Revisiting/revising art and home: (Be)Longing and identity in out-of-school art education settings

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Revisiting/Revising Art and Home:  
(Be)Longing and Identity in Out-of-school Art Education Settings

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Abstract:

This paper addresses teaching artists and explores the notion of home, in terms of  
rich spaces and possibilities of art education within and outside of schools.  Art educators  
locate themselves in the realm of schools as well as the art world, through their dual roles  
as artist and teachers.  An interest in the idea of origins, home, and space can also  
illuminate different conceptions and constructions of the art room.  We even classify  
visiting or guest teaching artists within “artist residencies,” implying artists actually  
reside or live in particular art education spaces, as if these spaces were homes.  Many art  
educators feel “at home” not only in traditional school art programs, but also within  
community arts initiatives for visual art outside of school walls.  This article will examine  
teaching resources and alternative spaces of fine art and studio craft education beyond  
schools, within community art programs, museums, and digital spaces.  Nostalgia for a  
range of legitimate, informal, and even imaginary art education spaces reminds us of how  
artists can be ambassadors to the worlds of art, by framing deep artistic inquiry into  
homes and home lives.
Introduction: Locating Spaces of the Arts and Teaching Artists

What do our students long for within spaces of art education? What would they like to understand and express about homes and families? This paper examines home as a valuable context and concept for teaching artists. Kathleen Vaughan (a researcher of art education environments) has extensively considered the notion of home, defining the concept in terms of students’ lifeworlds and conceptions of self in place, neighborhood, and the construction of family homes. Her research emphasizes the idea of locating or finding home through art-making and related explorations. Space can also be contextualized more symbolically in terms of home decorating magazines as both depictions of space and “pedagogical sites” (Lackey 326). Art education researcher Lackey also examines her own homelife as a child, and realizes her experience of the possibilities of home as an aesthetic site of family representation as well as an imaginary concept of “fantasy and longing” (324). These exercises (and other explorations discussed in the following pages) allow us to explore history, family, and imagination as parts of art-making around the home.

If art-making allows us to imagine and define home and space, we may also consider notions of origins and homes as generative and defining aspects of art education. Teaching artists and other educators often speak of the visual arts in education as spatial concepts as well as programmatic philosophies. Various art educators can locate themselves within the realm of schools as well as the art world, as part of dual, eclectic roles as artist-teachers and teaching artists. Meanwhile, the Italian Reggio Emilia approaches to early childhood education have prompted early art education in the U.S. to adopt the site of the classroom space as atelier or students’ studio (Swann, 2005; Tarr,
The overlapping spatial arrangement of classroom and studio is often richly purposeful, with space set aside for each child artist to create, store, and exhibit their artwork. An interest in the idea of home and place can also illuminate more unusual conceptions and constructions of the art room. For example, an art teacher or teaching artist might meaningfully arrange parts of her classroom or community arts space in ways that evoke a living room, a grocery store, a playroom, etc. We even speak of visiting or guest visual artists as having “artist residencies,” implying artists actually reside or live in particular art education spaces, as if these spaces were homes.

Like art educators, the arts too may find many homes in education with similar qualities of instability, transition, and community. We may pause to consider how art education philosophies frame each varied space, from museums to websites, to studios and galleries. In contemplation of issues surrounding physical out-of-school spaces of art education, I have realized that a process of overlapping and layering can suit the various identities of artist, teacher, and perpetual learner. This article will examine teaching resources and pedagogical alternatives in consideration of spaces of art education beyond schools, camps, and museums. As an art teacher educator and teaching artist, I will also emphasize home and space in terms of emerging digital communities in contemporary craft. As Madhavi Malapragada has noted, “cyberculture studies has for the most part neglected the relationship between home and cyberspace . . . it has rarely posed the question, what kind of relationships exist between virtual and ‘real’ homes” (200). In response to this observation, this paper examines problems and potentialities of websites and resources from art stores in contrast with blogs and other sites by individual artists and educators as varying adjunct “homes” of art education. I will comparatively explore the overlaps and discords that exist between craft activities in schools and in digital space
One sustaining thread that pertains to out of school space is the notion of home, both in the positionality of self online (such as homepages) and the reflective spaces where we live and process art education outside of school walls.

