

**Working the Margins of Community-Based
Adult Learning**

INTERNATIONAL ISSUES IN ADULT EDUCATION

Volume 19

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Working the Margins of Community-Based Adult Learning

*The Power of Arts-Making in Finding Voice and Creating Conditions
for Seeing/Listening*

Edited by

Shauna Butterwick

University of British Columbia, Canada

and

Carole Roy

St. Francis Xavier University, Canada



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Let's Go to the People's Place, 2011

92 × 150 cm, Gobelins tapestry of wool

Tapestry designed and woven by Murray Gibson; based on artworks by members from L'Arche Antigonish, Nova Scotia: Michael Boddy, Tommy Landry, Lisa Leuschner, Mary Anne MacKinnon, Cory Pelly, and Matthew Wright.

Commissioned by The People's Place Library, Antigonish, Nova Scotia.

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We are inspired by the creativity and dedication of artists, community arts facilitators and adult educators who work with the arts in community settings or as researchers. Their vibrant practices offer hope in challenging times when divisions are often exacerbated. Yet, through the arts, we find pockets where efforts are made to communicate across differences with respect and sincerity.

We thank all the authors who so enthusiastically contributed to this collection. We are also especially thankful to Trina Davenport for her help in the selection of the cover image of the tapestry by Murray Gibson and L'Arche folks, and to Murray for allowing us to use it on the cover. We are grateful that Randee Lawrence agreed to review the book and write the concluding chapter. Thanks also go to Jessica Egbert for assisting with reviewing the final proofs and working with authors.

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SHAUNA BUTTERWICK AND CAROLE ROY

INTRODUCTION

OUR ORIENTATION AND INTENTIONS

A dynamic and vibrant pluralistic democracy involves communicative practices where the voices of all citizens are included and considered important. Some groups and individuals, however, which are positioned on the margins (due to structural inequalities) have had a harder time expressing themselves and being heard. The margin, as Denis Donoghue (1983) says, is also “the place for those feelings and intuitions which daily life doesn’t have a place for and mostly seems to suppress” (p. 129). Our dream for this volume was to gather stories from the margins and explore how various art and creative forms of expression can enable the voices of underrepresented individuals and communities to take shape and form. Voice is not enough however, voices and stories and truths must be heard, must be listened to. And so the stories gathered here also speak to how creative processes enable conditions for listening and the development of empathy for other perspectives, which is essential for democracy. This orientation to listening is one that Susan Bickford (1996) pays particular attention to; she argues that listening is a crucial aspect of pluralistic democracies along with the development of empathy. Listening, not just speaking, “is what unites us, and we accomplish this through the exercise of empathy” (p. 13).

Artistic and creative expression can enliven our empathy with others and build relations of solidarity. While there are various orientations to the notion of solidarity, we align with a decolonizing perspective. As Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández (2012) argues:

Decolonization is about challenging the very idea of what it means to be human, and by extension, the logics of inclusion and exclusion that enforce social boundaries, including notions of social, political, and civic solidarity. It is about imagining human relations that are premised on the relationship between difference and interdependency, rather than similarity and a rational calculation of self-interests. (p. 49)

Artistic expression allows insights into particular situations; audiences are often more emotionally open to creative representations than other forms of communication. As feminist philosopher Martha Nussbaum notes, “as we tell stories about the lives of others, we learn how to imagine what another creature might feel in response to various events. At the same time, we identify with the other creature and

learn something about ourselves” (in Harmon, 2002, p. 176). At times empathy also provides impetus for action and the arts can also communicate ideas and emotions in a way that provokes engagement and responses.

Creative and arts-based forms of expression, many believe, are powerful forms of adult learning, engagement, and community building because they engage our imaginations. As Maxine Greene (1995) has articulated:

Imagination is what, above all, makes empathy possible. It is what enables us to cross the empty spaces between ourselves and those we teachers have called “other” [...] imagination ... permits us to give credence to alternative realities. It allows us to break with the taken for granted, to set aside familiar distinctions and definitions. (p. 3)

In this book we honour the use of the arts and creative expression as ways to enable underrepresented groups to communicate their experiences, create audiences who can learn from and bear witness to those experiences, thus building “the capacity to invent visions of what should be and what might be in our deficient society, on the streets where we live, in our schools” (Greene, 1995, p. 5).

