



Field-Based Art Programming As a Facilitator for Transformative Learning Experiences in Tertiary Education: Participants Reflections on Land Arts of the American West

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Abstract. Field-based art programming proposes a different pedagogical model to respond to contemporary challenges that artists face, ranging from ecological crises to the education and development of artists. This article analyzed interviews with field-based art programming participants across two decades, focusing on artists' experiences through their own voices. Out of the interviews with participants from Land Arts of the American West, in which participants travel, camp, and create at different sites throughout the Southwest, the participants narrate important elements of field-based art programming. Using Mezirow's theory of Transformative Learning, this article uses participants' descriptions to analyze the pedagogical aspects of field-based art learning that denotes a transformative experience, distinct from what is available to them in conventional tertiary art classes. Central reoccurring themes identified include immersive nature, art-making, community, and place. Participants' responses reveal Disorienting Dilemmas and having transformative experiences.

Keywords: Field-Based Art Education; transformative learning experience; student reflection.

[es] La programación artística basada en el trabajo de campo como facilitador de experiencias de aprendizaje transformadoras en Educación Terciaria: Reflexiones de los participantes del programa Land Arts of the American West

Resumen. La programación artística basada en el trabajo de campo propone un modelo pedagógico diferente para responder a los desafíos contemporáneos que enfrentan los artistas, que van desde las crisis ecológicas hasta la educación y el desarrollo de los artistas. Este artículo analiza entrevistas con participantes de un programa de arte basado en el trabajo de campo, centrándose en las experiencias de los alumnos. En las entrevistas con participantes de Land Arts of the American West, en las que los participantes viajan, acampan y crean arte en diferentes localizaciones del suroeste de los Estados Unidos, los participantes narran elementos significativos de la programación de arte basada en el trabajo de campo. Utilizando la teoría del aprendizaje transformativo de Mezirow, este artículo utiliza las narraciones de los participantes para analizar los aspectos pedagógicos del aprendizaje artístico basado en el trabajo de campo que denota una experiencia transformadora. Entre los temas recurrentes que se pueden identificar en las entrevistas, se incluyen la naturaleza inmersiva o los nuevos procedimientos artísticos comprometidos con la comunidad y el medio ambiente. Además, las respuestas de los participantes revelan experiencias relacionadas con el dilema desorientador y las experiencias transformadoras.

Palabras clave: Educación Artística basada en el trabajo de campo; experiencia de aprendizaje transformadora; reflexión del alumno.

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1. Introduction

Art Education has transformed in recent years, proposing different instructional models to respond to contemporary challenges, such as the ecological crisis and curricular standardization as a result of globalization. One recent approach is field-based art programming, in which participants² are removed from the conventional physical and temporal space of academic settings and become part of an itinerant community compromised of their classmates and professors to engage in various sites by researching, learning, and creating. Gilbert and Cox define field-based Art Education programming as an innovative model for the Anthropocene in Higher Education by describing and analyzing five field-based art programs around the world (Gilbert & Cox, 2019)³. The five programs they study are: Land Arts of the American West at the University of New Mexico, Landmarks of Art at MiraCosta College, Art and Environment at Colorado State University, Field Studies at Australia National University, and Visual March to Prespes at Western Macedonia University. In these programs, university participants are taken out of their conventional academic context and are relocated to different cultural and environmental sites in order to learn and respond directly to the place using a variety of creative tools. In some cases, participants live in a community made of their fellow participants and professors that travel and camp together. At times they visit very isolated sites, while others they join local communities to learn and work on specific creative projects.

Because the learning structure that occurs in field-based art programming is so distinct from the traditional art classroom model, this experiential learning provides a new opportunity for participants to self-reflect on their aesthetic assumptions. This opportunity can be analyzed using the theory of Transformative Learning. Since the 1970's, Transformative Learning has been extensively studied in the area of Adult Education (Taylor, 2007), but according to Mezirow, who developed this concept, that process is foreign in Higher Education, particularly when its primary concern is giving information (Bloom, 2015). However, by taking participants out of the university context to live, study, and make art in different environmental and cultural sites, participants of field-based art programs are detached from their traditional learning context. In this immersive environment of field-based Art Education,

² Students are referred to as "participants" as it collapses the power dynamics of professor/student by making everyone a "participant", which is a feature of the pedagogy of field based programming.

³ Young et al. (2015) focuses one of those five, the Field Study Program in Australia, presenting its implementation and results.

participants are presented with new aesthetic explorations and meaning-building opportunities in their interactions with peers, professors, and places in ways that promote self-reflection to allow for Transformative Learning in Higher Education.

Using Mezirow's theory as a reference, this study uses the reflections of 38 field-based art program participants from the Land Arts of the American West (LAAW) program at the University of New Mexico in the Southwestern United States to examine the different ways in which participants interpret and give meaning to their experiences, express transformation in their aesthetic points of view, and understand how field-based art programming creates the conditions for Transformative Learning. In doing so, this study contributes to the existing research on field-based arts programming introduced by Gilbert & Cox (2019) and Young et al. (2015) and advances Mezirow's theory of Transformative Learning.