**Art Education and Folklore Feelings of Home**

In defining various homes of art education, the question of origins and starting points applies to journeys online as well as in the physical/“real” world of art and teaching. Artists may meaningfully evoke or explore space and place in both forums. If we take up the notion of the home in terms of art history, folk art and folk studies online may be rich starting places. As the late Ronald Neperud (a researcher of art education and environmental design) has noted, a “singular focus on museum and gallery fine art has been supplemented by culturally diverse creations of ‘outsiders,’ folk artists, people with disabilities, the institutionalized, people who make things at home” (2). Created by art educators, Utah State’s Fife Folklore’s Archive is one exemplary educational website that examines folklife and education through songs, recordings, and stories, encouraging students to survey families and investigate their own home lives for sources of art and inspiration. Meanwhile, web resources like Folkvine.edu playfully acknowledge the tourist aspect of folk art consumption with a gift-shop-like space for Florida’s folk arts. The site is set up as if one is traveling to a home or home-like gallery, in which the motions of the mouse causes bobbleheads to bobble, lazy susans to turn, and zines that appear to shuffle and flip pages. Within this arrangement, consumer culture and local culture may overlap consciously and with a sense of criticality.

More recently, Vavoula, Sharples, Rudman, Meek, and Lonsdale, have noted the
inquiry-based educative potential of Myartspace.com to link spaces and works of the museum to images and contexts students can collage, construct, and explore in the classroom and home via the computer or mobile phone. Bette E. Schneiderman has created similarly open-ended online spaces within her Electronic Educational Village. Her research examines the blurring of categories of learner and teacher, and of schools and out-of-school spaces. She conceptualized her Rembrandt Project as a sort of portal of perception and interaction. Within this site, digital spaces of community learning may be more like conceptual and structural frames or windows for looking through than like homes, or resting spaces. In other words, we may perceive and travel through them to other sites of learning. Transience is not limited to site visitor travel, however. One feature of many web resources is that they can be frequently updated and revised, but this also means that visitors may find defunct links or missing content. To use web resources consistently is often to accept a certain fluidity of content, community participation, and location. Further, the contextual richness of such websites creates a layered environment for learning and thinking, which Sherry Turkle has described as an “enlarged thinking space” (29). These contemporary examples point out the ways in which we may look at, represent, and redefine homes online.

**Museum Websites: Student as Visitor in Adjunct Spaces of Art Education**

Adding dimension to the concept of space and homes as starting points in teaching, museums may be conceptualized both as temples of their communities as well as digital archives. Hilde Hein has reminded us that museums were, in the oldest sense “temple of the muses, a ‘sylvan grove to which scholars repaired . . . amid books” (5). Museum education has been a part of the National Art Education Association’s
committees and presentations for several years, extending from artists and art historians to student populations. The gallery space of the art museum has become, in many cases, a sort of annex to the K-12 art classroom. Museums sometimes contain classrooms and studios for school groups (as is the case within the Guggenheim Museum’s Learning Through Art Program). One area of digital art education that becomes increasingly widespread is museum websites, including not only more official webpages, but also adjoining spaces for extension of museum content.

Museum programming can extend to podcasting, afterhours social events, and workshops. Museums often feature websites as teaching resources and even alternative sites of learning that extend beyond the classroom and the museum, into teens’ afterschool lives. For example, The Red Studio website of the Museum of Modern Art created collaborative explorations of adolescents within the MOMA. Corresponding to the extracurricular website format, The Red Studio gives a “behind the scenes” look at art and artists with an interactive collage, teen podcasts, and interviews. In this way, the site is focused on alternative spaces both in its focus and its use. Sites like these give students unique pathways to and from the museum and designate teen-specific space within and surrounding the physical site. Students’ sense of investment and belonging within a site is important in making museum content accessible and engaging to young viewers.

While museum content may be enhanced by digital presence and interactivity, some museums exist solely online. The recently created Adobe Museum of Digital Media archives digital art and related research for more mature visitors. Designed by an architect, the website has the look and feel of physical space. This physicality is enhanced by museum orientation material in the form of video content, introducing visitors to its space and exhibitions. The exhibitions show the process of creating art and
writing, unfolding in accordance with the clicking of the viewer’s mouse across the computer screen. The format of the museum invites us to explore ways in which art media is meant to be viewed and experienced, for the web allows personalized navigation at home. Links invite the viewer to progress through areas of interest as they view the art, enabling navigation that would not be possible within much video art in gallery spaces. Similarly, the Comic Book Museum has a vast virtual presence that preceded and expands upon its physical content, just as comic books themselves communicate and express narratives and images to the viewer in ways that glass cases may not. These examples demonstrate meaningful contexts in which digital spaces outperform their physical counterparts.

