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Forming a New Reality Through Art

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Abstract

This capstone explores a deeper understanding of what it means to provide an effective outlet for children and adults in low socioeconomic communities. Working closely with Sons of the Sun, a nonprofit organization aimed at providing an arts studio space for the “studio-less,” the realization that it takes more than being provided a space to express yourself and take part in self-growth, flourished. Through self-reflection, observations, and interviews came the understanding that in order to formulate change in underserved communities, exposure to the arts, parent relationships, and community involvement can help make even the slightest difference for some children’s realities. Through the process of making an interpretive exhibition at a museum in Monterey County, a Sons of the Sun mural was used to shine light on the process and the power that comes with making community murals.
Using Art To Formulate Change

I sit in my current room, it is silent; it is almost uncomfortably silent. Where are the sirens, the sound of a helicopter at two in the morning? Where is the music that is usually playing loudly, the constant arguments from the next-door neighbors house? All the sounds that echoed through my window that almost became a loud but familiar lullaby that would put me to sleep.

Why am I here? Am I smarter than the kids I grew up with? Why did most of my cousins get pregnant at 15 to 17 years old? Did their parents not talk to them the way my parents did? Why am I always referred to as the educated one; the white-washed one; am I really that different?

Why did my friend Cesar lose his life in the 10th grade because he simply ‘looked’ like a gang member? The nicest kid that sat next to me in my 6th period Science class, gone. Why wasn’t his death broadcasted? Why did my dad simply say, “Another one. Kids losing their lives over made-up rivalry.” But the biggest question should have been “what are we doing about this?” Why weren’t things addressed or talked about, especially a shooting that happened in a neighborhood three blocks down from ours in broad daylight. Why did my aunt tell my cousin David to stop riding his bike instead of voicing her concerns to those that are in charge of public safety? Why did she not feel like her voice was worthy enough to be heard?

All the questions listed above are questions I recently asked myself for the first time. The first time I truly reflected on things that I went through and witnessed growing up. I then understood the power of reflection, whether it be done in an art form, in a journal, vocally; any one of these processes can help recognize a problem and may then help create a solution. All of my realities may be shared with others that are in my community. They too might have faced
what I have had to face; they too have normalized the cop cars driving through the streets, they have seen people ‘get out’ from the ‘hood’ and thought highly of them, and they too have lost someone of significance due to gang violence. I have also recognized that nothing was or is being done and that is mainly accredited to not having the know how. It is time for a change, time for concerns to be heard, seen, and addressed; time for a new normal. It is time to teach and give the resources, exposures, and access to organizations, programs, and people that have the same idea in mind. That idea being what is best for their community, that want nothing more but to create a safe environment and success for their people.

**Literature Review**

It is no surprise that low socioeconomic communities deal with issues like the lack of school funding, low-academic achievement, gang violence, high crime rates, teen pregnancies, drop outs etc. It is also not a surprise that temporary fixes like the increase of policing in said communities to decrease gang violence or a program offered to help alleviate the educational gap within the educational system, will only be a surface approach to the issues. Both the youth and adults in low-income communities are not being given the chance to take a step into the process of developing better outcomes for themselves currently and for the future inhabitants of these neighborhoods. For those that do want to make an effort, they do not know the steps that could be taken to raise awareness of their realities. In places like Agricultura, CA, located in Monterey County, with issues that were listed above being the current embodiment of their problems, introducing new and innovative ways in voicing concerns could be done. Proposing things like transformative art, defined as “art to create a shift in the way an individual or a community views
and experiences an issue or themselves” (Campbell, 2012), and the process of murals would be a
great step in doing so.

When focusing on the arts as a factor or element for change, it is important to highlight
what it benefits in terms of well-being. When exposing the community to the arts and cultural
resources, the individual interacting prospers. For example, the arts can propel mental health,
allow for social and emotional skills to develop, and increases communication skills
(Createquity, 2018). With the new developments, the theoretical framework of intrinsic
motivation arises. Intrinsic motivation is characterized as engaging “in a behavior because it is
personally rewarding, not for an external reward” (Cherry, 2018). When an individual is seeing
change within themselves and that change is personal and internal, they are more likely to
continue on that route (Arevalo, 2018). Working closely with a nonprofit organization, Sons of
the Son, which promotes individual growth and community involvement through events and
large projects, it was noted that intrinsic motivation plays a key role in its participants and that
promotes positive leadership. With this new sense of self and the interaction with community
members that are seeking similar outcomes, a communal voice for social action on hopes and
issues can flourish.

