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## NEIGHBORHOOD ART HIVES

### Engaging Communities in Teaching and Learning

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Students continue to have a strong presence in the studio despite the community studio course being finished. They clearly enjoy spending time in the studio with friends and family. On Friday there was a mix of students and regulars from the neighborhood. One student art therapist donated a large box of broken ceramic pieces to create mosaics and shared these with other participants in the studio. I was eager to try these methods and worked alongside one of our seniors with disabilities, who made her very first mosaic with pride and enthusiasm . . . A new participant enjoyed privacy in the garden creating an incredible clay vessel. It was the final day for our student volunteer, who worked on completing various projects that were initiated during the summer. S. and I gave her our mosaics as a thank you

gift for all of her hard work at improving the studio space. Only one of the neighborhood boys stopped by and re-invented a pair of sunglasses he found in the space. A mother worked alongside her young child painting rocks . . . another mother and son continued working on a wall mural downstairs to improve our kitchen space. A small group of young adults who have stopped by a few times to make art met at the hive once more.

(Sarah <sup>1</sup>, La Ruche facilitator)

La Ruche d'Art, a community art studio and science shop located in a working class neighborhood in Montreal, is open three days a week. The space operates as both a *third place* for the community and a *third space* storefront classroom, utilizing arts-based practices in the university course Community Art Studio: Methods and Materials (CATS 631/ARTE 398). This chapter documents how this unique space serves as a compelling site for community engaged service-learning (CESL). La Ruche attempts to respond to criticisms that service-learning can reinforce the power and status of academics and professionals, disempowering local residents. La Ruche works at equalizing participation between community members and the academy in order to co-create and share knowledge. Voices of students collected during a research project are woven into this description to underscore these dynamics.

### **The Community Art Studio/ Storefront Classroom: An Interstitial Space**

La Ruche d'Art, affectionately known as the art hive, functions as a transitional hybridized space. It is simultaneously a community art studio, gallery, garden, university classroom and a

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all names of participants are their actual given names.

place for richly layered community conversations. First and foremost this free and open space operates as an arts-based public homeplace (Timm-Bottos, 2005) for people living in the neighborhood. Public homeplaces are protected spaces, which informally invite individuals to engage with each other in hopes of nurturing each other's leadership potential, especially youth and those considered the most vulnerable and the most marginalized in their communities (Belenky, Bond, & Weinstock, 1997). They are spaces where active witnessing of and engagement with multiple perspectives contribute to building community where expression, understanding, and vision unfold (Watkins & Shulman, 2008). La Ruche serves as a weekly gathering spot for isolated seniors, young families, and youths in order to make art and discuss what matters to them. These discussions culminate periodically in non-juried community art exhibits.

As a storefront classroom, it is also a welcoming place for university students to bring life learning to their coursework as well as joining with others to co-create community projects. This type of storefront learning calls for experiential methods and challenges teachers to think outside the academic status quo. While didactic teaching plays a small role in this alternative setting, many opportunities are available to students to share authority, power, and responsibility of course content demonstrating how knowledge is socially constructed, i.e. 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). Teaching strategies informed by women's ways of knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986) are employed. Respecting students and their own subjective knowledge acquired through life experience provide the grounding for respecting their ability to learn in ways that educators may not have envisioned, and is, in and of itself, a robust tool for cultivating student empowerment (Irwin,

1997).

A key component supporting students in broadening these socially constructed participative processes into their everyday practices as professionals is to engage in a series of community engaged service-learning experiences. It begins by situating their initial experiences directly in a neighborhood community setting. This setting creates a potent context for translating understanding into action, positioning individuals as active creators and potential transformers of their material and cultural world (Irwin, 1997). Students become comfortable with using art materials and sharing what they know since the classroom is also working art studio. Given that they travel off campus to the studio (taking the metro, walking, biking, or driving), students become familiar with the physical community before they commence their CESL experience. Kate noted that having the storefront classroom embedded in St. Henri was central to her learning.

I have taken so many classes in stagnant classrooms . . . and even if [La Ruche] was maintained in the same format and put [in a university building], 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.

She observed that walking through the neighborhood provided a transitional space for her to be more receptive, open, calm, and comfortable in her work at the studio. It helped her to create a community-focused frame of mind.

The art hive provides a welcoming, inclusive space in order to promote a cooperative learning environment where cognitive, affective, and skill integration can take place. “Cooperative

learning experiences . . . provide occasions for compassion, understanding, negotiation, learning to listen and hear the views of others, and giving voice to one's own views" (Irwin, 1997, p. 250). This interstitial space serves many purposes and promotes experimental methods and approaches.

