Bridging Educational Communities to Creatively Explore Social Justice Topics Through Film and Dance

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Abstract: This school-university partnership collaborative project was student-centered and focused on supporting learning goals for three different groups of students through knowledge sharing and translating theory into practice. Students from three levels of education (high school, undergraduate, and graduate students) engaged in a multi-semester, integrated arts project that culminated in the performance of film and dance representations of social justice topics in education. The project engaged the community through the public performance and connected school, university and the community to advocate for social justice and the arts. We share the student learning outcomes from this project to demonstrate that the school-university partnership can provide valid pedagogical support for the collaborators. The mutual non-hierarchical relationship between the partners was the key to the success of the collaboration.

KEYWORDS: Social Justice Education, Activist Art, School-University Partnership, Dance Education, Arts Integration

NAPDS NINE ESSENTIALS ADDRESSED:
1. A comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope than the mission of anypartner and that furthers the education profession and its responsibility to advance equity within schools and, by potential extension, the broader community;
2. A school-university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embracestheir active engagement in the school community;
4. A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants;
7. A structure that allows all participants a forum for ongoing governance, reflection, and collaboration.

Introduction

This school-university partnership was a collaboration to create an integrated applied learning experience that supports the goals of the high school dance program, pre-service teacher education course, and higher education graduate course, respectively. Walsh and Backe (2013) emphasized that the main beneficiaries of school-university partnership should be the students. We agreed and focused this collaboration on providing students from all three groups (i.e., high school, undergraduate, graduate students) with experiences related to both social justice and arts education. We modeled a collaborative approach that blurred the distinctions across our respective foci as a way to demonstrate to our students the value of working across levels of education to engage in social justice and arts education. The final culminating event of this collaboration is a dance + film performance (see Figure 1 below) that represents an integrated performance and celebrates the work of all students involved in the project.

Figure 1. *Four dancers perform about LGBTQ+ topics*

The year-long project started with Liao's (author 1) idea of creating a project-based arts integration experience for undergraduate students in the Integrating the Arts in the Elementary Curriculum course. We intentionally sought ways to involve students in social justice education to learn about issues in education these undergraduate students will encounter in the classroom once they become school teachers. In order to learn about social justice topics, undergraduate students in education were paired with graduate students from the Social Justice in Education course. The graduate students shared their learning of social justice topics with the undergraduate students, which the undergraduate students utilized to create a film to represent their learning of social justice issues through an art form. Throughout the collaborative process, graduate students guided the undergraduate students through reflective activities that helped them identify relevant themes that drove the content that will be included in their films. The process of peer mentoring and education was modeled with high school students during the development of the dance aspect of the project as well.

Following the completion of the films, the undergraduate students met with the high school dance students in the advanced dance class and the dance International Baccalaureate (IB) program to share their films and discuss ideas for choreography of dance pieces that accompany and relate directly to the films. The high school student choreographers engaged in their own

reflections and workshopped their ideas with us and their undergraduate student mentors to finalize their pieces. The dance and film components of the project were then performed in an integrated performance at the university theatre at the end of the semester. The final performance of the project in Spring 2017 was attended by students from all courses engaged in the project as well as campus faculty, administrators, and family members of the performers.

We agree that a shared conceptual understanding is one of the requirements for effective school-university partnership (Walsh & Backe, 2013), and framed our project using the five goals discussed below. Our central belief is that the integration of social justice and arts education provides a way to engage our educational communities in meaningful and mutual learning and development. We approached the project with five goals we hoped to accomplish and model for the professional development of our students:

1. **Share knowledge** about both social justice topics in education and arts-based methods for understanding and addressing those issues;
2. **Exchange ideas** about ways to integrate the arts into educational activities and conversations about social justice topics;
3. **Encourage theory to practical** application of theoretical or scholarly learning about social justice topics and the arts to real-world situations (i.e., classroom, school, curricular initiatives);
4. **Outreach to the community** that engages the multiple and diverse communities affected by social justice topics; and
5. **Create bridges across programs and populations** that models a social justice approach to collaboration and shows appreciation for all stakeholders.

