Article

Short- and Long-Term Outcomes of Community-Based Art Education among Students in Higher Education

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Abstract: Advocating for the academic value of community-based art education requires empirical evidence that students are not just participating in community-building activities, but also effectively learning content. Unfortunately, little is known about the short- and long-term cognitive outcomes on student participants, particularly in higher education. Based in a phenomenological methodology with a reflective lifeworld research design, this longitudinal study seeks to understand the interwoven cognitive and social outcomes of participating in community-engaged art projects among college students. Informed by a theoretical framework in which CBAE situates learning in authentic social contexts, findings suggest that it may be decisively poised to yield short- and long-term educational benefits in which student learning deepens through the development of social connectedness. These findings expand the possibilities for collaboration as a pedagogical model for inclusive postsecondary education.

Keywords: community-based art education; social cognition; affective cognition; embodied cognition; social learning theory; social emotional learning; participatory artmaking; collaborative learning

1. Introduction

Although community-driven artmaking has gained popularity in recent decades, advocating for the academic value of community-based art education (CBAE) requires empirical evidence that students are not just participating in social activities, but also effectively learning relevant knowledge and skills. While community-building art practices in schools have effloresced, there is limited empirical data available on the outcomes of participating in community-based art projects involving students, and most focus on community organizations rather than school settings [1–4]. Studies of community-based projects that investigate public health [5,6] and economic benefits [7,8] attest to the rich civic yields of community art but offer little direct application for educators. The few school-oriented studies that exist most often include students in elementary and secondary schools [9–11], making research on the outcomes of CBAE among students in higher education rare [12–14].

As a whole, research on community-based art tends to under investigate learning outcomes as well as the potential for its civic outcomes to influence academic yields. Drawn from a theoretical perspective in which cognition is not independent of, but deeply entangled with social and emotional context, this qualitative study seeks to understand the potential impact of CBAE on the interwoven cognitive, social, and emotional experiences of college students. The first objective of this study is to document and interpret the immediate outcomes of a community-based art project among college student participants, with an emphasis on how cognitive and social factors culminate into inclusive environments and meaningful learning. A small body of existing research [9–11,13,14] suggests that participants experience an increased sense of group solidarity and community, civic dialog, and ability to make critical connections to their surroundings. If this is the case, it is worthwhile to fully investigate how CBAE, as a pedagogical approach that facilitates group cohesiveness, might function as a means to create more empathetic students and inclusive

classrooms. Ultimately, however, little is currently known about the nature of learning that occurs as a result of these projects or how such social outcomes might be intertwined with cognition.

Notably, almost no research has been conducted on the *long-term* outcomes of participating in community-based art projects. In a rare exception, visual sociologist Tiffany Fairey, describing a longitudinal participatory community photography project in Peru, noted:

> In a funding environment that prioritizes short-term demonstrable results, the majority of participatory arts and media evaluation happens during and just after a project has taken place. There is little incentive to build a picture of the long term impact of initiatives and a dearth of research that considers how the effects of participatory arts and media projects play out over time [15]. (p. 182)

In turn, the second objective of the study is to document and interpret the outcomes of the same project one year after completion, making this a two-part longitudinal investigation. With no known existing empirical research on the long-term outcomes of participating in a community-based art project in an academic setting, it is difficult to anticipate the outcomes. Perhaps some of the immediate reactions to the project would dissipate over time. Prior to the study, I hypothesized that revisiting the artwork after the project was completed might act as a visual reminder that revives some of the initial responses. In that way, making collaborative public art in a visual format (rather than ephemeral, performative work) might sustain a sense of community as well as stimulate retention of learned content. Understanding the short- and long-term outcomes of community-based projects might further substantiate its value in educational settings not just as a feel-good activity, but as a valid pedagogical strategy with significant cognitive and collective worth. Such findings would contribute to a better understanding of the pedagogical strategies that might intrinsically lend themselves to cultivating more inclusive classrooms. As a result, this study aims to answer the following questions:

- What are the immediate cognitive, social, and emotional outcomes associated with participating in a community-based art project for college students?
- How do those outcomes change over time?

2. Theoretical Framework

Given the diminished sense of social connectedness in contemporary times [16–19] coupled with the recent erosion of social skills among students [20], educators currently face a host of social and academic challenges. As a potential antidote, this study investigates participation in community artmaking with an eye toward easing those social struggles and informing effective pedagogy. Linking research from multiple disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, and educational neuroscience, advances the possibility that CBAE can play a pivotal role in fostering social cohesion and meaningful, contextualized learning. Furthermore, this investigation explores growing evidence that the two are acutely interlinked.

For verification of the symbiosis between artmaking and social cohesion, we can look for clues from the past. Notably, humans have bonded together through the arts since the prehistoric era when all art was community art that organically forged solidarities. During this time, rituals and ceremonies, which were primarily composed of multimodal art forms—combinations of "song, dance, performance and visual spectacle" [21] (p. 245)—served an important role in cementing the interpersonal bonds of close-knit societies. The most recent thinking on paleolithic hand stencils, for example, is that they were produced not by individual artists, but collectively as a family activity [22]. A deep history of communal artmaking suggests participation in collaborative public art projects may have intrinsic social value [21,23–25]. This may be due in part to the physical synchronization required to make such events happen. Aesthetic philosopher Noel Carroll asserts that coordinated movements create harmonized cognitive and emotive states. As a result, "artworks have the capacity—at a fairly elemental level—to promote cohesion among groups" [23]

(p. 100), a notion recently confirmed by synchronization at the physiological level in global studies of ritual [26]. Notably, those early societies were inclusive by nature, and art in the form of ritual functioned not just as a bonding experience, but also as a clear signal of solidarity [21].

Dovetailing with the social history of artmaking are emerging insights from social and affective neuroscience. A growing body of empirical evidence is transforming theories about learning by suggesting social and cognitive benefits go hand in hand [27,28]. According to educational researcher Mary Helen Immordino-Yang, "educators have long known that thinking and learning, as simultaneously cognitive and emotional processes, are not carried out in a vacuum, but in social and cultural contexts" [28] (p. 101). Empirical findings explicitly detail the capacity for emotional and social context to sustain cognition by making content relevant to the individual [29].