### **Underlying Conceptual Foundations**

I'm at home, but I'm in public. I'm less afraid than I was before. What is discarded is made new. What is broken can be fixed. I don't have to do it alone.

(Farida [pseudonym])

Third space theory, coined by Bhabha (1994), refers to a created space within a space where individuals have the opportunity to take ownership of their learning by engaging in crucial discussions and participate in "cultural" practices. It is a space where transgressive acts can be played out, where people can let their real selves flourish, 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). This transitional space allows students to reshape their professional identity of working in community as artists, therapists, or teachers based on the cultural practices inherent in the community art studio. Learning within a third space, students understand and internalize their identities through an arts-based process of self-awareness, interaction, and reflection. This process may entail redefining their identity in accordance with their present and future vocational visions.

Third places (Oldenburg, 1989) are spaces- neither home nor work- where people can engage in informal associations through conversation, learn about each other in a safe environment, and

create relationships with diverse others. In the case of La Ruche, studio relationships are created through art-making and gardening, which act as a stimulus for citizen inquiry (i.e. gathering, reflecting, dialoguing and disseminating community input through arts-based methods). Like most third places, community studios develop a personality that mirrors the community. This then allows university students to meet in a middle ground, between the public and private sphere, experiencing an authentic and unique CESL experience.

### **The Example: CATS 631/ARTE 398 Community Art Studio: Methods and Materials**

This experiential course, cross-listed between the Department of Creative Arts Therapies and the Department of Art Education, is for artists, teachers, therapists and others interested in learning nonclinical aspects of creative arts therapies as developed within free and welcoming public settings. The course is taught in an active community studio in order to demonstrate literally how to set up small and sustainable spaces for community-building and to demonstrate the principles of studio practice. Students learn, through CESL and art-making, the theory, methods, and materials used to create public art homeplaces, which serve as a practical way to take art as a form of mutual healing into neighborhoods. Students develop an understanding of community art studio methodology through experiential methods, especially engaged CESL, culminating in public presentation. Each student is expected to contribute his or her own knowledge and experience and integrate experiences with the course theory and related literature.

#### **A Three-Phase Process Approach to CESL**

Students in the course CATS 631/ARTE 398 undergo a three-phase transitional process into their

CESL experience. The first phase is being in class in the third space, the storefront classroom. 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 community and the art materials. But this familiarity goes beyond the physical. The instructor and the teaching assistant embody the practice of *being* within a public homeplace. Students are greeted just as community members are greeted when they enter the art hive. Faculty and students make and share healthy snacks to promote bonding and cohesion. This approach allows students to experience the socio-emotional benefits of being in a public homeplace. Art-making and dialogue are instructional essentials; students integrate the conceptual elements of the class with their own somatic experience of those concepts. Students are encouraged to voice their questions, reflections, insights, and experiences as they relate to or diverge from the concepts covered in class, thereby deconstructing hierarchy, status, and authority in the typical university classroom.

The second phase in the students' transition to their CESL experience is to spend a portion of their time at the hive when the studio is open to the public. Former students, who have experience working with the public homeplace methodology, staff the studio during these hours. These role models play an orienting and supportive role to the community members working in the studio, the students engaged in CESL, as well as attending to their own art-making projects.

Hailey noticed

. . . some boys who seemed to . . . need direction, as they weren't doing a lot of art-making. I wanted to go and get them some materials, but I watched how S. casually suggested art-making ideas and then let it go, and I modeled myself after him.

In this way, CESL students: 1) become aware of new ways of being with others in the community space; 2) learn how to step back rather than control activities within the studio; and 3) observe and experience how to create safe spaces for emergent processes coming from community members. It is also 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 or science shop. These hours of CESL in the art hive give the students an additional opportunity to observe, embody, and integrate the principles of the community art studio and public homeplace. Students witness and live relationships that are empowering, approaches that support the emergence of knowledge from community members, and the healing and community-building powers of art. When reflecting on his reactions to a community member during his first CESL experience at La Ruche, Lindsey confronted some uncomfortable truths about himself when reflecting on his reactions to a community member in the studio.

It brought up many questions for me about the navigations within a shared space like this and inclusivity . . . I recognize this to be a surfacing of my own prejudice. I thought that my experience is probably a shared one, and identified a similar reaction with others . . . However, I was at the same time heartened by the interactions between this woman and other participants . . .