ADDING TO THE CONVERSATION

There are adult educators and community activists and artists working in a wide range of settings who promote the use of the arts as ways to communicate individual and collective perspectives and provide opportunities for exchanges in multicultural and pluralistic societies. Some of these stories have been gathered together in a number of recent publications that have focused on the contribution the arts make to community and to a more just society, including a series of books on the arts and education published by Lesley University. Several of those volumes relate to this project, including: *Dancing the Data* (Bagley & Cancienne, 2002) which focused mainly on using alternative forms of creative expression in research, *Passion and Pedagogy* (Mirochnik & Sherman, 2002) which was oriented to teaching art to children and teachers, and *The Arts, Education and Social Change* (Powell & Speiser, 2005) which explored therapeutic and transformative work through the arts.

There have been two volumes (Lawrence, 2005; Hayes & Yorks, 2007) on the arts in adult learning published by *New Directions in Adult and Continuing Education* (NDCAE) a well-known publication in the field of adult education. In the 2005 NDCAE special issue, chapters depicted a variety of art forms including poetry, storytelling, photography, theater, and autobiographical writing created by ordinary people. A key theme was illustrating how these art forms were mechanisms for releasing the imagination in a variety of adult learning settings. The 2007 NDCAE special issue continued with the exploration, making the case for how the arts are “integral to the learning process” (p. 90). Chapters explored how the arts have been used in prisons, community development, and with young adults, concluding that

“the arts can bridge boundaries separating people and keep those boundaries porous” (Hayes, 2007, p. 2).

How arts- and crafts-based learning can and should be considered as a site of overtly politically oriented adult learning was a strong thread running throughout Darlene Clover and Joyce Stalker’s 2007 co-edited book, *The Arts and Social Justice – Re-crafting Adult Education and Community Cultural Leadership*. As with NDCAE volumes, Clover and Stalker’s book covered a broad range of social justice concerns using various arts practices such as clowning, graffiti, story-telling and other literary arts, performative art, fabric art including weaving, tapestries and quilt making, and popular theatre. Here in Canada, Deborah Barndt’s collected edition *VIVA – Community Arts and Popular Education in the Americas* was published in 2011; the volume examined the power of community arts projects in five countries adding an important international dimension to the conversation. It documented the results of a transnational exchange with multiple partners in Panama, Nicaragua, Mexico, the United States and Canada. Similar to earlier publications, this text sought to interrupt notions of art as elitist and created only by individuals, illustrating “the integration of art in its infinite cultural forms into daily rituals, community building, and movements for social change” (p. viii). In 2012 the “Aesthetic Practices and Adult Education” was the theme of a special issue of *International Journal of Lifelong Education* (edited by Clover, Sanford, & Butterwick) which was later published in 2013 by Routledge as a book. As with others, that special issue explored how arts-based processes were integral to adult learning and community engagement in a variety of contexts with a variety of learners.

AND NOW...

The focus of this book is on the practice of arts-based adult education that occurs at the *edges or margins*. We solicited carefully chosen examples, including some international, of how various art-making practices (poetry, visual art, film, theatre, music, dance) can support individuals and groups at the edges of mainstream society to tell their story and speak their truths, often the first steps to valuing one’s identity and organizing for change.

In addition to some narratives from academics working in the arena, we have invited community-based artists to share stories bringing these creative endeavors into the wider conversation about the power of arts-making to open up spaces for dialogue across differences. Furthermore, we have also sought contributions that, while taking up the category of margin as a site of practice and a social location in relation to hierarchies of privilege and penalty, also trouble the assumed binary of margin and centre. Art practices from the edges can expand our visions by encouraging critical thinking and broadening our worldview. At this time on the earth when we face many serious challenges the arts can stimulate hope, openness, and individual and collective imaginations for preferred futures. Inspiration comes from people who, at the edges of their community, communicate their experience.