This is particularly important for educators who hope their students will retain content over time and even transfer it to other contexts. Inundated with information from our senses, one of the brain's significant functions is to filter input for socially and emotionally relevant content and flag it as worth holding onto for future use [28,30]. This tendency springs from the architecture of the human brain which evolved in such a way to support our survival as a social group and has not changed much since that time [28]. In other words, we evolved as social creatures and our brains retain information that supports our social survival, thereby coupling learning with social context. In addition, the recent discovery of mirror neurons further evinces the human predisposition to learn both socially and visually [31,32].

Recognizing learning as an inherently social process is relevant to students of all levels. According to Immordino-Yang, the older students become, the less curricula generally consider social and emotional factors:

> [A]ffective and social aspects of development are generally considered in examining curricula intended for young children. Affective and social neuroscience findings suggest, however, that emotion and cognition, body and mind, work together in students of all ages. Future research and theory in education should attempt to understand how best to characterize and capitalize on the emotional and social dimensions of learning in older students, including adults, keeping in mind what is known of the biological underpinnings of these processes [33]. (p.102)

Aligned with Dewey's socially driven progressive education [24] and Vygotsky's social learning theory [34], social and affective neuroscience confirms that emotions and social settings have real cognitive value, which enable students to retain, apply, and transfer knowledge. The arts are often inherently imbued with social and emotional content [34,35], and as a result might constitute a natural conduit for learning in a contemporary setting, especially in collective form. This new perspective on cognition thereby converts the arts' implicit social and emotional connotations, previously considered a cognitive liability, into a wealth of educational potential [36].

In addition, new understandings of embodied cognition and the benefits of multimodal and contextualized learning tie meaning making inextricably to context—physical, social, and emotional [37–39]. If education is most effective when it integrates the whole of the mind and body, this is particularly true of artmaking embedded in a community due to its collaborative public nature and large-scale format [40]. Community art projects often require cooperative learning strategies that can generate "communities of practice" [41] and meaningful learning [42] through their interactive qualities and shared purpose. Understanding how context can prioritize content lends new support for learning in realistic and applied situations. Community art, which more often than not takes place in locations outside of the classroom, provides students genuine opportunities to apply knowledge to authentic settings [40,43].

CBAE is characterized by an inclusive and experiential nature which situates students' learning among the needs of the community and often results in a collaboratively created

product. Art educators Lawton, Walker, and Green define it as "education for [social] action with art as the medium for learning" [44] (p. 102). According to educators Krensky and Steffen, CBAE can motivate students to contribute to the public dialogue: "Through artistic interactions with their environments, students become the investigators and re-creators of their world, making this type of art education exceptionally well suited to support the development of social responsibility and democratic participation" [45] (p. 13). As such, it makes an ideal vehicle for nurturing student engagement and inclusive learning environments or projects that students collectively envision and realize.

While there are many approaches to socially situated artmaking [46], what makes CBAE stand apart is its emphasis on education in which the work is always asset-centered [44]. At its core, CBAE marks a shift toward relationships. According to Lawton,

> Community-based art education is primarily about fostering asset-focused, community-based teaching and learning experiences with and through art. Community based art education takes place in both educational institutions and communities. It provides opportunities for participants to develop art skills while learning from one another about their community as situated in the larger context, and by building meaningful connections through artistic collaborations that inspire personal, social, and communal transformation [46]. (p. 206)

Taken as a whole, these diverse viewpoints converge on the potential of CBAE to teach students in ways they are already predisposed to learn. They further suggest that CBAE might be a means to recreate some of the group cohesion that characterized our predecessors' inclusive and collaborative societies. By extension, practicing educators might benefit from knowing more about the intertwined emotional, social, and cognitive benefits of engaging in these large-scale, collaborative public works through the praxis of research and theory. Given the multitude of challenges students at all levels of education face in today's fraught academic landscape, it behooves educators to seek the path of least resistance, especially one that is marked by potential social and cognitive advantages.

3. Methods

This qualitative research study is situated within the theoretical perspective of hermeneutic phenomenology, which aims to understand both the experience of the participant and the essence of a specific phenomenon—in this case the nature of learning that occurred as a result of participation in community engaged art projects. Informed by Husserl's notion of intentionality [47], Heidegger's interest in the nature of being [48], and Merleau-Ponty's existentialism [49–51], this study draws particularly from the reflective lifeworld research of Dahlberg, Drew, and Nyström [52].

The first phase of data was collected in spring 2018, concurrent to teaching a course titled Community Engaged Art at The College of New Jersey, located just outside of Trenton, in which the central focus was acquiring strategies to create meaningful public art in collaboration with the community. Two populations participated in the study: college students enrolled in the course (9) and collaborators from the community (4), who served to triangulate data. This study was approved for human subject research by the Institutional Review Board of The College of New Jersey (approved protocol number: IRB-2017-0106, approval date, 2 December 2018). The class met for three hours twice a week from January through May. The number of participants was dictated by the number of students enrolled in the class, with all students electing to participate. The students were a combination of studio art majors and preservice art educators.

Dahlberg, Drew, and Nyström suggest a combination of fieldwork, interviews, observations, drawings, and narratives as methods for collecting meaningful data [52]. The research study utilized participant observation, including informal interviews with students while working on course projects, the projects themselves, surveys, focus groups, and visual journals as sources of data. Input was also provided by the four collaborating artists.

Student participants were asked to complete assignments aligned with the expectations of an advanced visual arts course, including participation in two community-based projects

and regular contributions to visual journals. The projects themselves utilized the C.R.A.F.T. (contact, research, action, feedback, and teaching) methodology articulated by Knight and Schwarzman, et al. [53] to ensure a responsive and collaborative stance toward the community. Early projects involved researching a local community organization, followed by an assignment to generate grant proposals for the Old Trenton neighborhood in response to their call for proposals. Research into the history and current sociopolitical trends in the city weighed heavily in the first half of the semester. The course involved frequent trips into the city and interaction with Trentonians, including our cooperating artists and many local arts organizations, thereby facilitating local, personal interactions.