Through the work of murals, dated back millions of years with things like cave paintings
or religious lessons, there has been a continuum to their benefit in the grand scheme of things.
Early on in the process of murals, it was seen that murals were “a new level of communication
between those communities and the larger society” (Cockroft & Baret Sanchez, p. 2), it was
also apparent that murals could highlight positive social change and multicultural focus through
community participation. In Figure 1, there are five different components that help
communication flow when partaking in community events and collective ideas. That being outreach, consulting, involving, collaborating, and sharing leadership. These 5 focal points are currently a part of many programs and organizations that promote murals and people can see them on school campuses, along neighborhoods, and on commercial buildings. But most projects are navigated, done by a professional individual, or a group of young individuals that are only taking part in the actual creation, i.e. painting. But, there needs to be more than just one person representing a whole community or demographic; there needs to be a sort of union and communication between the youth and their respective elders, they too need to be a part of the change in order to create a supportive environment for progression. In Muy Macho a book that shares a collection of Latino writers and their experiences, Luis J. Rodriguez (1996) wrote:

In our barrios, I see the monstrous chasm between our elders and the past, and our youth and a future. We need the fire of youth. We need the fire of elders. Fire to meet fire. When youth do not see the light from the elders, when they are not warmed by their fires of wisdom along a windswept and cold road, they lose sight of their aims, they lose heart, they get confused and sidetracked. (Rodriguez, 1996, p.199)

The recognition and importance of all members within a community and sharing the shifts and bad experiences one probably deemed as unimportant, due to the lack of action, could be a part of the collective voice represented in a mural.
The reason this specific course of action is being presented, is because there is something missing. There is always a turn to schools when trying to remold the youth in low-income communities. They have this understanding that children are falling through the cracks, that there is something within the school system that is failing them, and that is why they are going through said unfortunate events. They are not wrong. Something is falling short, but things like No Child Left Behind (NCLB) presented in 2001 with the goal of “improving the academic achievement of the disadvantaged” (U.S. Dep. of Ed., 2018, p. 15) and things like Common Core State Standards (CCSS) launched in 2009 to create and ensure “that all students graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career, and life, regardless of where they live” (CCSS Initiative, 2018), are not the solution. Yes, they are programs that were created to help academic achievement, but what if academic achievement goes beyond the classroom and roots from a child’s home and community. What if the students need familiar and relevant materials and lessons that tie in their home, that tie in their problems? Although the study of culturally responsive pedagogy has been done which is, “a
student-centered approach to teaching in which the students’ unique cultural strengths are identified and nurtured to promote student achievement and a sense of well-being about the student’s cultural place in the world” (Lynch, 2012), not much is actually being done to implement these practices. Introducing multicultural literature that goes over the occasional shift in languages, going over what flags look like in different countries, and painting sugar skulls for Dia De Los Muertos has been done over and over and it is time to take it a step further and seeing that, yes, culture and realities can be pretty and colorful, but presenting what a student has to go through in terms of their realities and putting them in a space with people that share similarities, is also greatly important to understand themselves and what things are expected of them through historical data and studies.

**Method**

For this capstone project the researcher investigated a local nonprofit organization, mentioned earlier, to see how the illustrators and the participants in low socioeconomic communities view the importance of transformative art through murals. They were also asked questions on personal experience and if that plays a part in them coming back to participate. When it became apparent that the group of individuals improve the self in this type of environment, it was sadly noted that finding a creative space that provides support and materials at no cost is difficult. That is why shining light on people who are making a difference is key in helping parents, community members, and children so they too feel accepted, feel a part of something, and feel like they can speak out. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature, the researcher used what was learned to formulate an action that responds to the focus issue in a way that inspires, informs, or involves a particular audience; this all being
done in hopes to give individuals the positive recognition they deserve.

**Context**

Agricoltura\(^1\), CA also known as the salad bowl in Monterey County, is made up of 76.6% Latinos (DataUSA, 2018), meaning that it is a minority population. This population is known to have high crime rates, single family homes, and low academic achievement. So why does this matter? Sons of the Sun, the nonprofit organization that will be highlighted and discussed throughout this paper is located in Agricoltura, CA as well and has been recognized for their artistic drive and inviting atmosphere. With this, they were linked with a migrant education program sought to help give migrant students high-quality education and an improved way of life. Sons of the Sun both partake in events and art classes/lessons within the district and in addition, were provided a free studio space located on Lechuga Elementary inviting members from the community to participate at no charge.

