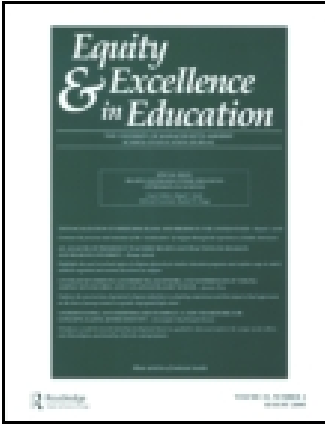


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## Awakening Teachers' Capacities for Social Justice With/In Arts-Based Inquiries

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Social justice-oriented teacher education can guide preservice teachers toward greater critical socio-cultural knowledge, analytic skills, social responsibility, and commitment to act in the interest of providing all students with high quality educational experiences. This qualitative case study examines how arts-based inquiries in social justice-oriented teacher education can provide the necessary generative spaces for developing preservice teachers' critical sociocultural knowledge. Data were drawn from student interviews and reflective papers across four sections of a course employing collaborative, arts-based inquiry. Findings highlight the cumulative knowledge, pleasure, anxiety, confrontation with material and symbolic bodies, and self-transformations that can develop from art practices and help to awaken preservice teachers' critical consciousness for teaching for social justice.

Critical multicultural education and social justice education scholars have long recognized the agency of teachers to affect meaningful change in the lives of their students, both within and outside of the classroom (Banks, 2008; C. Grant & Gibson, 2011; McDonald & Zeichner, 2009). From this perspective, social justice is a responsibility of all teachers (C. Grant & Agosto, 2008). Within the larger struggle for social justice, critical multicultural teachers support students' academic growth, cultural competence, critical consciousness (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2009), and capacity to plan and act to ameliorate the underlying cause of social inequalities by bringing about a change in public awareness and policies (Sleeter & Grant, 2007). By drawing from the community's resources and supporting students' cultural knowledge (N. Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Villegas & Lucas, 2002), teachers can help their students achieve academically and become conversant with the cultures of power (Delpit, 1988) without sacrificing their identities, languages, and senses of belonging to their communities (Valenzuela, 1999).

The interest in developing teachers' capacities for social justice has expanded in recent years (C. Grant & Agosto, 2008; Kumashiro, 2004). A social justice-orientation in teacher education can guide preservice teachers toward greater critical sociocultural knowledge, analytic skills, social responsibility, and willingness to act based on an understanding of history, structural conditions, and discourses that continue to reproduce unequal learning outcomes and disparate access to high quality learning opportunities in today's classrooms (e.g., institutional racism, class

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disparities, gender inequalities) (Kincheloe, 2004). This orientation assumes that the development of teachers' pedagogical capacities rests on their ability to continually analyze and interpret everyday classroom and neighborhood interactions within the context of large-scale social and political struggles (North, 2006; Pollock, Deckman, Mira, & Shalaby, 2010).

While much has been written about what teachers need to know and be able to do to provide an equitable, high quality education to all students (Banks et al., 2005; Gay, 2002; Howard & Aleman, 2008; Villegas & Lucas, 2002), less is known about how to facilitate teachers' acquisition of this knowledge. Some promising approaches have been developed for social justice-oriented teacher education, such as "race reflection" (Milner, 2003, p. 175) and "collective knowledge production" (Sleeter, 1995, p. 431). Still, the field of teacher education continues to face numerous challenges in designing instructional methods that effectively help preservice teachers examine the significance of their identities, privilege, colorblind ideology, and racial difference (Obidah, 2000; Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005). Helping preservice teachers understand how larger structural conditions impact learners' daily experiences in the classroom is particularly difficult (Castro, 2010; King, 1991), but this knowledge is essential for catalyzing preservice teachers' critical consciousness and commitment to educational equity and social justice aims (Paccione, 2000). Although teacher educators' specific choices in teaching strategies, requirements, activities, and goals in multicultural teacher education courses can have an impact on students' levels of receptivity, discomfort, and resistance to course content as well as the overall gains students make in adopting positive orientations toward cultural diversity (Brown, 2004), research has shown that preservice teachers' experiences in these courses can unintentionally reinforce deficit thinking and stereotypical beliefs about minority groups (Brown, 2004; Gomez, 1996; Terrill & Mark, 2000). Student resistance is exacerbated when courses devoted to issues of diversity organize coursework and content in ways that emphasize learners' individual needs and experiences without linking those needs to the larger sociopolitical and historical context (McDonald, 2008).

More research is needed that considers how teacher educators might effectively teach courses with social justice aims and how students make sense of those learning experiences (Lowenstein, 2009; Sleeter, 2001). This article addresses this gap by examining how arts-based inquiries can provide spaces for developing critical sociocultural knowledge in social justice-oriented teacher education courses. A conceptual framework of interpretive and critical theories of aesthetic learning support our analysis of how undergraduate students gained meaningful insights into race, class, and gender through various arts-based inquiries. We describe students' experiences with individual and collaborative arts-based inquiries and the transformative potential of the artmaking activities. As we make the case for the relevance and value of arts-based inquiries in developing teachers' capacities for social justice, we also consider the possible challenges of integrating the arts into teacher education courses.

### INTEGRATING ARTS-BASED INQUIRY INTO SOCIAL JUSTICE-ORIENTED TEACHER EDUCATION

Many recent studies examine the possibilities and benefits of integrating critical interpretations of artistic performances and objects, including popular culture, in teacher education (P. Grant, 2002; Knight, 2006; Pauly, 2003; Samson, 2005; Trier, 2005). Although engaging in critical reflection is far from a passive activity, media scholar Brian Goldfarb (2002) urges educators to expand this

singular positioning of students as consumers, or as an audience, to one in which students are empowered to creatively “appropriate the means of production to produce new sorts of meanings” (p. 69). There are a few studies that explore how preservice teachers learn about issues of social justice through artistic production (Belliveau, 2006; Berghoff, Borgmann & Parr, 2005; Brown, 2005; Maguire & Lenihan, 2010; McDermott, 2002; Mullen, 1999). As an example, Dillon (2008) found that preservice teachers in a six-week course designed around collaborative playwriting and acting achieved a beginning level of critical consciousness. He suggests that students’ transitions from object consciousness to subject consciousness provided “a new disposition upon which the surface behaviors of critical pedagogy can be grafted and become ultimately effective” (Dillon, 2008, p. 190). Without such self-transformations, which implicitly demand a shift in how one understands the teacher role within a broader sociopolitical context, preservice teachers lack the fundamental understandings they need to implement critical pedagogical methods with fidelity (Bartolomé, 1994; McDermott, 2002).