The art practices used by adult educators in this collection are as varied as the groups involved. Darlene Clover writes about visual arts used with street-involved women in Victoria while Verna MacDonald reports on a successful play with people who live with mental illness and Paula Cameron discusses the use of zines with young women who experienced severe depression. Brian Nichols reflects on his annual visits to a hospital in Zimbabwe where he provides art making, films, and massage to people with HIV while Jan Selman and John Battye recount the use of popular theatre in Kenya. Murray Gibson tells the story of tapestry making with residents of l'Arche while Beverly Hoffman writes of a photovoice project with people with disabilities in Belize. Elizabeth Johnson describes the dance created by women prisoners and their daughters in Arizona while Ingrid Hansen and Peter Balkwill used puppetry with prisoners in British Columbia. Bryan Bowers writes of an experiment in peacemaking with Indigenous and settlers communities using visual arts and historical artefacts while Gordon Mitchell examines the use of arts with immigrants to Europe and with residents of South Africa. Kim Villagante reflects on her practice of mural and music making with Filipino youth while she, Shauna Butterwick, and Marilou Carrillo write about fashion shows with Filipino women immigrants to Canada. Carole Roy suggests that documentary film festivals can bring diverse perspectives and experiences to new audiences.

The results are inspiring: from exploring new means of expression and coming to voice, to establishing new identities or re-establishing relationships between separated mothers and daughters, to building a sense of community with immigrant youth or among people who live with mental illnesses, to challenging stereotypes of immigrants or people with disabilities. Others found greater understanding from audiences or developed a collective critique as immigrant women. In the wake of these art projects participants were left with a more positive sense of themselves and greater confidence and resilience, as well as tools for reflecting on, expressing and valorizing their experiences.

The book is divided into three sections; the first part, "Telling Our Story through Visual Arts" includes four chapters that, while diverse with respect to the location of the creative activities and the issues being explored, all speak to the power of visual expression, such as photography, zines, tapestry and art therapy, as a medium for telling stories not often told nor heard. In the second section, "Creative Expression: Increasing Understanding between Communities" the power of film festivals and documentaries, photovoice, exhibits and community dialogue, as well as creating community murals and using photography is explored. In the final section of the book "Enacting and Embodying" yet more creative processes are explored including political fashion shows, puppetry, community theatre and dance. We have invited Randee Lawrence to review all of the chapters and offer some concluding thoughts reflecting on the themes that thread their way through these various stories and what they add to the growing conversation and appreciation for arts-based engagement. She brings a strong aesthetic sensibility and extensive experience in using arts-based approaches in her own teaching and research.

IN CONCLUSION

We have captured a few examples in this book, but we know that the field is even more diverse and there are other inspiring stories we need to hear. Elliot Eisner (2010), well known for his advocacy for arts-based approaches, points to how “the kinds of nets we know how to weave determine the kinds of nets we cast. These nets, in turn, determine the kinds of fish we catch” (p. 49). Our hope for this book was to cast a bit of a different net and as a result, capture stories that might not have been told. We invite others to use different nets and thus contribute to the growing literature and conversation on the use of arts in adult learning, community engagement, and democratic practices. We hope this volume encourages other—academics, artists, community organizers—to document their practices and share their wisdom.

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SECTION 1

TELLING OUR STORY THROUGH VISUAL ARTS

DARLENE E. CLOVER

1. FEMINIST ARTS-BASED ADULT EDUCATION WITH HOMELESS AND STREET-INVOLVED WOMEN

The arts have both a social significance and a social function, which might be defined as the transformation of desire into reality, reality into dreams and change, and back again.

(Lucy Lippard, 1983, p. 5)

This chapter is about the brutal reality of poverty and homelessness in the lives of women who suffer from mental illness, have experienced violence or trauma, or have simply taken one too many tight economic turns and found themselves destitute. An increasing number of women are subject to violence and rank amongst the ‘visible’ homeless across Canada today, yet they are frequently and paradoxically, invisible. This chapter is also about aesthetics, about art, and their role in deepening personal and social connections, transforming how poor and marginalised women understand and negotiate reality, enabling them to imaginatively construct new possibilities, and apply these back to reality in various ways. Therefore, this chapter is about feminist adult education and its juncture with art practice in what Walby (2011) calls, the interests of women.