2. Methodology

In order to study the implications of field-based art programming as a facilitator for Transformative Learning Experiences in Higher Education, this study uses a phenomenological methodology because of its focus on understanding the essence of the participants' experiences in a particular lived phenomenon and the diverse meaning that participants attribute to those (Creswell, 1998). Phenomenologists support the idea that the researcher should not pretend to be detached from their own beliefs and preconceptions (Groenewald, 2004). Bracketing is a technique that has been developed in phenomenological studies as "a method used in qualitative research to mitigate the potentially deleterious effects of preconceptions that may taint the research process" (Tufford & Newman, 2010, p. 80). In this study, the principal researcher is a former Land Arts of the American West participant. A bracketing technique was implemented, consisting of reviewing his own field journal and using an external source to administer to himself the same questionnaire and in-depth interview, in order to limit influence of his personal involvement in the topics as a way to identify his own preconceptions.

In this case, the study group consisted of participants in the field-based art program of Land Arts of the American West (LAAW) between the years 2000 and 2018. Field-based programs are led by instructors in a unique relationship between teacher and learners, in which they travel together, exchange ideas, can even collaborate together and share with participants' different responsibilities, for example setting up camps, cooking, or other logistic aspects. Since the learning occurs in the place and community the role of the professor no longer has the traditional function of information-giver. According to Gilbert, "A common motivation in our cohort for creating a field program has been the desire to explore an alternative mode of the arts education that replaced the hierarchy of faculty and students with an egalitarian community of artists" (2019, p. 129). Initially, participants were contacted to complete an online questionnaire. Participants responded to questions about their experiences during the field activities as well as how they consider the influence of that experience on later years. Then, the group was stratified by Purposeful Sampling using the answers from the questionnaire to select two participants per program year whose responses presented the most reiteration of concepts related to the focus of the study or other relevant emerging topics. Purposeful Sampling was chosen because

instead of a random selection it uses the knowledge the researcher has about the population to intentionally select the most accurate representation of the population (Lavrakas, 2008).

Between 2019 and 2020, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with those participants both in-person and via online video conferences. The interviews began with participants from the year 2000, when LAAW was initiated, and focused mainly on aspects of the field-based art pedagogy in relation to artmaking, community, and environment, allowing participants to describe and elaborate upon their experiences and the meaning that they attribute to them. At the end of each interview participants were asked what questions they would like to propose to the others to identify topics of relevance to the participant's community. During the content analysis, meaning units that described a specific phenomenon were identified by using qualitative data analysis software and then reduced to reoccurring themes. Then, the declarations that contained aspects related to Mezirow's theory of Transformative Learning were analyzed to find how the structure and pedagogy of field-based learning facilitated that type of experience, particularly in the areas of transformation in aesthetic values and cultural production by presenting a Disorienting Dilemma and facilitating self-reflection.

The core of this research consisted of interviewing 34 participants across 16 years of LAAW, including from two universities, international, undergraduate and graduate participants from mainly Fine Arts educational backgrounds, but including other disciplines and non-degree seekers. The interviews were administered progressing from the early years to the more recent. They ranged from 30 minutes to an hour and a half and were guided by semi-structured questions. Interview questions were related to five main topics of Place & Site, Mobile Studio, Community & Collaboration, Aspects to Connect Place & Community, and the Pedagogical Impact.

After the interview documentation, data analysis consisted of significant statements and descriptions that captured a picture of the LAAW program learning. Throughout the 38 interviews certain themes were evident in participants' reflections of their particular experience. The principal themes were Art Making, Community/Collaboration, and Place/Environment. A particular aspect that became evident when analyzing the data was the interconnectedness of the themes as a central element of the LAAW experience, making it near impossible to isolate the themes without studying them in connection to each other. For example, when a participant was referring to art making, they often were also talking about an aspect of creating that had to do with the environment or community. The resulting subtopics were explained in connection with at least two of the themes. All the responses need to be understood in the canvas of an immersive environment, in which the themes and subtopics cannot be separated from the others. The interconnectivity of the themes reflects the interdisciplinary nature of a field-based art programming.

3. Field-Based Programming in the Arts

Field-based learning is an experiential teaching strategy with a long tradition particularly in areas such as environmental science, education, or social work (Lonergan & Andresen, 1988). In Art Education, apart from the book discussed in this chapter, and Young et. al's research on field-based programming at Australia

National University, there have not been extensive studies or publications to explain the phenomenon of field-based learning in the Arts. *Arts Programming for the Anthropocene* by Bill Gilbert, the founder of Land Arts of the American West, defines and explains this learning approach in the context of the Arts in tertiary education. Gilbert and Cox delve into the origins of this program and the pedagogy of several field-based art programs on three continents and provide a practical manual for educators wishing to implement field-based art programming (Gilbert & Cox, 2019). They describe the motivation for an alternative learning model and focus on experiential learning to answer the contemporary challenges of educating artists in the following way:

Each of the programs covered here stemmed from a decision that rather than join an existing, codified arts curriculum conversation, they would explore alternative models that take art education out into the wide-open spaces of the world of direct experience in order to invent and re-invent the tasks that make meaning for artists. (p.152)

They also reference the curricular influence of John Dewey's theory of Experiential Learning and Gruenwald's Critical Pedagogy of Place. Gilbert (2013) outlines two motivations that emphasize the current relevance of field-based learning, the urgency to counter the deficiencies that online education generates in the quality of the learning experience and referring to the area of interdisciplinarity, the need of the Arts for the development of creative thinking in any area of knowledge.