Craft(ing) in Art Education: Locating Creation and Consumption in Art Education

Outside of museum education, craft websites may also be linked to institutions and/or corporations, with ambiguously commercial contexts. We may wonder how art educators collaborate with and/or counter the informal education of commercial resources in the crafts. Craftzine.com is a digital community that focuses on events, community conversations, marketing craft products, and teaching. The “101” section of craftzine.com mirrors the naming of introductory collegiate courses, featuring tutorials in silk-screening, dying, Adobe Illustrator, and several home/domestic-related topics. Its “community” page reads like a digital bulletin board of announcements and questions, replete with links to etsy.com sales where crafters can sell their work. Similarly, PaperCraftPlanet.com is sponsored and contains advertisements along with weekly art challenges with various activities for each day (as schools, camps, and other programs
often do), and community boards and profile pages for its participants.

Despite the vitality and grassroots interactivity of these digital craft communities, one of the major concerns voiced by craft artists and fine artists with whom I have worked centers on sites like Etsy.com and an artistic ambivalence toward the consumer-driven focus this ascribes to D.I.Y. (“Do-It-Yourself”) culture. The boundaries of consumerism and education are being further blurred by sites for arts and crafts suppliers. Some of my art and art education students have worked at craft stores during their schooling, oftentimes to obtain a discount on much-needed art supplies. Businesses like Michael’s Arts & Crafts Store are frequently spaces where informal classes and tutorials are held. Michael’s website also features projects and family events. Similarly, the events section of the website for Dick Blick lists less commercially-driven art openings, fairs, and art organization meetings hosted at its store locations. Meanwhile, Dick Blick is linked to Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube, common sites of social networking for youths and young adults. Utrecht, another popular art supply company, also features links to Facebook and Twitter, and has its own blog. Here readers can find posts by artists about their processes and techniques, with musings on supplies that are often indistinguishable from the “product placement” one often finds in television and film. Pearl Paint, a sort of Mecca for New York’s art students, does not have apparent education or teaching resources on its website, but a visit to the store will often provide the consumer with a great deal of informal “education” about materials and usage.

As teachers, we may reconsider many of our efforts in creating space and facilitating art content through materials as complex and potentially political, touching on issues of consumption and ecology. The ways in which we define, obtain, and use or consume art materials also relates to personal and community space, for these items
decorate (or at least populate) portions of our homes and classrooms. As one example, I choose to model teaching to my own art education students with recycled and repurposed materials. This choice is partially motivated by ecological concerns, for I wish to emphasize the potential of art to reclaim objects and rescue them from landfills, and even to raise questions about materiality, meaning, and the environment. Additionally, I am interested in working within constraints of budget that new teachers may find themselves in as well, depending upon public school funding. Further, I wish to reflect my own location as an artist through my tools.

Looking Homeward: Art Education Histories

Examining art media also leads us to consider various creative contexts. Many art educators and art education professors feel at home not only in traditional school art programs, but also within community arts initiatives for visual art outside of school walls, at various times in their careers. For example, I began teaching art while I was still studying studio art and art history. I worked as a teaching artist within residencies at summer camps, afterschool programs, and craft projects with the elderly, museum populations, and community art programs. More recently, many of my art education students assert that meaningful art education experiences outside of school walls prompted them to become art educators.

When I invite my own art education students to think about student learning in visual art and stage theories of artistic development in schools, they often share their own early learning experiences alongside those of young students they are observing in the classroom. Many students note their first teaching experiences as children, “playing school” or creating their own “camps” and other arts learning models in the home. I too
enjoy revisiting my own first memories learning about clay with a toy pottery wheel, or figuring out the construction of papier-mache figures and other gifts to make with my sisters. A sense of nostalgia for a range of legitimate, informal, and even imaginary art education spaces reminds us that artists can be ambassadors to the worlds of art, particularly by inviting students to excavate personal histories.