Review of Relevant Literature

Social Justice in Education

Persistent issues of diversity, inclusion, equity, and equality have plagued educational systems throughout the history of the United States (Adams et al., 2013; Bull, 2008). Racial and ethnic minorities and female students, for example, were excluded from higher education until the 19th century, and even after laws were enacted to provide access for marginalized populations, disparities between privileged and marginalized groups have been perpetuated. Once overt exclusionary practices have now been replaced by more covert forms of marginalization (i.e., microaggressions) that maintain systems of power and privilege for dominant groups at all levels of education, particularly within public schools and institutions (Adams et al., 2013).

> An educational approach that is grounded in social justice requires us to widen our perspective on the educational system to determine whether its general structure aligns with our fundamental and shared political convictions about the way that the schools should contribute to the development of children in the context of their cultures and communities. (Bull, 2008, p. 176)

In other words, we must work with the members of our communities in the development of educational policies and practices that reflect our shared values. Social justice in education is

intended to move us beyond a recognition of the importance of diversity and towards the development of a system that uplifts everyone--regardless of social identity, status, or location (Adams et al., 2013; Bull, 2008).

Thus, the social justice philosophy to which we ascribe is framed as both an outcome and a process (Adams et al., 2013). An outcome of social justice in education is the development of opportunities for students to understand the effects of oppression on marginalized individuals; as a process, social justice in education encourages students to utilize affirming practices to address the negative effects of oppression. Art is one way we sought to accomplish this.

Beyerbach (2017) concluded that "using the arts to teach about social justice issues engages students and challenges them to think deeply. . . They are quicker to identify patterns and understand issues and are less inclined to construct walls of resistance" (p. 7). We agree and work collaboratively to engage our students in both arts and social justice topics in ways that were relevant to their specific levels (i.e., graduate, undergraduate, and high school students) and goals (i.e., higher education, teacher education, and dance education). Performances of film and dance representations of social justice topics depict students' engagement with and reflection on topics explored during the project. In this section, we explore scholarly perspectives that have informed our approach to the integrated film and dance performance that represented the culmination of our work. The project described in this article embodies both the goals of social justice education and activist artmaking. The final event of this collaboration project, Performance of Social Justice, is an activist art that aims to raise the public's awareness of social justice issues in education.

Learning Social Justice through the Arts

Multiple perspectives related to social justice and the arts informed the development of the project. Beyond our desire to model social justice as both an outcome and process, tenets of post-critical ethnography (Noblitt, Flores, & Murillo, 2004) and critical race theory (CRT) (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) informed our approach to addressing social justice topics in education. Post-critical ethnographers engage in community-based research with their participants, which aligns with our desire to engage in collaborative and mutually beneficial work on the project (Noblitt, Flores, & Murillo, 2004). Lines between researcher and participant are often blurred in post-critical ethnographic research as the researcher becomes immersed in community in which he/her/hir conducts research; additionally, participants often assist in the research process as collaborators because their perspectives are valued and voices honored in dissemination of the research (Noblitt, Flores, & Murillo).

One central tenet of CRT is the use of counter-stories to give voice to the perspectives of marginalized populations who were previously silenced (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Counter-stories can take multiple forms and, indeed, art is one way in which counterstories can be represented in order to effectively honor marginalized individuals. In our work, film and dance represented the medium through which we could give voice to the social justice topics examined and individual perspectives represented by our students. The integrated film and dance performances represented artistic counter-stories in two ways. First, the performances are intentionally staged to share the voices of marginalized individuals collected in the completion of

the project. Second, our use of film and dance represents a non-traditional form of student engagement and evaluation not typically validated in college curricula. We contend that the significant emphasis placed upon the performances in student engagement and evaluation represents an academic counter-story where art is valued, particularly as a representation of learning about social justice. Beyerbach and Ramalho (2017) supported this application and concluded that "learning in art and learning in life are interconnected, particularly the ability to navigate through the dominant culture" (p. 253). For students, the opportunity to use "expression through art can bring the unconscious to a state of consciousness" (p. 254). Thus, arts are an appropriate and effective mechanism for engaging students in learning about social justice topics.