The third phase is to venture out to other community art studios. This phase extends the students' frames of reference regarding the distinctive and varied "personalities" of communities and their art hives. These occasions help to build student responsiveness to the uniqueness of communities, avoid stereotyping, and craft additional opportunities for students to put theory into



practice, and at the same time expand, revise, and possibly abandon set notions, prepared plans, and prescribed roles. It also prepares students to consider creating their own art hives, since they are also asked to develop their own real or imagined community projects. One student at St-Sulpice assembled a donated floor loom and engaged an early adolescent boy in its construction.

I proceed to take pictures of the loom to document the process of putting it together . . . I have been forgetting to take pictures until now, and this is the third week . . . I dismantle a part of the loom which is easy to remove but that is big enough that it will make a difference between the pictures. I then ask J. if he can help me put the piece back in place. He readily accepts and puts his attention to the task.

During phases two and three, students are required to write field notes at the end of each CESL session. These field notes focus on three kinds of responses (Zlotkowski, n.d.): descriptive accuracy (written in normal font), a critical response to create personal awareness (written in bold font), and an intellectual analysis focusing on course concepts, readings, and themes (written in italics font), in order to transform experience into substantive learning. These field notes permit students to preserve tracings of their cognitive, somatic, and socio-emotional learnings, and integrate them; they also may serve to provoke and revise thinking about alternate ways of working within communities. Students are assessed throughout the three phases of the process and evaluated for their level of engagement in the readings and class activities as well as their ability to weave together the course content with their own experiences in the field.

### **Art Hive Principles Taught Through Art-Making and Performance Methods**

A variety of methods are used in this course to support students' transition into their CESL

experiences. This section will focus on three powerful processes: *each one, teach one*; *intention and witness*; and *métissage*.

*Each one, teach one* is a method that emphasizes the democratization of knowledge. It serves to level the playing field between teacher and student and facilitates students developing and building on their own authority of experience (McNiff, 1993). The term “each one, teach one” comes from the pre-Civil War era when African Americans were not permitted a formal education. In order to share skills people met informally, often in secret, to learn to read and write. This method was again effectively employed during the civil rights era to resist Jim Crow laws through small citizenship schools where individuals prepared to claim their voting rights (Clark, 1990). The method was passed down and it is the title of an important book written by Ron Casanova (1996), a street artist who effectively advocated for people’s rights, especially individuals, families and youth living without homes. To celebrate this way of sharing knowledge, each student leads a 15-minute skill share conducted in small rotating groups, scheduled frequently throughout the term. Skills have ranged from making a raw kale salad to body awareness to sculpting Tibetan Losar butter lamps to constructing beads from recycled paper. Recounting her own experience,

**Carlee:** I started with craft, which I got involved creatively as a young girl, making greeting cards . . . it was Valentine’s Day during my turn, so I thought it would be nice to do . . . cards. And it was simple. It was just to cut out and fold hearts. But the gesture . . . to give someone a homemade card on Valentine’s Day is really nice . . . I kind of wanted to try to engage in some dialogue with people, “Oh, have you ever received a homemade card? And what did that feel like?” So it wasn’t about the process, but just remembering those gestures and

those moments.