In *Arts Programming for the Anthropocene*, the Land Arts of the American West field-based program is described more in-depth, forming a basis for a guide of how to implement such art programming. In the section, Participant Voices, the most important aspects of the field-based pedagogy, such as: community engagement, interdisciplinarity, environmental and social place, and creative research are reflected from the point of view of both program directors and artist participants, including the evolution that each of the programs has had over the last twenty years. With these types of innovative models, the participants' voice is valuable to help to understand the effects of this learning experience. Continuing on this path, the research of this study aims to capture the voice of participants of the Land Arts of the American West from the last two decades in order to better comprehend and explain the core of the field-based art experience.

4. Transformative Learning in the context of Field-Based Art Programming

Rooted in Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Habermas' Domains of Learning, and Kuhn's Paradigm of Change (Enkhtur & Yamamoto, 2017), the Transformative Learning theory developed by Jack Mezirow (2000) describes a learning process:

... by which we transform our taken-for granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action (p.8).

Challenging previous frames of reference is central to the process of Transformative Learning. Frames of reference are defined as a meaning perspective, which is the formation of assumptions and expectations through which we process our thoughts, which contain habits of mind and resulting points of view. Habits of mind are “A set of assumptions broad, generalized, orienting predispositions that act as a filter for interpreting the meaning of experience” (Mezirow, p. 17, 2000). This has important implications for Art Education, since there is an aesthetic habit of mind that can be studied from the participants’ perspective in the context of field-based art programming and is described as, “values, tastes, attitudes, standards, and judgments about beauty and the insight and authenticity of aesthetic expressions, such as the sublime, the ugly, the tragic, the humorous, the “drab”, and others” (Mezirow, 2000 ,p. 17).

For Mezirow, self-critical reflection is essential for Transformative Learning to occur. We use language in order to understand and share our experience, in this regard the arts deserve particular attention as a medium for reflectivity, “art, music, and dance are alternative languages. Intuition, imagination, and dreams are other ways of making meaning. Inspiration, empathy, and transcendence are central to self-knowledge and to drawing attention to the affective quality and poetry of human experience” (Mezirow, p. 6, 2000). This study presents the transformation that takes place in field-based art participants’ learning, specifically in the area of aesthetics. It describes Mezirow’s Transformative Learning theory and its application to field-based art participants’ personal reflections on their experiences and how it changed their course of action and way of defining themselves as artists.

4.1. Disorienting Dilemmas in Field Based Art Programming

The Disorienting Dilemma is a phase of Transformative Learning that is described as a trigger situation, a new experience or an accumulation of them that promotes self-reflection by challenging previous beliefs. In field-based art programming traveling and relocating out of the traditional learning context of the university sets up a new situation for participants favorable to the kind of space described in the Disorienting Dilemma as a factor to activate transformational learning. With the intention to increase creativity by using the Peak Experience theory, Field Based Art programming produces a similar situation to that defined in the Disorienting Dilemma:

In LAAW, peak experience is driven by direct engagement with the environment over extended periods of time. Students are removed from their normal routines, their support structures and their creature comforts and exposed to the vast space of the western desert and the severity of the elements. Students living day to day in the cycle of light and dark imposed by the movement of the sun with only a small tent as protective enclosure are often pushed out of their normal mindset into a peak experience. The resulting shift in perceptions opens new avenues in their practice both in the field and for years afterwards. LAAW students experience a related dislocation upon reentering urban life. (Gilbert, 2019, p. 21)

The previous quote refers to a physical and temporal Disorienting Dilemma, but the implications of the community is another relevant aspect, given the significance that Mezirow applies to the way we rely on others to assess and communicate our

experience, “Transformative learning involves participation in constructive discourse to use the experience of others to assess reasons justifying these assumptions, and making an action decision based on the resulting insight” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 8).

4.2. Critical Pedagogy in Field Based Programing as a vehicle for Transformative Learning

One of the most influential pedagogies for Transformative Learning is Critical Pedagogy and the concept of conscientization, which is the process of achieving a critical consciousness (Freire, 1974). Freire refers to critical reflectivity and action as praxis or, “the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (Freire, 1993, p. 79) and it is considered as the initial stage that leads to transformation. Similarly, for Gilbert the ground between Place-Based Pedagogy and Critical Pedagogy creates a space for the field-based art curricular model as it engages directly through learning and creative practice with specific places and communities while responding to contemporary, global, social and ecological issues (Gilbert & Cox, 2019).

The Disorienting Dilemma is just a starting point that needs to be followed up by the instructor facilitating the conditions and space for participants’ self-reflection. Apart from a physical and temporal dislocation, the field-based art programing also sets an opportunity for building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships that consists of an adaptation of the typical community relationships of higher education students placing them into an itinerant community of artists. Gilbert explains the radical change participants experience from their conventional school life to their field-based settings describing how they:

Whether on campus or off, very few live in an art-based community where their interests are shared, supported and revered. In the LAAW field program the alienation of contemporary urban life is replaced with a community of like-minded souls who share a commitment to making art. Students and faculty travel together as a mobile arts collective, our responsibilities being to take care of each other and make art (Gilbert & Cox, 2019, p. 19).

According to Mezirow, particularly in traditional information-given models in Higher Education, students are dependent on the values and beliefs of their professors (Bloom, 2015). Both Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and Mezirow’s *Transformative Learning Theory* (2000) largely discuss the profound negative implications of the traditional authoritarian teacher figure and information-given models towards achieving transformation.

5. Participants’ Experiences Support Transformative Learning

Before conducting in-depth interviews, a preliminary online questionnaire was administered to gather the collective thoughts of participants from all 16 years of the program and identify core and emerging topics to produce qualitative and quantitative information related to the way former participants perceive the influence that their LAAW experience had on their lives.

