

# Aesthetic Representations of Community

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*This teacher/action-research inquiry investigated awareness and understanding about students' sense of place (community) through arts-based lessons within a classroom ethnography framework. Two Teacher Candidates used social constructivist pedagogy to plan and teach the same lessons to two groups of elementary students in two different locales, Kamloops (small city) and Ashcroft (rural). Soundscapes, visual imagery maps, role play and reflective writing were the aesthetic media utilized. Interpretation of the data collected (video, audio, observation and field notes, class discussion and informal teacher-student and student-student conversation) were developed and created using autobiographical, reflective narratives by the teacher-researchers involved.*

*Findings included: (1) shared creative experiences utilizing acoustic awareness and the use of aural representation as a way of expressing understanding was a new and effective learning tool for students in this study; (2) sounds and images, as concrete representations of reality as well as symbolic abstractions, metaphorically reflected broad socio-cultural associations and norms, which were represented as strikingly similar in the two different communities; (3) unexpectedly, community aspects represented on both the map and soundscape were exclusively focused on place, without people; (4) the various art forms permitted students multiple ways to understand, express and communicate understanding that addressed a diversity of learning styles as students built skills in, and made connections between, the art forms and notably, these modalities made learning more accessible and enjoyable for some reluctant learners in both classes; and (5) generative, collaborative decisions about representing ideas had to be negotiated, thereby requiring critical thinking skills of students as they demonstrated personal attitudes, values and beliefs, providing opportunities for peer leadership and scaffolding.*

## Background

The 2006 UNESCO World Conference document, *Roadmap for Arts Education*, cited research indicating that:

Introducing learners to artistic processes, while incorporating elements of their own culture into education, cultivates in each individual a sense of creativity and initiative, a fertile imagination, emotional intelligence and a moral “compass”, a capacity for

critical reflection, a sense of autonomy and freedom of thought and action. Education in and through the arts also stimulates cognitive development and can make how and what learners learn more relevant to the needs of the modern societies in which they live. (p.4)

The research presented in this paper was inspired by an exploration of Soundscape composition in a music education course at Thompson Rivers University (EDVP 411) and by the CURA-supported *Thinking About Home* project (2002), in which children's understandings of their community were documented through visual images. Ensuing discussions about the various ways people interpret and represent understanding through the arts sparked the intellectual and pedagogical curiosity of Joi Freed-Garrod (EDVP instructor and TRU, B.Ed. faculty member), Darcy Martin and Jennifer Denton (Teacher Candidates in the TRU, B.Ed. Program). In the process of completing their fall term's coursework, Darcy and Jennifer were also preparing curriculum for the final, 12-week practicum, in which they would teach between 80% and 100% of a full teacher's workload. The teachers saw the understanding of "community" as a potentially powerful component of their students' life contexts: in the classroom and school, within the family, from local to global citizenship. However, as student teachers newly working in the classrooms, the researchers could not be certain of the background knowledge and vocabulary the students had in respect to the concepts of community, culture or sustainability. The teachers also did not know the level of awareness the students had about the history, geography, politics and economy of their respective communities when designing the lessons prior to the practicum.

Finding the arts a powerfully expressive tool in their own experiences, both Teacher Candidates expressed interest in designing a curriculum in which the arts would be the primary means for their students to express and communicate their learning. Using the arts seemed an obvious choice to support students in developing the critical and creative thinking skills involved in responsible citizenship, in exposing students to the many facets of "community" and giving students a means of expressing their understandings aesthetically. These teachers wanted to engage students in investigative thinking about their socio-cultural identity and sense of self in relation to the natural environment, constructed places and people, at a deep level. "Deep" learning requires engagement in intellectual, emotional, kinesthetic and spiritual aspects of oneself; therefore, it seemed appropriate to situate teaching and learning strategies within the embodied, holistic framework of arts-based curriculum within the overarching paradigm of aesthetic education. The nature of the tasks required collaborative action from the students on an on-going basis, including discussion about ideas, choices for materials to represent these ideas, and planning and practice of ways to demonstrate these ideas with the materials. The results in the various media were examples of socially constructed views on public space.