Social Justice Arts Education and Activist Art

Social justice arts education is social justice education through the means of artmaking. Dewhurst (2010) suggests that "as long as the process of making art offers participants a way to construct knowledge, critically analyze an idea, and take action in the world, then they are engaged in a practice of social justice artmaking" (p. 8). Social justice art education has been an important discourse in the field of art education based on the scholarship of social justice education and the socially responsive and activist art development in the contemporary art field (Dewhurst, 2010, 2014; Garber, 2004). Artmaking is the means and also the goal in social justice arts education. This emphasis is different from using the arts to engage students in learning about social justice discussed above. The common goal for the undergraduate course and the high school dance program is meaningful artmaking. The approach of social justice arts education engaged students in critical artmaking reflecting on the social justice topics.

The Performance of Social Justice was also activist artmaking. Many art educators have engaged students in activist artmaking (Darts, 2006; Dewhurst, 2014; Keifer-Boyd, 2010; Quinn, 2013; Rhoades, 2012; Taylor, 2002; Tavin & Ballengee Morris, 2013). For example, Taylor (2002) engaged her students in the "Empty Bowls" project to raise funds for low-income housing communities. Rhoades (2012) involved LGBTQ youth in video making as a way to advocate for LGBTQ issues. These examples of activist artmaking all aimed at promoting changes through the arts. The Performance of Social Justice project is a public activist art performance advocated and raised the awareness of the social justice issues represented in the performance.

Project-Based Arts Integration

This project is also an example of teaching through arts integration. Arts integration is a teaching approach that utilizes the arts in teaching and learning different subject contents. The Kennedy Center defines arts integration as "an approach to teaching in which students construct and demonstrate understanding through an art form. Students engage in a creative process which connects an art form and another subject area and meets evolving objectives in both" (Silverstein & Layne, 2010, para. 1). The undergraduate course on arts integration aims at providing students with authentic arts experience and showing them true arts integration can produce powerful learning experience. A common critic of arts integration (mis)practice in the classroom is that many teachers only have students create decorative works often seen been displayed on the

Bulletin board (LaJevic, 2013). In order for students to recognize the value of the arts, students need to realize that they can create real art that has an impact. The film and dance performance in the project was a way to show the undergraduate students the product of arts integration can be something beyond typical classroom art activity.

Project-based learning can achieve the goal of creating art that has real-life impacts and takes arts integration into next level. Project-based learning involves students working in a learning experience that has real-life implications (Jones, Rasmussen, & Moffitt, 1997; Krajcik & Blumenfeld, 2006). Students are engaged in a problem-solving process to produce an authentic project (Boss, 2011; Larmer, Mergendoller, & Boss, 2015). The combination of arts integration and project-based learning guides the undergraduate students' assignment in this collaborative project. The high school students were also involved in project-based learning. The creative problem-solving process in this project involves students in researching and finding ways to represent the social justice issues in education through creating remixed films and choreography dance pieces to represent the issues.

Curricular Connections and Project Engagement

This partnership enabled students to collaborate at three levels of the educational system: graduate school, undergraduate teacher preparation, and high school. The project benefited all three groups of students and engaged them in a collaborative experience unlike others in their school education. The base of the partnership was to achieve course and program goals and to enhance the learning and development of students at all three levels through exposure to social justice topics and arts education. In the sections below we discuss course objectives for EDL 558: Social Justice Topics in Education and EDN 414: Integrating the Arts in the Elementary Curriculum, as well as the program goals for the IB Dance program students.

