in that it cannot be pre-scripted, reveals new perspectives to all participants in the moment, and requires a back-and-forth dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee; in short, there is an important element of surprise that opens up spaces for new kinds of learning.

Perhaps the most obvious way in which interviewing fosters collaborative learning is that neither the adult educators nor the youth participants know what the interviewee will say. One teaching artist described this element of mystery in this collaborative process:

“I tell them all of the time, ‘Hey, we are doing this together, I don’t know the answers.’ And you know we write the questions, ... we prepare for interviews, so they [the youth participants] come up with a lot of questions, we [all] edit them down and organize them and so forth. So, I say, ‘guys that’s a great question, I don’t know the answer, let’s find out when we talk to this person or that person.’

Because the teaching artists and youth participants are both meeting the interviewees for the first time, they are hearing new information *together* and learning to make sense of it simultaneously. In this way, the process of interviewing results in a learning context in which everyone involved is experiencing a sense of discovery. As one teaching artist stated, “the nice thing is that we are



discovering this together. So I feel like I'm on the same playing field [as the youth participants].”

Echoing this idea of the shared “playing field”, in CUP's Urban Investigations, the interview task provides an unusual opportunity for youth and adult teaching artists to work as partners in art-making. Beyond the fact that they both engage in a parallel process of discovery, the process of developing, conducting, analyzing, and translating the interview into a work of art is also collaborative. This collaboration happens on multiple levels, as one teaching artist describes:

“We work together, it's a collaboration. It's a collaboration of different levels. First is with your students, then it's with people up top [CUP directors] and sometimes we bring graphic designers to help us too. So, it's a collaboration of different levels....It's like a diamond sort of thing where you basically have to carve it. So it takes different levels to get there. So it's a collaboration of different levels. You go back and forth with the student a lot, all the time. ... we [teaching artists] send them [youth participants] the proofs so they can actually see it before we even publish it.... So yeah, it's a long process.

Throughout this collaboration, youth and adults each bring their own expertise to the table to work together to prepare for, conduct, analyze, and transform an interview into a work of art; the youth participants generated ideas and questions based on their own experiences and the teaching artists shared their technical skills in interviewing, and art and design. When learning shifts to be collaborative—or, as Youth Radio's Lissa Soep (2006) writes, a kind of “collegial pedagogy”—the experience is likely to empower both the youth and the adults involved. Because both parties can contribute as full partners in the design, coordination, and analysis of the interview, the process engenders a sense of group ownership over the project. As one teaching artist stated, the youth are empowered because they

“own the project that they are creating and it's not like in some ways ok, they're [the youth] here because I'm saying we're doing a project on energy. I'm giving them that prompt and telling them what we are doing but in every other way like they get to make a lot of decisions.

This shared decision-making is a key component of the entire process—from the initial interview through the creation of the final work of art. The same teaching artist continued this sentiment:

“I want them to feel like they are teaching me something too and like they are learning something that I haven't thought of. I think that is important that it feels like a really collaborative experience in terms of, like, I'm the art teacher and I'm teaching you how to shape correctly or draw something that looks like something in the real world. You know, it's more like I'm teaching us both how to get information from the real world and apply that to our lives. Which is a hard kind of organic thing that happens as you do it.

In talking about the work of youth and adult producers at Youth Radio, Soep (2006) describes that “With collegial pedagogy, mentoring adults offer access to equipment, expertise, in-the-moment advice, creative collaboration, and crucially, a network of relationships with outlets for young people's work” (p. 38). Whereas many youth arts organizations have created opportunities for entirely youth-led projects, the shift to a collegial pedagogy, where youth and adults work as partners, allows for an authentic power-sharing in the art-making process. This collaborative process also facilitates opportunities for youth and adults to learn together. “The beauty of this collaboration” one teaching artist noted, is that “it's not like I'm telling them what do it's okay as what can you bring to the table and what can I bring to the table and we start from there.” This back-and-forth was evident in our observations as we noted constant discussion between youth and adults as they worked together to make artistic decisions about their final artworks. At times working all on one sheet of paper to draw out a plan, it was clear that the interviews provided a common ground from which each participant—be it a young person or an adult teaching artist—could contribute actively and with authenticity.

While this kind of collaborative learning may sound elegant in theory, it is important to note that shared decision-making and true collegial pedagogy is not without its challenges. To truly share the decision-making process with youth participants, teaching artists must give up some of their own power and control over the curriculum and over the final product. This can result in a sense of what one teaching artist described as “uncertainty” as they worry, “what are we going to make in the end?” Yet, this uncertainty is actually a critical part of the process as it opens up a unique space in which youth and adult teaching artists come to create a work of art collaboratively. One teaching artist captured this tension in describing her reflections about the process:

“We don't go in knowing what we are going to make. ... our whole brainstorming process was the challenging part for me because I am just, like, nervous about wanting to make sure that [the project] gets done. Also, on the flip side... I'm not the one who is creating the project. So, this goes back to it being a collaborative work project. Like, I'm not the one creating it so it's not really fair for me to say, ‘oh I have an idea and I want you guys to create this.’ That's not what it is. It's the students, they have to come up with what they want to see, what they envision, how they can reflect what they've learned throughout the summer into some sort of print form.

Such ongoing negotiation of the balanced contributions of both youth and adult participants throughout the Urban Investigations highlighted how interviewing can be a useful tool to encourage collaborative art-making.

## 5 Final thoughts

In writing about the role of teaching, Maxine Greene (2003) reminds us that it “is a matter of awakening and empowering today's young people to name, to reflect, to



imagine, and to act with more and more concrete responsibility in an increasingly multifarious world" (p. 72). In our research with the Center for Urban Pedagogy's Urban Investigations youth program, it is clear that the pedagogical tool of interviewing can play a useful role in providing a range of opportunities for young people to develop their skills as creative agents for social change. Through CUP's Urban Investigations, youth participants learned how to compose appropriate and investigative questions, how to ask those questions to stakeholders with real access to power, how to analyze the responses, and how to translate the information they learned into a creative platform for a wider audience. In addition to being useful skills in many professions, these interviewing capabilities are particularly useful in creating art. Aligned with the work of contemporary artists, this research-based art practice includes observational skills, data collection and analysis, visual mapping of ideas, interviewing skills, listening skill, question posing, communicating skills, technical skills of videotaping, drawing, and photography. Interviewing, as an artistic tool allows youth to use their art to ask probing questions that make us think anew, thereby challenging the status quo. Echoing Greene's words, the youth participants used interviewing as a means through which they learned to ask questions about the world around them and then to share what they learned with a wider audience. As such, interviewing serves as an important process of art making, another addition to the post-modern principles of art and design. At CUP, our research highlighted how interviewing can be seen not only as an effective teaching tool, but also as the foundation upon which young artists build their understanding and artistic visions of the world as they see it and the world as they would like it to be.

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## Endnote

<sup>i</sup> In this paper, we draw upon data from our interviews and observations of educators and participants involved in two Urban Investigations at the Center for Urban Pedagogy. Excerpted quotations were recorded and transcribed by our research team. To maintain confidentiality, we will refer to the interviewee's role within CUP as the primary identifier for each data point.