For a period of two years, I was involved in a feminist, arts-based adult education project with approximately 20 homeless/street-involved women in the city of Victoria, British Columbia. I say ‘approximate’ because women tended to ebb and flow in the project for social, economic, and health reasons. I use both homeless and street-involved terms, as this was how the women in the project described themselves, as many did not live rough. I begin this chapter by locating myself in the context of this project, and by locating this project in discourses of women’s homelessness, and feminist arts-based adult education. Following this, I describe the workshops, and the collective and individual aesthetic artworks that emerged. I weave these descriptions through the looms of feminist arts-based and adult education thinking, to illustrate their purpose and aims. The final section of the chapter highlights some of the successes of this project, at personal, social and institutional levels. It also explores the complexities, challenges, and outlines lessons learned. These types of creative, pedagogical projects are not a panacea; they do not stop homelessness and neoliberalism in their tracks; they do not prevent women from reverting back to problematic ways that can prove fatal. I argue, however, that when understood in more local and less aggrandising ways, projects such as this can alter understandings and change some realities (Manicom & Walters, 2012; Walby, 2011).

D. E. CLOVER

LOCATING MYSELF; CONTEXTUALISING THE PROJECT

I am a feminist adult educator who works in community settings, facilitating workshops and engaging in participatory forms of research, and in the university, as a professor of adult education and leadership at the University of Victoria. To me, feminist adult education is a means to render visible and challenge sexism and other ideologies and inter-related acts of oppression that affect women in their lives, and thereby, affect society. I also identify as an arts-based adult educator, a discourse I have helped to shape and expand, along with other feminist adult educators (e.g. Clover & Sanford, 2012; Clover, Butterwick, & Sanford, 2012; Clover & Stalker, 2007). I have come to view the arts as critical, creative forces in education, learning and knowledge mobilisation. They are at times gentle, nurturing, and therapeutic; they are also, at times, provocative, oppositional and explosive in their power to activate the critical and defiant imagination. The imagination is central to arts-based teaching and learning as it creates opportunities “to explore experiences other than our own, in ways that can expand our comprehension” (Thompson, 2002, p. 31). For Mohanty (2012), the “imagination is the most subversive thing a public can have” (p. vii), since it is what allows us credence to alternatives of neoliberal and gendered normatives which we are being programmed to believe. As Collins (2006) reminds us, it is vital “to keep in mind the significance of the aesthetic dimension within a politically oriented emancipatory pedagogy [as it can be] an [expression] of support for a more just society” (p. 125).

The two-year feminist arts-based adult education project with a group of homeless and street-involved women began following a course I had taught on arts-based adult education. The course explored feminist aesthetics and pedagogical theories, community arts projects, and arts-based and informed research practices. Corrina, a student who had taken the course, and who worked for a social service agency that served the needs of the homeless, approached me one afternoon. She had taken the course out of interest, but the power of arts-based approaches had now come alive as she considered the outcomes of a recent needs assessment her agency had undertaken to explore ideas for new programming.

The many homeless/street-involved women who responded to the survey requested three things. One was for a women’s programme. The number of women living in sub-standard housing or on the streets in Canada, and particularly in the small but wealthy city of Victoria, is growing. Yet this phenomenon is little understood. Homelessness is still framed through a male-orientated lens – ‘sleeping rough’ – whereas women’s homelessness and street involvement differs in many ways (Lenon, 2000; Scott, 2007). The outcome within many agencies that support the homeless is ‘gender neutrality’. Batliwala (2013) reminds us that although there is no universal gendered experience, all experience is gendered.

The second request by the women was for an opportunity to explore their creativity and artistic sides. Illeris (2009) reminds us that neo-liberal discourses of lifelong

learning are not about empowerment but rather, individualized commitments to learn, to develop, and to change according to the market. For the homeless, the educational scope is limited to one of employability, training to acquire the skills necessary to enter the workforce and become ‘productive’ members of society. Adult education is not meant to be used to engage them in what Greene (2005) satirically called ‘the frivolous pursuit of art’. Yet cultural activity is integral to building a sense of community, to self-worth, and personal and collective identity. The arts encourage learning, respect, understanding, and “bring pleasure and gaiety to our lives” (Wyman, 2004, p. 14). They are integral to what it is to be human, not add-ons to be enjoyed by those with the privilege to do so.