EDL 558: Social Justice Topics in Education

The Higher Education specialization of the M.Ed. in Education at UNCW (MHE) requires students to complete ten core courses, including EDL 558: Social Justice Topics in Education. The MHE program prepares graduates for professional positions on a college campus in areas such as advising, housing and residence life, student activities, and financial aid, among others. EDL 558 is intended to develop higher education professionals who can think and act in critical ways about a broad range of social justice topics. Students in the course examine topics related to privilege, marginalization, and social justice work in higher education. A myriad of social justice topics are addressed in the course, including race/ethnicity, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, class (socioeconomic status), religion/spirituality, and (dis)ability, among others. Readings, discussions, and activities are focused on the theoretical foundations that frame social justice work and practical implications for multiple stakeholder groups.

Student evaluation in the course is primarily linked to activities that inform students' engagement in an applied or experiential learning project called the Social Justice Project (SJP). The SJP is intended to encourage development in four ways that align with the social justice approach of the instructor: (a) demonstrate understanding of the theoretical foundations of

diversity, multiculturalism and social justice; (b) discuss philosophical perspectives that have shaped the ways in which leaders in higher education engage in social justice work in higher education; (c) identify the ways in which power, privilege, and marginalization impact various institutional stakeholders in disparate ways; (d) critically reflect on the effects of social justice work across institutional and administrative contexts. Course readings and activities were developed to achieve the following student objectives:

- Demonstrate understanding of the theoretical foundations of diversity, multiculturalism and social justice;
- Discuss philosophical perspectives that have shaped the ways in which leaders in higher education engage in social justice work in higher education;
- Identify the ways in which power, privilege, and marginalization impact various institutional stakeholders (e.g., students, faculty, staff) in disparate ways; and
- Describe the effects of social justice work across institutional and administrative contexts.

The EDL 558 graduate students provided the foundation for the project by sharing their reflective work from applied learning activities they complete exploring specific aspects of social justice topics in education. They also served as mentors to the EDN 414 students in the development of their projects ideas and content. The iterative process of critical reflection about social justice topics, mentorship of EDN 414 students, and feedback on the required elements of the performance provided the educational foundation for topics examined in the final integrated performance.

EDN 414: Integrating the Arts in the Elementary Curriculum

Integrating the Arts in the Elementary Curriculum (EDN 414) is a required course in the undergraduate teacher preparation program. Students examine ways they can utilize the arts as teaching tools in the elementary curriculum. The central mission of the course is to help undergraduate students develop understandings of the roles the arts can play in teaching and learning. The course is designed to provide experiences in creating the arts to develop students' knowledge and appreciation of the arts. The course also creates applied learning experiences for students to practice their knowledge and skill of arts integration. One of the course objectives is: *Understand how the arts communicate meaning, nonverbally as well as verbally.* Creating artworks to communicate ideas is the way to teach this objective. As a project-based arts integration learning experience, the undergraduate students in this course are responsible for developing the film that is utilized in the collaborative performance. This assignment aligned with the arts creation focus in the course. Artmaking also involves students in the creative problem-solving process. The course objective addressing this aspect is: *Understand that true arts integration involves students in creative problem-solving process in order to construct and demonstrate their learning.* Students were challenged to create representative films to show the social justice issues in education and discuss possible solutions. Learning about social justice issues in education is essential for preservice teachers as they will be working with diverse learners and encounter those issues in schools. Therefore, the social justice-focused artmaking

experience aligned with the course objective: *Appreciate the diverse gifts, abilities, and cultures of learners.*

Learning to create a remixed film is media arts education which helps students understand the media critically and learn to create counter-stories. Media arts refers to the using of digital media to create artworks. Learning how to create art using digital technology is essential for the undergraduate students to gain knowledge and skill for integrating technology and media arts in their teaching. The remix strategy used in the film creation is a strategy used by artists and art educators to resist and disrupt the cultural narrative (Ivashkevich & Wolfgang, 2015). Creating the remixed film helped the undergraduate students research and examine the social justice topics and construct their understanding and discuss solutions.

High School Dance and International Baccalaureate (IB) Dance

JT Hoggard High School students enrolled in the Advanced and IB Dance Program were responsible for the choreography and performance of the movement component of the collaborative performance. In addition to working with the undergraduate students as noted above, the dancers also reviewed the social justice reflective work completed by the graduate students. The dancers used their review of the reflection videos and discussions with undergraduate collaborators as inspiration for the development of the dance component of the project.