The studio space at Lechuga Elementary is located at the back of the school and is not limited to only students who study there; giving the opportunity for other members of the community to also experience this ‘improved way of life’. When one walks in there, it is instantly a space that inspires. There are a display of canvases both finished and unfinished. If one looks straight ahead, large canvases, large rolls of paper, stands, and additional paintings are located against the wall. If one looks to the right, there are paint brushes, paints, crayons, paper, flyers for future events and artwork from students and participants pinned to a corkboard. Looking farther on, there is an additional room with materials to sculpt and put unfinished or paintings. To the left there are small couches and toys and books allowing for people to partake

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\(^1\) Pseudonyms have been used for the names of people, places, and organizations.
in different activities aside from the general artworks.

As for the sounds, you hear laughter, questions being asked, conversations between one or more individuals. You can also hear music, music that the researcher found familiar at times. The music ranged from Spanish to English, from country to rap, from oldies to rancheras. There would be the occasional, ‘what is this?’ but overall everyone just listened and went about painting, sculpting, crafting, and drawing their work.

The people also ranged. Although predominantly Latino, because of the community that it is located in, there were people both young and old and everything in between. There were parents sitting with their children, there were people with muddy boots coming in from working the fields, there were children that are in elementary, middle school, and high school and even college students that have been involved with this organization for years. There was a multitude of personalities and this would all show through their paintings. From expressing feelings, to painting a bunny, to painting landscapes, everyone was developing and growing and conversing. This allowed the researcher to not feel like an outsider and felt the genuine connections to the members in the program.

**Participants and Participant Selection**

For the interviews, the curator of this organization was asked similar but separate questions from the additional three illustrators that were interviewed. These members in specific were interviewed due to their knowledge and involvement with Sons of the Sun. Most of these individuals have been a part of this organization for 6+ years and their experiences and outlook
on the arts were held in high regards.

**Joe Arevalo.** Joe is a Latino male who migrated from Mexico at the age of ten. As the founder of Sons of the Sun, Joe seeks to have an inviting space for those that do not have the access to the materials that allow a person to develop their skill and express themselves. As the lead role in Sons of the Sun, he handles the funding, locations, and events to not only display his artwork but the artwork of the organizations participants.

**Victor Garcia.** Victor is a 22 year old Latino male who also migrated from Mexico at a young age. As a member in Sons of the Sun for 11 years, he is known as Joe’s right hand man. Aside from attending most meetings with Joe, he is also an illustrator and instructor at the elementary and organization.

**Junior Preciado.** Junior is another Latino male who migrated to the states at an early age. He too works closely with Joe and is an illustrator and instructor at both the elementary and Suns of the Sun. He has some college education but noted that his strong suit is his art and having positive and motivating connections with the children.

**Tony Aguilar.** Tony is a 21 year old male who also migrated to the states at a young age and has been a part of Suns of the Sun since he was 11 years of age. His current role at the organization, aside from partaking in the community events, is the graphic designer.

**Researcher**

The researcher felt personally connected to this concern due to her upbringing. She had first hand exposure and experience with a community very similar to that of Agricultura, CA. She later saw a positive shift in her community when the arts, particularly murals, started taking the streets. With this change, came her passion to help promote local organizations that allow for
positive interactions with the community and allow a community to create their voice in community concerns when need be.

When someone grows up in a community with people that have accepted their misfortunes, it is almost impossible to change. The researcher felt that she was ‘lucky’ to have gotten out of where she grew up and did not end up waking up repeating the life that so many of her community members partook in. That being the acceptance of gangs, of homicides, and underachieving schools. But through her time at her university, she realized that one should not ‘escape’ or feel ‘lucky’ to leave a seemingly bad community, but there needs to be steps and a guide to help alleviate people from this systemic oppression.

This epiphany, allowed for the researcher to collaborate with this organization and understand where they are coming from and why they do what they do. She was not a foreigner coming in trying to understand their problems, she knew first hand what it meant to have a disconnect with her community, to not have access to the arts, and to not feel like she was going anywhere in terms of educational prosperity.

**Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions**

There were two different sets of questions, one set was specifically for Joe Arevalo that started this organization and the other set of questions were for the illustrators that help with the events, the organization, and that help teach at the different elementaries. Three of the interviews were conducted via voice recording and the other interview was written out. For all interviews, dependant on the answers, elaborations or questions were added on.