The LAAW program has a timescale from 2000 to 2018, only interrupted by the years 2001 and 2008, the total of participants is 179, and the number of participants per year varies from six to fifteen, an average of eleven participants per year. The online questionnaire was selected as a method of sampling to reach the maximum number of former LAAW participants. After collecting participants' contact information, the online questionnaire reached 137 participants, constituting 77% of the total program. The invitation was sent via email and Facebook and as a result, the online survey received 63 responses, a 47% survey response rate, therefore a third of all former LAAW participants contributed to the study and the per year response average was between three to six former LAAW participants. The following summarizes some of the quantitative data collected through the survey:

- When asked to describe how they think their Land Arts experience had influenced their current exhibitions, art projects or publications out of 53 responses just 2 indicated little to no impact and 2 expressed some influence in a neutral way. 49 percent indicated a variety of artistic shifts related mostly to the use of materials, and artistic processes related to community, environmental or ecological art. The remaining 51 percent referred to this influence in more profound terms expressing a range of not only artistic terms but in a variety of personal aspects connected to the theory of Transformative Experience, such as questioning previous assumptions, building confidence or the influence in long term personal and artistic decisions.
- When asked about the influence in their current teaching methods out of 42 responses 88 percent expressed a direct impact on their current teaching practices; the commitment to diverse aspects of experiential learning being the most recurrent topic apart from the curricular integration of Environmental or Ecological Art and conducting field and placed-based activities.
- Nearly 80 percent of survey participants recognized the influence of their LAAW experience to be present in other professions, apart from art making or teaching. They repeatedly discuss various effects on their work processes and shifts in their philosophy, particularly related to the integration and value of issues related to place and community. There is a common allusion to the topic of relationships, either as something significant in connection with place, or relative to collaboration. Participants often talk about the type of relationships and collaboration with other participants and the community that takes place during the LAAW program as on a deeper level than the ones they experienced in conventional classrooms.

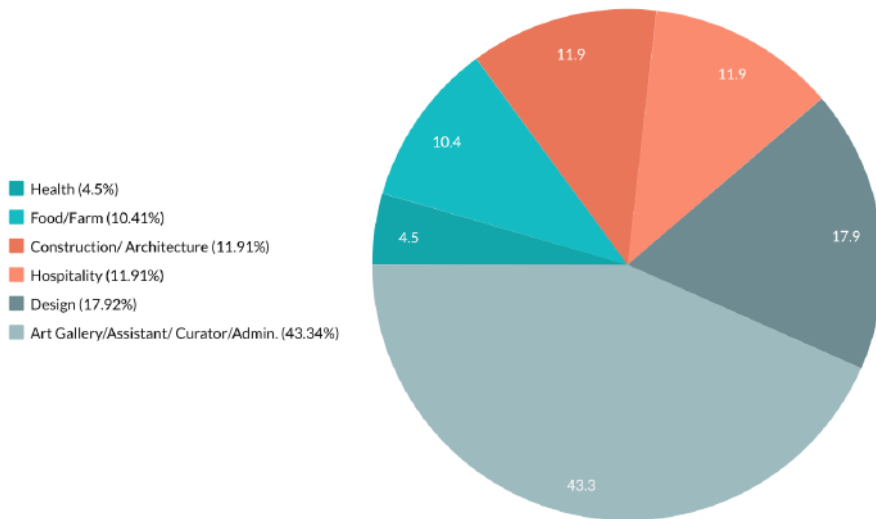


Figure 1. Representation of different professions referred to by participants apart from art making or teaching, 2018. (David Naranjo).

The study of the data collected from the online survey emphasized the need for conducting interviews to explore in the greatest depth possible, the phenomenon of the artistic and personal transformation that field-based art programs produce. Therefore, from the participants available from the survey, by the use of purposeful sampling the two cases per year whose responses contained the most thorough descriptions of their field-based experiences were selected to be interviewed. Although the cases were stratified by year, this nonrandom method prioritizes those participants that showed to better express and self-reflect on their experiences, not pretending to obtain generalizable results for all participants but to provide the most comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of the transformational experience that occurs in field-based art programs.

After conducting interviews 32 out of the 34 participants expressed personal transformation in different degrees as a consequence of their experiences in the LAAW program. The transformational statements demonstrate diverse levels of intensity that can go from the way an artist has developed a particular process in their future career to a shift in the way a person experiences the world and identifies themselves as an integrated part of nature. Within those transformations some participants express that the impact might have decayed with time while others refer to it as not sinking in at the beginning and to realize the importance of it with the passing of time.

There is not a significant indication that shows that a particular time was more impactful than another since the concentration of those statements are distributed evenly across the years. But an emerging topic related to the affinity of participants with a specific art philosophy can be identified. LAAW started with an emphasis on the study of the works of Land Art and then transitioned towards Ecological Art. Since these are on occasions seen as two confronted art movements, evenly represented in both ways participants repeatedly articulate their connections or rejection towards one or the other. Except for a few exceptions those participants feel

more connected with the art movement of the year they participated in and there is no indication of a pattern that suggests that the focus on either one results in a more or less transformational experience. What it can be noticeable are differences in the focus of the reflection, participants reflect on re-evaluation of previous assumptions, mind shifting or changes in their path of action in a bigger extent towards the concepts that pertain to the art movement that they feel connected with.