Many education and art education theorists have looked to aesthetic experiences in formulating a postmodernist view of art in which arts practices are undertaken as investigations rather than as mere illustrations or prescriptive exercises (Efland, Freedman & Stuhr, 1996; Gude, 2004; Sullivan, 2005). “Artists who explore ideas through artmaking do not begin with unalterable ideas, but exercise flexibility, allowing change, transformation, and modification to have sway over the process” (Walker, 2003, p. 6). Instead of seeing art as a direct expression or reflection of one’s prior knowledge and experiences, artmaking and viewing are a means for understanding or working out the social, cultural, economic, political, and personal significance of experience (Walker, 2001). Context, therefore, plays an integral part in the construction of meaning (Neperud, 1995). Sullivan (2005) argues that when art takes place as a form of inquiry, the knowledge or “meanings artists make from their imaginative investigations are not only *collected* from their encounters with things around them but they are also *created* in response to their experiences” (p. xii). When learners achieve meaningful insights through the interaction of artful production and reflection, arts practices then become authentic aesthetic experiences (Dewey, 1934). Here, aesthetic experience is not restricted to formally trained artists, art critics, and connoisseurs, nor is it exclusively the domain of so-called “fine arts” exhibited in museums or on stage (Duncum, 2007). To the contrary, aesthetic potential exists in the day-to-day encounters that are given little conscious thought (Duncum, 2002, 2007; Irwin, 2008; Jackson, 2002).

We employ the term “arts-based inquiry” instead of “art” in this context to highlight how engagement with artistic techniques, processes, and forms can lead to aesthetic experiences that alter one’s understandings of self and the world. We borrow from Wang’s (2001) notion:

An aesthetic experience is always open to something *other* and *different*. It is beyond the repetitive and the uniform that an aesthetic experience plays its transformative role and leads to an essential openness to the “moreness” and “newness” of experiences. (p. 91)

As with all inquiries, arts-based inquiries are bounded by accumulated knowledge, the concrete materials at hand, and methods demanded by the situation (Johnston, 2009). Arts-based inquiry, drawing as it does from the aesthetic power of the arts, privileges imagination, novelty, and unpredictability above replicability that characterizes the definition of truth in modernist scientific inquiries (Wang, 2001). As in arts-based educational research (Barone & Eisner, 2006), arts-based inquiry reconceptualizes artmaking as an interactive, reflexive practice of problem finding and

problem solving, that is, artmaking as a form of re-search: “knowledge creation in visual arts is recursive and constantly undergoes change as new experiences ‘talk back’ through the process and progress of making art” (Sullivan, 2005, p. 100). Whether visual, performance-based, literary, digital, or a combination of these, arts-based inquiry is a process one undertakes to transform prior understandings and misunderstandings through the manipulation of material and symbolic tools and the reconstruction of social and cultural meanings (Barone & Eisner, 2006; Johnston, 2009). Aesthetic learning experiences born of art practices expand the limits of one’s knowledge.

### THEORIZING TEACHER AWAKENINGS THROUGH CRITICAL AESTHETIC LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Art and arts-based inquiries offer a model for aesthetic learning experiences that transcends specific subject matter and materials. For any field of study, including those not traditionally associated with the arts (e.g., the sciences, business, nursing, teaching, research, and others), aesthetic learning experiences can invite learners to become fully immersed in their pedagogic material (Dewey, 1934). Ellsworth (2005) describes how successful pedagogical encounters with art, media, and architecture can generate for the learner “sensations of being somewhere in between thinking and feeling, of being in motion through the space and time between knowing and not knowing, in the space and time of learning as a lived experience with an open, unforeseeable future” (p. 17). This means that learners become absorbed cognitively, somatically, and emotionally within the materiality of the aesthetic learning experience. These experiences “invite the sensation of mind/brain/body simultaneously in both suspension *and* animation in the interval of change from the person one has been to the person that one has yet to become” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 17). This penetrating intensity marks the unique pedagogic potential of aesthetic experiences to encourage critical awareness and self-transformation.

This section discusses the framework we use to interpret how arts-based inquiries prompt aesthetic learning experiences that awaken students and teachers’ capacities for social justice. We draw from Uhrmacher’s (2009) six forms of participation that, in combination, can engender an aesthetic learning experience. These include (a) connections, (b) active engagement, (c) sensory experience, (d) perceptivity, (e) risk-taking, and (f) imagination. Where our project departs from Uhrmacher’s is in our incorporation of the ideas of theorists and philosophers who have written about the intersections of the arts, aesthetics, and transformative learning. These ideas and conceptual distinctions are rooted in intellectual traditions ranging from (neo)pragmatism, critical theory, feminist theories, and postcolonial theory.

#### Connections, Active Engagement, and Sensory Experience

Uhrmacher’s (2009) first three concepts—connections, active engagement, and sensory experience—form the foundation of any aesthetic learning experience. First, students must make connections to the learning environment. These connections may be visceral, conceptual, empathic, and/or sensory. Second, students immerse themselves in the learning environment, actively engaging with the objects and ideas that comprise the essential aspects of the learning environment. Third, in order to be fully present in this manner, learners must be given the time and space in which to utilize their available bodily senses to interact with the objects and ideas.

These three qualities of aesthetic learning experiences posit the mind and body as a singular, undivided entity. We live our lives through our bodies, and the body comes to hold meanings that mediate our interactions with the social world (Weiss, 1999). Through voice, language, touch, posture, phenotype, physical stature, and ability, the body is the material through which culture, difference, and power operate. “Body knowledge” (Springgay, 2008, p. 24) can play a central, aesthetic role in coming to care about others and committing oneself to dismantling social inequalities. This form of embodied, relational knowing “is concerned with the processes of encounters, the meaning that is made with, in, and through the body, not discernable facts about a body” (p. 36). In critical aesthetic learning experiences, students’ minds/bodies together sense and make sense of entrenched social arrangements and normalizing cultural practices.