### Theoretical Foundation

This study is grounded in aesthetic education and arts-based research. The term "aesthetic representation" is considered to be embedded in the aims of aesthetic education as described by Maxine Greene as a means to "express perceptions, feelings, and ideas through reflective shaping of media: paint, clay, musical sound, spoken or written words, bodies in movement" (494). Data included in these expressions are rich, complex, personally subjective, and contain multiple meanings. Arts-based learning is a way of knowing that "is *poiesis*, knowing by making, as contrasted with *theoria*, knowing by observing...this making is a forming...Poetic knowledge proceeds by way of the imagination; we make forms embodying...the truth of what we see" (Levine 3). These forms include sounds, images and gestures that are symbolic—metaphorical representations of attributes, connections, knowledge, awareness and other complex relational understanding that goes beyond the "one-right-answer" fact-search of the traditional, behavioural objectives often set as learning goals for lessons. These symbolic

renderings are grounded in an aesthetic sensibility. Working in arts' media, aesthetic orientations are often naturally elicited and appear as part of the arts-based teaching and learning process through emergent questions such as: What is emotionally pleasing/distressing?; What/who is "good"/"bad"?; What/who is valuable/not valued?; or, what "feels" right/wrong?

## Research Design

This qualitative, classroom ethnography investigated the lived experience of the classroom (see van Manen, for example), which formed the context and content of events and human interaction for a particular focus into teaching and learning. Classroom ethnography parallels other ethnographic frameworks in that culture, and includes such things as practices, relationships, identifying features, rules, etcetera—some overt and some tacit—as the main focus of study (Spindler and Spindler). Classrooms, like other settings, have their own set of components that constitute "cultural" elements, noted by researchers through fieldwork that involves observation, taking hand-written field notes, video/audio tape recordings, conversations, interviews, etcetera (see Gold, for example). An ethnographer's goal, according to Wilcox (1982), among others, is to "combine the view of an insider with that of an outsider" (462). In this study, the teachers are both *in* and *outside* the action, since they participate with the children in the activities and lessons (as they teach/facilitate) as well as stand away from the classroom interactions as they observe and collect data.

The pedagogical methodology was framed within a social constructivist perspective that used the arts as the primary tools of teaching and learning. These novice teachers desired to investigate the efficacy of the arts and their power to evoke, understand, express and communicate knowledge, skills and attitudes on a particular curricular topic. Evidence for the arts as ways of knowing has been well documented in the arts education literature (see Gallas, Cornett and Smithrim, and Goldberg, among others). Learning with, about and through the arts provides a means of knowledge acquisition, expression and reflection that is meaningful, changes perceptions, transforms understanding and attitudes, and invites action (making and doing). The focus of the teacher inquiry presented here was an experiment in social constructivism, seeking to use the arts to map two dimensions of social and physical space: (1) salient visual features and characteristics; and (2) salient aural features and characteristics. The teachers wanted to investigate children's perceptions of space and place, using symbolic visual and aural interpretations to represent their journeys through space and time within a particular environment. Following Moore's (1975) idea of interactional-constructivist perspectives (see Matthews), teachers constructed lessons that would reflect a collaborative view of their community, rather than an individual perspective.

Arts-based experiences may assist the transformative process of learning through the use of imagination and creative thinking. They can allow for the ambiguity of complex ideas to be included in the "answers" given for the questions/problems set, inviting multiple ways of knowing and expressing that understanding. Expressions of learning in these modalities are integrally authentic, "open[ing] up in its own way the Being of beings. This opening up, this de-concealing, that is, the truth of beings, happens in the work" (Heidigger 39, cited in Barry). Using the arts to explore these salient features through a social constructivist pedagogy, learning experiences were devised that involved the reflective shaping of media (gestures and body movement, sound, drawing, individual reflection and interactive discussion) in which a students' imaginations, senses and intellects all work together to uncover questions and insights. As Maxine Greene reminds us:

The very sharing of the encounter may well give rise to a community of distinctive people, each entering from his or her own location against his or her own lived experience. If that experience includes creative or expressive adventures in any of the

art forms, understanding and the ability to notice, to respond, can only be enhanced.  
(494)