Participants have also regularly expressed across the years to have faced emotional and physical challenges during their field-based experiences. These are also distributed in the three topics of Art Making Community/Collaboration and Place/Environment. For example, participants have expressed emotional challenges when referring to being faced with creating art outside the studios without the materials that are usually available for them. Some struggled to live isolated with a new group of people for long periods of time or challenges related to travel and living with few personal things and without most of the modern commodities.

Evidence of the long-term transformational impact of the field-based art experience arose in the interviews with participants across the trajectory of the program, they were able to relive their experience in detail. They described art making, living in an artist community, traveling to be immersed in remote landscapes and environments without modern conveniences, as well as connecting with communities around the Southwest. The purpose of the interviews was to create a space for participants to self-reflect on their LAAW experiences and the meaning they attribute to them. The following graphic helps visualize how the three main themes in combination produce the sub-topics that often are described by participants with language that reveals a Transformative Learning experience.

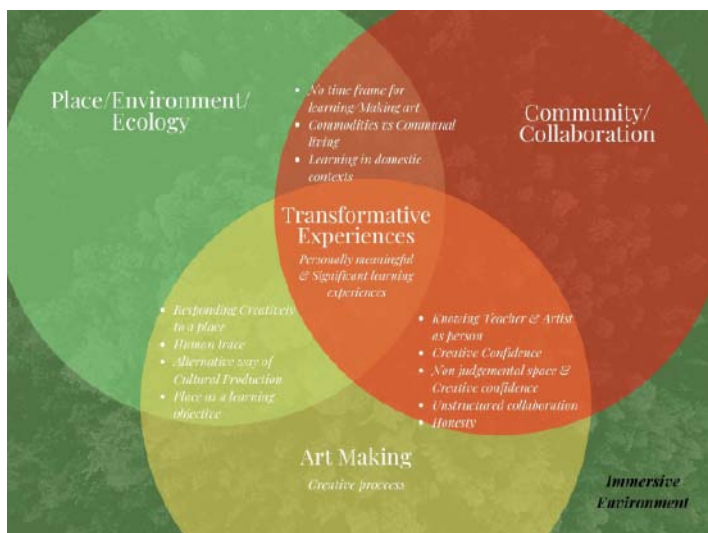


Figure 2. Ven diagram that represents themes and subtopics resulting from the LAAW interviews, 2020. (David Naranjo).

As the themes were intertwined and Transformative Learning emerged across them, it is evident how participants refer to their learning in terms of self-reflection

and the ways that their field-based experience presented an opportunity for them to challenge their previously held frames of mind. Participants use language that reveals emotions, personal introspection, and actions in the form of change, evolution, or development. 2006 participant Cynthia first introduced this idea of how the field-based art programming can potentially be a source of Transformative Learning experiences in the following way:

...I think that everyone who goes through that program has some kind of a transformative experience. It's not like you can go and camp in the desert for two months and come out of that completely the same person. It is a disruption to your routine in a really significant way. (Personal communication, May 29, 2019)

Participants spend so much time together, going through similar experiences, there is a general recognition that what they went through in Land Arts is not a common learning experience. In the following sections, as participants describe art making, community/collaboration, and place/environment, they echo this idea of a personal transformation described by Cynthia and that connects Mezirow's Transformative Learning theory.

5.1. Art Making

In the field-based art program, participants referred to a critical self-reflection in a number of ways that denotes the course of Subjective Reframing in conjunction with an artistic shift. 2017 participant, Mikala, spoke about how the time and space created in LAAW facilitated a process of questioning previously held assumptions:

I think that you learn a lot about yourself, and it gives you a lot of time to learn about yourself. And you're definitely challenged in many ways, and it just forces you to be super creative and rethink. It made me really want to question a lot of the structures, societal structures, that we are placed in. I go back and read my journal from Land Arts a lot, because I just left feeling so inspired about just being able to question things and then be able to find my own answers to things and not have to settle for following a certain path or accepting a certain answer just because that's the way it is. This, I think, really helps push those boundaries and just opens your mind to so many viewpoints of things that maybe you just hadn't ever thought about before. (Personal communication, February 7, 2020)

In *Towards Transformative Learning*, Mezirow (2000) emphasizes the importance of challenging previous assumptions through critical self-reflectivity. He divides this into two categories, Subjective and Objective Reframing. Mezirow explains Subjective Reframing as critical self-reflection of your own assumptions. These assumptions pertain to narratives, systems, organizations or workplace, feelings and interpersonal relations, and the way one learns. In the LAAW interviews, participants like Mikala expressed this critical self-reflection with language related to questioning, relearning, and shifting mindsets that are crucial for critical thinking in artistic production that reflects on contemporary challenges. Along with these lines of critical reflection on systems and organisms, some participants spoke about how the distinct pedagogy of the field-based art programming and the opportunities to create in different spaces out of the university context, helped them to re-define and expand the roles of professional artists. 2003 participant Katherine articulated

the often-narrow vision of the future expectations art students usually adopt that were challenged by her participation in the LAAW program:

It allowed for the arising of a new, more open mental framework that dissolves the existing mind-numbing repetitions. As an artist, with said concepts my only goal would be to become an employee of a big gallery, a concept devoid of the spacious vitality from where the creative process emerges and this is what happens when a concept is handed down, washed clean of its original vitality where scrupulous, vital artists are making really good work and are in a process of vital exchange with the wider world. As a younger artist, I couldn't though see very far and so I was looking in the wrong place, into this very narrow concept, that then was yielded open in-to more spacious and vital ways of working through being in such a program. (Personal communication, September 19, 2019)

This is an example of Objective Reframing, in which one questions assumptions of others in a given narrative or task-oriented problem solving. In field-based art pedagogy, since projects are based on the historic, cultural and aesthetic, context of the site, and focused on the experience this allows new opportunities for reflection, since this process differs significantly from the tasks participants are used to working on in conventional learning contexts. During the field-based experience, participants find themselves in a situation that is closer to that of a professional artist than that of a student, sometimes referring to the experience as similar to an artist-in-residency. This leads to provide students opportunities to develop professional maturity. 2016 participant Kaitlin discussed the distinct experiences between the structure in conventional learning formats and those of the field-based art programming. She expresses in the following way how her participation in LAAW provided an opportunity to critically reflect on the traditional ways of learning that are structure-given and to exchange it for a self-directed learning model that creates a personal learning structure embracing a sense of ownership:

Whenever you remove all of the barriers of "physical comfort," some sort of structures that we all- for the most part, I think Westernized students have learned, that that's like a sort of place you go to, and it's safe. And so, you have this parameter of learning that you just associate with being at school, and when you remove all those parameters, you're left with anti-structure, and so you have to kind of form your own structure from that. That's really what helped me a lot. It was like I've really formed my own sense of discipline because I had nothing else but to do that and to explore, but it was all of my own making... When I did Land Arts, the major difference for me was the recognition that being outside was the studio practice. It wasn't getting out of the studio to get inspired; it was actually going into the studio more so than I had ever experienced being a painter working inside or even with other art processes. So, it was this big moment of, I think, personal acceptance as well as personal understanding and so for me, it was a transition that I was totally happy to throw myself completely into, and it felt really good. Maybe the hesitation was only just the previous training that I had to unlearn or something. (Personal communication, February 1, 2020)

The open time frame limits in an immersive environment allows participants to focus without other distractions on one particular matter without having to move from class to class. Many participants have Transformative Learning experiences directly related to questions about how they make and understand art. They have an

open space for creativity since they do not have to do weekly assignments from other classes and the freedom to decide what artistic response they will have to a site, as well as the ability to work alone or collaborate, including being able to choose their medium, which may or may not coincide with the one they are formally trained in. They are responsible for their own time management as if they were professional artists working towards an exhibition, which they do make at the end of the course. This promotes the ability to question their aesthetic habits of mind and previous standards around aesthetic expressions and create new points of view and actions. An alternative way of cultural production emerges due to changes in their art processes and conceptions from being in the field compared to when they were in their studios on campus. In the approximately seven weeks of camping during LAAW, participants have the time and mental space to delve into their artworks in a way that is not possible with the constraints they face in conventional classrooms. Participants expressed to have experimented and adapted to their current conditions, allowing for growth in their artistic practice, and often talked about this transformation in terms of a shift in their preferences about making art, referring to aspects such as materials, subjects, artistic approaches and procedures or a transformation in their artistic philosophy and the kind of artist they want to be. Geordie, 2002 participant, indicates how spending significant time in a place with no specific time-limits for creating, has impacted his artistic confidence:

The advantage of having free time is that it builds confidence in the creative process if you take the time and you engage and you will develop a fundamental and profound relationship and you will do something and respond and you can feel confident as you move through that it will happen. Whereas if your throughout with this evaluation hanging over you, I think that confidence can get shaky because you may not make progress. What's going on? Is this something? Is it not something? And so, I think for me in terms of that year project, for my final graduation project that's where I think I saw that confidence really helped... That confidence, the notion of confidence in the creative process, I think that's the advantage of that long Land Art cycle. Non-evaluated, out there, Land Arts cycle is confidence. I think it's really hard in the current creative academic environment because so much is evaluated and so much is so critical and what's this worth? I just think, so how can students just be confident in open-ended creativity? (Personal communication, May 19, 2019)

One of the most characteristic subjects that participants refer to on many occasions is a change in their own confidence as artists. In their reflections the participants attribute the building of creative confidence to diverse reasons, for example the non-evaluative character, overcoming challenges to adapt to new artistic processes and materials and the opportunity to connect directly with communities and audiences. They tend to characterize this as one of the most significant benefits as a result of their experiences traveling and living in the Southwest environment in a non-judgmental pedagogy that does not emphasize standard evaluation.

5.2. Community and collaboration

Throughout the interviews it was evident how transformative it was to be immersed in an itinerant community of artists that spends so much formal and informal educational time with classmates and professors, as well as how elucidating it is to

have a direct experience with small communities across the Southwest, and to be able to collaborate with interdisciplinary professionals. One of the products of the community living are the opportunities produced for conversations and collaborative reflectivity. In field-based art programming, this reflection is facilitated by participants' personal field journals, classroom discussions, instructor conferences and all the moments when participants and instructors exchange their thoughts in an informal way, which becomes an added instructional tool. Erika, a 2003 participant, exemplifies how the favorable conditions and opportunities for reflection can guide to personal transformation:

I really valued all the conversations. I feel that's when I realized that for me, to take the step from ideas to a piece of art I need to talk it out, and discuss it, and argue it, and think about it. The way that I think best is through conversations and Land Arts was ideal for that. You have all that time around meals, cooking, the campfire, the van rides, the formal conversations, the readings and the conversations with guests to talk. The conversations aren't abstract either because you are talking about the place that you're in. The place you're surrounded by. And, I think that's when I started first asking the questions to myself about my relationship with place. From that point forward, that has been the driver for my whole practice. It completely changed my work conceptually. I mean completely! It was the start of a major change. (Personal communication, September 22, 2019)