### Perceptivity, Risk-Taking, and Imagination

Uhrmacher’s (2009) first three themes of connection, active engagement, and sensory experiences provide a foundation for the final three themes of aesthetic learning experiences—perceptivity, risk-taking, and imagination. By connecting with the learning environment through active engagement and sensory experience, learners are able to perceive or attend carefully to the relationship among ideas and the affective qualities of their material reality. In the act of interpreting (reflection) and making (action) an artistic work, one must strive to overcome what Dewey (1934) calls “perception arrested” (p. 54), a habitual state of mental, emotional, and physical being that closes a person’s receptivity to nuance and gravitates toward hegemonic cultural meanings that routinize daily living.

For some, artmaking evokes fears of failure and creative impotence (Bayles & Orland, 1993; Berghoff, Borgmann & Parr, 2005; James, 2004). Overcoming such fears through risk-taking is an inherent part of aesthetic learning experiences (Uhrmacher, 2009). Dewey (1934) links risk-taking and critical perceptivity, stating, “All conscious perception involves a risk; it is a venture into the unknown, for as it assimilates the present to the past it also brings about some reconstruction of the past” (p. 284). Consequently, conscious perception is a potentially transformative process of opening oneself to seeing the world and oneself anew. In this process, one risks destabilizing habitual, seemingly fixed cultural frames that work to normalize oppressive social conditions and schooling practices. Given the risks involved with unsettling one’s prior perceptions, aesthetic learning experiences can be emotionally charged. The more emotionally engaged one becomes during an aesthetic learning experience, the more potentially memorable, meaningful, and generative are the personal transformations (Berghoff, Borgmann, & Parr, 2005).

Perceptivity, according to Uhrmacher (2009), enables imagination, that is, new understandings of taken-for-granted conventions. Although imagination can be associated with escapist fantasies, we are more interested in two other categories of imagination: intuitive imagination and interactive imagination. Uhrmacher holds that intuitive imagination comes from sustained exploration of a topic or method. Over time, fluency in and facility with the topic or method increases and enhances learners’ abilities to synthesize and apply knowledge in complex and creative ways. New thoughts and unexpected insights seem to flow spontaneously and effortlessly out of nowhere. Intuitive imagination feels more like a hunch or sixth sense than a conscious, intentional process. Methods for helping learners develop critical consciousness, such as Freire’s (1970) decodifying and problem posing, nurture intuitive imagination. As students gain experience and grow more

capable and confident in seeing, naming, and questioning oppression, marginalization, and inequality as they play out daily in schools and society, the more intuitively and creatively they can engage in critically “reading the world” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 23) and crafting innovative responses. With interactive imagination, the learner—whether creating or interpreting an object—co-constructs an aesthetic experience through open-ended, deliberate pursuit of novel ideas as they emerge (Uhrmacher, 2009). Over time, the aesthetic learning experience shapes and is shaped by the learner’s agency, as concurrent reflection and action continually unfold between the learner and the material of the social world. Both forms of imagination—intuitive and interactive—constitute a hopeful, questioning-oriented, creative practice in which innovative possibilities for change are conceived and something other than what was can materialize.

### Aesthetic Awakenings

The questioning orientation that characterizes social justice education is difficult for many teachers to develop. Kumashiro (2004) states, “We do not often question certain practices and perspectives because they are masked by or couched in concepts to which we often feel social pressure to conform, including such concepts as tradition, professionalism, morality and normalcy” (p. xxiii). Alternatives to these common sense perspectives “are *already* dismissed as irrelevant, inconsequential or inappropriate” (p. xxiii). In social justice-oriented teacher education, imagination plays a key role in helping future teachers develop a questioning orientation to teaching.

According to Greene (1995), teachers’ and learners’ “imaginative capacities” are fostered through aesthetic encounters when they “work for the ability to look at things as if they could be otherwise” and “become able to break with what is supposedly fixed and finished, objectively and independently real” (p. 19). Though aesthetic learning experiences do not, by themselves, bring about structural changes in society or institutions such as schools, they do offer opportunities for attending to and actively shaping one’s reality in new and unexpected ways. During engagements with the arts, many learn to notice, name, and respond to previously invisible or overlooked qualities of what they see and experience. Greene (1995) describes this awakening process as a relational transaction with otherness:

It is not some interiority, some realm of awareness inside the brain. Rather, it must be understood as a reaching out, an intending, a grasping of the appearances of things [that . . .] always reaches beyond itself toward a fullness and a completeness that can never be attained. (p. 26)

Awakening through imagination is an intersubjective process that opens an in-between space where people of different races, ethnicities, genders, languages, nationalities, and histories may relate to each other and know themselves differently (Ellsworth, 2005). When this imaginative practice is employed in a self-reflexive manner to confront one’s positioning within matrices of oppression, it can awaken or give rise to critical consciousness. For teachers, this imaginative reconstructive process also involves personal risk of discomfort and disorientation from the loss of normalcy and certitude that accompanies familiar understandings of learning, teaching, knowledge, and schooling (Kumashiro, 2004).

Leonardo and Porter (2010) offer a caution. They suggest that when class discussions about racism occur, particularly in mixed-race settings, teacher educators are often overly preoccupied with creating a relaxing, “safe space” (p. 139) with the intention to allay white students’ fears of

appearing racist and to induce their full participation. The common practice of structuring critical class conversations as imagined safe spaces through the use of rational argumentation and rules of decorum may ease the dominant group members' insecurities and inhibitions (Ellsworth, 1989; hooks, 1994). Leonardo and Porter argue that this form of colorblind safety indulges Whites by preserving a "white racial frame" (p. 149). Minority students, however, risk psychic pain and alienation (Blum, 2002; Oliver, 2002) when participating in this supposed safety zone. These safeguards ultimately ensure the status quo where whiteness remains invisible and white privilege intact.

The power of aesthetic learning experiences is that they invite students to risk moving from familiar to the unknown. According to Wang (2001), designing such experiences requires a mixture of relaxation and intensification. "A relaxing atmosphere intends to make students feel free and confident to explore what interests them. A stimulating environment intends to draw students into an active process of unfolding and undergoing to make transformations possible" (p. 92). We read this in light of Leonardo and Porter's (2010) caution that we not presume that all students feel equally free to participate in critical dialogues. The contradictory states of relaxation and intensification that characterize a transformative aesthetic learning experience suggest that social justice teacher educators should aim to create safe-enough spaces that hold the potential, however tentative, for trust among students occupying different social locations.