Teachers seeking to construct “deep” learning experiences for students find that arts-based experiences provide robust and rich means of imparting ideas and raising critical questions, understanding concepts and possibilities, and can be tools for expression of a wide variety of cognitive and affective understandings. It is important to note that for many students this is a new way of learning and takes time to ingest; it takes repeated immersion to grasp and use these means of understanding and expression for the fullest learning advantage. Collaboratively designed lessons were taught by two teachers in different classroom settings: Darcy Martin and Jennifer Denton conducted this study in their classrooms, grade 4/5 in Kamloops and grade 3/4 in Ashcroft, respectively, taking on dual roles of researcher and teacher. The arts (visual art, music and drama, which were also linked to personal reflective writing) were used as ways of knowing and expressing understanding about a significant topic or issue in a curricular area. All lessons were designed to explore aesthetic sensibilities accessed through the arts-based learning activities.

## **Participants**

Participants in this study were a sample of convenience comprising the students in both teacher candidates’ homeroom classes. All students participated in five collaboratively designed lessons for Social Studies, Language Arts, and Fine Arts. The intention was that all students would receive the same lessons and participate in the same activities.

## **Overarching Goal and Key Research Questions**

The overarching goal of this inquiry is to gain some insights into students’ aesthetic representations of their community. To accomplish this, lessons were designed that sought to explore several aspects of thinking about and understanding “community” from the child’s perspective. This study examined the students’ perceptions of the physical and human geographies of their communities and any connections that their sensorial experiences of place might have had toward their developing a sense of community, citizenship, and social or cultural identity. The following research questions were explored through classroom activities:

- What sorts of cultural awareness did the children have and how did they understand culture in a community context?
- Would the children make connections between culture, belonging, and community sustainability?
- How did the children experience and understand the localities in which they live, and where did they place themselves within them, both physically and contextually?
- How can the arts (visuals and sounds), as aesthetic representations, be used to represent understandings about and aspect of one’s community?

These research questions were implicit in the lesson plans and demonstrated in the pedagogical design. Using sound, drama and visual representation to represent and record aesthetic experience would provide complementary/alternate means to the more traditional oral and written forms for documenting deep learning. (The idea to use visual art to express understanding of geographic/physical

surroundings was borrowed from the *Thinking About Home* project). Aurality was a previously unused means of understanding for the students in this study. The teacher-researchers were aware that the aural sense is often underused in school-based teaching and learning, and this became a focus for their inquiry, in their use of sound to invite an additional expressive layer to the students' work. The teachers were interested in their students' perceptions and representations of the relationship between sound, visuals and words. They carefully developed teaching and learning components that elicited multi-modal representations (visual maps, soundscapes and writing samples) that represent enculturated attitudes, values and beliefs as well as geographical and historical knowledge.

## Data Collection

Data were collected by each teacher, who assumed the dual role of teacher-researcher during this study. Action research (or teacher inquiry) assumes that the teacher desires to look carefully at her practice for the purpose of making meaningful change for the benefit of her students. The teacher acts in her everyday professional role as an integral part of the classroom proceedings, as well as shifts into the role of researcher, observing and collecting data in a variety of ways. This dual role, while very informative to the wider educational community, to the individual teacher-researcher and ultimately, to the students, presents a situation that calls for an extremely high level of focus, professional capability and a willingness to embrace ambiguity (Freed Carlin 1998). Teacher-researchers in this study collected data through observation, hand-written field notes, student assignments (including discussion, writing, drawing and composing soundscapes), informal conversation and audio/video recordings. Interpretation of data collected involved: individual teachers' evaluations and analysis of class assignments, field notes, video/audio tapes, conversations, etcetera, as autobiographical narratives; review of data in dialogue with the other teacher and the primary researcher for purposes of reliability through triangulation; use of a data interpretation tool to look for emergent patterns and surprises (comparative analysis); where possible or appropriate, consultation with the Teacher Mentors of the practica settings or students involved in the study.