> The International Baccalaureate (IB) Mission as stated on the IB website is as follow: The International Baccalaureate Diploma Program (IBDP) aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect. To this end, the organization works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging programmes of international education and rigorous assessment. These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right. (IB Mission, n.d., para. 3)

As stated in the IB Learner Profile, there are "10 attributes valued by IB World Schools who believe these attributes, and others like them, can help individuals and groups become responsible members of local, national and global communities" (IB Learner Profile, n.d., para. 12). There are many components of the IB Learner Profile embedded in this Social Justice Collaborative Project. The following are most pertinent:

> (1)   Communicators: We (students) understand and express ideas and information confidently and creatively in more than one language and in a variety of modes of communication. We work effectively and willingly in collaboration with others.
> (2)   Knowledgeable: We (students) develop and use conceptual understanding, exploring knowledge across a range of disciplines. We engage with issues and ideas that have local and global significance. (IB Learner Profile, n.d., para. 3, 5).

The high school choreographers were challenged to interpret serious themes and create meaning in their dance constructions from issues atypical of the dance choreography trending in their generation. As stated in Dewhurst (2010) above, the IB students critically analyzed an idea, and

through their creative process were engaged in a practice of social justice artmaking. One 11th grade IB dance student had this experience: "I definitely gained a new perspective throughout this entire process. I was unaware of my topic (Rural Communities) as a social issue and was enlightened about others I knew or thought little about. I am very grateful for all of the opportunities I have. I am more conscious of how others may never receive those same opportunities." In this instance the student echoes and learns that an outcome of social justice

> in education is the development of opportunities for students to understand the effects of oppression on marginalized individuals; as a process, social justice in education encourages students to utilize affirming practices to address the negative effects of oppression. (Adams et al., 2010)

The dance students participated in multiple stages of knowledge making- communication, translation, interpretation, creation, presentation, reflection - all with issues that have local and global significance. The maturation process in this project was evident. The high school student experience was interactive on many levels and stepped outside of the norms of high school education realms.

Project Learning Outcomes

The learning outcomes from all three groups of students match our course and program goals. In addition to the learning of social justice topics in education for all the students, each group of students developed views and skills specific to the goals of their respective courses. For example, the graduate students mentored the undergraduate students and taught them about social justice topics in education; the undergraduate students developed understanding and appreciation of the impact of the arts, and developed the skills to create digital media; the high school students learned how to express meaning through choreography as well as the leadership skills to work with both undergraduate students and their peers on a collaborative project. We discuss specific learning outcomes from each group of students in the following section.

Graduate Students Learning to Mentor

Graduate students enrolled in a higher education focused degree program do not typically have opportunities to work with undergraduate students in teacher preparation or high school dance students. Indeed, at the start of the project, some graduate students asked why they are working with groups outside of higher education, and what they can expect to gain that is related to their future work as higher education professionals? By the end of the course, graduate student reflections revealed meaningful development in several ways that are relevant to their development as future higher education administrators.

Not surprisingly, one of the most significant ways in which the graduate students develop is from their exposure to issues of social justice and diversity. Social justice and inclusion is a critical competency for students to develop because they are expected to be comfortable working with and providing support for an increasingly diverse student population (ACPA-NASPA, 2015). One student's reflection best exemplifies the growth experienced from exposure to issues of social justice:

It is unbelievable how much I did not know before this class, and I am sure I have much more to learn so I had a difficult time saying I was at an advanced level for anything because my perception is that I have improved a great amount, but I still have a long journey to reach an advanced level of competency. I do feel comfortable discussing issues more than I once did and I think that will be valuable as I continue to learn. This student's reflection demonstrates that not only do students gain a more meaningful understanding of social justice topics, they leave the course and project with more realistic appraisals of their competency in the area of social justice. As this student noted, the course is a starting point for students' development, and there is more work to do as they become professionals and leaders in the field.