Teacher candidates—many of whom are white and middle-class and have not had the chance to experience first-hand or critically reflect on the inequitable ways that sociocultural factors operate in schooling (Gay & Howard, 2000)—must have the opportunity to acquire this knowledge if they are to embrace a teaching orientation committed to equity. A socially just orientation to teacher education seeks to help preservice teachers recognize that teaching operates in a social context punctuated by unequal social relations (Ladson-Billings, 2009), which daily acts of teaching either reinscribe or seek to transform. This process is complicated by the fact that teacher candidates enter teacher education programs often lacking key critical sociocultural knowledge, and sometimes have difficulty engaging critically with such material (Sleeter, 2008). In this article we consider how incorporating arts-based inquiry practices in teacher education courses may address these complications by helping teacher candidates awaken to the possibilities of teaching for social justice.

## METHODS

### Background and Context of the Study

The findings presented in this article come from a larger qualitative case study (Stake, 1995) that examined the change and depth of understanding undergraduate students held about sociocultural knowledge, schooling, and teaching after taking a semester-long course focused on sociocultural influences on schooling and learning. The course, titled *Sociocultural Influences on Learning* is taught at a large, Research I university in the southern region of the U.S. Keffrelyn, an assistant professor, began teaching the course in fall 2006. She is one of several university faculty members, lecturers, and graduate student instructors who offer various sections of this course every semester.

Amelia approached Keffrelyn to volunteer as a graduate teaching assistant in the spring 2008 course after learning that Keffrelyn used a variety of arts-based methods to help students gain more



critical sociocultural knowledge about teaching. Amelia's participation in the course related to her background as an elementary art teacher and interest in the arts as a vehicle for the preparation of teachers who are committed to teaching for equity and social justice. In fall 2008, both Keffrelyn and Amelia taught their own individual sections of the course, using the same pedagogic and curricular approach developed by Keffrelyn. Amelia taught one section of the course in spring 2009. The findings in this article come from data generated across four offerings of the course (three 15-week semesters—spring 2008 [1 class]; fall 2008 [2 classes]; spring 2009 [one class]).

The goals for the course focused on students: (1) acquiring a complex understanding of socio-cultural knowledge that was grounded in learning to teach in socially equitable and just ways; (2) recognizing that all aspects of the schooling and teaching process were impacted by sociocultural factors—including issues related to race, social class, and gender; (3) understanding that teachers, through their daily decision-making and practice, played an important role in reinscribing or challenging inequitable opportunities for students to learn; and (4) acknowledging the problems with approaching students, their families, communities, and/or cultural/racial group in essentializing and deficit-oriented ways. In keeping with these goals, Keffrelyn identified and provided for students a set of key terms, concepts, and frameworks. These were culled from extant critical multicultural teacher education literature as important in preparing teachers to teach in socially just and equitable ways. They included theories on academic achievement, meritocracy, social reproduction, racial formation, gendered practices, and culturally responsive/relevant pedagogy.

Students read a variety of articles, chapters, and book-length manuscripts (often based on ethnographic research) in the course. These readings explored the historical struggle for education experienced by marginalized groups of color; contemporary challenges facing urban schooling; the roles that race, class, and gender play in schooling; the notion of white privilege; and the transformative power that teacher caring and culturally relevant/responsive teaching can have on student engagement and learning in the classroom. Students participated in whole-group and small group discussion; watched various video clips taken from documentaries and sitcoms; listened to short, targeted mini-lectures delivered by the instructor; and engaged in arts-based inquiry activities.

Students participated individually and collaboratively in creative, arts-based inquiries throughout the semester, including creating collages; drawing diagrams and depictions; writing fiction and non-fiction narratives; developing storyboards; and recording, acting, and editing a film. The focus was not on the art techniques or completed artifacts themselves as a learning outcome. The artmaking tasks were a way for students to explore the course content. This included: investigating how sociocultural factors played a role in the students' own K-12 schooling experience, considering the historical struggles faced by different groups to access equitable schooling, and illuminating the dominant messages of gender circulated across mainstream, popular discourse. See Figures 1 and 2 for examples of artifacts created during the students' arts-based inquiries.

### Data Collection and Analysis

Participants in the study included both male and female students from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds who, after completing and receiving a grade in the course, volunteered to be in the study. While the course draws students from a wide variety of majors and future professional interests, 70 of the 83 students taught over the three semesters of data collection planned



FIGURE 1 Storyboard developed for a video case project on how social class operates in schooling. The film explores the key concepts social capital, othering, equity, social reproduction, privilege and meritocracy.

on becoming K-12 teachers, with the vast majority beginning the K-6 teacher education program in the subsequent semester. Fifty-four students decided to participate in the study. Twenty of these participants (18 of whom were preservice teachers) agreed to an interview with one of the authors at the end of the semester. We conducted interviews of our own students. Primary sources of data used for this discussion include one semi-structured, 45–60 minute interview conducted with participants after the completion of the course and students' final reflection papers.

Both authors participated in data analysis. This process focused on reading and coding all of the interview transcripts and reflective final papers that illustrated the students' interest in



FIGURE 2 Collage created in response to readings, film, and lecture on gender discourses and images in the mass media.

and judgments of the usefulness of various materials and activities for their learning about sociocultural influences and schooling. We worked independently to analyze each interview transcript and reflective paper using a three-phase design grounded in the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). First, we coded all interview transcript data for how students discussed their experiences in the course and the significance of the arts-based activities and assignments on their learning. These codes addressed (1) if and how the activities and assignments were useful to the students' learning and (2) the specific activities and assignments that were

useful. Second, materials were reviewed again for emergent themes that were distinct from the initial set of codes. These categories generally focused on the unique features that the participants cited about their experiences. Third, we identified disconfirming evidence that contradicted data already coded and made adjustments accordingly (Yin, 2003).

## FINDINGS

The learning experiences many students attributed to arts-based inquiries suggest that significant shifts in understanding were spurred by their engagement with the conceptual materials, the arts practices, and the other students in the course. The arts-based activity most noted was the final collaborative video case project. In this assignment, 3–4 students collaboratively developed a realistic dramatization that explored the inequitable ways that race, social class, or gender operated in the context of schooling. The assignment included writing a case narrative, an overview of the key themes examined in the case, and a set of 3–5 critical questions related to the case; enacting the case while digitally recording and editing their performance; and burning their films onto a compact disc for later viewing. On the last day of class, students presented their collaborative videos to the entire class. This was the only arts-based inquiry in the course for which the final product was graded.

In explaining the kind of learning experiences the collaborative video case project afforded them, several students described the challenges of negotiating group power dynamics and the personal transformations that arose from producing a realistic representation of raced, gendered, and classed bodies. Four themes emerged across students' reflective statements about how this culminating experience and other arts-based inquiries used in the course helped them to expand their critical sociocultural knowledge. First and foremost, participation in arts-based inquiries throughout the course helped students' increase their critical sociocultural knowledge. For many students, artmaking offered a pleasurable form of engagement with course content but simultaneously aroused fears. As they worked to collaboratively produce visual representations of their critical sociocultural knowledge, students also worked to make sense of race, class, and gender as relational, embodied experiences. Some students found that arts-based activities gave rise to self-reflections that expanded and enlivened the ways they understood course material, themselves, and others. These themes are discussed separately below.

### Building Critical Sociocultural Knowledge Through Art-Making

Repeated opportunities to explore and represent course content with artmaking tools and processes enabled students to build critical understandings of sociocultural factors in schooling over time. Throughout the semester, students routinely moved through cycles of working with key concepts independently and collaboratively using simple, creative, art practices, such as drawing pictures, creating conceptual diagrams, and constructing collages. Figure 3 shows a drawing produced by Sandra,<sup>1</sup> a Mexican American female student early in the semester in response to her reading on Mexican Americans' historical struggles for educational equality (see G. Gonzalez, 1990). She described the experience of making the drawing in this way:

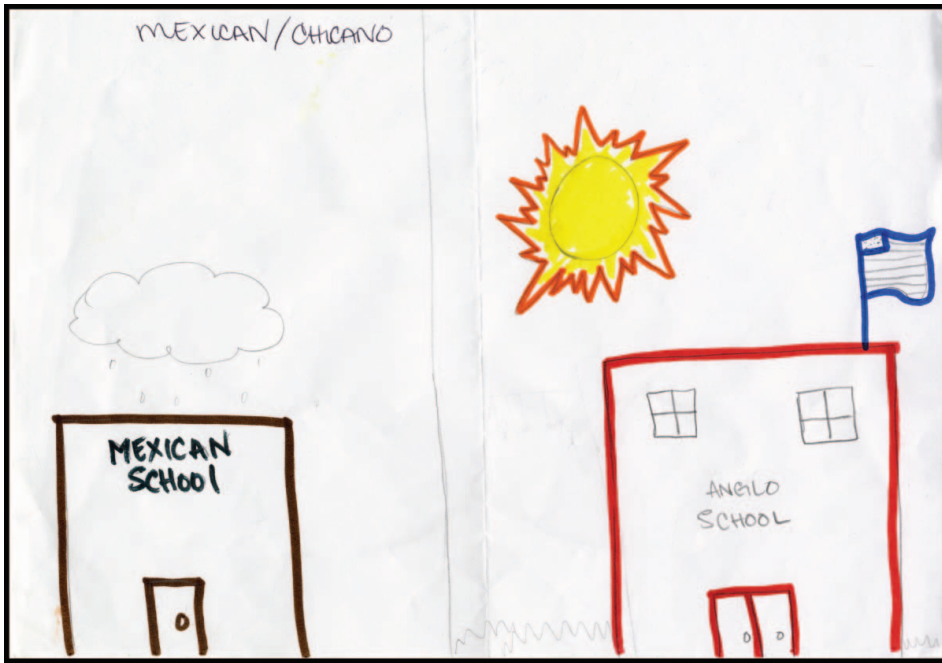


FIGURE 3 Sandra's drawing in response to a course reading.

My picture shows a Mexican school, plain-looking, with a rain cloud over it, then an Anglo school in perfect condition with bright colors and a sun. This is suppose to show that schools with a majority Mexican population usually don't have enough money to make their schools look well put together with new and working materials, as the majority Caucasian schools do. I know that this is not how every majority Hispanic school or majority white school is but it's just surprising to see how even I have been influenced to automatically think of that set up when asked about the difference between those two settings. (Final Paper)

By creating an image to represent her knowledge (and then writing about that arts-based experience in her final reflective paper cited above), Sandra felt that she became conscious of her own assumptions and was able to elicit her own tacit knowledge about historical inequalities between white students and students of color. Sandra achieved greater insight through her drawing than she anticipated. When she stated, "I know that this is not how every majority Hispanic school or majority white school is," it is as though she wanted to acknowledge that her depiction could be read as a stereotypical rendering of Anglo-Mexican relations. She finished her thought by saying, "but it's just surprising to see how even I have been influenced." The process of reflecting on the course material followed by the opportunity to respond creatively, in this case by drawing, and again reflecting on the drawing seems to have enabled Sandra to gain a critical understanding her own thinking about racial inequality.

Many other students indicated that this kind of creative image-making activity was an important aspect of their learning. The following statement from Helen, a student from China, is representative of how many students' felt that their learning was enhanced through drawing:

Drawing stuff and sharing it with the group [was memorable] because we couldn't, like, write out what we are thinking. I think that also helped a lot because we had symbolic meanings and that kind of filters out the unnecessary things. I think that helped me a lot in terms of understanding. (Interview)

Over the course of the semester, drawing and collage were frequently used as a means for students to represent their shared knowledge of key ideas. In the process of using these arts techniques to construct new meanings, students' knowledge went beyond the limits imposed by purely verbal explanations of sociocultural phenomena (Leitch, 2006).

The artifacts resulting from the students' early arts-based investigations were not formally evaluated or used for course grading. Instead these activities provided students with tangible images that were then available as tools for engaging in ongoing critical dialogue with each other (Freire, 1970). Some students found that their discussions and differing points of view over the collaborative design of an image enhanced the truthfulness of their representations. Leslie, a student who self-identified as white, middle-class, and lesbian, told of creating convincing, true to life images with her collaborators. "Putting the concepts into a picture helped clarify our ideas. It was often challenging to come up with an image or group of images that felt right for the whole group" (Final Paper). During this process of imaginative problem solving, the pictures commanded careful scrutiny and negotiation of meaning by group members.