## Teacher-researcher Narratives

The unique situation of being teacher candidates in a practicum setting while conducting this research led to a number of challenges. Not only were the researchers relatively unfamiliar with the school setting and the classroom dynamics, but they also had to fit their lessons within the existing teachers' pedagogical approach. As teacher-researchers, they faced limitations arising from the length of their practicum. The option was not available to extend these four lessons, even when it might have benefited the breadth and depth of the students' understanding. The practicum situation required that the teachers were observed and assessed during the presentation of several of these lessons. Having three or four adults in the room might have changed the classroom dynamic for the students and had the potential to limit both teacher and student spontaneity and participation.

As pre-service teachers in a practicum setting, it was difficult to ascertain potential difficulties or to predict how students would respond aesthetically using an integrated arts approach. To present the lessons in ways best suited to each classroom's unique character, the teacher-researchers first integrated performance and music into their language arts lessons. The students participated in activities similar to those planned for this study. Classes were presented with more open-ended learning and greater student self-direction was required in the less constrained environment. The *Drama Contract* (see Appendix 2), in particular, became a key document in many ways for each class. It established a trust

within the group that encouraged students to take the personal risks required of learning through the arts, and it set a tone for the behaviour expectations required of individual students.

To preserve the authenticity of the students' aesthetic representations of their community, the visual mapping and the soundscaping lessons were presented with a focus on the representational process and had few limitations or criteria for the final product. Classes discussed features of a traditional map, such as a legend, and students often talked during the creative process about scale and proportion. Students were explicitly informed that they could interpret and represent their communities as they perceived them. This meant that places or features that the children felt were more important than others could be shown as larger than other, less important places on the map, if they so chose. Express "permission" to ignore scale and proportion was meant to reduce any reluctance that less artistically confident students might have, and to encourage student creativity, connection, and active participation in the drawing and sound mapping processes.

## **Classroom A**

This grade 4/5 classroom consisted of 30 students—20 girls and 10 boys—with 14 grade fours and 16 grade fives. The school's catchment area draws from a semi-rural neighbourhood of farms, acreages, and primarily single-family dwellings within the city limits of Kamloops, BC. In this classroom one student was on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and one student was identified as having Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). One student had transferred into the classroom from outside of the district the week before the lessons had started.

The teacher-researcher reasonably expected that ideas of community were approached in accordance with provincial curriculum standards at each earlier grade level for these students. The instructional approach and the nature of the students' exposure to the concepts of community in earlier grades were unknown. In pre-lesson assessment based on whole class discussions, the students demonstrated little critical thought about their communities past or present, or about their own roles in them.

In the eight weeks prior to the lessons, the students studied cultural contributions of various groups to Canadian society, with a focus on Chinese immigration and the building of the railroad. They also learned about the impact of transportation and technology on Kamloops' development over time. This school has a strong music program that includes instrument instruction (primarily recorder during the grade 4/5 year). Six of the students participated in the school district's Strings Program and received twice weekly supplemental instrument instruction on the violin. They had little or no exposure to drama as a learning method during the current school year and had typical classroom exposure and participation in art.

Discussion around the use of sounds to represent place included an invitation for students to bring and use "found instruments" to create a soundscape, which connected to their earlier viewing of a musical performance that incorporated found objects as instruments. Students were also asked to consider what they heard during the sound centres activities, and how they recognized places by thinking about where "*happy voices*", "*children shouting*", "*cheering*", and "*people talking*" might take place, as well as by the information and clues that background sounds provided. The teacher briefly explored body percussion with the students, and students provided ideas for ways to represent a variety of sounds connected to urban and rural life in Kamloops. They were also explicitly asked how they could use their voices to represent the community through sound. Students suggested they might mimic babies crying and people shouting.

Students' early exploration and discussion about their aural environment indicated that they had very limited awareness of both what they heard around them and the information that could be garnered through listening. Though students mentioned hearing other languages while visiting TRU on their Virtual Tour Bus, those elements of cultural diversity did not appear in the aural map. While there

was a lot of discussion about the visuals, there was minimal discussion about the sounds. It seemed quite outside their normal range of experience and the gap in their understanding was noticeable. This would be an area for future focus. Further research should provide students with field opportunities to explore aurally a variety of human-place relationships in their community. (See Video 1 in the table of contents for a brief video clip of this classroom.)