The community-based art projects included first taking part in the global participatory street art project, Inside Out, initiated by French artist JR, in which students worked around a self-generated theme "Fabric of Trenton" and initiated dialogue with local residents to create a large-scale photographic installation in multiple locations (see Figure 1). The second project involved partnering with the East Trenton Collaborative and area residents to codevelop, create, and install artwork in their community garden. This collaboration resulted in a double-sided 4′ × 24′ mural (Figure 2), as well as bilingual garden signage that also served as a colorful, didactic scavenger hunt for neighborhood youth (Figure 3). Visual journal prompts included documenting expectations for the projects, assumptions and changing perspectives about the community, personal reactions to research and community interactions, and developing insights. Their final entry required students to reread their journals in their entirety and include reflective annotations. Informal interviews were conducted with participants as the project unfolded and the primary investigator acted as a participant observer.

Figure 1. Inside Out installation at Nixon School, one of several sites for the "Fabric of Trenton" project in Trenton, NJ.

In addition to the data provided by the coursework, students took part in a survey and a focus group at the beginning of the course, at the end of the project, and approximately one year after the project's completion to provide longitudinal data (spring 2019). Focus group prompts concerned changing knowledge and feelings about the community and how the project might have affected participants' social, emotional, and cognitive experiences. Collaborating community artists mentored students through design phases, took part in some of the projects, participated in the focus group, and served to triangulate data.
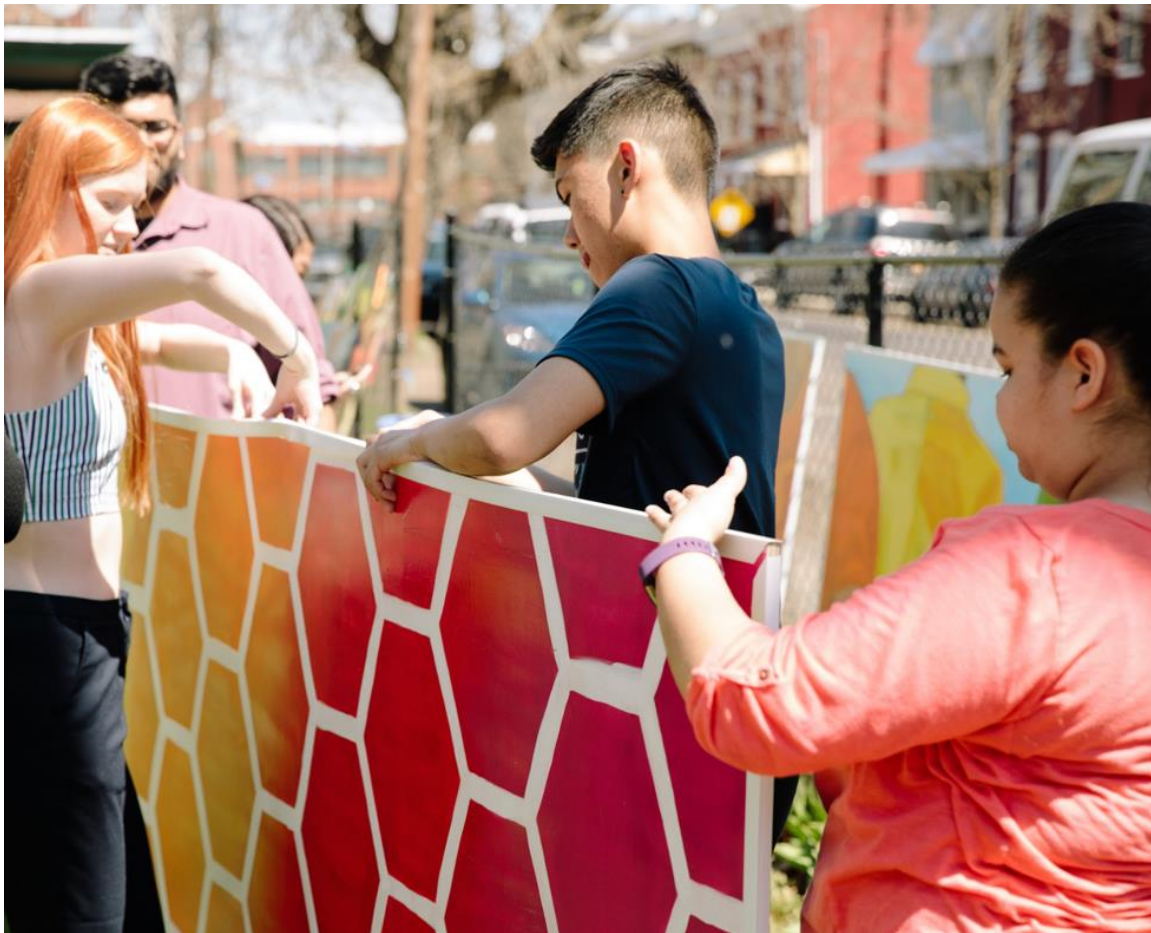
Figure 2. Installation of double-sided mural in East Trenton community garden.

Figure 3. Bilingual signage for the community garden made in collaboration with the East Trenton Collaborative and local residents.

4. Results

Data analysis consisted of whole–parts–whole hermeneutic phenomenological thematic analysis, which resulted in the identification of emergent themes and revealed outcomes that were both anticipated and unexpected. Findings from the first round of data collection, including surveys, focus groups, and participant observation, indicated the following immediate outcomes:

1. The students' sense of community was greatly broadened within the class and beyond. One student commented, "it was just a nice way to open the door for all of us to be a part of the community, even if we aren't like fully a part of it and we don't live there, it's nice to know that we have contacts, where we can not only keep in contact with them but they invite us to things and we feel welcomed as a member." (findings from the end-of-course focus group).