A third request by the women was for the development of ‘non-threatening ways’ to speak to the public about the realities of homelessness and poverty. Although many people in Victoria support homeless shelters, transitions houses, safe injection sites and low-income housing, there is an equally large, and often more vocal group, that rages against homeless women, portraying them as too lazy to get a ‘real’ job, worthless prostitutes, or as ‘choosing’ to be addicts or alcoholics and live off the backs of taxpayers. Newspaper headlines frequently include comments about ‘cleaning up the streets’, as if those living there were bits of trash to be collected and discarded. How do we more effectively tackle this ignorance and the negative stereotypes it perpetuates?

Corrina and I began a series of discussions with community-based artists, and the homeless/street involved women at the agency to develop a project that would combine the three requests. Everyone was enthusiastic and agreed art would be central to the project; everyone was firm that we would all engage in the art making; everyone was firm that I would act as a spokesperson, an advocate, on their behalf with the agency and other external forces; everyone was determined, despite fears, that we would do something public.

Approximately 20 women took part in the project, participating as they could over the two years. These women varied in artistic ability and cultural heritage: Caucasian, Metis, First Nations, South African to name but a few. The majority were highly educated, with university degrees – in one case a PhD – and they were born in or near Victoria, or had been living in the city for years before becoming homeless. These facts disrupt two stereotypical discourses of those who live in poverty in Victoria: (1) the homeless gravitate here for the climate; (2) the homeless are illiterate or otherwise uneducated because if they were not, they would not be in their current position. What had brought all the women to their current status was some form of violence or trauma, mostly at the hands of men, although the violent legacy of residential schools played its part. In a recent global report, UN Women (2013) found that 35% of women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a male, although national figures bring this closer to 70%. Most women surveyed for that report, admitted to, and/or exhibited, mental health problems, exacerbated from living on the streets.

D. E. CLOVER

THE STRUCTURE AND ARTS OF THE PROJECT

An important framework of the project was cultural democracy, defined as active participation in the creation' of artistic works, both individually and collectively (McGauley, 2006). This does not negate the value of visiting museums and reflecting upon or engaging with arts and exhibitions, as this too can be a valuable aesthetic practice (e.g. Styles, 2009). Hyland-Russell and Groen (2012) illustrate how these cultural sites develop greater community literacy and a sense of belonging in marginalised learners. This is also important to keep in mind since a key element of the project was the public exhibition of our work in art galleries. But in this project, a cultural democracy emphasis enabled us to be the creators, actors, and meaning makers of culture/art. Through direct experience with art making we positioned it as a means to both personal and collective development (e.g. McGauley, 2006; Thompson, 2002).

The first year or phase of the project we titled *Warrior Women Garden of Art* in reference to the number of Indigenous women, as well as our resistant and pro-active natures. The second phase we called *Phoenix Rising*, a metaphor of growth and change. The project consisted of workshops, four hours per day, three days per week. One key feature of the workshops was its flexible format. We needed to respond to the differing needs, and to the unpredictability in the lives of poor and homeless/street involved women. A second feature was food. Among other things, finding food takes a great deal of time in these women's lives so this had to be dealt with. This combination is commonly known as the 'bread and roses' approach, responding to the physical need for sustenance with the need to be creative, in our case (e.g. Thompson, 2002).

Six artist-educators – Josie Broker, Suzanne Jackson, Sasha Collins, Candace McKivett, Paulette Francoeur, Shylene Schlackl – facilitated the majority of the workshops, although Corrina and I also facilitated three collective project workshops. Collectively we had skills in quilt, mask and plaster-cast making, collage, poetry, photography, and mosaics. Individual artworks included small sculptures, poems, collages, paintings, bead work, miniature mosaics, masks, and a traditional indigenous dress assembled from plastic bags and aptly named *Disposable people; Disposable culture*. Hundreds of Indigenous women have actually been murdered or gone missing over the past few decades, a horrific fact that sees little or no concern from either the police or governments (Taber, 2015). Collective works included a quilt, a mural, a life-size marionette, a decoupage on wood, and a tile mosaic featuring our Phoenix taking flight.

By engaging in individual art making, although this was always done in a group setting with conversations flowing, we allowed for our personal creativity; by engaging in collective art making we built relationships, collaborations and developed our collective voice. Therefore, the project focussed on individual concerns, and personal challenges, but it was equally a space to broaden our discussions to the