LAAW allows for a significant amount of formal and informal teacher and student led discussion that are either structured around the campfire or that spontaneously happen at any time, which participants refer to as a meaningful aspect of their experience. Thomas McIlwraith, who studied the effects of Disorienting Dilemmas in field-based anthropology studies in transforming higher education students' beliefs, expresses in the following way how Mezirow describes the need for instructors to also create favorable conditions after creating a Disorienting Dilemma, for true reflection and transformation to happen. He writes referencing Mezirow, "A disorienting dilemma is an experience which does not fit with pre-existing beliefs. It promotes self-reflection because beliefs and values are challenged. From there, critical reflection, dialogue, and action follow, and personal transformation can occur especially if an instructor is able to guide the post-dilemma reflections" (McIlwraith, 2016, p.58). Related to the space created in LAAW for sharing ideas, the opportunity for participants to be in an itinerant group of artists is a unique learning community that influences participants' experiences. As a consequence of these shared experiences with other people involved in art making, strong relationship ties are enhanced. 2014 participant Noel is an example of the long-term effects of relationships formed amongst participants in LAAW:

Land Arts was everything that I was looking for in an academic program, just in terms of being able to have my studies and receive that academic validation and credits for what I was already knowing that I needed to be doing and putting me in touch with all the people that would end up being really influential for at least the next three years of my life. Because after Land Arts I lived with Randall and then Christine, and they had both done Land Arts that same year. And then I ended up living with CB another year after that and so all three of those people had done Land Arts and so basically, for the first three years that I was living in Albuquerque, my life and friend group and everything like that kind of just revolved around extensions of the program. So even if it wasn't a direct academic influence all the time, which it was, it really influenced different aspects

of my life. Not only in how I was thinking about things but who I was thinking about things with. So, I mean, who knows? Maybe I would have come to New Mexico without Land Arts, but at the same time it was very much my means of being here. (personal communication, December 2019)

What happens for participants, traveling, discovering places, assuming new roles, having to integrate themselves into a new small societal structure, is in many cases expressed as deeply challenging and impactful. Under these new circumstances, removed from modern life and their already established relationships and support groups, there is the necessity of integrating into a new social group that is characterized by their artistic identity. One of the goals of any student pursuing an artistic career is to become an active part and integrated agent in their society through art. The creation of an artistic social group that shares their ideas through art that continues on after LAAW is demonstrated in Noel's words. Beyond their immediate artistic community, during LAAW participants get to learn from small local communities and make art projects in collaboration with them focusing on themes that are relevant issues to those communities. Some artists, who had never experienced this integrated experience before found themselves encouraged and inspired by making art about place in connection with the human presence. An example of this came from 2012 participant, Cecilia:

For me, the biggest thing was- I had this big moment in the program where I realized that- we went to Wendover after a week at Firepoint. And I felt like, "Oh, I make art about people. I don't make art about nature. I make art about people in nature and people in the world." And just feeling so much more fired up by the kind of built environment and the edges of built environment meeting a landscape and sort of what that weird area was. And I think that's really been a formative interest in the years since the program. (Personal communication, December 10, 2019)

Despite the name of Land Arts, with its usual focus on place, the LAAW program has a strong commitment to community engagement, which draws participants' attention to the inextricable link between land and the people that live in there. For example, LAAW has collaborated for several years with the border community of Barrio Buena Vista in El Paso, Texas, working on different community-based socially and ecologically engaged artworks or in the CLUI Center of Land Use and Interpretation in Wendover through collaborative projects. During these experiences, participants came to the realization that a place, is not isolated from their community and have referred to the impact of these types of experiences in their artistic careers and how they shaped their artist identity, explaining that they often in their current artwork, recollect those memories and sometimes come back to those places and people for their future projects. Along with working within communities, artists and professionals from other fields stay with the group to discuss important issues about that specific place. These guests live with the group and often create collaborative projects together. Nina, 2003 and 2011 participant, talks about the influence of her field-based art experiences on changing her ideas to see the value of the integration of art with other disciplines:

Then also for a willingness to kind of let your practice be influenced by and take even some of the tools and methods of other practices, of other professions. I mean, for some people, it's going to be contact with some of the biologists that they meet on the trip or

environmentalists, ecologists. For me, it wasn't very specific, but it did open my mind to the fact that something like design, either environmental design or even more traditional design, is something that I could combine with artmaking. I think if I had just sort of done a more traditional trajectory and art, I don't know that I would have been so willing to consider combining artmaking with other disciplines. (Personal communication, January 3, 2020)

The reflections of participants reveal that collaboration is a significant characteristic for them because it provides practical opportunities and opens paths to the discovery of alternative ways of creative production. Nina, among others, talk about how the LAAW classroom structure of including guest professionals, such as scientists or designers, can make an impact on the future artistic outlooks of participants. In a conventional classroom setting, students get to learn from artists that they see through lectures and follow their strategies, but in this context, there is a distant relationship. In the classroom context of LAAW living with other artists and professionals for several days and developing projects with them, allows to get to know them personally and understand the reality of interdisciplinary work, building the artistic confidence necessary to open their minds to the decision of developing related artistic processes.

