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Pedagogical Souvenirs: An Art Educator's Reflections on Field Trips as Professional Development

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Abstract

This essay explores the nature and importance of field trips as sites for artistic development, intellectual fulfillment, and pedagogical inspiration. The author weaves personal reflections from a professional field trip and experience teaching art education online with creative and pedagogical references to make a case for experiential learning as professional development. At a time when we experience so much of the world through screens, when school field trips are in decline due to budget cuts, and when professional development is more focused on assessment than intellectual development, this piece encourages readers to imagine how art educators, and our work with students, might be affected if we permitted ourselves and were supported in our desires to step outside our classrooms and have our own adventures in learning.

9:55 a.m. - 5th Avenue & 82nd Street

I'm standing on the sidewalk in line with hundreds of other globetrotters waiting to enter the Metropolitan Museum of Art. When the doors open, we'll walk up its infamous 150-foot wide granite stoop (Project for Pubic Places, n.d.). It will be a short journey, but one richly layered with place and purpose. Once we reach the top, we'll enter The Great Hall, the Met's aptly named, high vaulted main lobby. The hall is the kind of space that makes you look up; one in which you can't help but feel extraordinary.

As is the case at most museums, school groups don't use the main entrance. Instead, they enter the educational wing through a standard doorway on the lower level. But The Met has other special staircases; special in the way Dissanayake (1998) defines art - different from the stairs we climb most days. I still remember ascending the stairs that lead from The Great Hall to the Met's second floor galleries on a field trip in first grade. I don't remember much about the art we saw that day, but I remember those stairs (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Big stone stairs are special stairs.

> *Experiences like this can play a powerful role in creative and intellectual development. As a young child I could sense that something was special about the stairs at The Met. They made me aware of myself in a new way, in relation to them. They were powerful and historic, making me feel simultaneously small and strong. They put me in a frame of mind to look closely at coin collections from ancient Greece, medieval suits of armor, and Renaissance-era tapestries. My professional life today is rooted in aesthetic awareness and historical empathy grounded by such experiences.*

Professional Development in the Field

I recorded this reflection in a journal I kept during a professional field trip I took recently to conduct research for a graduate level course I teach: *Art Education Beyond School Walls*. Reading it as I rode the bus back to LaGuardia Airport (NYC) for my flight home, I realized the trip had been about reconnecting with myself as a learner as much as it was about the new content I brought back to share with my students. In this essay I revisit and further my reflections from the field to explore such trips as a form of professional development. The opportunities they provide for experiential learning can influence not only what we teach but the nature of our teaching itself.

My experiences and reflections comprise a case study of curriculum development informed by a professional field trip. Each day of the trip I filled my research journal with notes, sketches, quotations, brochures, and names of new connections and authors to look up when I got home. I filled my phone with pictures everyday and posted them to my blog with reflective notes each night (see Figure 2). I used these notes and pictures to think through the trip in relation to my objectives for my students. I came back from the trip not only prepared to make revisions to the form and content of the course, but to change the way I presented the material and spoke with my students about the subject and their research. The findings presented in this paper are grounded in excerpts from my travel log and the work my students accomplished as a result of my journey.

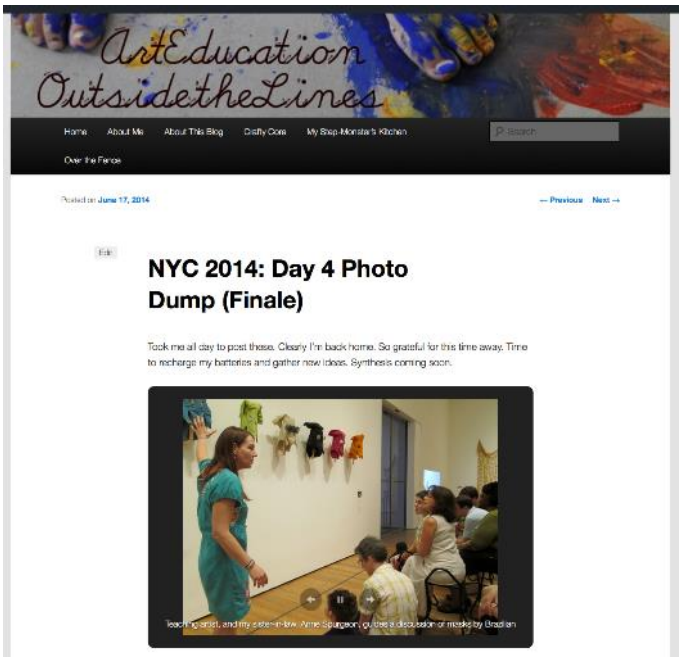

Figure 2: Screenshot from my blog where I uploaded and reflected on images each day.