**Questions for Joe Arevalo:**

What is your process when it comes to educating the children on murals?
Do you tie in heritage/culture? How?

Why do you think it’s important to build a sense of community?

How do you tie in the world around them? Do they reflect on diversity/concerns/realities?

What was it like to display such a long study? What did it mean to you when it came to making this mural? Identifying an issue?

Do you think there should be a greater emphasis on mural funding?

Do you feel like you’ve helped the youth in your organization find their voice?

What was it like seeing it develop?

Why did you choose to work with this community in particular?

How did you come across this space?

Is there a specific reason why you chose this space? I.e. specific community

What kind of environment do you hope for this to be? What do you want this space to represent?

**Questions for Sons of the Sun Illustrators:**

Is it difficult to come up with a collective idea and message?

What do you hope for these murals to do? What does it mean to you to partake in murals or art in general?

How do you feel when you come here? Is there a certain thing you feel when you come here? Do you feel like it’s an inviting place?

Do you feel more connected to your community?

What’s been the most influential aspect in partaking in these types of projects?

Do you feel like you’ve developed a voice since you joined this organization?

Why do you keep coming?
Procedure

Participants were selected based on their affiliation with the organization. Prior to interviewing them, the researcher asked if they were willing to talk about their involvement with the organization and their personal experience and growth. The interviewees agreed to the face-to-face interview along with being recorded. They were also informed that their names will not be used in the paper and that conclusions would be drawn based on their answers. The researcher was flexible in conducting the interview and made herself available to the time and space that worked for the interviewees; being the studio space while they worked on their own projects.

Data Analysis

When going over the answers to the interview questions and trying to understand how they correspond with changing a community and their problems, it helped develop what needed to be done and communicated to the general public. This organization caters to a group of individuals that are similar to them and that are seeking a different outlet and when seeing personal skills develop, they do not allow for outside influences to hinder their progress.

Results

For this capstone project, members from Sons of the Sun were interviewed to better understand their personal motivation and their interaction with their community. Along with the interviews, there were observations done by the researcher to see the type of space that was being presented, not only with materials, but also with the social atmosphere. These were important steps to understand the power behind not only the arts but also the level of comfort that allows people to express themselves and possibly voice their concerns.
With the observations listed in the methods section, there were a few things worth nothing, one being that the arts cannot be forced, that people sought help when needed, and there was a component of parent-child relationships that made this organization stand out.

These conclusions lead to a consensus, or an understanding of all of the different aspects and how they intertwine. An organization that fosters not only exposure of the arts, but also ties in parents and different members from the community, allows for effective and motivating relationships that will encourage and cultivate change.

Below, Table 1 shows what makes an organization effective and a social leader in low-income and underserved communities.

Table 1

Criteria for Effective Organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effectiveness</th>
<th>Exposure</th>
<th>Parent-Child Relationships</th>
<th>Community Involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>x</td>
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To display all of these findings, an interpretive exhibition was put together by the researcher to both highlight and shine light on a local nonprofit organization and to show what makes it effective within said community.

EVALUATION OF OPTIONS
As noted in Table 1, there are three criteria within an organization that will allow the youth and community members to partake in the arts as a form of reflection and combat their societal norms. Those criteria were:

1) Exposure of the Arts
2) Community Involvement
3) Parent Involvement

All three criteria will be expanded on and explained to help show the importance and impact each component has on an organization. Exposure of the arts is the first step in accessing the arts as a form of expression, community involvement allows for individuals to draw connections and gather a united response to their problems, and parent involvement allows for a role-model position and a sense of support that will increase the intrinsic motivation that was explained before. The goal of this action project was to show an audience what steps can be taken to formulate change and to create a different reality for themselves if they deemed it as something worth changing. It is also important to note that this exhibit was also sought to promote and support organizations that allow for these connections to develop.

**Exposure of the Arts**

There have been many attempts in integrating the arts in schools and communities and it is directly correlated with the claim that the arts are good for individuals. Some things that the arts enhance are improved health, mental well-being, cognitive functioning, creative ability and academic performance (Guertzkow, 2002, p.10). With these benefits alone, having organizations and programs that promote this well-being in certain communities, can go a long way and can therefore call for positive engagement and recognition.
Community Involvement

In this specific community, normally defined as communities that have at-risk youth, minorities, or are just poor neighborhoods can truly benefit from intertwining the arts with civil engagement. When the arts allow for members of the community to partake in a collaborative activity, it fosters trust between people and can deeply motivate and allow people to envision a different reality. When the use of murals are taken and can encompass public expression, not only are they aesthetically enhancing their neighborhoods, but they are increasing their pride and sense of connection to their community.