Image-mediated interactions among students around the topics of race, class, gender, sexuality, language, and culture were opportunities for students to reassemble and reconsider the course's content. Again, Leslie spoke about how the material explored over the course of the semester was a significant part of the collaborative artmaking process:

I loved making the video because it made everything come together and even though it wasn't a written project we really needed to go back and kind of, very thoroughly, go through everything we had written and read and what elements we wanted to put in there and what we felt was the most important thing. (Interview)

For most students, the course content provided an important, cumulative knowledge base for creating the final collaborative video. For Courtney, a white female student, the course content was a significant aspect of her learning during the final filmmaking project:

We [the video case group] also had a little too much fun filming the actual project, which I did not expect to result from it! I really came to understand the issues faced with gender discrimination and how prevalent it is (and has always been) in our society . . . The video case project definitely raised my awareness of this. (Final Paper)

When working to develop their videos, students like Courtney drew from the cultural devices provided in the course—conceptual frameworks, normative behaviors for discussion, and verbal and visual cases of sociocultural processes in and outside schools—to understand a range of disparities in opportunities to learn.

## Pleasure and Fear

Almost every participant noted in positive terms how memorable the collaborative video case project was. The combination of working with others and using forms of reconfiguring and representing knowledge that differed from the routine essay-writing assignment was an enjoyable experience for many students, as reflected in these three female students' comments:

The video case project, I think that was a lot of fun. I liked it, just getting to work with people that I probably wouldn't have talked to. (Interview)

I am usually pretty good with computers and so to learn something new is really interesting for me. It was exciting because you were building it together, putting it together. (Interview)

The video case . . . was the most interesting and fun project thus far that I have been involved in. I honestly never really enjoy working in groups and tend to think that my ideas are always the best and most worthwhile. I had an amazing group in which each member brought something extraordinary to the table and we worked together very well. (Final Paper)

A few students, however, talked about feeling discomfort during the artmaking aspects of this project. For example, Shannon, a biracial student, recalled the challenge her group faced: "I don't think any of us were very good actors. A lot of people were really shy about it, too, so there is that ordeal" (Interview). For these group members, the performance aspects of the video project called for some risk-taking.

In all sections of the course, students were asked to sign up for the topic they most wanted to concentrate on for the video project—race, class, or gender. In two of the three semesters, only a few students chose to work on race, which suggests that students preferred not to have to explore race in-depth. This avoidance may indicate a challenge inherent to collaborative and/or arts-based methods dealing with race (Desai, 2002; Fox, 1994). In order to make sure that all three topics were addressed, the project was altered so that diverse groups of students were assigned to focus on race even though their first choice had been to create a video about gender or class.

Group deliberations, about racial identities in particular, heightened some students' fears about creating a video with and for others. It is worth noting that none of the participants who developed gender or class videos divulged any feelings of confusion, anger, isolation, despondency, fear, or other negative reactions or personal challenges regarding their involvement in the collaborative project. A few students who created race videos spoke about the tension between a desire for recognition and the fear of misrepresentation of historically marginalized groups. Angel, a Mexican American male student from a low-income family, was assigned the task of collaboratively creating a video about race along with his group members—an Asian female and three white females. During his interview, Angel disclosed that his racial and ethnic positioning in the class forced him to have to choose between feeling complicit in or resistant to the production of problematic racial narratives about Mexican Americans. His words revealed his initial trepidation, and hopefulness, for an authentic racial dialogue during the artmaking process (Leonardo & Porter, 2010). The following excerpt from his interview shows how he negotiated creative authority in the collaborative space:

When I first saw the topic I was kind of a little bit nervous about it just because I was one out of maybe two or three people who were Hispanic in the entire class. I was coming from a different background than most people in the class and I didn't know how that was going to work out in terms of race,

looking at the main group or the main dominant race in the classroom. So I was a little worried or you know a little sketchy about it at first. . . . But then when we started discussing within our group what the objectives were, what we were trying to do with the video. I thought maybe I could give a message or do a video or do a project where, to change the way, how different people view my race or how my own people view themselves as being from that same race. So then I was kind of like pumped up. I was excited about the film or working with the plot of race.

In elaborating his thought process, Angel described the overwhelming presence of white students in his group, in the class, and at the university. Coming from a small, predominantly Mexican American community, Angel felt he lacked experience in interacting with white people. Angel anticipated that in the collaborative video case project he would have to deal with misunderstandings and conflicts of artistic vision within his group of collaborators. At the same time, he felt “pumped up” by the alternate, liberatory possibilities he imagined for the project.

In the end, Angel’s group did not produce the uplifting portrayal of Mexican Americans that Angel had envisioned. Instead, they developed a cautionary tale that showed how his character was deprived of educational opportunities when social capital and cultural capital shared by two white administrators and a white student enabled subtle forms of institutional racism and white privilege. He stated:

I don’t know who came up with the plot, and I just went along with it. I didn’t want say anything. I was like, “Okay.” But at the same time I figured, “Okay, I mean, I guess if we are aware of the bad stereotypes and the bad perceptions and we are trying to change all of that, then it’s okay. I guess if we are trying to get the message across, then it’s okay for me to do this.” So I just went along and did it. . . . I just felt like there could have been, like we could have presented our message a whole lot better than it was. I’m not saying that I was mad or disturbed about it, but I just felt like we could have done it in another way.

For Angel, the collaborative space of inquiry failed to deliver on its empowering potential. Although he claimed not to be upset, there was a double silencing—once when he felt he was unable to penetrate the white dominated discourse shared by the women in his group and again when he was denied creative agency to perform a counter-narrative. Even as unequal relations of power played out on the interpersonal terrain of the collaboration, Angel talked about pleasurable aspects of this shared artmaking experience:

When a group of people get together and they have different ideas—this person has a different idea and this person—then just getting to put all those ideas together as one main plot was really cool and really insightful.

Leslie also talked about a combination of satisfaction and apprehension in producing a video case about race. During an interview, she explained that during her upbringing in a liberal household, she was told “don’t ever say anything about race because you don’t have any issues. You don’t have any problems. You don’t have anything to worry about. You are in the clear.” When confronted with having to make a video about race, Leslie was initially reluctant to deal with what she called her “blind spot”:

I was horrified. I was terrified. I was not horrified-disgusted; I was horrified like, “Oh my god, I will never be able to do this. I don’t know what to do.” . . . We had all of these incredible discussions and did all of these great things and now we are going to take your blind spot and blow it up. . . . it was such a great project for me because I would never have volunteered for that in a million years. I mean



I was scared. I didn't want to put something out there that would offend anybody, that would go too far, or that would be wishy-washy or not saying anything.

Her initial fears of appearing racist and vacuous intensified her experience of making the video (Wang, 2001).