Field trips afford us opportunities to break away from the familiar and encounter the strange. Such experiences engage our senses and challenge our perceptions. These ruptures permit us to get lost (Solnit, 2005). And, if we approach them with flexible purpose (Eisner, 2002), we can discover new understandings within the experiences they provide. When the trip is over, we go back home, like Dorothy to Kansas, left to find use and further meaning for what we learned through our adventures in our daily tasks. As such, they have potential to be meaningful and transformative educational tools. Sadly, research suggests such opportunities are in jeopardy as schools in the United States struggle to keep ahead of the next standardized test and balance district budgets (Hunley, 2011; Turchi, 2014; Wheeler, 2011).

I use the term field trip broadly to refer to journeys outside our regular routes and routines. These need not be to major institutions like The Met. Local options might include a visit to a regionally significant landmark, artist's studio, or antique shop. They can be as simple as walking around your neighborhood, cell phone camera at the ready, with a focus on doorways, trees, the color yellow, or any other feature in the visual landscape. The important thing is that we venture out into the world and experience it, first-hand (London, 1994).

As a part-time professional art educator and full-time mother I need field trips like this from time to time. I find it energizing and inspiring, personally and professionally, to go places where I can see things I don't see on a daily basis. To be in different kinds of spaces,

surrounded by special things. To speak with people I have never met before. I don't think I merely enjoy such experiences on a personal level, I think I need them in order to grow and to thrive professionally. I believe the same is true for my colleagues, as well as for our students.

Coffee Break

> *My mission for the next few days is to visit settings for art education outside of schools to get new ideas for a course I teach on the subject.* My inspiration for Art Education Beyond School Walls *was a similar course I took while a student at Pratt Institute so it seems fitting to return to New York City for fresh ideas. The university is paying my way and I have been encouraged to consider how I might share my experiences upon my return. How will I position this trip in relation to my research and teaching? What might I learn and what will I be prepared to teach others as a result? In other words, what use is this trip, beyond providing me a four-day trek around my favorite international center for art and culture? Sounds like a request to stop blogging and work on an article worthy of peer-reviewed publication.*
>
> *Still, it feels best not to let myself get too caught up in defining outcomes at this point. Better to focus on the here and now. I want to open myself up to what might come. Something always does, especially in* The City. *I'm reminded of Solnit (2005), "...to be lost is to be fully present, and to be fully present is to be capable of being in uncertainty and mystery. And one does not get lost but loses oneself, with the implication that it is a conscious choice, a chosen surrender..." (p. 6).*
>
> *Of course all this flies in the face of current educational business-speak where outcomes are always a priori, with time for questions later, maybe. But I'm not bound by such rules. I'm on a self-defined field trip, guided by an emergent curriculum (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1993). My map has a few pre-set points, but I'll be filling in the lines between based on what emerges along the way.*

Stepping Outside the Screen

Before I go any further, I have to acknowledge one great irony underlying my use of experiential learning as an underlying philosophy for my work. I teach in an *online* master's program. In many regards, this is the antithesis of learning in the real world. I spend time with my students in-person only during a few live class sessions each term and during individual meetings on Skype or the telephone. They spend time with one another on campus for a few weeks of studio courses over the summers and routinely cite this as a vital component of the

program. Much of the work for the course I was redeveloping would be done on the computer, that flat screen that welcomes us into so many places we might never have seen without it, but which are, ultimately, all made of the same hollow pixels.