## **Classroom B**

This grade 3/4 class consisted of 20 students, 11 boys and 9 girls with four grade three students. The school is set in the rural town of Ashcroft, BC. There were three students who were on Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and three students in Speech and Language Therapy (one of them also on an IEP). There were some behaviour issues in this class related to attention spans, calling out, and difficulty listening to and following directions.

Most students in this class had exposure to the concepts of community in one of the previous two years with another classroom teacher. In that class they mainly discussed members of the community and their importance. There were also two students who had arrived at the school within the two months before this study took place, and the teacher-researcher had no knowledge of their previous exposure to the concepts of community. All students had some previous exposure to Fine Arts but they had little to no exposure to drama methods and aesthetic representation. (See Video 2 in the table of contents for a brief video clip of this classroom.)

## **Reflective, comparative comments by teacher-researchers, lesson by lesson**

This section outlines the lessons (scope and sequence) collaboratively prepared by the two teachers and then, reflective summaries of the ways these planned lessons unfolded in the two classrooms. The tables represent summaries of the actual outcomes of these lessons in the two classroom contexts, showing some of the ways the students represented/expressed their understanding in different ways.

### **Lesson # 1 – Tour Bus**

The instructional outcome of the Virtual Tour bus was that the students would, based on the experiences of daily life in their respective communities, make associations to key landmarks that the teacher-researchers felt were commonly associated with each community's identity. In presenting this lesson, students were asked what a visitor would observe about Kamloops/Ashcroft. In doing so, teachers hoped to trigger sensorial responses to place. Guided questioning asked students to “roll down the windows” of the virtual bus and observe and record what they saw, smelled and heard at each destination on the tour. Tables 1 and 2, presented below, provide teacher summaries of the process (what happened, what the students did) in each class based on the planned lesson.

Students' written responses on the virtual tour assignment showed that they were able to connect to various sensorial memories, including sight, sound and smell. In describing the downtown, one student noted the smell of cigarettes as he passed the outdoor café tables, suggesting that the students were connecting with place in a physical way during the virtual tour.

Several students chose to record and respond to the tour with drawings (see Appendix 3 for selected tour itinerary samples). No pictures of the tour stops were provided on the map or in the classroom, so students were drawing from memory and/or imagination.

Students listened to recordings of a youth hockey game in an arena, a public swimming pool, and sounds and conversation from a local grocery store. With guided questioning, I led students to consider their own sense of belonging and its relation to place. One student commented that she found community in her church, and that single comment led the group in a different direction.

I invited students to follow their individual connections by representing and explaining their understandings of culture or community on a blank postcard. The resulting representations ranged in complexity and focus. Some were simplistic, yet they captured how we share and show culture: religious practice, food, clothing, architecture, technology. Some showed a historical perspective, while others chose to use word designs to represent community.

The lesson plan changes meant that the focus and connection between sound and place was less explicit, and it was difficult to assess from interacting with the students and from their final products whether or how associations to sound affected their visual representation of place. The variety of images also made the visual representation a truly unique reflection of the students' perceptions of place, since they were not constrained by representing only the places they had heard recordings for.

Table 1 – Classroom A – Teacher summary of Lesson 1 – Virtual bus tour

We gathered at the carpet to share thoughts when the tour was completed.

All students said that they enjoyed the activity. One student said that it felt like they were actually at the locations. When I asked them what the most difficult part was most agreed that it was identifying the smells at each location.

After the discussion at the carpet students returned to their desks and completed a self-assessment that gauged their participation, difficulties, and what aspect they enjoyed the most. In their responses many students listed visualizing as the part of the activity that they had the most difficulty with, as well as the aspect that they enjoyed the most. This tells me that they were challenged and enjoyed that challenge.

Sound clips of the hospital, arena, village office, police station, the grocery store, and the high school were presented to students at small group listening centres.

When the students were listening to sound clips and identifying the location I saw many different strategies being used. Some groups were listening quietly to the tape the first time and then discussing what they heard before listening to it again.

