2021-2022 CAPE Artist/Researcher Program Research Summary

Understanding Agency Across Space and Time in Arts Integrated Learning

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In the 2021-2022 school year, after a year and a half of school closures, teachers and students had to process how to be together in physical classrooms again. In CAPE partnerships, classrooms are regularly reimagined through the integration of contemporary art practices — the return was another opportunity for teachers and teaching artists to collaboratively explore how to reconstruct classroom space based on what was learned from the pandemic. Remote learning was characterized at times by black boxes, silence, limited materials, absence, and isolation. At the same time, during remote learning, we found CAPE's partners to attune projects toward student engagement, expand what participation could look like, and unbound the use of material resources and learning time from norms. These practices revealed ways of using structures and materials to increase student engagement in ways that expanded agency for students, teachers, and teaching artists.

This year's Artist/Researcher Partners Program research explored how two teaching artists, Gina and Jordan, made sense of pre-pandemic, remote learning, and current in-person classroom spaces. Through professional development and research activities, we discussed and made art around what they did not want to reproduce, what they wanted to recreate, and what they wanted to reimagine. To explore the dimensions of classroom space, we discussed the varied structural and material conditions across time. We also discussed how they perceived their own agency and their students' agency to shape these conditions. It was important to explore agency across space and time because the ability to understand how structures and materials can limit or expand agency creates the opportunity for teaching artists to reconsider their practices toward transformation. The following themes from the study describe how teaching artists understood agency by inquiry into the conditions of classrooms across space and time.

Flexible Participation Structures

Partners wanted to support students learning together again by using collaboration in projects. Teaching artists described flexible approaches to structuring groups. With upper elementary students, Gina created the opportunity for students to determine when to work individually or in groups. This decision emerged from a realization during school closures that participation can and should look different based on student needs. With first graders who did not have opportunities for socializing in person for Kindergarten, Jordan structured different stages where collaborative groups changed to cultivate unexpected social connections between students who may not typically interact or had previously not perceived their commonalities.

Physical Space as Part of Design

Teaching artists used the physical space to expand learning possibilities within and beyond classroom walls. The heightened awareness of physical space emerged from the isolation of remote learning and a reconsideration of the

Gina's Reflections

Pre-pandemic Classroom Space

Desks or tables put together in "pods." Great for small group collaboration. Could create situations of exclusion, or individuals not getting enough solo time.

Orderly; Students mostly staying in seats; Materials delivered to them.

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2021-2022 Classroom Space

Used outdoors

as a project

space

Students were more mobile in the classroom, getting up to gather materials, etc. role of physical space in learning. Gina's class used the school's outdoor space to disrupt social tension, soften the sounds of collaboration that may have been too loud indoors, and enable a more comfortable spread within the workspace. Jordan promoted social and spatial awareness by having students work closely in the classroom's shared space and having to manage how their bodies, use of materials, and sculptures impacted others.

Continued Rethinking of Materials

During remote learning, partners guided their classes to use everyday objects and to work with limited materials. For example, Gina began experimenting with outdoor installations and the use of ephemeral materials like sticks, snake skins, and flower petals. She continued that exploration this year in a climate change project using the outdoor space and weather as materials. Gina's class observed human impact in real-time as their landform sculptures quickly eroded in the school garden (see Figure 1). Jordan wanted to support his students to continue rethinking material resources by providing limited access to useless and otherwise "intentionally inadequate" materials like stickers instead of tape (Figures 2 and 3). In collaboration with another artist, Jordan and his class also explored the qualities of sound in materials and improvised in making music with their sculptures.



Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 1: Eroded sculptures in the school garden after a storm.



Figure SEQ Figure *
ARABIC 2: Limited
materials for one activity



Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 3: Materials determined by the roll of dice

Sensitivity to Sonic Space

The sound of remote classrooms was described as silent and controlled, and both teaching artists shared missing the "chaotic hum" of learning in person. This sensitivity to sound informed how they perceived and responded to the sonic space of in-person classrooms. Gina used the school's outdoor space to dampen the sounds of collaborative learning and enable students who were done working to play in ways that may have been too loud or disruptive indoors. Jordan shared how the chaotic hum in the sonic space of classrooms signaled being in community, sharing ideas, and learning from one another. The sensitivity to the sonic space of classrooms revealed how sound could be used as a material to agentively support teaching and learning and to provide important information about what the space is limiting or constraining.

Conclusion

These themes illustrate how teaching artists processed conditions across space and time and were able to explore the opening of possibilities, inquire more deeply into the role of underexplored qualities of space like sound, and reaffirm their commitment to co-creating agency with their teaching partners and students to expand what school can be.