5.3. Place and Environment

From traveling and living in isolation with a new group of people in new places and environments participants express living through experiences that can be defined as Disorienting Dilemmas, a learning situation that challenges previous assumptions or conventions and is described as the initial stage for Transformative Learning to occur. This phenomenon is described by many participants during the interviews and, Geneva from the 2014 group conveys the challenge at the start of a field-based experience and describes how as a consequence, the confidence and self-respect she developed as an artist endures:

I keep wanting to revisit situations like that. I crave being on the field. I crave being in nature. I crave being far away from home in a completely different place. I think that discomfort is one of the main ingredients in creativity. And I think it was two years after I did Land Arts, I did a two-week backpacking trip in British Columbia that was something I wouldn't have thought I could do if I hadn't done Land Arts. So that definitely was a huge catalyst for pursuing those things and continuing to seek out these different environments and ecosystems that really fuel my creativity that you really can't experience unless you're really put in them without the comforts of a hotel room or a car where you're putting your body into the environment, really experiencing it first-hand. That's kind of my main form of artistic research now, it's just exploring different places that I can only get to by foot and by really pushing those limits and experiencing it in such a visceral way that really has been such a huge part of my art practice since. It's just taking things in in a really physical and immediate sense. But it's not something I would've had the confidence to do if I hadn't had the initial discomfort in Land Arts of feeling so out of place. (Personal communication, December 14, 2019)

In LAAW some of the conditions that generate Disorienting Dilemmas include an itinerant lifestyle of traveling to create art and learning by inhabiting remote and isolated locations, camping in nature without modern conveniences, to be absorbed

by vast environments in the Southwest that present participants the in-depth experience of very different ecosystems, within periods of several weeks. As a result, participants recollect strong memories of the particular significance for them of those environments and the knowledge they developed from the holistic experience, and many participants have expressed transformative learning attributes that are connected to their future identity and artistic trajectory. One of the most referenced topics by participants was the new artistic process that they developed from being in and learning from a specific place and creatively responding to it. Many of them have continued working in this line in their careers, residencies, and teaching. 2002 participant, Julie, describes how this affected her creative vision regarding how to make art in response to a place:

I think that the most profound effect on me was it was like a school for intuition. We are outside of our studios, we don't have all of the materials, we don't have all the resources, we just have what's in our bags essentially. And we have some knowledge of the space or the place, but our way through to find some meaning was just feeling the place, observing, contemplating, intuiting a response. I feel like that's still with me and so it's less of an intellectual outcome. What I really learned to do is how to move into place, feel my way, find my way, have a creative response, leave no trace, and move on. (Personal communication, June 24, 2019)

Developing the skills necessary to creatively respond to a place in a conventional classroom setting presents limitations. Usually, fine art students have not experienced this artistic process of going to a particular place to study it from different perspectives; history, ecology, culture, and having to respond to these particular circumstances with different resources compared to what they are used to in the university. Apart from the initial challenges of experimenting with a new method, as Julie and a significant number of participants describe, this creative motivation to respond to the place leads to the adoption of a distinct artistic process in response to those circumstances. The practice and interiorization of this new way of art creation outside of the studio makes available alternative ways of artistic identity. The words of 2006 participant Jarrod, reveal another distinguishing characteristic of field-based art learning in response to the relationship that participants can develop with a place as creative individuals:

I have land and I go draw on it. I go make the pilgrimage to this land in West Texas and I go make stuff on it and no one, maybe no one, ever sees that. It's more about what I need as an artist. I think there's something that brings back the thinking about art as a ceremony or as a ritual and that act of doing it, the process of doing it, and sometimes bringing people to it, is what's important. That's what I want, that's what I've taken into my life now and what that means is sometimes I'm doing things that not a lot of people see, art form isn't writing about them, it's about just that process of making things connecting with the land and also connecting with a few people, a few hundred people through it. This just feels like it's a different construct and I think that largely comes from Land Arts. (Personal communication, June 7, 2019)

Participants develop a personal relationship with their artwork that is internal and is not focused on a graded assignment due to the extended time they spend in a site with a small community of people to create art with a unique direct relationship with place, nature, community, and oneself as an artist. In the extended time of LAAW

there is no one or two-hour class session where participants are supposed to be artists and develop their artwork, instead they are full time in connection with their subject. Once they have enjoyed this level of engagement, as Jarrod explains they are encouraged to not be dependent on the external judgements and values of others but on their own sense, which supports an intimate and personal connection to place that can make the artistic process become a ritual separated from making profit or pleasing a wide audience.

6. Conclusions

Field-based art programming at the university level creates Transformative Learning experiences for its participants as described by Mezirow. This can be attributed to several aspects of the programming's pedagogy. For the majority of its participants, who received a conventional in-school instruction from Elementary, Secondary up to a Tertiary Visual Art Education, it significantly breaks the patterns acquired throughout an educational journey. In the field-based art programming, participants are taken out of their traditional physical and temporal learning spaces and immersed in real world situations. Throughout the interviews, participants referred to this as an experience closer to the one of a professional artist, that step out of the learning context of the University, its conventions and that it operates in direct contact with the natural world and small communities to face using creativity big contemporary issues.

During their journey, many participants encountered unfamiliar situations that this article has identified as Disorienting Dilemmas and experienced opportunities for self-reflection that encounters and confronts existing assumptions about art understanding. Immersed in the process of envisioning oneself less as a student and more as an artist and as the artist that one wants or does not want to be. As a consequence, artists create self-developed thoughts that crystalize, grow and mature in their minds towards a change in their path of action.

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