Other groups were very excited about pointing out familiar sounds throughout the tape that led them to miss some of the sounds that they often caught on the second playing. It was interesting to see students work in this way, as it is rare to have listening as the sole means of processing information in a lesson.

After the listening portion, students were required to fill out a process statement. Most students completed the written portion of the assignment with little problem but some had difficulties changing tasks to writing. They had difficulty identifying with what they saw and heard at those places as soon as they had to represent that in writing. This is an interesting observation because these same students had little difficulty completing the same task in the role-play during the previous lesson.

Table 2 – Classroom B – Teacher summary of Lesson 1 – Virtual bus tour

### **Lesson #2 – Sound Centres**

Sound centres encouraged the students to listen attentively. They had to pay attention to non-visual, non-textual details in order to identify common locations in their community. Beyond the specific instructional objectives, the activities in this lesson were intended to provide layers of experience for the students.

Teacher-researchers felt that student success with the soundscaping component would require student preparation and practice learning through each modality. Listening to sounds from a variety of known environments was intended to develop artistic connections for the students that they could access later when representing their community through sound.

The sound postcards aimed to both connect students with the perspectives of individuals within their communities and also to highlight places that the children might recognize as having social significance. Would students express personal or social value for the resources, political, social, cultural or recreational facilities in their communities? Would that importance be demonstrated by including these locations on their visual maps or in their soundscapes?

### **Lesson #3 – Visual Mapping**

The process of creating the visual map was included in the lesson set to encourage students to consider how mapping creates an image of place. It also aimed to have students understand that representation of place can be artistic and personal. Between the two classes the students worked with varying degrees of structure, as dictated by the management needs of each classroom. The resulting visual maps for each classroom were a collaborative effort that involved all the children. Tables 3 and 4, presented below, provide teacher summaries of the process (what happened, what the students did) in each class based on the planned lesson.

This was a two-period lesson with students first mapping Kamloops as it might have been 200 years ago. I provided time for practice drawing before starting on the actual map. After discussion, they agreed to begin with the mountains as a reference point.

Three students drew on the mountains, which became the backdrop for the map. Other students added the river and natural landscape elements. Though the mapping started one group at a time, the class was soon working *en masse*, organizing and making space for one another as they drew.

By working at the same time, the foundation image was truly a communal representation, versus a combined work of several separate groups responding to the contributions of those that drew before them. Subsequent work saw students identify and add features that showed the Kamloops community as they saw it presently. Individually and in pairs, students discussed and drew their representations on butcher paper, cut them out, and attached them to the backdrop drawing. As a whole class, they made changes as they saw fit and the final product was a reflection of their individual perceptions and the consensus of the class.

Table 3 – Classroom A – Teacher summary of Lesson 3 – Visual mapping of the landscape

This lesson spanned over three periods. To begin I taped a large piece of paper on the wall and explained to students that they would be responsible for creating a map of Ashcroft.

I started the map with the help of students. In black felt I outlined the main geographic landscapes as an outline for students to use as a guide. With their guidance I drew the mountains, the river, the bridge, the main roads and the mesa.

The directions that I gave for the next step was that they were to be divided into groups and each group was going to be responsible for filling in an area on the big map. Students were to draw buildings, trees, and other indentifying landscapes, cut them out and paste them on the large map.

After dividing the students into groups, they were responsible for deciding what was going to be represented in their assigned area and how they were going to do it. For the most part they worked well in their groups, with some minor difficulties and arguments about what they wanted to represent. In the end the final product would be the map used for the last and final lesson.

Table 4 – Classroom B – Teacher summary of Lesson 3 – Visual mapping of the landscape

#### **Lesson #4 – Soundscapes**

This lesson considered that the students' sense of place might be best represented as a map of their own community as they interpret it. Creating an aural map, or soundscaping their visual map, could

provide the children with a way to represent their community beyond its physical geography. Integrating visual and aural modalities would reduce written and oral language limitations for the students. This lesson was intended to allow them to express and represent their community in a unique and creative format that they had not previously experienced. Tables 5 and 6, presented below, provide teacher summaries of the process (what happened, what the students did) in each class based on the planned lesson.