Parent Involvement

When it comes to parent-child interaction, it is understandable to have people think that too much interaction can limit the child from growing and coming into his/her own. But it is important to know and understand the nature of certain children’s background and how it relates to their day to day. For example, many children in low income communities face familial challenges like single parent households, parents that work day in and day out leaving little time for parent-child communication and this often leads a child to seek other forms of interaction and seeking bonds and acceptance elsewhere. Not all children seek out problematic relationships and the growth of a child and their independence relies on the steps they choose to take; “the way a child becomes emancipated seems to be this: as he gains in competence and confidence he takes whole portions of his life into his own hands” (Davis, 1966)., but often times there needs to be some form of guidance early on in the child’s life from their parents or authority figure. For example, “If we have eyes to see, the success story can intrigue us too; it is the story of problems overcome by the child, with appropriate assistance from his parents” (Davis, 1966). When
programs and organizations allocate times that work for parents and allow them to participate
they are encouraging a deeper bond between parent and child and are making it easier for the
youth to be well rounded and supported.

**Conclusion**

Being that the central resource for this capstone was this nonprofit organization that
promotes artistic expression, defining different components within the arts such as
transformative art and murals became a focal point. The question then became how will this
action being an exhibition, make a difference and impact this community that is known for gang
affiliation, low-academic achievement, and having low-income families? Although it was
difficult, it was evident that the use of this exhibit was to help promote and allow the community
to see the resources that are available for them. It is understandable that there are setbacks in
finding organizations similar to this one in different communities and it is known that that often
times nonprofit organizations are at risk factor of losing their funding. But it does not diminish
the importance and the qualities that fall within these organizations and how they allow
individuals and communities to foresee something different and positive through exposure,
community involvement, and parent participation.

**Action Documentation and Critical Reflection**

In choosing a topic, I wanted to focus on something other than the quality of my
education or different things that could be implemented in a classroom to propel student success.
I can recall a classroom discussion, where I realized that I was one of very few who attended
college and did not become pregnant at a young age. I then remember talking to my professor at
the time about why that was, he then asked me to reflect and look at my community. To see if
there was anybody promoting or trying to change the characteristics that come with a low socio-economic community. I then realized that there was not anything being done, and if there was, there were not any steps in promoting programs or organizations. That lead me to present the focus issue at hand, that there are not enough steps being taken to promote change in low-socioeconomic communities. Initially, this project was thought of as something to beautify the streets through murals and allow for community members to partake in the making. This was all to promote community involvement and have members feel proud of their city and general environment. I later realized that this would only be a surface approach to the problems, it was not just about painting giant images on a wall, but it was about tying in those images and peoples reality. I knew that addressing issues like gang violence or simply showing cultural pride in a collective way, would not only bring the community together but actually feel like they are being represented and highlighting focal issues.

Once the realization came about and doors started opening, I was introduced to a local muralist in Monterey County who was able to conceptualize this idea about unity and expressing yourself visually and he was able to facilitate my process in displaying it. Through his nonprofit organization, I was able to interview him and the illustrators that help teach in this organization and also do some informal interviews with other members that participate in this organization and I realized the power that comes from these atmospheres. That is when my action option came in full circle.

The connection I had with this muralist was brought about by the director of the arts and culture department at a local museum and together with her and this muralist, I was given the opportunity to put together an interpretive exhibit of a mural that the organization helped develop
and paint. I knew then that it was my chance to understand the process of a mural and how different components like having a collective voice, being able to reflect and talk about community concerns and issues, and allowing outsiders to see what partaking in this type of action can do.

With the exhibit being my focus and my action, I knew that both my interviews and observations of this nonprofit organization would ultimately help me find out that there is more than just a paintbrush and some paint, but there is the aspect of self, community, and parental support that comes with change. To reflect this new comprehension, I created definitions that were relative to murals, displayed in photo 1 and then put them on a self-made display board, photo 4, to give a general idea to the public about the components that can possibly lead to change.

Photo 1: I made large sheets that went about defining relevant material about the impact the arts and murals have and how they can possibly lead to a form of change in low socioeconomic communities. To follow along, I gave a description of the study that was being reflected in the images around the exhibit room, the nonprofit organization, defining transformative art, talking about murals and what they do, talking about the self and community and how this can lead to positive social change.
For this capstone project, I worked on an exhibition space at a local museum. I was given photos of a previous mural that had been done by both a nonprofit organization and a separate institution to voice a community concern and the hopes they have for some sort of change. I then conducted interviews and did observations of the studio space to understand their impact and their correlation with the community.