Early art-making memories can be acknowledged and meaningfully expanded in community arts centers not only through teaching artists mentoring, but also through mentored, peer learning. As linguistic anthropologist Shirley Brice Heath notes, youth arts organizations can engage “turn-over teaching” (13) in which older or more experienced students mentor or teach younger and/or less experienced students. Camp models of art education, for example, often involve many layers of leadership, in which former/alumni campers become counselors-in-training, full camp counselors, and then art specialists. From my perspective, the learning and teaching extends beyond that of the teaching artist or camp instructor, within a constructivist and peer-mentored framework.

Experiences of peer learning are enriched by arts experiences with the teaching artist that extends beyond the residency itself. Robin Mello has examined Maine teaching artists programs, observing a particularly important role that teaching artists may play, that of facilitating students’ connections between the residency experience and other settings. The real world context of apprenticeship models encourages students to observe practical applications of art (Charland, 34). In recognizing the importance of the authentic arts environment in the enrichment of the students, artists may identify tools, evidence of drafts or attempts, physical art works, and other items associated with their authentic arts environment to physically share with students. Students often relate to these examples over longer periods of time. Such was my experience as a difficult
middle school student when local poet Kathleen Aponick agreed to mentor me each week in her home studio. Her words, works, and processes have echoed across my life as art teacher and resident artist of poetry and visual art within public schools.

Physical Spaces: Community Homes for Art Students

It might be argued that teaching and art-making share qualities of hybridism, fluidity, and openness to many different kinds of practices and practitioners. Many of my colleagues frequently work alone in a school or even (in difficult budgetary situations) operate within two or more different schools as the sole art teacher. The flexibility of the outsider status (a quality that art teachers may alternately celebrate or lament) can generate a particular sense of empathy for the outsider nature of community arts programs in museums and other cultural centers. This empathy or kinship is enhanced by many art teachers’ alternating, dual roles as school educators and museum or camp staff.

One example of ways in which pedagogy itself can be reconceived and varied in useful ways from arts center models might be found in the Richard Hugo House. Speaking of student engagement, Director Frances McCue suggested “when I say ‘teaching,’ what I really mean is ‘gamesmanship.’ I'm offering tasks that distract people into staying engaged with a process” (597). Approaching teaching with a sense of play and playfulness may allow us to be more engaging, more fun. This is not intended solely to cater to students’ interests, but rather to ask “what if” – what if we begin our teaching with points of true fascination for teachers and young artists alike? Addressing Canadian arts partnerships and teaching artists residencies, arts researcher Betty Hanley notes how artists-in-the-schools have a tendency to bring novelty and generate student excitement
with regards to arts learning by sharing artistic passion and expertise with both students and teachers. While resident artists typically do not contend with factors that would interfere with that demonstration of exuberance and artistic flair (e.g. extended classroom management, assessment activities, and other long-term administrative tasks of teaching).

While administrative tasks may be unavoidable for some art educators, we may note that art curricula in camps, afterschool programs, and museums are choice-based. Participants generally elect to be present and also select their own areas and levels of engagement. In contrast, at the elementary and middle school level, participation in arts classes may be mandatory. This difference between compulsory and elective education is another possible site of collaboration and crossover. Teachers in schools can emphasize elective decision making within the required art class through the use of choice-based projects, activity stations, and other art-based options within the curriculum and leading into afterschool activities. In this way, the outsider quality of community arts may extend to the range of individual artistic choices and pathways within the curriculum.

Choice-based artmaking can also be observed within communities of family outside of school. Art Education Professor F. Richard Sabol’s research examines the role of choice in artwork created by children at home. He notes that students working on art at home make choices about materials, subject matter, working times, and other areas of artistic creation, taking on decisions sometimes reserved for the teacher within school walls (8). When an art teacher or resident artist builds a meaningful artistic rapport with students and integrates their home lives, a framework of “homework” can become more authentic. Within the context of art education for younger students, art teacher Jennifer Crum researched the kind of art children make outside of schools (within the context of their home environments) and classifies different conceptions of art materials, art
projects, and aesthetic sensibilities. She even reflects upon her own history as a young artist, ultimately proposing a framework for teachers to connect with art outside of school walls:

(1) encouraging students to bring in artworks they created at home to share with others in art class;
(2) making connections with my students by incorporating aspects of their art from outside the classroom, such as media and subject matters presented into my curriculum;
(3) exhibiting a genuine interest in artworks children make at home to establish trust and respect in my teacher-student relationships” (43).