### Bodies as Material

As they were making the video case, several students had unexpected insights that emerged from embodied performances that opened up an interactive imagination (Uhrmacher, 2009) between self and other. Jasmine, a Mexican American, female student, described how, during the process of creating the collaborative video case, the enactment of another's identity moved her to comprehend racial otherness in a way that was more resonant than when writing:

With [writing] the case we were kind of separated from that. We didn't think of it as a part of us or something, but when we had to act it out, we kind of felt weird like we were really in this situation and we kind of, at least I kind of was able to see maybe how the people in that situation would feel because of what was going on. When I was writing it, I was just like kind of an outsider. (Interview)

Undergoing this embodied weirdness of "being-with" (Springgay, 2008, p. 34), moving out of herself into a relational space between self and other, enabled Jasmine to imagine her character's subjectivity rather than merely observe actions from an objective (safe) distance. She said, through her embodied performance she was able "to see," at least in part, from the position of an other.

During her interview, Helen elaborated on her experience of working with racialized bodies to visualize truthful, yet non-essentializing, narratives. A portion of her interview is reproduced here to show how difficult it was for her to articulate the hidden, implicit ways in which race operated in her group's creative decision-making. She started by explaining her collaborative video case, which drew from the dominant discourse of parent involvement.

Helen: Our case was on how white parents were involved [in the school] and how the two principals who were choosing the class president were white. I think I was supposed to be the principal, but because there would have been a better connection, we switched.

Interviewer: Why couldn't you be the principal?

H: Because I am Asian.

I: And what would that mean? How would that have changed the video?

H: In terms of the message that we were setting out, I don't think it would have made a big difference, but the fact that the principal was white, there is a connection, you know, like the principal's white and they—I don't want to say it. It's hard to explain.

I: What don't you want to say?

H: Well, I think the principals picked the white student [to be class president] because she was also white. I guess they have a better understanding of their race.

I: And that would have been different if you had played the role of the principal?

H: Yeah, I think it would. It would have been less, no, not less racist because I am a third person in terms of choosing between the white and the Hispanic student. . . . Because it was a short case we had to make, I think we just sent the message out from that. I think if I was the principal, we would have had to talk more and be more—I think having a white principal itself was sending out a message itself.

This group's video showed how, when selecting a student class president, the cultural affinity and racial preferences of two white school administrators negatively affected a Latino student's chances for success. In trying to make their case concise and explicit, Helen's group opted for an illustration more than an inquiry of racial practices in schools. The piece they made used racial bodies to produce a more typical display of white racism. Keeping Helen in the role of one of the principals, on the other hand, would have created a more interesting, complex case in which white supremacist ideologies were performed through bodies of color, thus questioning the notion of racism as simply the enactment of offenses by white individuals against victims of color. The group opted for the moral certainty and comfort of the familiar narrative over the version in which Helen's body in the role of principal might have encouraged multiple, contradictory readings of race and racism.

### Remaking Inside and Out: Attending to Daily Oppressions and Inequalities

Art-based inquiries may involve viewing and making processes, that is, both reflection and action. For the majority of the preservice teachers in all three semesters of the course, these reciprocal processes of art seemed crucial to awakening their imaginative capacities for social justice. Through seeing their classmates' completed video cases and producing their own pieces, most students remarked how their arts-based inquiries into race, class, and gender required an *undoing*, a willingness to see differently.

Jasmine, for example, reflected aloud about how, within the context of working on the video case with her group members, she came to more critically interpret the ubiquitous yet cumulative small-scale and often stressful violations, insults, and barriers some groups face every day. Her words convey the kind of awakenings many other students communicated in their final papers and interviews:

It was difficult for us to think of an experience that had race in it. I mean you think you see so many happen but we couldn't think of something that would be really good. So it was really difficult to do. I just realized there are so many things that happen around us. When you have to think about it, it's like "What *did* happen?" I guess you kind of don't make it as important in your mind. You kind of just see it and then it's like "Okay," and then you don't keep it there . . . Like when it's subtle, there are a lot of things that happened that are really subtle. And you can realize the big ones, you know, like if someone is like *really* racist. But when it's subtle you could just stop and think about it. If you don't, then it's like you don't really see it as a big racism thing, but it is I guess.

The disruption of routine, common sense ways of interpreting visual experiences is a crucial part of the art-based inquiry process (Dewey, 1934). By making the familiar sites/sights of education strange, arts-based inquiries can encourage generative, aesthetic, pedagogical spaces in which preservice teachers can risk remaking the ways in which they perceive and know the world and their social location within it, thus remaking themselves (Ellsworth, 2005).

Caroline, a white, middle-class, female student, discussed the way her arts-based inquiry troubled her certainty of knowing the course content when, in the midst of creating her video case, she confronted her own underlying deficit orientation toward Latinos. The simultaneity of making and reflecting characterizes the critical arts engagements that fostered her awakening. She is quoted here at length so as to show how her intricate self-revelation and self-reformation were integrated through the process of artmaking.

We had made up most of our script and everything, and then when we re-looked at what essentializing was, *that* was what we're doing. And so we had to write a new one. And then when we tried to decide on what wardrobe [the characters would wear] and things like that, then we did it again! And I think that it's like racism. It really is. That you think of a race and when you think of that race and you're like, "Oh, Hispanics. They dress like, you know, they have baggy clothes and this and that" but that's racist. . . . I think that's what I learned from it [creating the video case] . . . essentializing is basically racism when we're putting them all together and making them be like this one person with no other thought about them. I guess when we were doing it, you would think like, "Oh, well *my* friend, you know, she's different." But what about all the other people that are different from that race? And I think that's the main thing I learned, that it's easy because everyone around us does it. . . . I'm sure that it's not something that we all mean to do. But it kind of helped to stand out when we did the case study that we were doing it. . . . I thought that it was just, that I understood, but I guess at that moment it was so natural that I forgot you really shouldn't do those things. That really helped it stick to my head.

Caroline's words help us to grasp how critical, arts-based inquiry is not just perceiving and manipulating outer material conditions; one's inner life also undergoes a re-making process that can spark a critical awakening within one's consciousness.

## DISCUSSION

One of the key pedagogic components of the course described in this article is providing students with multiple arts-based inquiry experiences. Students' frequent aesthetic experiences assisted them in building critical sociocultural knowledge using art-based skills. The recursive, collaborative, arts-based learning opportunities in the course enabled students to develop co-constructed understandings about the socially unjust nature of schools and teaching. In this way, knowledge was understood socioculturally; it was meaningful and shared among people.