<p>Lesson #4 – Sound Mapping of the Landscapes as Soundscapes Classroom A</p> <p>As an introduction, I invited students to experiment and represent place on the map with a variety of instruments and unconventional sound sources: homemade drums, paper bags, castinettes, hand cymbals, an electronic keyboard, plastic bottles filled with water, wooden sticks, recorders, and boom whackers. Some represented the place they had drawn for the map; others selected areas that they had a musical idea for.</p> <p>I found the students’ connections between instrument, sound and place interesting. One student used the hand cymbals to make the sound of an apartment block, explaining that you hear pots and pans if you live in an apartment. This struck me as an intimate sound and place association.</p> <p>The group worked through a few practice runs and referenced the visual map to decide on dynamics and timing of their composition. As videographer, I was unable to direct the students across the map or conduct the soundscape. Students did not suggest that someone direct. They did ask if they could watch or listen to their soundscape, but further instructional time was unavailable.</p>
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Table 5 – Classroom A – Teacher summary of Lesson 4 – Sound mapping of the landscapes

<p>For this lesson I brought in a wide variety of musical and found instruments. As a class we listened to each instrument and discussed what the sound reminded us of. I then asked students to explore the instruments with the sounds of the community in mind.</p> <p>Students were then asked to represent the area of their community that they created on the map using these instruments. Students each chose an instrument that represented their area and rationalized their choice in front of the class.</p> <p>We then created the soundscape. After giving directions to students regarding cues, I used a metre stick to move around the map. When the metre stick pointed at their areas they would make their sounds. They faded in and out as I moved closer and further away. The final take of the soundscape went smoothly and students were awed by the intensity of the moment that they participated in.</p>
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Table 5 – Classroom B – Teacher summary of Lesson 4 – Sound mapping of the landscapes

As might be expected, the lessons unfolded differently in each classroom, reflecting the unique lived experience of each setting. While the project goals and key questions remained copasetic, both teachers found it necessary to make content or pedagogical changes to the original set of lessons in order to respond to students' ages and emergent needs: instructional formats were altered (whole class rather than small group sound centres); student assignments were modified (cultural postcards in place of sound postcards); one of the planned lessons was eliminated (no letters to people in the community asking for a response to a drawn image sent on a postcard); a broadening of the scope of several of the lessons in classroom A was included so that aspects of community sustainability could be addressed from the grade five curriculum and accommodate student requests to expand the instructions for the postcard assignment; and a more structured approach to the activities was required for effective classroom management in classroom B.

## Findings

Two of the key findings reported by the researchers were: (1) students demonstrated skills and understandings in the particular art forms and (2) students had an ability to collaboratively construct and express understandings about community through aesthetic representations using aesthetic modalities. The researchers noted some surprises about the aspects of community that were chosen to be articulated in each classroom, in particular, the absence of people represented in either the visual or sound maps. With the exception of general "human noise" at high density places such as the arena or Dollar Store, students did not represent voices or other human sounds that would demonstrate their consideration of place not only as a physical, geographical one, but a social and personal construct as well.

All students displayed consistent on-task behaviours in the various activities. They demonstrated their engagement and learning through the tasks assigned as well as informal conversations during the processes of those tasks. In terms of the specific art forms, both teacher-researchers noted that the students had little prior knowledge of technical terms, basic elements and principles and/or techniques. Unfortunately, the time frame and scope of expectations for these Teacher Candidates in a practicum setting precluded pre- or post-teaching extensions to fill these gaps. In spite of the Teacher Candidates' lack of experience they showed aesthetic considerations associated with each art form, at levels paralleling prior experience and knowledge from both enculturation and some formal teaching. In the area of visual art, student awareness focused on content (buildings, physical and geographic features, etcetera) and how this content was imaged (colour, shape, size), with attention to realistic recall (detail, position and perspective). Sound/music patterns of rhythm, volume dynamics, tone colour and sound-source choice reflected understanding and associations with the visual artifacts represented on the maps. Both concrete representation of place (for example, water bottles shaken for the river, hand bells for church bells) and abstract representation of mood and emotional response to place (guiro used for the train, tambourine for the noisy apartment building sounds) were created. Drama and body movement representations included humour, sense of fantasy, playfulness and mystery, particularly during the virtual bus tour of the town, when each student took on the persona of a stranger visiting their community for the first time. Students also engaged in writing reflections on the various experiences and word choice demonstrated emotional and metaphoric understanding.