Graduate students also developed an appreciation for the challenges of representing learning about social justice through the arts while honoring the voices and perspectives of the topics and individuals who informed their work on the project. One student noted that "The other challenge was integrating movement into the performance for the EDN 414 without turning it into 6 white women doing tribal dance." Since the graduate students are mentors on the project to undergraduate students who create the film and high school dancers who create the dance, the mentorship process was critical to ensuring the film and dance representations align with the meaning students glean from their work on the project.

Thus, graduate students also acquired valuable practical skills through their engagement that contributes to their professional development. Many graduates will work directly as mentors and advisors to undergraduate students once they have earned their master's degree. One graduate student commented: "Working with the EDN 414 class was a great experience to practice mentoring and advising undergraduate students. Additionally, the information I learned and the projects I created have enhanced my professional experience/portfolio - in fact, I am using portions of the assignments in my Culminating Project and LinkedIn profile." As the student noted, the students' experience on the project provides practical skills necessary in the field of higher education, despite the fact that they work across the larger educational spectrum on the project.

Undergraduate Students Learning to Act

Undergraduate students in the course had never experienced such a large-scale collaboration. The complexity of collaboration provided both challenges and opportunities for learning. The final performance was what really helped the students see the whole picture and the impact of the project. Students were able to experience how the performance created an impact on the viewers and how their film works became important parts of the performance. For many students, this was their first time participating in creating authentic artworks for public showing. Whether or not they realized that they became co-artists of this performance project, for many of them, they felt proud to be part of the performance project and helped the high school students with completing the project. An important objective of the undergraduate course is to *understand that true arts integration involves students in the creative problem-solving process in order to construct and demonstrate their learning.* This project-based learning did exactly this to involve students in creating films representing social justice issues in education to demonstrate their

learning of the topics. There are three findings regarding the learning experiences for the undergraduate students emerging from this collaboration.

The layers of collaboration enhanced learning. Students reflected that the project was complex with layers of collaboration. The undergraduate students are especially working as the pivots between the graduate students and the high school students. These layers of collaboration are what made this project a unique learning experience. The undergraduate students were able to learn from the graduate students and the high school students. A student reflected:

> After meeting with our graduate mentors and discussing the information with my group, I realized there was a lot about socioeconomic status that I did not know. Being able to create a video to correspond with the information we were learning, helped the material make more sense in my mind. Seeing the choreography that the high school students created to interpret the material made it even more powerful.

The combination of film and dance created a powerful experience. The art form of combining film and dance was new to most students. Even creating the film itself was a new adventure for the undergraduate students. Students found that the art forms complemented each other and created a multi-sensory art experience. One student shared:

> The performances seemed to make the topics shown in the videos seem more real. It brought the issue to life. I also danced growing up and have always found it to be very emotional which I think helped to get across the points of each of the videos and topics they were on.

The dances embodied the films and became a powerful arts experience that helped students see the issues in different ways.

Art can be impactful. One of the important goals of the undergraduate course is to teach the students to appreciate the arts and understand that art can have impacts in many ways. After watching the final performance, students recognized that although they were familiar with their own videos, the dance added new meaning to the works. The performance made an impact on them. One student said:

> Having them dancing in front of the videos added a sense of passion and realness to all of the videos that we created and enhanced our projects. Watching these performances also made me realize just how much can still be changed in this world.

The performance deepened students' learning beyond the information in the video and inspired students to create actions. One undergraduate student noted, "Each component played a powerful role and gave me a better understanding of the topics presented. It brought the topics to life, as we watched real life footage from the world around us; it made these social justice issues much more real. I left feeling inspired."