Given this, I feel it is even more important to encourage students to get up from in front of their desks and step out into the world, to make field trips. As London (1994) argued, with all the access communication technologies offer us,

> there exists a fine [educational] device that is rarely used to its full advantage—the door. This simple apparatus allows students to step outside and encounter a world far richer than the reduced and predigested shadow-of-the-world our schools offer in its stead. (p. 5)

The course begins with an introductory webquest surveying the landscape of art education in settings outside of schools around the country. The second third of the course is devoted to a case study of a similar program in students' own communities. After establishing a relationship with a local institution or program, they schedule and conduct observations and interviews. Ultimately, they analyze and synthesize their findings into an overview to share with the group and, oftentimes, the subjects of their research.

A second point worth mentioning is that most of my students are school-based art educators. I do not send them into the field in search of new job prospects, but to push them into venues which look, feel, and operate differently than their classrooms. They observe art programming for a wide range of people from preschoolers to senior citizens, and veterans dealing with post-traumatic stress to ladies enjoying a night out together. I want them to take their observations and experiences in the field back to their classrooms to see where they might lead. The final project invites them to do this. Some imagine partnerships with the organizations they visited while others develop plans for after-school clubs and summer programs. A number of students have gone on to realize these ideas as part of their capstone projects (Benesh, 2014; Dodson, 2014; Wiseman, 2015).

5th Avenue and 60th Street - Encountering the Field

> *All my senses are picking up data, awakening me to the present and reminding me of the past. The sights, the sounds, and the smells of New York are so familiar. Being here is truly a full-body experience – it's no wonder so many artists use it as a playground for psychogeographic exploration (Hart, 2005). When I lived here I loved to take day-long walks, unplanned encounters with the city. There is always something waiting around the corner; just keep yourself open and you are sure to find something of interest (Figure 3). If not, at least you can get some*

exercise.

Figure 3: Olaf Breuning "Clouds" greeted me as I emerged from the subway the first morning of my trip; a good reminder to look up down and all around.

> *This kind of* wandering as research *is on my mind as I take the first deep breaths I've taken in awhile. I sit back and think only of where I am and the direction I am headed – not the laundry, the dog, my in-laws, the weeds growing in the garden, papers to be graded. I'm reminded of the conceptual artist On Kawara who spent so much of his career marking time and space, being present in the moments he inhabited. His work was simultaneously about a great deal and nothing at all, an attempt to remind himself that he was alive and on this earth to engage with the spaces and people he encountered. When I am engaged with the world around me in this way, I see, hear, and experience things differently than I normally do. I experience them as an artist (Roland, 1996/2001) and as a naturalistic researcher (Lincoln, 1985).*

Traveling Out to Travel In

Holistic and experiential approaches to learning have been popular with progressive educators for well over a century. John Dewey (1938) advocated learning about a subject from multiple and unifying disciplinary perspectives as a form of institutional rebellion and empowerment

lodged against industrial era models of schooling. In more recent times, advocates of outdoor education have used experiential learning and its related tenets as a rallying cry for programs that take urban kids from the city to the woods to confront the unknown and, in turn, themselves (Mackenzie, Son, & Hollenhorst, 2014). Unschoolers claim their children can learn more as they navigate the world independently, with supportive guidance from their parents, than they can sitting at a desk, even when that desk is parked in front of the latest smartboard (Hewitt, 2014).

Vascellaro (2011) emphasizes the educational role of experience in teacher education programs at the Bank Street College of Education. He instinctively uncovered the power of being and learning in the field as an elementary school teacher and went on to research it with his students and their students for decades. For his dissertation, Vascellero (1999) studied Bank Street's historic "long trips" during which pre-service teachers traveled together for a week or more to a remote location without predefined objectives. In the beginning of his research, Vascellaro wondered what the trips had to do with becoming an educator. But over time, he came to understand and agree with "the trip leaders [who] believed and hoped that the knowing, the feeling, and the experiencing of the field trips would change the person, which would influence all of his or her work with children" (Vascellaro, 2011, p. 7).

Vascellaro's research on the long trips supports my belief that the best educators I know don't just love kids, they love learning. This sounds simple and obvious but with all the things teachers are responsible for during the course of an average school day – taking attendance and lunch orders, managing technology, communicating with parents, checking homework assignments, balancing budgets, and attending faculty meetings – it's easy to forget. A big part of being a teacher is modeling being a learner. And just like our students, we need to have time and space to let our minds run free. To follow an idea for a while and see where it leads.