Photo 2: This photo is the studio space that I would go to and interact, interview, make observations, and even partake in the arts. This photo just displays the artistic environment with materials and murals and paintings from the past. Overall, I felt inspired every time I came into this space and I felt represented being a Latina and the images displaying my culture.
When I initially started this project, I felt like I had an idea of answers I was going to get from the interviewees. But something unexpected emerged, this organization did not have a direct goal when it came to how they are going to impact the community. Their aim was to simply be the artistic space that many people do not always have the access to. Through this, I knew I needed to find out more information about intrinsic motivation and how these children and members in the organization find it in themselves to want to be in this space and want to partake in the events.

To understand this new perspective, I made changes and modifications within the questions I was asking, I knew that the illustrators motivation did not come from the community but from themselves once I started conducting the interviews. I did not mind having to do these
alterations, because I knew that this was a part of the process and knew that maybe there was something deeper within this artistic space that I was not seeing before or aware of.

The response to most of my research questions was that there is no predictable response and there is no particular way they run this organization to make it successful. These kids and members of the community participate without being forced or fully aware of the true value. I remember the owner of this organization apologizing for not having certain answers and how he allows for people to come in and work on what they want to work on and ask for help if needed. I knew then that this organization was truly authentic and only sought was best for a person by allowing them to see themselves grow and develop.

What I know now as that there is not always a set plan when helping the community and sometimes it is just a matter of providing access. With that information, I know that sometimes providing a space, although seemingly small, can go a long way for an individual and that develops into something much larger. This organization did not seek the attention it gets, it just acted and opened up different opportunities for people and through that have been successful for 24 years.

What I learned about myself is that I had to make myself available and open to the people around me. I also knew that I had to be flexible, that things were not going to always follow my initial plans for this project. I also knew that I had to put myself in spaces outside of the studio and see them, being the members and illustrators, involved with the community. I also knew what it meant to create and develop relationships with the illustrators, participants, and parents. They were not going to just talk to me about their lives and tell me why they go there. I knew
then that it takes a lot of work to make a difference and to be accepted as an agent for change or a representative of a certain community.

**Synthesis and Integration**

As a senior here at CSUMB, I put much thought into what I have learned and what I am taking away. There are words in the Liberal Studies world like Differentiated Instruction, PBL, Social Justice, Common Core, etc. and I can look at all of these and explain and hold a decent conversation in what all of this means in the educational context, and I know I developed as an educator being my major learning outcome 1.

I then think of the steps I can take for a community much like my own and know that I want to provide positive outlets and access for the youth that do not have it, to allow students to see themselves in their coursework, to fight for quality education; with that I know I have tallied diversity, multicultural, and a social justice collaborator. I can go on about my major learning outcomes, simply because I’ve loved every component of it and have also developed as an individual because of it.

But the biggest takeaway was my Action Research Project, because I put into practice what was intended for me to learn and absorb throughout my time on this campus. I never thought that I would work alongside an amazing nonprofit organization that goes above and beyond for their members nor did I think I would have my own exhibit to display their process. I had to reflect and think what that kind of environment and exposure could have done for my community. I believe deeply in breaking negative patterns that do not allow our youth and community to thrive, I believe that self worth and a sense of belonging will go a long way for people emotionally and academically. With that I end on the need to stress on public connection
rather than private cognition and that as an educator we need to rid the roadblocks and provide an open path for children’s success.

The next steps I see as necessary in order to become the professional that I envision being, is to fully immerse myself in a community in need. I learned that I do not have to go in there and rescue anyone, they are very aware of the community they live in and sometimes do not see themselves as needing to be rescued. That is when I feel like my stepping in would make a difference. They need a person that will stand by them and hear their realities, someone to facilitate the process of learning and someone that will communicate different organizations that seek the same hope for them; the hope for better choices and better life outcomes. I will not be there to fix students, I am there to motivate them and to see themselves as something more than a pre embedded label of failure. Children in these areas sometimes need a figure that cares, a figure that will go the extra mile in watching them succeed, and although I am highlighting an organization that has and continues to succeed in doing so, I know that I as a future educator will use the layout of this organization and this aspect of comfort and give the access to know and understand oneself in my future classroom.
References