Collaborative constructions of understanding were evident throughout the lessons; peer scaffolding, problem solving and skill development were seen through the aesthetic responses. In one classroom, as students were drawing their map on the butcher paper attached to the blackboard, peer scaffolding was observed and heard: partners would go to draw the mountains; one would begin with wide, sweeping lines while the other began with smaller peaks; they would stop, talk together, and then

continue, one hand drawing above the other, mountains adjacent and over top in aesthetic combination. At another time, comments were overheard as the students worked together: “Let’s put the First Nation space by the river” “Why?” “They probably want to fish and stuff.” The teacher becomes involved in the process by asking, “What should go up first?” “The river” is the immediate answer. “Why?” the teacher responds, extending the critical thinking. Other students interject comments: “Because it goes basically all the way through Kamloops;” “To add to what G... said, it’s on different parts of Kamloops;” “We could do the river and also do the mountains so we know where to put the river.” One example of linking understanding across contexts was evident when a student took her sound awareness from a real experience outside this unit (having visited the noisy water treatment plant) and shared that with her peers to make another layer of meaning for them.

## Discussion

Insights and questions emerged from this research. Further investigation could include layering the arts as ways of knowing onto the geographical, social and temporal aspects of community spaces, as tools for making meaning and communicating understanding, as in, for example, determining the impact of attaching aural aspects to visual representation in terms of developing understanding of place and zones of movement over time in those places. Investigating the similarities/differences of personal visual and aural representation of specific places in the community and the individual’s sense of belonging within those places, versus collaborative visual and aural representation of public space would add the specificity of the temporal aspect of maps and soundscapes of place in addition to the generalized aesthetic “mapped” sense of a community. As well, Soundscape composition could be extended to include mapping: people (economic, work, cultural perspectives); or historical time line (sounds across time in the same place, or the changing sounds in geographic areas as people demographics shift over time). Originally, we were hoping to address the issue of cultural identity, but we quickly realized that this aspect would need to be put aside for future investigation.

Exploring the ways in which students express their cultural identity and understanding of social status and power issues through aesthetic representations would allow for expansive and deep understanding of each person’s relationships with others. For example, we wondered where/how they view their “place” in the group and community or the importance of other people or particular places, and if they could articulate who is silent, ignored, or powerful in the community. The fact that people were absent from both visual and aural maps even though adults and children figured in the discussions and role play, was unexpected. This omission made us aware that the children’s identity and sense of themselves and other people in the community bears further investigation as a research focus. Linking research investigation to curriculum would continue, as there are topics/themes in Social Studies, Communication, Personal Planning, and social justice aspects in the Visual and Performing Arts that are designed to develop a sense of belonging, empowerment and responsibility for becoming effective and productive global citizens. This research/curricular focus would also resonate with the recent document (June, 2006), *From Restless Communities to Resilient Places: Building a Stronger Future for All Canadians*, submitted to the External Advisory Committee on Cities and Communities, which stated: “Given the benefits of culture in communities, the report argues that culture should be placed ‘at the heart of the community, not as an afterthought but an underpinning to our communities.’”

A constraint of the study presented here, like other qualitative research, is that nothing in it is directly reproducible; neither the students nor classrooms nor any of their lived experiences. However, the content of the lessons, the process of learning experiences and the research foci may be vehicles for other explorations of shared construction, discussion and understanding of the mapping and sounding of cultural contexts within which those participants co-exist.

In conclusion, the researchers gained insights that align them with Grumet (2004) who believes that “the arts hold the promise of providing a link between our individual subjectivity and our public

discourse.” Using the arts as vehicles for aesthetic expression may enable us to look inward as well as share outwardly, providing deep learning and multiple means for investigating, demonstrating, and reflecting on what we know, thereby providing powerful vehicles for social constructivist learning in the classroom.

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