High School Choreographers Learning to Lead

Rather than being "told" what to do, the high school choreographers collaborating in this project were "bold" in their roles. The nature of this project required them to communicate on several levels - to their peers and to the undergraduate students, and ultimately to an audience. Their responsibility to interpret the films and social justice themes into movement gave these young artists "ownership" of their process and translation of the films. Throughout the semester,

they were engaged in ongoing communication with the undergraduate filmmakers and were given the responsibility to expand the films to three-dimensional physical expression. In the context of Beyerbach (2017), the IB/Advanced dance students were required to "think deeply" crafting their ideas into choreography. The high school students had not previously been involved in this type of process and product. Taking ownership of their creative role fostered (a) responsibility, (b) negotiation, (c) time management, (d) artistic voice, and (e) leadership.

Exposure to social justice makes it local: "As an individual I knew about social justice problems but I never really paid attention to them or looked at the whole problem to see who it was affecting. I learned that social justice isn't just about the stuff you hear about on the news it's about the things that are local to us that need to be helped" (10th grade IB dance student).

Students took on leadership with peers: "I gained more leadership skills! From the beginning, I was nervous about pleasing the UNCW students' standards, but they helped me every step of the way. From asking for input on the video, or giving me ideas on how to choreograph, they were influential through the whole project" (10th grade – IB dance student).

Challenges and Possibilities

The collaboration process was an adventure full of challenges. Our collaboration involved three groups from across various levels of education, including high school and university, which means that there are many accommodations needed to make things work. The major challenges included time conflicts and communication, school policies and funding, and the project complexity. These challenges and how we overcame them are described in greater detail below.

Time Conflicts and Communication

The project design involved direct interaction between the high school students and the undergraduate students. Because the undergraduate students had back-to-back classes, their schedules did not allow them to travel to the school regularly to meet with the high school students. Scheduling was one of the major barriers as the school and the university curricula were not designed to accommodate for this kind of collaboration. We could arrange, however, for the high school students to travel to the college campus to meet with the undergraduate students during their scheduled class time. An additional challenge involved with high school students was that they did not regularly check email, which was the primary mode of communication for the other project stakeholders (i.e., faculty and university students).

The communication between the graduate students and the undergraduate students was also constrained by time conflicts. An additional complication was that some of the graduate students were distance education students who did not live locally. Although some groups of undergraduate students and a few graduate students were able to meet face-to-face, most groups had to host online meetings in order to communicate. Still, there were a few undergraduate students who could not interact directly with the graduate students. Email between the two groups was the main communication tool.

While technology helped to overcome these obstacles, the primary reason we were able to overcome them was regular and consistent communication among us (all authors) as the project

leaders and facilitators. We stayed in regular communication via email and text, held biweekly, in-person meetings to discuss the project, and also regularly visited each other's classes while the project was ongoing to provide feedback and track progress. Our communication with each other was crucial to the project's success, particularly as our students struggled at times to connect with each other. We were able to monitor and address gaps in communication among students as well as to anticipate other issues because of our efforts to stay connected with each other as project facilitators.

School Policies and Funding

The limited opportunities we had to connect our students included a couple of scheduled trips for the high school students to visit the university. The transportation of the high school students needed to follow school district field trip rules. While this provided some obstacles included the need for advanced planning and permission from parents, the biggest obstacle was funding for the school buses to transport the high school students from their campus to the university, even though they are located approximately just two miles away. Throughout our planning process we also identified the need for funds to cover the costs of the university performance venue. We were able to obtain some funds to support the project from departmental monies at the university. While limited, the funds provided enough money to cover both the school bus and the rental fee for the performance venue. As we continue the project, funding will undoubtedly remain a barrier that will need to be addressed.

An additional constraint was related to access to the performance venue. The space we utilized was busy with other scheduled performances, and because we had limited funding to cover just a few hours during the morning of the performance, we were not able to bring students to rehearse during their free time in the evenings prior to the final performance. Thus, our only rehearsal time was approximately an hour before the formal performance.

These challenges were overcome by using our resources creatively. For example, we combined limited funding from different departments in the university. Since two of the authors (DeVita and Liao) represent different academic departments at the university, we were able to access additional funds than would have otherwise been available. In order to overcome our scheduling and rehearsal conflicts, we arranged for small group and online meetings to assist with the collaboration.