While students used the key concepts and knowledge from the course to assess the quality of their collaborative artistic productions, they also relied upon feelings of authenticity and realism to discern the accuracy of their work. Feelings, based on emotions, perceptivity, and experience, were highly valued ways of knowing that served to balance logical, analytic reasoning (Derry, 2005). For instance, the validity of students' creations were, according to Leslie, judged using what "felt right for the whole group." But just as reason and logic can be coercive tools that normalize the subordination of minority voices in group discussions (Ellsworth, 1989), emotions, perceptions, and experiences must also contend with authoritative discourses (Bakhtin, 1981) that make opinions and feelings of the dominant group seem representative of the only natural, legitimate reality with no room for compromise. The collaborative process, therefore, cannot guarantee all participants' feelings are given equal power in shaping a group's creative ideas and

artifacts. The filmmaking project was an instance in which asymmetrical power relations and positionality played a role in students' arts-based inquiries.

Students noted experiencing both enjoyment and satisfaction when producing work, particularly as part of the collaborative video case project. Despite the pleasure that accompanied the creative process, some students experienced distress when deciding how to bring their work to life in the context of sociocultural factors, particularly race. Concerns abound for the students around selecting and representing characters in their collaborative cases that did not fall into essentialized constructions of people, nor that portrayed students, families, communities, and/or racial/ethnic groups in deficit-oriented ways. Video provided a highly visible and reproducible medium through which the student-performers' knowledge and beliefs about race were documented and put on view before a large audience of their peers. In addition, the video was used as one of the formal, summative assessments of students' learning. The heightened exposure to public scrutiny and the magnitude of the project as a major (graded) assignment may have felt more threatening than the collages, drawings, storyboards, and narratives created earlier in the semester. There also may have been an unspoken fear of conducting an inquiry about race that stemmed from students' lack of knowledge, interest, or personal experience (Leonardo & Porter, 2010). For example, the responsibility for producing a visual representation of their understanding of race left Leslie "horrified" and Angel feeling vulnerable. Despite all the preparatory readings, written work, and discussions that took place throughout the semester, the task of visualizing a racial narrative for public exhibition required personal risk-taking that was stimulating for all the potential missteps and the possible rewards. Leslie and Angel's experiences suggest that arts-based methods are not inherently freeing and that collaboration does not always produce empowering learning experiences.

Students' arts-based inquiries were as much about coming to understand their own and others' experiences as already racialized, classed, and gendered as they were about producing a polished final video. Students recognized through their developing sociocultural knowledge and the various aesthetic activities that they engaged the visceral, real nature of human bodies—both their own and the bodies they symbolically invoked through their case making. These were not merely sensory experiences (Uhrmacher, 2009); rather the physical body operated as (curricula) material, which the students read, made sense of (in the context of social discourses, images and practices), and later invoked to imaginatively create and present their final videos. It is often the case that physical bodies get ignored/figured out of intellectual explorations (Bordo, 1987). However, in this instance, the aesthetic potential of the moment entwined with students' expanding sensations and knowledge of the oppressive and inequitable relations found in society and schools. Even in the case of Helen's group that applied a simple coding of racism as a white problem, race had to be confronted as it was enacted and felt through their bodily senses. Race could not easily be intellectualized and minimized as an abstraction or artifact of history disconnected from the students' own educational experiences.

Along with this complex sociocultural knowledge base and through various artmaking processes, students in the course actively engaged with their own and others' bodies to experience a remaking inside and out that illuminated the daily oppressions and inequalities that take place in schooling and in the teaching moment. These new insights placed students in the position of having to think differently about their own and others' perspectives about the world. In thinking differently, the students recognized their social reality in what was for them novel, yet often troubling ways. This disruption to their "sedimented preceptors" (Slattery, 1995, p. 135) was

inherently unpredictable and, in many ways, risky. These new perspectives, in turn, “remade” how the students understood themselves, the world, and their place within it.

## CONCLUSION

What, then, do arts-based methods of examining critical sociocultural knowledge tell us about students' learning on this topic? First, we recognize that when employing arts-based inquiry as a means of helping students learn about the inequitable nature of schooling in the U.S., students are not just “doing art”; rather, they employ aesthetic processes to examine, uncover, and voice new, more complex knowledge around the sociocultural with a critical perspective in mind. This process, while at times pleasurable, does invoke anxiety, fear, and a sense of danger in students, as the aesthetic can (and very often seeks to) disrupt normalized ways of thinking about self and the world. It also requires that students attend closely to the nature and implication of daily decision-making, particularly in the case of teaching. Arts-based inquiry can also place students in the position of having to become more reflective and attentive to the ways teachers continually recreate the world—either by reinscribing existing inequitable social relationships, or by challenging and seeking to transform these inequities. As a result students—as future teachers—become keenly aware of and reflective of the individual and collective responsibility they hold as agents in their world. Indeed, they hold the promise of replicating what already is or transforming what is and, thus, creating new social possibilities.

One of the interesting insights we gained from this study is that without conducting this study and interviewing students from our classes, we would not have recognized the powerful role that arts-based methods had on the students' experiences and learning. Although we recognize that most instructors do not have the time or the luxury to interview students at the conclusion of a course, we suggest the need to incorporate alternative ways to elicit students' ideas about their experiences and learning with arts-based inquiry. Instructors could access this information by asking students to critically reflect on their experiences with engaging artmaking in the class. This could be done after every class session, during specific class sessions, or at the end of the semester. Asking students to talk about how they felt while creating or doing an activity in the classroom or having students discuss their experiences in small groups that later share back to the instructor would offer vital information to those who want to strengthen and reflect on their teaching.

We recognize that some instructors who do not have a background in the arts may feel uncomfortable using arts-based methods in their courses. These feelings might come from the common assumption that specialized training in the arts is needed to effectively employ art as a pedagogic tool. This perspective assumes a limited vision of what constitutes the aesthetic. This vision holds art as separate from life and something that only a privileged few can access (Freedman, 1994). If nothing else, we hope that this article helps to challenge these kinds of limiting perspectives by illuminating the power that arts-based inquiry can play in helping future teachers acquire critical sociocultural knowledge about teaching. And while we recognize that in and of themselves, arts-based methods cannot promise to result in all students committing (or being able) to teach for equity and social justice, we argue that these methods do offer a powerful entry point into and pathway toward acquiring the knowledge teachers need to teach in socially just and equitable ways.

## NOTE

1. Pseudonyms are used throughout this article.

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