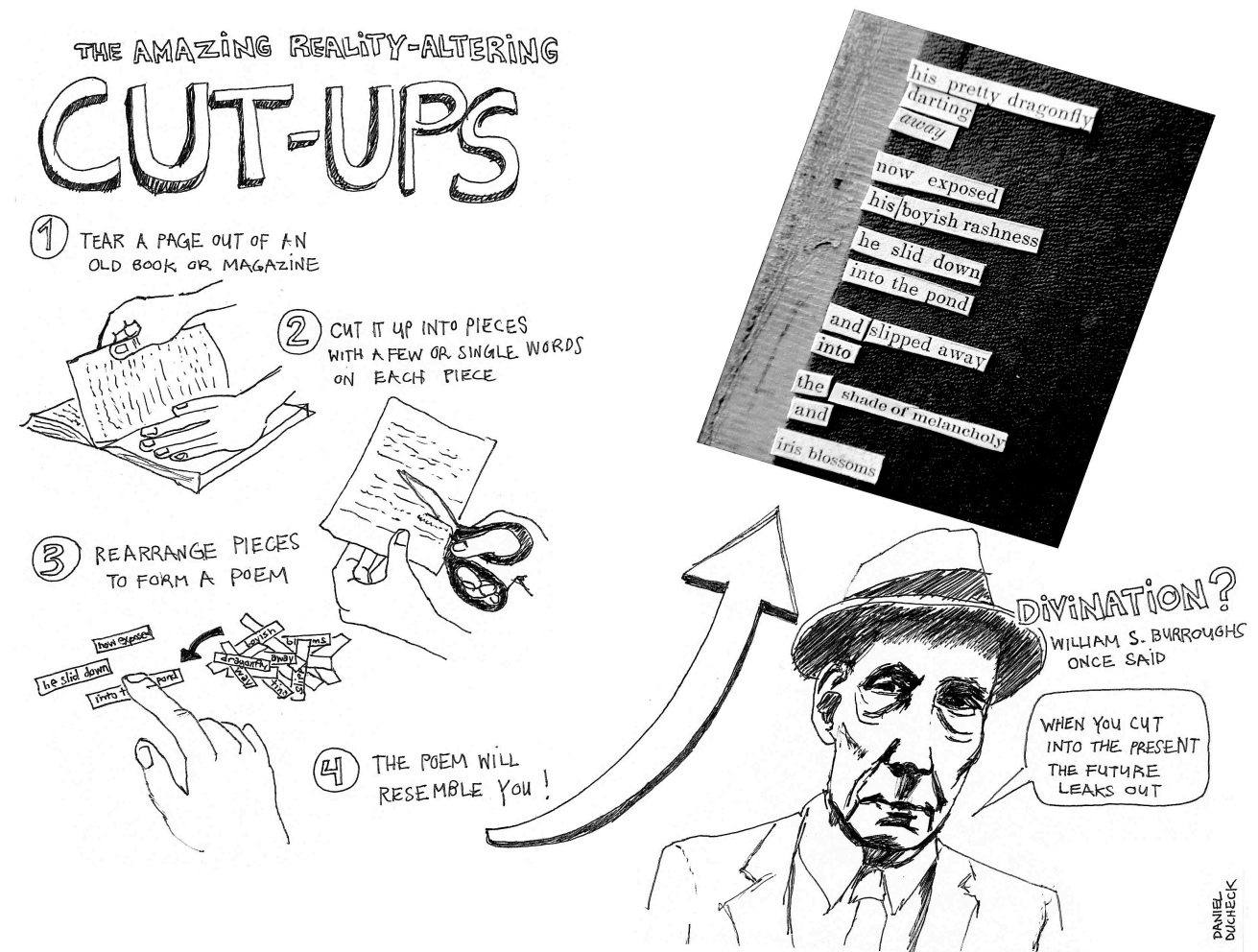
**Rosemary:** Why was that important to you?

**Carlee:** I think because it's just the meaning behind the artwork and what artwork can do to someone's day . . . if you offer them your artwork, I think it's a really humbling experience to get someone's work as a gift . . . and I just wanted to promote that . . .

This activity emphasizes that everyone has a skill to share and the roles of teacher and student are interchangeable in community. Each student contributes a page to a collective zine (a self-published, locally circulated original and repurposed work of texts and images), creatively describing the activity, which is then compiled and distributed. See Figure 1.

Another method frequently employed in the storefront classroom is preparing students to receive learning from their own spontaneous art-making. *Intention and witness* is a research inquiry process developed by Pat Allen (2005). Students begin by setting an intention about something they are investigating in their everyday life. The intention is then deliberately set aside and students begin a self-directed open art-making process. After 45 minutes of art-making, a writing process ensues and the student art-makers answer a specific set of questions. Finally, the class regroups into what is called the "no comment zone," a circle where individuals simply read without commentary whatever portion of their writing they would like to share, or pass if they prefer. This method helps students see how knowledge can come from within through a powerful visual language. The no-comment rule serves to protect the tender stages of beginning creation and to assist students in being able to listen to their own and others' inner wisdom. Magali uses this technique to reveal her process of transformation throughout the

Figure 1: An example of a zine page by Daniel Ducheck.



semester.

Vine branches come out of a found tin can, painted in shades of brown, and filled with rocks and pebbles. On the branches, colorful tissue paper flowers are tightly attached with pink and red woolen threads. The flowers are yellow, red, orange, green, and blue; some are big, some are small; they seem to be in bloom. My original intention had to do with “knowing how to build a structure for personal and communal growth.” The process of building this plant-like structure informs my intention in a literal way, and also uncovers the metaphoric. I remember noticing a plastic flower plant in an earthenware pot on the top of a shelf in the studio as I came in and looked around at the beginning of class. The structure I created feels evocative of that image. As this piece is the first one I created in the class, I decide to place it the furthest away from the viewer in the installation art project.