Project Complexity

The complexity of the project was unprecedented, which made it difficult for us to easily articulate what the project *is* to external stakeholders, particularly when seeking support and funding. In earlier stages of the project, we were rejected for funding because of our failure to effectively demonstrate its value to all respective groups of students. The critique returned by reviewers was that the disparate pieces did not seem to fit together; however, we contend that what is not easily expressed on paper is more apparent when observed through the lens of the culminating performance. Our students' and colleagues' reactions who attended the performance confirm the power of the collaboration.

Radhakrishnan (2017) concluded that "the constraints that surrounded the opportunities for arts integration and aesthetic experiences were often a consequence of time and curriculum" (p. 221). The collaboration project breaks the constraints and embraces the challenges to provide the opportunity for arts integration. The collaborative effort without hierarchy helped with the coordination between school and university. These challenges and how we overcame them can inform future collaboration.

Possibilities

Having gone through all the obstacles discussed in the above sections, we have learned from the experience. We understand better the school and the university curriculum and schedule differences and would recommend mapping out the schedule would be a priority to conduct a similar project in the future. We also recommend making the expectation of communication clear to the students, but be prepared to monitor that communication and make changes as necessary. For example, we had to adjust the communication requirements between graduate students and undergraduate students along the way because of the time constraints. Additionally, funding is critical to the program's success. We have had to reconsider the ways in which we present our project in order to gain administrative support. These continued efforts will be critical to the future success of the project.

The partnerships we created were intended to embolden support across disciplines and environments. This collaboration supported all three of us as well as our efforts to enhance students' learning and development in our respective courses. We were able to bring our expertise together to create something greater than our individual course and program. The project also showed how the school and university collaboration could provide each other with pedagogical support.

This pedagogical support was multidirectional. The university brought knowledge about social justice topics to the school, while the school shared how the issues can be represented through dance. The power in the partnership enabled the support and the determination to succeed and to move forward and give unique opportunities to all students and teachers involved. We plan to take the experience from this project and continue the partnership. A future collaboration can involve more schools to participate in the performance. In our second iteration of the project (Spring 2018), we involved middle school students in the project. Middle school students were recruited to perform the dances created by the high school choreographers based on the videos created by the undergraduate students. We believe that their addition extended the project's reach to another level of education and exposed additional students to the positive effects of the project.

Conclusion

The project proved that the school-university partnership is a valid way to leverage students' learning. As an innovative project, this collaborative effort demonstrated how the partnership between the university and the school not only produced learning events to support the educational goals of all three programs, but it also enriched the students' knowledge and

skills beyond the learning in the individual courses. In other words, we believe that the culminating performance was greater than just the sum of its individual parts. All students involved in this project gained knowledge on social justice issues in education as well as an appreciation for representing knowledge through the arts. The higher education graduate students were able to apply their learning and mentor the undergraduate students; the undergraduate students learned about social justice, arts integration, and creating media arts; while the high school students practiced communication and leadership skills as well as created meaningful choreography. These learning outcomes were achieved because of the collaboration.

An effective partnership between the school and university requires reciprocity in the relationships (McNall, Reed, Brown, & Allen, 2009). The collaboration began with sharing knowledge of social justice issues and exchanging ideas to create the performance. This process is a translation of theory to practice. This theory-to-practice work is what makes the partnership valuable. Although there are challenges in the process, we were able to overcome the challenges by working collaboratively in a non-hierarchical way to mutually support and benefit each other's pedagogy. Our investment in respectful and reciprocal relationships was the important factor in our successful school-university partnership.

We also want to note that this project reached out to the larger community through the final public performance. The social justice topics touched upon different groups of people in the community and created bridges to connect people from different programs. The final performance was not just a showcase of student learning, but it was a way to share the fruit of the partnership with the community. It was also an activist art that spoke to the community and brought the community to participate in the dialogue of important issues concerning the community. This unique student-centered collaboration can serve as a new model for engaging school and community in meaningful activity.

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