2. Students felt more connected to, and empathetic toward, the people of Trenton, which shed light on their own experiences, personal histories, and preconceptions. At the beginning of the course, students expressed many concerns about Trenton's reputation as a hot spot for crime and drug activity, but over time students' perceptions became more empathetic, shifting toward seeing the situation through individual's experiences rather than statistics: "When someone [who may be under the influence of drugs or alcohol] comes up to you it is scary at first, but then you have to take a step back and ask what is this person going through. It's a humanizing experience.". One student described a parallel situation in the area she grew up and how her experiences helped her understand neighboring communities that had a bad reputation: "Growing up in that community and then coming here and seeing that there was the same kind of relationship and then getting to be involved in that community makes me a lot less afraid to also interact with the communities near me in a similar way. It's not just this one place that this stereotype exists, I think this stigma is placed on a lot of places. I think you can learn from that and apply it to other things and other parts of your life. That might spread the love a little bit, so I think that was important." Ultimately, students were pleased to be able to change the narrative by contributing to positive media messages about Trenton through the local media attention the projects received (findings from the end-of-course focus group) (See Figure 4).
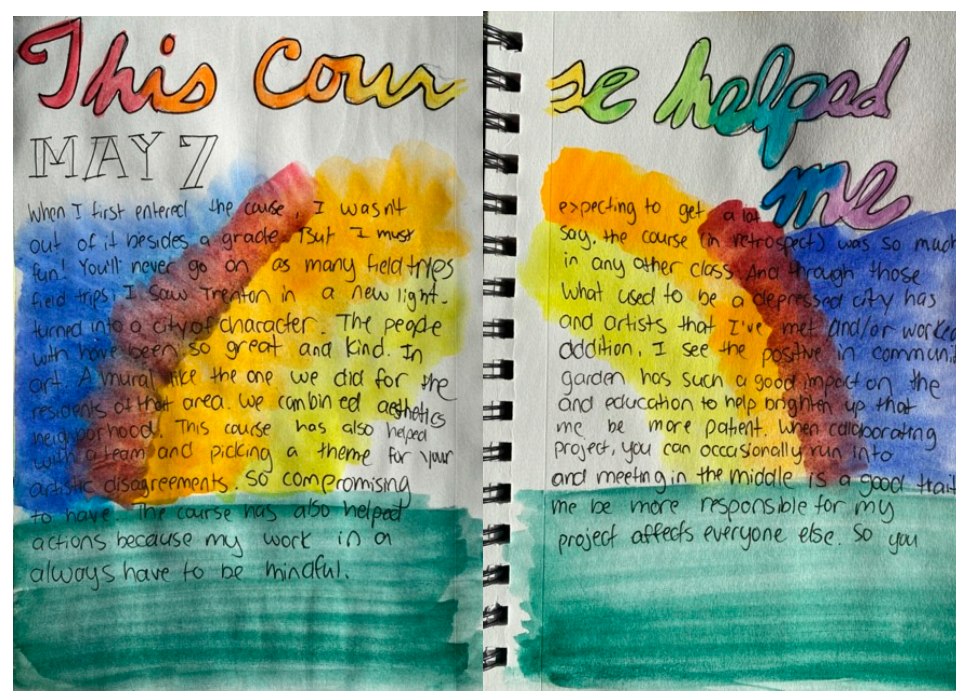

Figure 4. Visual journal, final reflection: "The course helped me to see…".

3. This interpersonal interaction led to a much higher personal investment in the outcome of the projects and internal motivation to complete them. The group consensus was that not wanting to let the community partners down, not grades, was the primary motivating factor. According to one student, "There were other people counting on you to have the garden mural done and like, you know, the worst thing is hearing 'I'm disappointed.' That is the worst thing. So having other people who you really don't know disappointed in you, as not only an artist but as a person too, it's like oh my god, this is devastating. You have to get it done for the sake of others, not just yourself . . . . That woman with the heart on her house, imagine being like 'sorry we couldn't get it done, I didn't feel like coming in.' Just thinking about so many people who were really so happy to have the opportunity to have us do this, we're not just letting them down, we're letting all the people that wanted them to do it, all the people that lived there." Students expressed appreciation for the contextualized nature and the hands-on nature of the projects. One student reported, "I think the hands on . . . if we had just read about community art, and just read the real examples from the text you had us read, we would have all been like this is a great idea, probably would have never gone anywhere, but now that we've all done it, it's like, 'Let's do it.'" (findings from the end-of-course focus group) (See Figure 5).
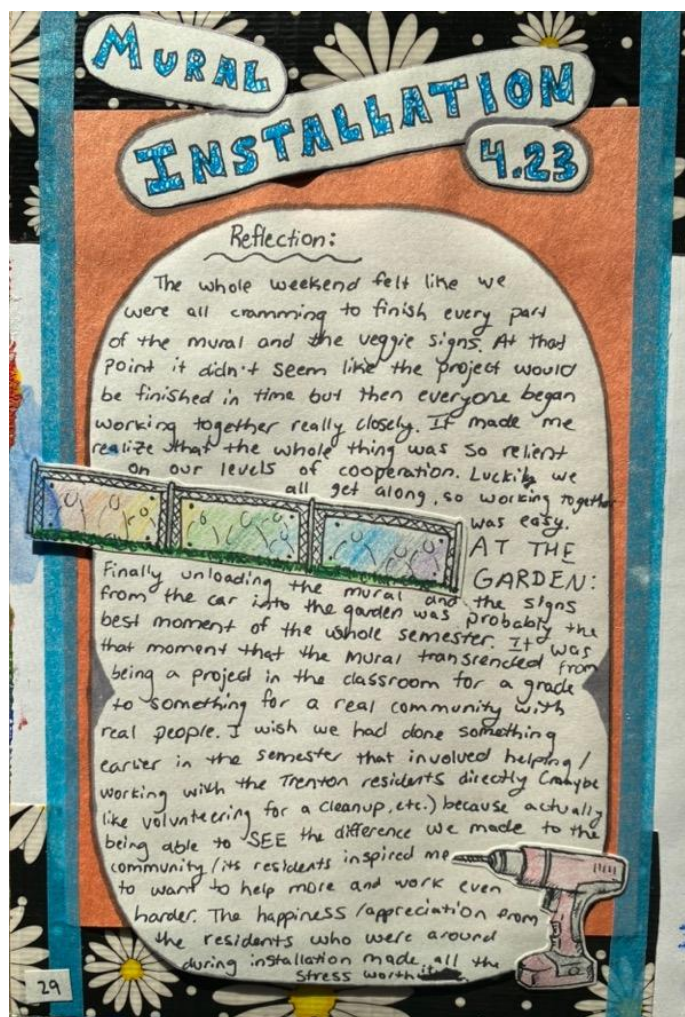

Figure 5. Visual journal: the mural installation.

4. Students were able to apply academic theory in concrete ways, demonstrating not only application of content, but also transfer. Students described specific ways they the course impacted their plans for the future. One said, "I applied [my learning]

elsewhere, I went to a school on my own and did some paintings on blacktops for kids, it was fun." Another said, "My goal for the summer is to make a master calendar of all the different non-profit volunteering events for my high-school students at high-west because I think, what I learned most about was what all the different non-profits, and the works that they do in the city and my students don't know anything about that . . . So that's my goal this summer, to get my students involved with all the different non-profits." Another said, "Actually the grant that [we] created –the painted planter idea–I submitted to my town. I'm doing it this summer . . . I'll get $500, the hardware store is donating wood to it, and I've already put the kids to work in one summer program. They're pumped. I'm pumped . . . .Kids each get a piece of wood, they can decorate them however they want, and then we put it together in a planter, and then we plant herbs in them . . . " (findings from the end-of-course focus group).

5. Students experienced a sense of personal growth, taking major steps towards new competencies. For example, one student commented, "Looking back on the visual journal, and reading everything that I had wrote, I grew so much as a person and how I viewed Trenton in the best way possible. So it's nice to look back on that and see how I thought at one point and how I didn't think we would come this far." Another said, "I remember telling someone at home about how the class was going, they were just like 'I can't believe you're going there' . . . yeah I'm going there. I'm actually doing such positive things I never thought I could do on my own." Collaborating artists confirmed this observation, stating "it was cool to see—to watch you guys grow up before our eyes." (findings from the end-of-course focus group).

6. Students were able to articulate ways in which their learning grew and changed from the very first days of class to the final result, demonstrating a metacognitive perspective on their own learning. After connecting some of their learning with content from other courses including Maslow's hierarchy of needs and their research on Confucius's perseverance, one student commented, "I don't want to sound super philosophical but you don't plant seeds to see the tree. You plant seeds for your children to see the tree, or your grandchildren. It's not for you." Another concluded, "The thing I learned from all of this is that what we do may not impact everyone else, but it has impacted each and every one of us to do this elsewhere." (findings from the end-of-course focus group).

While these findings are in line with other studies, the results from the second round of data collection were somewhat surprising. In contrast to my expectations that the immediate outcomes would dissipate over time, one year later, the effects seemed to have magnified. After reflecting on their experience, students stated that they felt even more strongly about the projects and their impact on their work as artists and art educators.

When asked how this approach differed from their other studio courses during the last focus group which included eight of the nine original participating students (one had since left the college), the students responded with the following dialogue:

D: The whole problem, well, for me– we were just talking about this before, like, yesterday. The whole problem with artmaking, me being a fine arts major and me graduating, like, in a couple weeks. The biggest problem is that a lot of artists don't know how to work with other people, they don't know how to compromise with other people, and they don't know how to talk to other people in a way that can benefit everyone. So, a collaborative effort, a group project like this where everyone has to put in their piece, everyone has to compromise, everyone has to do the extra step to help other people makes a big difference, especially socially, which is a really important skill to use, especially when you're going out, having a career even as an artist—especially as an artist, because you have to make those connections or it'll be very difficult for you to be able to say your piece.

PI: So, again, that collaborative aspect.

C: I also think in terms of studio versus this kind of thing is you are more invested because it's not just going up for a critique and then you're putting it away. It's got a goal, it's for somebody. It isn't for you. Which is nice.

A: Yeah.

D: It's bigger than you.

C: Yeah.

E: That's exactly what I was thinking, that it's bigger than me. Because, usually, my art, I just make it alone, and then it goes in a critique, then it goes in my bedroom–

A: It goes in my cubby–

E: Or my basement. There's a whole little graveyard of all my giant big paintings that I put in my basement that I still haven't put in my house yet. This—our mural—is on display. People actually get to see it. Like, instead of my studio paintings usually get hidden away or . . .

A: Not even. I throw literally all of mine out. I have nowhere to put it all anywhere in my house so I just take pictures and leave it here and then people here clean out the studios and I'm, like, sad. I'll keep what I want, really.

E: Yeah.

C: And even conceptually. Because when you're making a work for yourself about personal themes it's for you, but when you're doing this kind of thing you have to think about what you're trying to get at for other people.

A: Yeah.

C: So you have to think about the whole theme of it entirely differently. (findings from the focus group one-year later).

In this passage, students note that when considering both the end product and the conceptual process of generating a collaborative work of art, the interpersonal negotiation of ideas plays a pivotal role. This discussion also points to the public nature of the work as a significant motivator. Making something that is "bigger than you" allowed students to set aside their personal agendas and focus on the social impact of the work.

One year later, students were especially amazed by the connections they had formed, how that enabled them to feel a part of the Trenton arts community, and in many cases, connected them with other art educators. They marveled at how small the Trenton art world felt because "everyone knows everyone else." Accessibility seemed to be a significant factor. Some comments from the focus group are listed below:

B: Seriously, the art community there is crazy. Because I also had one of my placements in the Trenton 9th Grade Academy and our co-op, me and F's co-op, basically lives at the Trenton Coffee Roasters and is super tight with [one of our partner artists] and we went there one day during our fourth block off and took selfies and sent it to him. And it's crazy to think about the fact that there's people in the educational community in art and also in just the fine arts community that are connected. I mean, that's totally off topic, but to answer your question about it in relation to other classes, I think that one of the important parts is that when we're in classes we hear about other artists and we hear about super crazy people that are, you know, billionaires that are living their lives and having a wonderful time. And, like, yay that's good for them, but it's nice to see and to talk to artists that are making really cool work that are normal people that are down the street from you. And you think, 'yeah I could do this too, and you're cool, and we can talk about it, and we can stay in contact.' Which, like, we have and I think that's a really interesting element that is so not part of other classes.

C: Yeah, I think that's one of the strongest parts of this class, that it was, like, this is the only class that I've heard of a local artist, somebody more accessible to me. It's always just like–

B: 'Go to New York,' like, yeah right. Ok

C: Yeah right.

D: And, of course, New York is "accessible" for us, but yeah, it's literally next door neighbors instead.

C: Yeah. It just made it a lot easier to connect with real artists, not that we're not, but, like, established–

PI: Professional?

C: Yeah, professional. Because otherwise we just look up people online and we don't have a true connection to them at all.

A: Yeah.

C: But meeting with them, and seeing them, and hearing from them was such a different . . .

A: Watching their artmaking process.

C: Yeah that was a whole different level of knowledge. (findings from the focus group one-year later)

Those personal interactions seemed to enhance their sense of connectedness and magnify the impact of the course (see Figure 6). In this case, the authenticity and immediacy of the experience deepened student knowledge as it was expanding their social networks, suggesting that the two are intertwined.
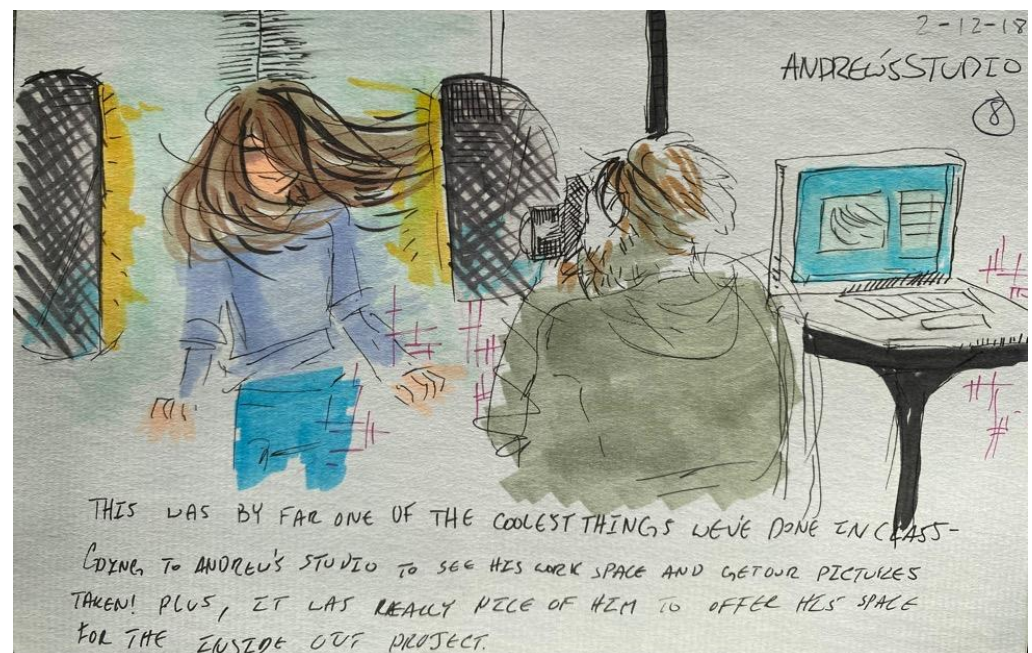

Figure 6. Visual journal: a visit to a collaborating artist's studio and the photo shoot.

Not only did students retain a sense of empathy and connection with the people of Trenton, particularly with the partner artists, they seemed to have expanded their cognitive repertoires to include collaborative and community-based strategies. This openness to people seemed to pervade not just their bond as a class but expanded their interpersonal comfort zone. One student stated:

"Going back to that idea of breaking down boundaries together, if you're doing it alone it would be a lot more threatening, but we're all, kind of– at least most

of us—we're all kind of going into a very new experience together. It made it easier and we also could, like, bond over it. It was nice because we got to know the people in Trenton and we got to know each other better. The artwork was collaborative and the experience altogether was collaborative between us and the community. There were just a bunch of themes that kind of carried out through all of it that were very good, social things. You know what I mean? I just feel a lot more comfortable around people here, people there, people everywhere". (findings from the focus group one-year later)

Most students retained and expanded their connectedness to the Trenton community. For many, this skill set also transferred to their home communities. One student, for example, modified her grant proposal and used it to obtain funding for a flower box project in her hometown, a project that she had already completed by the second focus group. Another started reading to children at the local library. Another student discovered that unlike her hometown, Trenton was quite open to civic proposals and has become a regular host of free holiday events at a local park.

Ultimately, the consensus from the participants was that this was a transformative experience that would continue to influence their lives as teachers and citizens. According to one student, "Not even has this been my favorite class because of what we did, but it's been the most impactful class that I've noticed on myself. Like, I am a different person from this class" (comment from the focus group one-year later).

5. Discussion

Returning to the research questions, data reveal that the outcomes of CBAE among participants in higher education include a range of entangled social, emotional, and academic outcomes. Community-based art education, in which "stakeholders learn from one another . . . while developing art skills, building meaningful connections through artistic collaboration, and inspiring personal and communal transformation in themselves and others" [44] (p. 10), provides a framework to embed content in fully authentic ways. Similar to prior studies of community organizations that found participation engendered community leadership and civic dialogue [1,2], all students reported feeling more connected to the people of Trenton, indicating a deepening understanding of their own personal histories and preconceptions. Through interacting with residents, students developed increased empathy toward members of the Trenton community and the individuals they encountered, thereby broadening their sense of community. Students also discovered a sense of connectedness with their classmates, evincing what Wenger calls a "community of practice" [41] which developed through sustained collaborative work toward a common goal and resulted in a greater personal investment in the outcomes of the project. The many hours students spent synchronized in symbolic production may have been a contributing factor [26].

Collaboration appears to be a key aspect of what makes CBAE an effective educational approach. Collaborative artmaking may have additional value in reducing marginalization and the experience of being othered by increasing participation among students [54]. Creating an inclusive environment through shared decision making and production is likely to have both social and academic benefits related to a sense of belonging. Prior research has revealed that with every cue for belonging, student motivation and perseverance toward a given task tends to increase [55], and this was seen among the students who participated in this study. According to psychologist Solomon Asch, "To be in a social relation, it is necessary to stand on common ground with others and to face daily conditions with shared understanding and purpose" [56] (p. 576). Along these lines, students who are asked to cocreate with community members are likely to develop a sense of cohesiveness based on their shared purpose, as our ancestors did in prehistory. Imagine the impact of this kind of collaborative mindset if consistently employed to a classroom of diverse individuals, or even an entire school.

Lawton further explains "providing preservice and in-service art educators with access to empowering community-engaged experiences that holistically integrate their artist/teacher/researcher identities can be personally, professionally, and socially transformative" [46] (p. 203), which appeared to be the case for both the preservice art teachers and the future studio artists who participated in this class. As a caveat, the transformative qualities of situating artmaking in a community are not a given and require critical engagement and attention to power dynamics in order to catalyze empowerment [57]. This remains a potential misstep for CBAE, and as educators we must be mindful of foregrounding the needs and wants of partnering communities while sidestepping or actively dismantling structural and systemic inequities. Additional research that matches (or mismatches) the community participants experience with that of the students could lend further insights into how these interactions are managed. Using the C.R.A.F.T. methodology [53] helped to mitigate this by situating action as the tip of the iceberg and grounding the actual artmaking in the relationships that developed between the students, partnering artists, and the community (Figure 7).
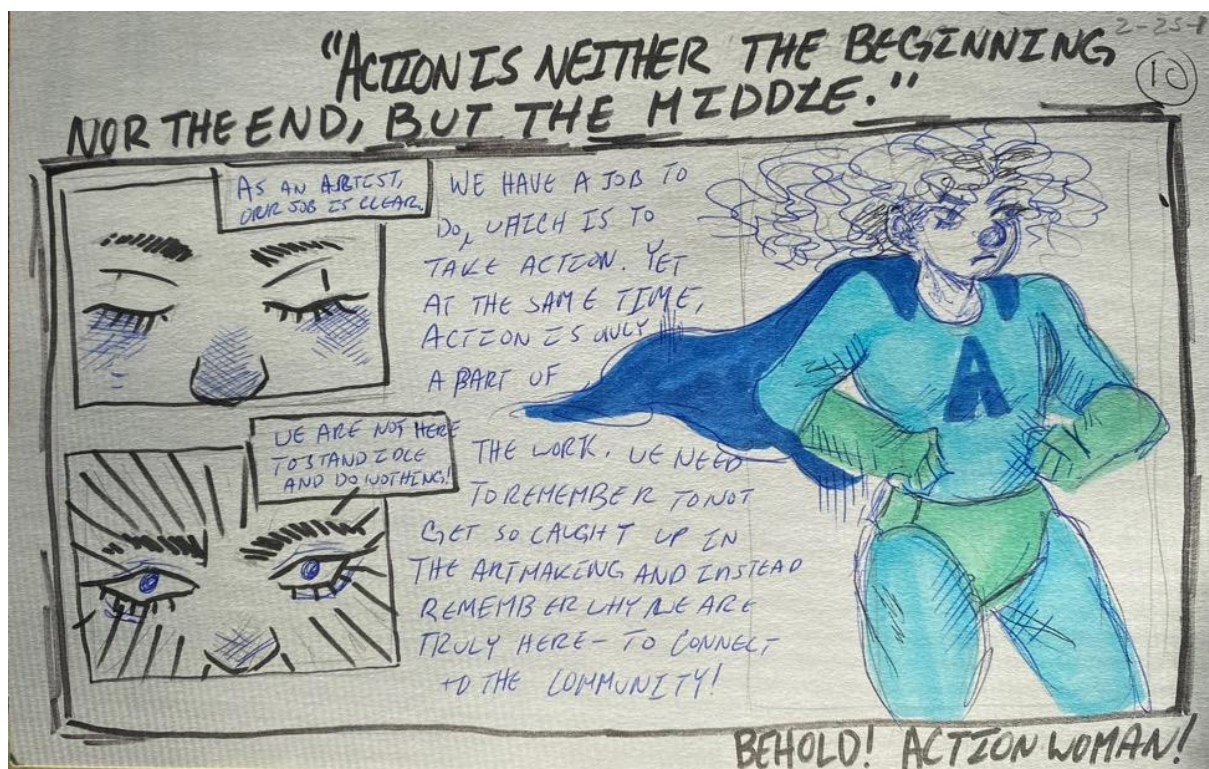

Figure 7. Visual journal: action.

Carefully scaffolding the interactions between students and community with history lessons, gallery, neighborhood, and studio visits with local artists, exchanges with community leaders, and—ultimately—open-ended dialogue with community members, might be a contributing factor to the transformative learning experienced by the students because it gradually informed and deepened their exchange and allowed them to overcome pre-existing fears based in stereotypes.

Participating in collaborative coproduction demands the development of relationships and necessitates communication where trust is essential to moving forward with a partner and a project. Garber [58] and Kester [59] both articulate the discursive nature of collective artmaking that relates to identified social needs and was evident in student work (see Figure 8). As one student wrote, "What's the point to this art if there is no dialogue surrounding it?" (Figure 9). Discourse is not just linguistic, but an openness to ideological exchange:

It grows out of the artist's active listening and empathetic identification, and a willingness to let the community influence art and artists. The art and its meaning occur outside the mind of the artist, and develop in the exchange between the artist and viewers, ultimately effecting the identities of both [58]. (p. 4)