The last method to be described is *métissage*, derived from the French-Canadian word *Métis* meaning mixed blood. It is a creative arts strategy of braiding stories together to create dialogues between and across various perspectives and discourses (Chambers et al., 2008). This method (Dawson et al, 2012) has been modified to increase student participation in discussions about course readings in order to connect challenging concepts with student’s personal experiences. Students are asked to come prepared to discuss a selection of required readings. In groups of three, students discuss these for 30 minutes. Within the last five minutes, they decide on a 2-minute story they each could tell using a provocative aspect of the readings (something to which they related, reacted, or critiqued) or a personal story that was triggered by the readings. Each

group then “performs” for the entire class. The performance method is specific: One student begins by telling her story, while the other two stand with their backs to the audience. These students then each spontaneously interrupt and begin their own stories. No interruption pattern is followed but only the current speaker faces the audience; and once interrupted, the student turns and again faces away from the spectators. This is repeated until all three stories are told. This process of interruption (rupture) may initially frustrate performers, but generally captivates the audience. Unexpected juxtapositions emerge; unanticipated connections are made. When all groups have completed their métissages, a large group discussion concludes the process. This activity, although initially evoking fear and vulnerability within the students, is an engaging and effective way to grapple with highly charged and difficult concepts. Additionally, students feel safe enough to share their own stories of trauma within this collective narrative form. It embodies the very real struggle individuals face to reach across differences.

### **Conclusion: Neighborhood Art Hives for CESL**

The aim of CESL has been to move university curriculum from a position of learning *about* communities to learning *in* solidarity with communities. Community-university art hives, serving as storefront classrooms embedded within neighborhoods, is one viable approach. Research into this storefront classroom highlights the power of service-learning experiences to shape/reshape professional identity. Students were able to choose, stretch, or revise their identity in a safe environment through collaboration with other students and community members.

In the past year (2013), open to the community three days a week, La Ruche d’Art welcomed over 3,400 visits from community members and university students and hosted five collaborative non-juried art exhibitions. It is a busy art hive of enthusiastic learning and exchange that leads to

meaningful next-step action projects in the community. By providing an interstitial shared space for CESL, a restorative environment is created to safely examine old ways of working through new lenses. In this process, forgotten viable methods from history are revived to experience new ways of working together that respond effectively and creatively to our current challenging times.

### **Annotated List of Organizations**

*The Art Hive Movement* <http://www.arthives.org/>

An interactive community space that welcomes everyone as an artist, the art hive is open to all, especially those who living at the lowest incomes or marginalized individuals. Its fundamental premise is that art-making is a human behavior that empathetically connects us, one to another.

*La Ruche d'Art* <https://www.facebook.com/pages/La-Ruche-dArt-St-Henri/174341355959676?fref=ts>

La Ruche is home to the Canadian art hive movement. It is a free community art studio and science shop open to everyone. Its mission is to make art more accessible, strengthen links between community members and celebrate diversity, through dialogue, art-making and gardening.

*Studio d'art St-Sulpice* <http://studiodartsaintsulpice.org>

This community art studio is a partnership project between Concordia University and l'Office municipal d'habitation de Montréal (OMHM); St-Sulpice social housing serves immigrant families. The community-university art hive's mission is to build community through intergenerational art-making.

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## Biography

**Janis Timm-Bottos** is a community art maker, art therapist, and assistant professor, at Concordia University in Montreal. She is collaborator and founder of six community art studios including, ArtStreet and OFFCenter Arts in Albuquerque, New Mexico; and La Ruche d'Art St Henri and Studio d'Art St Sulpice in Montreal, Canada. Her current research practice includes networking with other universities and communities across Canada to spread the ideas of the art hive and helping to initiate these small and sustainable sites of creative renewal in every neighborhood. She earned her PhD in American Studies from the University of New Mexico.

**Rosemary C. Reilly** worked in cooperative daycares and nursery schools for many years before attending Concordia University in 1987 to obtain a certificate in family life education. This proved to be a turning point in her career, from working with young children to working with families, schools, and organizations. She went on to earn a PhD in educational psychology from McGill, and became tenured at Concordia in 2009. Her particular research interest is exploring

learning as a lever for change with individuals, organizations, and communities. Rosemary employs an experiential teaching approach, which emphasizes the whole person and has been engaged with CESL since 1991.