The best teachers I know have a genuine appreciation of the role wonder and curiosity play in learning. They are, as Giroux (1988) suggested, intellectuals. Without experiencing for oneself the phenomena of encountering something entirely different and new, examining it directly with an open-mind, asking honest questions about it, and reflecting on the encounter, one can not hope to inspire such behaviors in one's students. Without such experience, teaching and learning are only understood as the passage of others' knowledge rather than aiding students in coming to their own understandings (Freire, 1970).

The best art educators I know, those who offer their students opportunities to think like artists, have had experiences in which they have approached the world and lived like artists. Without ever having an epiphany in the studio or a profound connection with work in a museum, how can one pass that love along to others? Such experiences require some amount of risk, of

opening oneself to the unknown. Field trips can produce a similar sense of exposure. Open the door. Step outside. See where the road takes you.

This trickling down of embodied knowledge – the teacher experiences, reflects, and ultimately changes behaviors – has clear connections to action research (May, 1993). Transforming my students into action researchers is one of my foremost goals as a professor of art education. I want to them to recognize themselves as everyday anthropologists, heightening their awareness of what is going in their classrooms at any given time. I want to inspire them to pay more attention to the particulars and subtle nuances of things, to see the learning happening within their students' learning. Through this autoethnographic case study, I was practicing my own form of everyday anthropology in an effort to improve my teaching.

Field Trips as Arts-Based Curricular Research

As previously mentioned, one of the major assignments in my course on *Art Education Beyond School Walls* requires students to conduct a case study. With students all across the country, in rural and urban communities, just taking note of the points on the map as they pop up is exciting. For most students, this is their first foray into qualitative research and before they venture off into the field, I offer them advice on collecting data that I hope will appeal to their artistic sensibilities.

> "Embrace your inner Walker Evans or Dorothea Lange." Translation: take lots of pictures, they'll help you recall and report the details of what you observed. But don't just take *any* pictures. Make portraits of the places you go that reflect the feeling you get from being there. Help us see the place as you did with big open shots as well as close-ups, bird's eye and worm's eye views. Capture the good, the bad, *and* the ugly. (See Figures 4 and 5.)

Figure 4: Getting ready for afterschool programming at Eckford Street Studios, Brooklyn.

Figure 5: Afterschool activities at Eckford Street include (barefooted) arts-based playtime.

> "Be a culture vulture." Examine and snag (when you are able) souvenirs like course schedules, event flyers, and other marketing materials. The style and substance of these documents carry meaning and can tell you a lot about the people and places you visit. (See Figure 6.)

Figure 6: Signs at The Met demonstrate this is a popular spot for local families.

"Evolve into a social butterfly." Whether it is in your nature or not, talk to as many people as you can to get varied perspectives of your location. Give your subject your full attention. Ask lots of questions. Take lots of notes. (See Figure 7.)

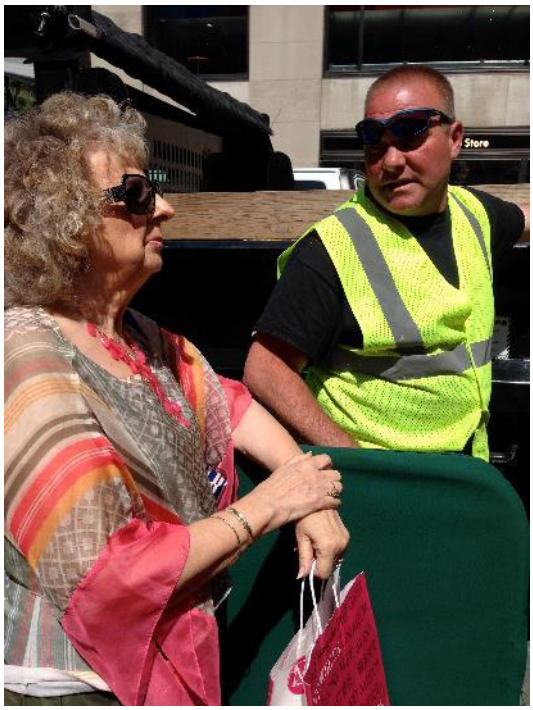

Figure 7: Unintentional art educator. A landscaper working on the installation of Jeff Koons "Split Rocker" in Rockefeller Center answers questions from passers-by, including the author.

Teachers give similar directions to students when they chaperone school trips (Von Zastrow, 2009). Ultimately, they are lenses to help students stay focused as they wander into the unknown. I hope my advice offers my students ways of transforming open-ended observations into lessons for their professional practice. When they return from their journeys, it is clear by the ways in which they talk about their encounters in the field that they learned something about themselves, in addition to the knowledge they gained about the organizations they studied (Wiseman, 2015). And when they share their findings, their classmates and I get to know them better through their reporting in addition to being privy to intimate glimpses of people, places, and possibilities we didn't know about before.

I followed these directives on my own field trip. I accepted the invitation to engage a cycle of observation and experience, reflection, and action (Carson & Sumara, 1997). I sucked up data through all of my senses and let it rattle around in my brain together with everything I know and believe about art education in and outside of schools. I was torn between the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations I had for taking the field trip. Both played important roles, and balanced one another, as I made a priori and spontaneous decisions about how to spend my time.

Likewise, in order for a field trip to be pedagogically meaningful, it must have some guiding objective, an extrinsic motivation. No principal would authorize a trip, nor would most

educators propose one, that did not set forth some educational goals for students up front. However, without unplanned and often immeasurable experiences prompted by being in different spaces and encountering new objects and ideas, the trip would miss an essential element. Most field trips are so highly structured, "they provide no real engagement with the raw world" (London, 1994, p. 24). One might as well stay at school and take a virtual tour on the Internet or watch a TEDTalk. While these are worthy exercises, they cannot take the place of authentic, first-hand encounters.

On the Corner of Prince and Wooster Streets

I have a few minutes between things today so I'm going to swing by the site of my first real job (Figure 8). After college, I worked as a gallery gal in SoHo. I had a love-hate relationship with that job. I sat at a desk all day talking to people about art, trying to guess who was worthy of the dealer's attention. In other words, who might be interested in buying, not just looking, at the work. I longed for a facebook of renowned curators and art critics, the folks my boss wanted to talk with but whom I only knew by name – Roberta Smith, Robert Storr, Laura Hoptman. These people usually walked into the gallery, looked around, then signed the guestbook just as they were about to leave, after they'd asked for the press release and flipped through the materials provided about the artist's bio and pricing. As they departed, I would realize who it was and try to stall them. Unfortunately for me, they usually made their excuses and ran out before I could summon my master. Their signatures in that book sealed my fate, guaranteeing I would be reprimanded.

Then there were the times when people clearly wanted to be recognized and were offended when they weren't.

> *An older gentleman: "Please let him know I'm here."*
> *Me: "Of course. I'm so sorry, but whom shall I say is here?"*
> *Him [incredulous]: "I'm _____ _____."*
> *Me [to myself]: Of course you are. Of course you have painted numerous large-scale self-portraits and are a hot shot in the contemporary art world right now. Ugh. How could I be so dumb. (Buzzzzzzz.)*

Figure 8: The gallery, now a Swiss Army store. I remember when that tree was planted. It was my job to water it, with a bucket I filled up in the basement.

> *While I had mixed feelings about the job, I loved being in the gallery - the high ceilings, the art on the walls, the books and catalogues to read. It was a special place, particularly in contrast to my small, dark apartment. I was an art nerd working in a SoHo gallery. I felt just about as cool as if I were on a movie set in Hollywood. Since then the neighborhood has changed. The galleries have moved onto the next industrial neighborhood and boutiques have taken their place. I wonder what's there now? Either way, it's so early in the morning, I probably won't be able to get inside. Too bad. It would have been nice to walk around in there again after all this time.*

The Field as Third Teacher

There is a popular adage among early childhood educators derived from the Reggio Emilia philosophy of teaching and learning: the classroom is the third teacher (Gandini, 1998). The idea is that children learn not only from their teachers and classmates, but also from the environments they inhabit. This is an indirect sort of learning, a *hidden curriculum* (Friere, 1988). It reminds me of something Winston Churchill said on the question of whether the

British House of Commons ought to be rebuilt in its old form following World War II: "We shape our buildings and, afterwards our buildings shape us."

As educators we ought to consider the third teacher when we design schools and classrooms, but we should also consider what it says about the importance of exposing students to other spaces. What impact does time spent in unfamiliar places have on our aesthetic awareness, self-knowledge, and sense of community? How can being in an unusual landscape or setting challenge, and ultimately stimulate our visual perception? How might it impact our ability to imagine alternative realities and empathize with others?

Greene, Kisida, and Bowen (2014) studied the impact of field trips on students in Arkansas who visited the Crystal Bridges Museum. They examined how the trips influenced students' knowledge of art, critical thinking skills, historical empathy, and interest in returning to the museum on their own. They found the trips had a significant impact on students, particularly rural and minority students. The implication was that the museum itself made an impact on the students, mentally and physically. Crystal Bridges is a new museum in an area with few other cultural resources. It is unlikely students in the control group would have experienced such a place before. Visiting the space exposed them to new imagery, ideas, and environments and influenced how they thought and what they thought about.

Finding Authenticity in Professional Development Opportunities

It is January as I write this reflection. My online professional learning networks are all abuzz with talk of the National Art Education Association (NAEA) Convention that will be held in New Orleans at the end of March. Who'll be there? What sessions are people planning to attend? When will everyone get together for coffee and beignets?

NAEA bills its annual gathering as "the largest professional development opportunity offered worldwide, exclusively for art educators" (National Art Education Association, 2015, p. 1). This isn't the sort of field trip I focused on in this paper. However, it is a good opportunity for art teachers to get out of their classrooms and see new places, to connect with others in their field, and to spend an extended period of time with ideas that can impact their personal approach to teaching as well as their artistic practices.

NAEA provides its members with tools to advocate for permission and financial support to attend the convention including a well-informed and useful document for making one's case that aligns with the language and culture of education today (NAEA, 2015). It encourages educators to approach the experience with intention. "Articulate the need. Document your case. Bring it back!" (p.2). The document positions art educators as professionals who need to stay up on the latest research in their field and connect with their colleagues to gain new ideas

for addressing student learning in the 21st century. What it skips over, from my perspective, is what these trips do for teachers as individual practitioners, how they nourish us creatively and intellectually, and how that impacts our work back in their classrooms. In other words, how can professional field trips serve as artistic development, intellectual fulfillment, and pedagogical inspiration?

Heading Home: Reflections from the M60 Bus

> *It's been a rewarding couple of days. I'm not sure yet how I'm going to make use of all that I've seen in my class, but I know that the experiences I had these past few days will add to my overall knowledge about art education outside of schools. I will draw on the exhibitions and artworks I encountered as new content for lessons and inspiration for my students. And I will encourage my students to get out and be in the world, and to bring the world back into their classrooms.*

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About the Author

Jodi Kushins believes that being an art educator isn't just a job; it's a lifestyle. One she embraces equally in her work typing Socratic-style questions in response to student work and in leading friends and family in creative activities. Jodi grew up, was educated, and taught high school on the East coast before making her way to the Midwest for doctoral studies in art education at The Ohio State University. She has taught courses on a range of contemporary issues in art education, supervised pre-service art educators, and introduced elementary classroom teachers to arts-based learning. She has also worked as an educational consultant in a variety of cultural organizations including The Columbus Museum of Art, the Dublin Arts Council, The Wexner Center for the Arts, and Ohio Wesleyan University.

Jodi's passions lie in art education outside school walls; in museums, community centers, home studios, gardens, and laundromats. In such endeavors she finds synergy between her interests in socially engaged and participatory creative practices, the artist as public intellectual, and the art educator as community activist. She is also engaged in explorations of artful parenting, the picturebook as art object, and the convergence of contemporary craft and social networking. Teaching online has had a profound impact on Jodi's understanding of what it means to work as a scholar in the 21st century. She writes regularly about her discoveries on her professional blog: Art Education Outside the Lines.

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