As an early childhood example, art educator Rachelle Doorley created the TinkerLab website, which digitally documents her exploration of creative thinking skill acquisition within her work, research, and personal life as a new mother. Such an integration of different manners of artistic experience can deepen connections in community as well as curriculum, utilizing collaborations across physical and digital spaces of art.

**Coming Home: Conclusions on Arts Spaces and Student Identities**

The notion of home evokes phrases that express belonging and a process of becoming and constructing: *being* at home, *coming* into my home, *sharing* of *my* house as *your* house (*mi casa es su casa*!), *making* ourselves at home, *going* home, *creating* a home for ourselves, and others. Personally, I consider New York City my home. Yet the various geographies in which I spend most of my time are not houses, nor are they the kinds of spaces that might be considered traditionally homey or home-like. These locales include universities, studios, schools, museums, and (of course) my apartment.

Interestingly, as is true of many rental properties, none of the individuals who live in the structure that contains my “home” own their space. In this way, my experience of home is contestable, transitional, and inherently unstable, like many urban dwellings.
However, home for me is also constructed and shared in ways that cultivate communality.

Examining the concepts of home and urbanity, Anthony Fung mused, "Why are city dwellers nostalgic for community life? . . . A possible reason is a desire for a sense of belonging, security, and identity, feelings that we have lost in our contemporary technological world” (129). He suggests that nostalgia inspires us to create online communities that can substitute for real ones in places where physical homes do not, or cannot exist. As the protagonist of the film Garden State muses, “It's like you feel homesick for a place that doesn't even exist . . . I miss the idea of it, you know. Maybe that's all family really is. A group of people that miss the same imaginary place.” Art is a kind of reflection space, and it is also a place for imagination, with representations that may be a unique balm for the artist in her longing for home and family.

Artist Beverly Buchanan employs temporary housing as a subject in her sculpture. She uses the shack as a structure that may invite educators and learners to dwell on the concept of home, in terms of present conditions in which we no longer construct the actual buildings in which we live. Instead, we make our homes by acting as decorators, as Laura Lackey has noted. This too is true of the web and its spaces in many cases. We do not typically create the computer, nor the browser, nor the hosting site that we may use to build our “homes” online. And yet we may use words and images and fonts and page layouts that do represent particular aspects of personality, just as one might paint, decorate, and arrange a home.

Blurring the boundaries of artistic, educational, and personal space can be very engaging for teachers. I would like to close this article with a few additional inspirations on integrating place and homespace into the classroom, whether through virtual worlds,
physical homes, or imaginary sites. I was once inspired by a challenge to begin teaching before my room was available for set-up. Rather than admit defeat, I invited my students to help decide how the room would be decorated and used. Their creativity and personal investment in the art education space made a deep impression on me. As a teacher educator, I now ask students and preservice teachers to imagine or create their artistic space with thoughtfulness and care.

A detailed curricular approach toward exploring place and space within Community Based Art Education has been modeled by Pat Villeneuve, including an expanded curricular emphasis, not just on art, but also touching upon surrounding contexts of architecture, commerce, cuisine, customs, geography, history, and people. Meanwhile, Mark Graham has advocated for inquiry into sacred spaces as part of drawing exercises, inviting students to consider conceptual and practical questions such as: “How is sacred space defined? How do you recognize it? Where are the places you go for refuge? How does a place become sacred?” (13). Additionally, teachers can also focus in on spaces of the school as small homes, as suggested by Sakatani and Pistolesi, who invited students to curate personal spaces of their lockers as art installations (50).

If we address concepts of space in such ways, we can also expand the meaning and applications of art education for our students. Whether we construct visual arts classroom space, examine site-based sculpture, and/or revisit concepts of home in personal and digital contexts, each activity allows us to examine identity, community, and the myriad roles of the artist. Exploring home(s) is a vital part of the ongoing processes of locating oneself and creating space: as a teaching artist, a creator of objects and images, and a member of physical and digital communities.
References:


