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Between Tradition and Tourism: Educational Strategies of a Zapotec Artisan

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Abstract
This case study examines the teaching and learning strategies employed by a Zapotec weaver in Oaxaca, Mexico, to draw attention to the personal agency of indigenous artisans participating in the tourist economy, and to examine ways in which non-formal and informal education in skills and understandings related to art can function in the lives of real people, especially members of less privileged cultural groups. Among the strategies employed by this artisan are intergenerational transfer, self-directed research, experimentation, and workshops. Implications for art education include consideration of economic incentives and other motivations for art-related learning in this and other settings.

Introduction

Across the base of an upturned chair in her family's open-air cafe, Demetrio's young daughter has woven blue, green, and aqua colored yarn in patterns through woolen warp threads she strung to make a rudimentary loom (see Figure 1). Like her father, this 8 year old is learning to weave through intergenerational transfer, or "learning at the knees," as a member of a weaving household in an indigenous community famous for its production of woolen rugs. Tradition is rich here in Oaxaca, but maintaining the economic viability of this or any artisanry requires adaptation to changing markets. The disciplinary lens of art education can illuminate some of the processes at work in the ongoing negotiation between artisanal traditions and fluctuating consumer tastes. In this paper I will focus upon the teaching and learning utilized by one young Zapotec weaver to bridge this gap.

Unpacking Production

Among notable scholarship that recently has examined indigenous artisanry from a postcolonial perspective, the edited volume by Phillips and Steiner (1999), *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Post-colonial Worlds,* presented emerging perspectives from anthropology, tourism studies, and art history. In his epilogue to the book, Nelson Graburn summarized three aspects of the production, and particularly the consumption, of artisanry that had received little attention prior to the publication of this volume. These included (1) the impact of colonialism on artisanry; (2) the individual agency of producers, intermediaries, and consumers; and (3) interpretations of authenticity among producers and consumers (Graburn, 1999, p. 344). Consideration of these factors raises new questions and problematizes earlier assumptions about the relationship between tradition and tourism.

Figure 1: Child's loom

This study will illuminate the concept of individual agency--specifically in terms of engagement in educative processes--as exercised by rug producer and merchant Demetrio Lazo. I will also share insights into this indigenous artisan's conceptualization of authenticity. To ground this discussion, I will first briefly discuss the concept of tradition

and its role in the marketing of hand-crafted indigenous artisanry. I will also discuss typologies of educational processes and review literature related to art education and artisans.

Defining Tradition

Tiffany (2004), Stephen (1996), Niessen (1999), Moreno and Littrell (2001) and many others have explored the deployment of 'tradition' in marketing indigenous artisanry, as "merchants tend to project to outsiders … a unitary ethnic image emphasizing kinship, shared history, and customs" (Lynn, p. 18). The term *tradition* is a cultural construct fraught with numerous, sometimes conflicting, connotations, from birthright or heritage to folklore to unwritten doctrine, and so my usage merits clarification here. Glassie (1995) defined tradition as "a continual process where the past is drawn upon to create the future" (p. 395). Others suggest that tradition is like a spandex bag, because: a) it serves as a container of cultural knowledges from which various elements can be selected and recombined as appropriate to meet new challenges (Moreno and Littrell, 2001); and b) it is elastic, stretching and changing shape as new knowledges are incorporated into a group's cultural practices (Vogel, 1991).

From this perspective, the adaptation of traditional artisanry to meet the changing tastes of tourists/buyers involves selecting or preserving certain aspects while incorporating new or different features, or reviving older ones, often at the suggestion of middlemen (Moreno & Littrell, 2001). As Niessen (1999) pointed out, "the market is one of the main drivers of invention. It is not, however a new influence on textile production…" (p. 175).

As summarized by Moreno and Littrell (2001), aspects of artisanal products that have been altered in order to appeal to consumers' changing tastes include: materials, style, inspiration, forms, function, meaning, aesthetics, color, decorative elements (designs or patterns), production techniques, and tools and equipment (pp. 661-663). Although often spurred by direct or indirect input from retailers and/or consumers (Moreno & Littrell, 2001), such changes ultimately occur because individual producers choose to alter their products and incorporate different characteristics.

From my perspective, it seems that artisans who are engaged in changing various characteristics of their craft must necessarily continue learning about new ways of working. If they are utilizing unusual materials, reinventing familiar patterns or introducing new designs, altering the equipment or techniques they use, or trying to appeal to different aesthetic tastes, they are engaging with skills and understandings quite familiar to art educators and commonly associated with art, yet little research exists into the specific educative processes that come into play. I contend that artisans who choose to adopt new strategies and learn new skills are exercising individual agency by actively

engaging in art educational processes, and that these processes and the motivations for undertaking them deserve further attention.

Formal, Non-formal and Informal Art Education

Within the academic discipline of art education, the lion's share of scholarly attention focuses upon processes, content, or outcomes of didactic processes that take place primarily in institutional settings, including schools, museums, and sometimes community centers. Art educational processes that take place outside of or beyond these settings, outside the sphere of influence of formally trained art educators (particularly outside of the West), receive significantly less attention.[1] Learning and teaching about art-related skills and understandings can play a significant role in one's life beyond school, even if these processes are not identified as "art education." It seems increasingly important, as art is pushed further to the periphery of formal education, to draw further attention to the personally relevant teaching and learning processes employed in non-formal and in-formal contexts by real people toward their own ends.

Singleton (1998) recommended that we must "deschool our conceptions of education" (p. 6) and "decenter entrenched assumptions about educational process, especially the implication that education can be effectively decontextualized and contained within schools" (p. 98). According to Schugurensky (2000), it is outside the curriculum of formal educational institutions and programs "where most of the significant learnings that we apply to our everyday lives are learned" (p. 2).

Although there are varying understandings of formal, non-formal, and informal education, the European Commission (2001) offered a set of definitions that can serve as a starting place for conceptualizing the distinctions between these types:

- **Formal learning**: learning typically provided by an education or training institution, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time, or learning support) and leading to certification. Formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective.

- **Non-formal learning**: learning that is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. It is, however,

[1] For insights into the conflicted relationship between indigenous cultural practices and formal art curricula in post-colonial contexts, see Ross (2004), Bresler (2001), Ballengee Morris, Mirin, and Rizzi (2000), as well as Kamens and Cha (1992).

structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective.

- **Informal learning**: learning resulting from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and typically does not lead to certification. Informal learning may be intentional but in most cases it is non-intentional (or "incidental"/ random). (European Commission, 2001, pp. 32-33)

Further refining these definitions, Carron and Carr-Hill (1991) identified four distinct contexts for non-formal education: a) para-formal, such as literacy programs, night school, or distance education, as a substitute for formal education; b) popular education, defined as training primarily aimed at populations in poverty, often run by community volunteers in settings such as churches; c) personal development activities, such as courses offered through museums, cultural organizations, or leisure clubs, usually utilized by the wealthier members of society; and d) professional or vocational training organized by employers or organizations. These authors held non-formal education to be distinct from informal education, which they defined to include socialization and interpersonal imitation processes.

Schugurensky (2000) offers a more nuanced understanding of informal education.[2] He identifies intentionality, mentioned in the European Commission definition above, as only one of two factors, along with consciousness, that in various combinations distinguish three separate types of informal learning, including: self-directed learning, incidental learning, and socialization or enculturation. While incidental learning is unintentional and unconscious, self-directed learning is both. According to Brockett and Hiemstra (1991), self-directed learning is

> a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes. (p. 18)

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[2] Although Livingstone (2001) is one scholar who differentiates between informal *education* and informal *learning*, I use the two terms interchangeably in this discussion, based upon models that draw no such distinction. In the field of art education, Brewer (1993) contrasted formal and informal *instruction*, but he was actually describing more-structured versus less-structured teaching strategies within the formal classroom setting.

In the Western artworld, some creative individuals are defined by their involvement in this and other types of informal art learning, and thus are known as “self-taught” or “outsider” artists, though some may participate in formal or non-formal art education as well. Art education scholars such as Congdon and Bucuvalas (2006), Jones (2001), Muri (1999), and others have studied the products and processes of self-taught artists, as well as the ways in which they did or did not become “educated” in art. In a slightly different vein, Wade (2004) described the lifelong learning practices – formal, non-formal, and informal – of fine craftspeople in the United States, such as goldsmiths, potters, and furniture makers, as related to increasing the sales of their work.

Although there may be some overlap between self-taught artists or fine craftspeople, and those who are considered indigenous artisans as discussed in the literature cited herein, this paper is concerned exclusively with the latter. I distinguish indigenous artisans as self-identified members of distinct, non-dominant linguistic or cultural groups who: a) rely upon a particular localized craft for their economic well-being; and b) have typically ‘inherited’ their involvement in particular forms of ‘traditional’ artisanry from elder members of their families or from membership in a larger community.

In Mexico, where I conducted the following case study, art is not a part of the curriculum in most public schools, except occasionally as an option in vocational high school programs. Outside of specialized university programs, most art instruction in Mexico is non-formal, offered through private classes, museums, and community cultural centers, primarily in urban areas. For indigenous artisans in smaller craft communities, however, most of the art educational processes in which they might engage fall outside of these options. In the discussion below, I will relate the categories of learning above to some of the educative processes in which artisans have been known to participate.

Artisans and Art Education

In Demetrio’s village lives one weaver whose artistic talents as a youngster earned him the opportunity to study art seriously in formal institutional settings. This weaver, Arnulfo Mendoza, with the successful Oaxacan artist Francisco Toledo as his mentor, studied painting and traveled the world, working for a while in Mexico City and Paris, and exhibiting his weavings in Japan and other countries. As a result, he incorporates learnings from diverse artworlds into weaving pictorial tapestries of original design. He has also done research to revitalize forgotten indigenous weaving patterns in his *Sarape* series of rugs.[3] Graburn (1999) suggested that while it is still rare to find indigenous artisans who have received a formal education in fine arts, inquiry into the effect on their work and their communities of practice would be worthwhile.

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[3] Details about how this weaver set out to revive traditional patterns and techniques are described in an article by Avila (2003) in an exhibition catalog of Mendoza’s work shown in Chicago.

In conversations with Zapotec weavers, I repeatedly heard descriptions of how Mendoza's designs became models for others in the village to copy. This reflects one of four other ways in which traditional artisans engage in art educative processes commonly acknowledged in literature related to indigenous artisanry as tourist arts. The first, as mentioned by Niessen (1999), is learning by "deciphering" or decoding what other practitioners of similar techniques have produced, in order to incorporate those qualities into one's own work, as Mendoza's neighbors have done. People who make things often catch themselves closely examining a hand-crafted item, noticing the way in which it was put together, and thinking, "I can do that!" If certain products seem to sell well, similar products will soon appear in the stalls of other artisans nearby (Niessen, 1999). This reflects intentional, conscious, self-directed informal learning.

Another type of educational process in which indigenous artisans take place is deliberate training in new techniques or processes by companies or by representatives of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) or Alternative Trade Organizations (ATOs), such as Aid to Artisans. Organizations like Aid to Artisans or Pueblo to People have a mission to help less-privileged artisans receive a fair price for their handicrafts, bypassing the middleman (Littrell & Dickson, 1999). The types of training offered by these organizations may range from business practices to art-related concepts, such as the dimensions of household items—for example, how large an embroidered pillowcase should be in order to be marketed in the US. This training typically leads to the production of specific items for sale in the retail outlets of these organizations back in urban centers.[4] This educational opportunity would fit the category of non-formal vocational training.

The third way in which indigenous artisans are acknowledged to participate in art educational practices is in educating the consumer about their wares (Littrell and Dickson, 1999). Often, this role is played by intermediary salesmen, importers, ATOs, gallery owners, etc, but artisans who sell directly to the public will also engage in this informal type of teaching. This didactic salesmanship rarely dwells on emergent stylistic adaptations or the complexities of contemporary community relationships, but is typically centered on the myths of a unitary heritage and a timeless past, as mentioned above. As we will see below, however, some artisans go beyond merely reciting an account of the ancient roots of their craft, to engage in more structured non-formal education of others.

In addition to these examples of learning and teaching, informal learning processes of intergenerational transfer or interpersonal imitation (Carron & Hill, 1991) are commonly

[4] See Littrell and Dickson (1999) for a more comprehensive explanation of Alternative Trade Organizations and their work with artisans around the world.

understood to be the basic training of most traditional artisans. I have also encountered descriptions of artisans experimenting with materials in self-directed efforts to learn and apply new adaptations for their goods (Littrell & Dickson, 1999; Niessen, 1999). I wondered what other art educational practices might be seen in the lives of artisans, what specific interests motivate these producers to participate in these processes, and how their active engagement in learning--with the purpose of altering their craft to make it more marketable--might impact their own conceptualizations of authenticity. The following is an effort to gain insights into these questions from the life of a single indigenous artisan.

A Case Study of a Zapotec Weaver

I first met Demetrio Lazo when I visited the Zapotec town of Teotitlan del Valle to interview Arnulfo Mendoza and his wife about his formal artistic education and her work as a gallery owner and promoter of local artisanry. My guide for this junket was an American woman living in Oaxaca, Lauren Beam. When she learned of my interests, Lauren suggested that we stop in to talk with Demetrio Lazo on our way out of town. Demetrio and his wife Maribel own and run La Cupula, a home-based business just off the Pan-American Highway on the approach to the village. The couple met while studying English, a skill useful to those in the business of interacting with and selling wares to tourists and others. Demetrio has pursued opportunities to develop many skills and understandings in the business arena, but I will not discuss in depth the family's business plan or any entrepreneurial training he may have pursued that is not directly related to the production of artisanry. In this paper, I will focus on these specific research questions:

- How do art educative processes contribute to the transmission, maintenance, and evolution of artisan production in this particular context?
- What motivates this artisan to pursue new learning related to his practice?
- And, how does this artisan view what he has learned and applied in terms of the "authenticity" of his craft?

To examine these issues, I conducted two formal face-to-face interviews with Demetrio, during March and July, 2006. To help ensure the validity of my interpretation, I utilized methods for triangulating data, including: informal interviews with two of his associates; document analysis of printed, web-based, and televised materials; video and still photograph documentation of interviews and site visits. I also utilized email to conduct member checking of transcripts and to ask follow-up questions. This study is part of a larger ongoing research project involving a younger generation of artisans, designers, and

entrepreneurs in Oaxaca, and so serves as a preliminary report on emergent issues undergoing further investigation.

Learning

Long famous for the production of woven goods, Teotitlan has a population of about 5000 people, approximately 80% of whom are employed in some aspect of the weaving industry (Stephen, 1996). Spanish is spoken in schools and for official purposes, but most families speak Zapotec at home, and English is rapidly becoming a necessity as well. As an ambitious young entrepreneur, Demetrio led his family into the bed and breakfast business, building an attractive establishment with six bedrooms, a restaurant, private living quarters, weaving and dyeing workspaces, and public showrooms surrounding an open courtyard (see Figure 2). Around the side of the building sits a long shed covering a row of large tubs made of various metals, set into concrete frames over hearths for wood fires. This area is used for dying wool yarn with natural materials.

Figure 2: Courtyard

Inside the front door is an open workshop space with at least four large horizontal treadle looms, modified over time from the type introduced by the Spanish about 500 years ago (see Figure 3). These replaced the backstrap looms utilized by Zapotec weavers for the previous two millenia, just as non-native sheep's wool supplanted the use of local fibers like cotton and agave.[5] During my visits, at least one loom was always in active use. Members of the immediate or extended family work on rugs there or deliver them from their home workshops to be sold in the shop space of La Cupula. The arcade along one side of the courtyard is filled with hundreds of colorful, tightly woven, hand-crafted rugs--

Figure 3: Loom

[5] Learning to use new technology and materials is often the result of intercultural contact in situations of conquest (Davenport, 2001).

hung on the walls, stacked on tables, and covering the floors. Each is labeled with information about the fibers, the patterns, and the specific dyes used, as well as the name of the family member who made it.[6]

As he showed me the temporary loom created by his daughter on the café chair, Demetrio explained that he was in the process of constructing a smaller scale version of the floor loom for her use. Demetrio himself learned how to weave this way, at the knees of his father and mother, but I was surprised to discover that he didn't learn from them how to use natural dyes for coloring his yarn. Instead, he taught himself.

By the time Demetrio was growing up, during the 1970s and 1980s, most weavers in the area were using synthetic dyes, because the bright colors and cheaper cost made their rugs more marketable. Only a couple of families in the area retained knowledge of natural dyes and how to use them. Demetrio shared with me that in about 1994, he noticed that those families were having success marketing rugs made with natural dyes. He liked the idea of using natural materials, so he started trying to find out more about it. Even though communities of indigenous artisans are often portrayed as cooperative and communal for the sake of marketing, in fact, the tense competition between families meant that no one in the village would share information with him.

> **Demetrio:** "People here are so jealous about their secrets. I believe there were, still are, two families that work with natural dyes, but they just didn't want to share their secrets. That's the hardest part: people here think if you share something with them, you are going to get the customer and they won't get more, and so it's very risky for them."

So, Demetrio engaged in auto-didactic processes in order to learn about dying yarn with natural colors.

> **Demetrio:** "I bought a book, *Mexico Antiguo*, and they were explaining a little bit about how they were using natural dyes on pottery and some textiles, but there was no recipe. Mainly what they mention was cochineal, and madder, so those were the colors I started using."

Demetrio confessed that his first experiments with cochineal resulted in a dull lilac color instead of the deep rich reds expected, causing his wife to question whether they shouldn't just continue using the synthetics they already knew. "But," he said, "I never gave up. I continued trying and trying different things." This included attending a

[6] For more on the importance of family relationships, *compadrazgo*, in the economy of craft villages, see Stephen (1996).

workshop at the Tlapanochestli Center in nearby Coyotepec (see: http://www.aztecacolor.com), where researchers have been working for over ten years to revive the cultivation and use of cochineal, including expansion of its current and potential uses as a colorant in foods and industrial products. Although Demetrio had already taught himself about dying with natural materials, at the Center he learned about cultivation of the cochineal insects on the leaves of the *nopal* cactus, and at one time had 70 plants of his own. This took time away from his other efforts, however, so now he prefers to acquire the cochineal from others. He continues to experiment with various combinations of materials and develop new recipes.

> **Demetrio:** "I do my own experimenting and if I get nice results, well, I like it. For example, for blue, there are so many ways to get blue! Also cochineal, both of them are great colors. You can blend them together and get a range of lots of colors. I didn't discover this, but someone told me about something like chamomile, but it was not chamomile… so I went to the mountains. I didn't know much about it, but I asked some people, 'I want to find some plant that smells really good.' They knew it as *pericon*, and said, 'Oh, it's this.' And I said, 'No. Chamomile, *manzanilla*.' 'No, it's this.' They showed me where it grows. I gathered some and I came back and discovered the most beautiful yellow color."

Figure 4: Skeins of Yarn

The range of over 300 colors he has achieved with natural dyes presents a beautiful palette. In a storage room upstairs hang hundreds of skeins of dyed yarn, matched by batch, for use by weavers within the family, and sometimes for sale to others (see Figure 4). He explained that he has also experimented with quality control, being careful to develop recipes that produce colorfast dyes.

> **Demetrio:** "I understand the plants, some are colorfast and some other ones are not. All the plants make color, but not all of them are colorfast. At this time I am not using any more of those plants that are not colorfast, because by doing experiments, you know… because most of my wool yarn dries outside, sometimes

> I leave it there on purpose for months. Three months is the challenge. Eventually it fades, but it's not too bad. And if it makes it three months without fading too much, that means it's good to use. In the direct sunlight, the kind of sunlight we get here… it's very intense."

I asked him how long he worked to learn about natural dyes. He replied, "All that I know, it took me, I think, three years to learn it." These days, Demetrio is referred to as a master of both weaving and natural dying. Stirring a vat of deep green water full of plant matter, Demetrio pointed out how the metal of each different tub acts as a mordant, producing distinct colors from the same recipe. He dipped a strand of yarn into the vat to reveal the color on fiber, comparing it to others hanging close by. Like other artisans who recognize the need to educate their consumers, Demetrio is ever ready to give a demonstration, a tour, a small sample of wool, to potential buyers. Without this information, consumers may not be able to tell the difference between the labor-intensive natural dyes and the less expensive synthetic colors still used by some weaving families in the area.

Teaching

One of the first things to greet a visitor to La Cupula is a display area set up for instructive demonstrations and lectures (see Figure 5). Baskets with samples of several different types of herbs, bark, and other plant matter rest next to piles of un-carded, carded, and spun wool in several natural shades. The highlight of the demonstration involves the cochineal bug. Several paddles of *nopal* cactus sit in a container covered with tiny white, cottony cocoons of this insect. Next to that is a basket of very small blue-purple pellets, the dried bodies of bugs that were hand-plucked from the cactus. Next to this is the grinding stone, *metate,* covered with a fine carmine-colored powder from the ground cochineal insects (see Figure 6). During a demonstration for tourists, Demetrio crushes a cocoon into a visitor's hand, leaving a smear of brilliant red. Then he dissolves a bit of the

Figure 5: Display Area

powder in a container of water to look like a glass of wine. After, he adds lime juice, then soda, to change the pH of the mixture, producing a range of rich jewel tones. He told me a story that his son would sometimes play with the small jars of leftover pigments after a demonstration, just mixing the dyes together and changing the colors.

Figure 6: Cochineal Powder

> **Demetrio:** "One day I was with Victor, my son. He always likes to play with the dyes, especially with cochineal, because he likes to squish the bugs. He also watches me do demonstrations, and he always wants to do that. So every time that I'm not watching him, while I'm weaving or doing the dyes, he's playing with the cochineal, mixing it with lime juice in a glass of water. So I got the idea, what if I give him paper? I got a piece of paper, just normal paper, and said, 'You can paint.' So first he started with cochineal, then he got a little bored with that and wanted some more colors… and then we added a little indigo, and then some leaves and agaves to make different yellows and greens, and got a nice range."
>
> "It's a lot of fun and actually also it was good for my selling, because sometimes people bring their kids. Kids don't like to buy rugs. They get impatient and they want to play. So I started doing that, I'd say, 'Do you want to paint?' They'd go, 'Yeah!'"
>
> "It was more interesting, so maybe that's why the parents were so happy, they'd buy a rug for compromise, I don't know… at least they have the time to look at the rugs…"

Educating consumers is an important aspect of making sales, and Demetrio is very good at it. He has a stack of color handouts printed in English ready to give to visitors. They explain his mission, family history, and the sources of his colors and designs. He is also internet-savvy, and purchased the domain name www.teotitlan.com before anyone else acquired it. His website is colorful, well organized, user-friendly, and educational. It lists opportunities to study with Demetrio in intensive residential workshops at La Cupula.

Although visitors to the cochineal research center in Coyotepec can enroll in workshops about cultivating, processing, and using natural dyes, it is located in a pottery village, off the beaten track, away from the weavers who use these dyes in making their rugs. For several years now, Demetrio has offered weeklong classes in weaving, natural dying, or both, in which participants stay at La Cupula, enjoying home-cooking in the café and even studying Oaxacan cuisine if they like. Some who attend receive continuing education credits from universities for participating in exchange programs organized around Demetrio's teaching.[7] Even the occasional painter has come to study with Demetrio, in order to make dyes to use as paints, like his son.

Demetrio has also traveled to the US several times to teach workshops on college campuses and in community art centers, and has presented at regional and national conferences on the fiber arts. In addition, Demetrio is in the process of writing a manuscript recording dye recipes and techniques, to be published only in the Zapotec language. Having learned how to make and use natural dyes without the help of knowledgeable neighboring weavers, he has no qualms about teaching others.

> **Demetrio:** "This information, it's new for me, but it's been in this world for a long time. The thing is that only a few people know about it. It's a secret, not to share with the competition. They're afraid. But in my case, I'm not afraid of anything, because I know pretty much what I am doing, and I don't mind teaching other people. When I learn, I just call my brothers-in-law, all my sisters, and say come and learn. So for me, it's not a problem to teach other people."

Motivations

In my interviews with Demetrio Lazo, I also wanted to explore his motivations for exercising individual agency through learning and teaching. I expected that Demetrio would be motivated by economics, primarily, as has been noted in the case of other artisans. I learned that he had this, but also other reasons for pursuing and sharing knowledge of natural dyes.

> **Demetrio:** "What the dealers wanted to buy [in the 1960s through 1990s] was synthetic dyes, because the product that they were offering in the States, you know, the people didn't know what they had, and sometimes they don't want to know. The cheapest wool, all the material was not so expensive; to make it worth it… and even then they were not making a lot of money. Now that I've been doing a lot of work with natural dyes, my market has grown a lot more… a lot more."

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[7] See Rebecca Severeide's website: http://www.vacationstodyefor.com/moreinfo.html

I asked him if buyers are becoming more savvy, and he responded, "Well sometimes, even if they don't know, we will make them experts here."

The changing demands of consumers for more natural products has led many to explore, revive, and expand upon these traditional techniques. In addition, however, a growing concern for their own natural environment and communities also motivate younger artisans.

> **Demetrio:** "This, the natural thing, it's something quite new again. Now, with lots of young people, like my age, they're involved a lot with it, which is good! Because what I believe is that more work for local people is best, like people that produce indigo or cochineal, they can make a better living by producing more. There's lots of towns that only grow corn, once per year, and corn needs a lot of water. And some of these plants that I'm talking about actually have been tested for how much water they need, which is not a lot. They can survive with these temperatures, they're suited for this climate. It's the best for them."

On his website, Demetrio expresses concern that too much interest in natural dyes will lead to over-harvesting of these plants (http://www.teotitlan.com). So, he is working to establish community nurseries to try to cultivate some of the wild plants used to make the colorfast dyes he prefers. Like the research center in Coyotepec, Demetrio is also interested in the use of natural dyes in foods and other industrial products.

> **Demetrio:** "If people can start producing that, and if more people got involved in natural dyes, there will be a market for that. But if we can't find that kind of market here…Now that I'm doing my teaching also in the US, we are finding new markets for them. Right now it's very, very slow because we haven't found that one big thing. If we really got a lot of people to do this nursery for natural dyes, it's not going to be used only for dyes for fibers, but it actually can work on foods, beverages, instead of using all those poisonous synthetics and artificial stuff that they put into the flavors or colors."

It seems that Demetrio, like many members of younger generations in other countries, has become aware of threats to the health of the global environment in ways that perhaps his parent's generation did not.

> **Demetrio:** "If more people in the world learned about natural dyes, the better it is, because it's better for the environment. The world is our big house and we just have small places where we hide. So it's important for the globe to use organic dyes, and all materials. This is a new century, and we have to be careful about the

environment. I have two kids and I want them to have the best place to live. And I want them to have kids also."

Authenticity

Neperud and Stuhr (1993) suggested that conceptions of authenticity based upon definitions of cultural purity can be problematic, and encouraged broader acceptance as 'Indian art' of "a variety of visual types ranging from traditional forms to more contemporary mainstream Western types of art" (p. 251). Graburn (1999) proposed that scholars might ask how 'native' artisans conceive of authenticity: as Western 'experts' do, or if they may have a comparable discourse about "genuineness and spuriousness" (p. 352). He suggested that the concept of *authenticity* might well exist only in the mind of the beholder, and may not have existed at all "until the tourists arrived" (Graburn, 1999, p. 351). Tiffany (2004) explained that "clients with little or no firsthand knowledge of textiles in general, and of Zapotec textiles in particular, are often hesitant to purchase a weaving without a convincing narrative of indigenous culture as a social marker of the craft object's authenticity" (p. 308). Because the culturally constructed concept of authenticity has attained increasing importance for consumers and thus for producers of artisanry, I wanted to find out about Demetrio's understanding of and concern for this issue. He talked about the way rug weaving has changed over time, from back-strap to treadle loom, from agave fibers to sheep's wool, from natural dyes to authentic dyes, and back again. Then I asked him how he thought about the issue of authenticity and if it really mattered.

> **Demetrio:** "It doesn't matter sometimes, as long as the person is being honest. People are going to buy a beautiful art or craft whether it is made with natural dyes or synthetic dyes. It doesn't matter, as long as the people are telling the truth about what's in it."

Rather than emphasize conformity to some reified standards of tradition, this artisan recognizes honesty as the basis for making judgments about authenticity. This stance stands in stark contrast to those who critique an object's authenticity in terms of adherence to certain cultural characteristics in order "to demonstrate to themselves, if no one else, a superior knowledge and power of discrimination…maintaining power and stratification in colonial systems" (Graburn, 1999, p. 352).

Conclusion

Revealed in the conversations above were several examples of art educative processes in which Demetrio Lazo engaged as both learner and teacher. As a learner, Demetrio participated in such informal processes as enculturation into community practices, direct intergenerational transfer, self-directed research, and experimentation. He also took

advantage of opportunities for non-formal education, such as the workshop at the Tlapanochestli Center for cochineal research. In teaching, he conducted informal demonstrations for family members, consumers, and other artisans, as well as non-formal and formal workshops for students in his home and in American universities. He also generated didactic materials such as websites, handouts, and other publications. His motivations for engaging in these art educational processes included both economic and environmental concerns. Not only did Demetrio see switching to natural dyes as a way to expand his appeal to consumers, but he also recognized how the growth of local production of natural dyes could contribute to the economic well-being of his region. In addition, he feels a deep concern for the global environment and wants to ensure a bright future for his children.

Demetrio is a young, forward-thinking indigenous artisan, whose use of the internet and global sensibilities may surprise some who seek "an image of timelessness and indigenous authenticity" (Cohen, 2001, p. 383) in their encounter with other cultures. Tiffany (2004) suggested that such realizations "pose a disjuncture with Western inscriptions inspired by National Geographic images and texts of traditional peoples living according to time-honored rules of custom in societies untouched by the outside world" (p. 310).

Demetrio Lazo provided important insights into the ways that learning and teaching of art-related skills and understandings can be utilized by an individual for personal empowerment and resistance to destructive forces within the larger world. Based on this case study it is possible to conclude that art education contributes in relevant ways to the economic endeavors and cultural practices of real people in their lives beyond schooling. Further examination of these processes engenders an understanding of how and why artisanry undergoes the kinds of changes reported by anthropologists, as well as how and why artisans enact individual agency. In addition, this study suggests that informal and non-formal processes of art education merit further consideration for what they contribute to the economic and cultural adaptability of non-dominant groups within society, particularly indigenous artisans negotiating the gap between 'traditional' practices and changing markets.

Congdon (2005) suggested that art educators need

> to culturally decolonize ourselves as a field. If only *we* are seen as art educators, then we impoverish both our students and ourselves. By labeling the *Other* teachers as educators, we open up our educational systems to a vast array of possibilities that are connected to people who have important things to say…people who can teach us how to build on our teaching strategies. (p. 147)

The insights into his learning and teaching that Demetrio Lazo shared with me reveal yet another way that this artisan engages in art education, by allowing glimpses into his life, his motivations, and his example, to inspire new inquiry and practice in others.

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After several years on the faculty of universities in Florida, **Melanie Davenport** is thrilled to be returning to her hometown of Atlanta to join the art education faculty of Georgia State University. She earned a PhD from Indiana University, her Master degree in Art Education from Georgia State University, and both a BFA and Teaching Certification from University of Georgia. She taught art in Atlanta public schools and also taught English for a year in Japan as a participant in the Japan Exchange in Teaching (JET) Program. Earlier, Melanie worked in scenic design and art production for television and film. Her current research projects involve teaching animation production techniques and developing visual culture curriculum for an indigenous school in Mexico. She approaches her professional activities from the critical perspective of an art educator interested in media literacy, intercultural education, and social justice issues.

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