Collaboration is so important that, arguably, the focus of education should shift from collaboration as a means to facilitate individual learning to an explicit learning objective in and of itself [60]. According to educator Erica Rosenfeld Halverson, "collaboration is both a method and an outcome of the artmaking process. Arts-based learning makes it possible for what we can achieve together to be legitimate outcomes of learning" [60] (p. 63). From this perspective, collaborative practice can facilitate productive conflict, create new possibilities, and forge a pathway to collective ownership [60]. Because CBAE privileges collaboration, all three avenues were evident among the participants in the study, particularly the notion of collective ownership, likely because the actualization of a large-scale work of community-driven art blurs the lines of ownership over the products and process: "Collaboration as-outcome . . . reframe[es] learning from what an individual person does to how a collective process actualizes ideas into meaningful representations" [60] (p. 65). In doing so, it takes the emphasis off of the performance of individual students and places it onto the collective learning process.
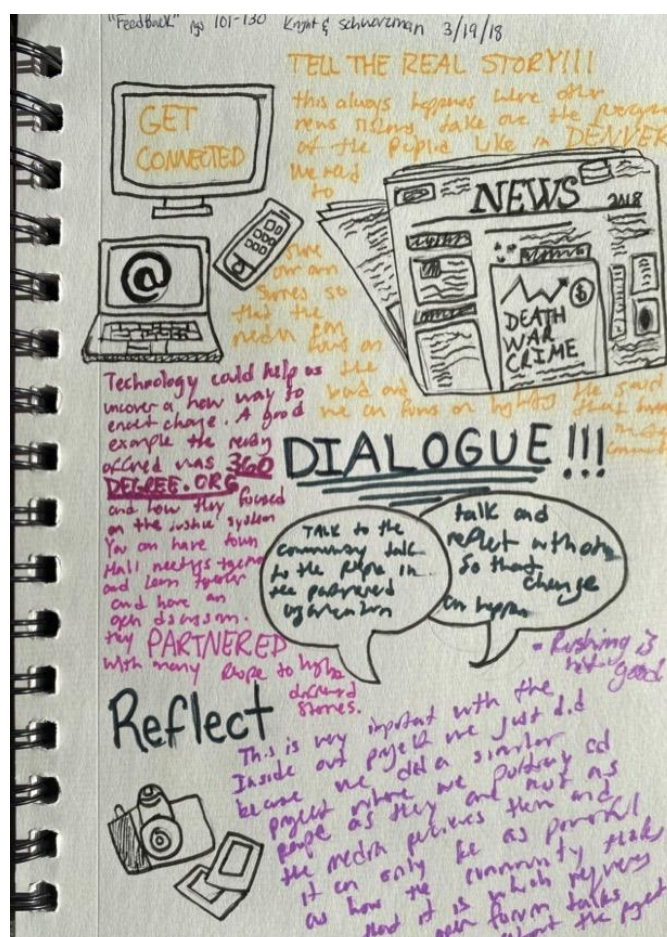

Figure 8. Visual journal: dialogue.

Ultimately, the centering of collaboration in the curriculum can create an opportunity to better understand ourselves and others, overlapping with many of the goals of social emotional learning (SEL), the rising form of character education in PK-12 schools [61]. Given the social struggles of students returning to in-person instruction at all levels of education, it can be useful to consider the benefits of collaborative work across the board, even in higher

education where SEL-based instruction is less common. Unlike isolated, individualized projects, the coproduction of artwork often exercises the full range of SEL competencies (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making) [62], including those that hinge on social interaction. Although SEL advocates push for deliberate, integrated, and sustained implementation, these findings indicate that collaborative artmaking can activate social emotional competencies without being eclipsed by them.

Figure 9. Visual journal: feedback.

Knowing that cognition leans heavily on our social wellbeing further fortifies the possibility that the social, emotional, and cognitive components of education should be considered cohesively from preschool through to adulthood. According to Immordino-Yang, "Future research and theory in education should attempt to understand how best to characterize and capitalize on the emotional and social dimensions of learning in older students, including adults, keeping in mind what is known of the biological underpinnings of these processes" [33] (p. 102).

Most unexpected was the level of application and transfer of academic concepts to practical situations, reinforcing the conclusion that social and emotional context can facilitate transfer [28] as well as the motivation to do so. At least three students were inspired to initiate community art projects in their home communities, several of which were already in motion by the end of the course, with additional projects completed a year later. The long-term dedication to these initiatives suggests a level of retention rarely seen in more traditional modes of instruction. The students' ability and willingness to apply and transfer content to their lives and home communities indicate that CBAE can be an effective peda-

gogical strategy with far-reaching cognitive implications. In addition, students exhibited an extraordinary capacity for metacognition, as they examined and understood their own learning and growth. In summary, the outcomes suggest that participating in CBAE results in social, emotional, and cognitive outcomes that are interwoven and mutually reinforcing. This appears to be true of the short-term and enhanced over the long-term as students gained additional experience, and reflective distance gave them some perspective on the impact of the work on their lives and career trajectories.

While this study demonstrated several social, affective, and cognitive outcomes associated with participation in CBAE in higher education, it also evinces the interwoven nature of these outcomes and reinforces the conceptual framework that educators and students are likely to benefit from attending to all three in concert [29,33]. In doing so, we might be able to envision a more meaningful and inclusive educational future.

6. Conclusions

This study is significant in that it is among the first to explore the long-term educational outcomes of CBAE in higher education, demonstrating that contextualizing content in social and emotional settings might drive more meaningful learning for students through collective artmaking. The outcomes have additional implications for the creation of inclusive academic environments, specifically through the use of collaborative processes that facilitate the development of empathy and dialogic practices. In turn, these data can help practicing educators and educational decision-makers equip themselves with the tools for inciting educational change that can authentically benefit students as well as society. Although further investigation into the short- and long-term outcomes of participation in CBAE is necessary to fully understand the outcomes in a more generalized capacity, this study offers a first step in evaluating the relevance of CBAE to current needs in the educational landscape, particularly developing social emotional competencies as integrated with (and essential for) academic outcomes and inclusive learning spaces. Because of its limited sample size and specific context, additional data collection from other populations, including community residents, would create a fuller understanding of the outcomes from multiple perspectives. Additionally, in a post-pandemic era, in which prosocial behaviors in educational contexts have been dramatically altered, the ways in which CBAE might be implemented and its outcomes altered should also be investigated as we look toward a very different future. Based on the findings from this study, however, we can begin to take collaborative practices, such as CBAE, seriously as a strategy for addressing some of the widening gaps in education in which students need social, emotional, and academic scaffolds. Subsequently, given the societal discord we face as educators and citizens, and the capacity for decontextualized learning to disenfranchise students, it behooves us to seek out methods that facilitate both meaningful learning and social cohesion. The findings of this study suggest that for the short and the long haul CBAE is poised to simultaneously achieve both.

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