

Reimagining Arts–Integrated Structures and Spaces Through Pandemic Learning

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On March 16th, 2020, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) school buildings closed and stayed closed at some school sites for over a year. This created massive disruptions for teachers, students, and their families. Disruptions resulted in substantive adjustments to the who, what, how, and why of teaching and learning, introducing unprecedented material and pedagogical challenges. For approximately 90 teachers across the district, adjustments were complicated and complemented by participation in Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE) programs wherein CPS teachers and CAPE teaching artists collaborate on inquiry-based, arts-integrated curriculum in schools. The CPS teachers and CAPE teaching artists were suddenly in a position to urgently reimagine what their teaching would look like remotely. The authors explore how teaching artists made sense of their structural adjustments related to tools and participation and, in turn, what implications their adjustments had on space and agency.

I overwhelmingly think that a lot of cool stuff is happening, and I worry a little bit that when we try to put it back in the “school box” it’s gonna be we just snap our fingers and we’re back into our old personas. And that’s not really working for me in general. (Jody, CAPEa, 2021)

INTRODUCTION

On March 16th, 2020, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) school buildings closed and stayed closed at some sites for over a year. This created massive disruptions for teachers, students, and their families. Disruptions reverberated throughout the education system and resulted in substantive and abrupt adjustments to the who, what, how, and why of teaching and learning, introducing unprecedented material and pedagogical challenges. This context also created a unique opening to reassess normative structures and the purpose of education by using the ruptures as a resource. The district’s emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic of remote learning broadly left teachers to determine adjustments alone. For approximately 90 teachers across the district, such adjustments were both complicated and complemented by their participation in Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE) programs wherein CPS teachers and CAPE teaching artists collaborate to design and implement an inquiry-based, arts-integrated curriculum in schools. At the heart of these partnerships are an intense collaboration and a commitment to working outside of routine classroom practices using critical art engagement that can be interwoven across disciplines.

Since 1993, CAPE has provided professional development programming on arts integration using a partnership model in Chicago and the surrounding areas. Each year of participation, teachers and teaching artists collaborate on an arts-integrated curriculum accounting for about 12 hours of classroom instructional time along with participating in 12 hours of professional development sessions. CAPE recruits practicing contemporary artists and pairs them with teachers. Distinct from traditional art practices, contemporary art practices involve using materials as conceptual tools (Sikkema et al., 2019) and emphasize personal relevance and criticality of contemporary life’s social, cultural, or political dimensions (Halverson & Sheridan, 2014; Smolin, 2010). CAPE pedagogy challenges normative classroom structures by disrupting participation hierarchies through shared roles; teachers, teaching artists, and students shift roles between teachers, learners, and researchers (Catterall & Waldorf, 1999; Sikkema, 2016). CAPE’s arts integration pedagogy tends to minimize direct instruction and use it for conveying practical information regarding assignments, tools, materials, processes, and examples (Hetland, Winner, Veenema, & Sheridan, 2007). This approach privileges artmaking and dialogic practices (e.g., discussion, reflection, and critique) that support artmaking and reasoning; this results in a process orientation as opposed to practices that privilege the final product (Diaz & McKenna, 2017; Halverson & Sheridan, 2014; Hetland, Winner, Veenema, & Sheridan, 2007; Smolin, 2010). Finally, CAPE pedagogy emphasizes dialogic practices to include joint inquiry and collective sense-making (Diaz & McKenna, 2017; Sikkema, 2016; Smolin, 2010). Arts integration results in an emergent curriculum that is responsive to learners’ active and collective inquiry and is characterized by epistemic openness (Campbell, 2018; Clapp, 2017; Smolin, 2010). The partnerships create a context where arts integration can be a conduit for broader inquiry and agency to reimagine what education can be.

In the COVID-19 pandemic, CPS teachers and CAPE teaching artists were suddenly in a position to urgently reinvent and reimagine what inquiry-based and arts-integrated teaching would look like *remotely*. If disturbances to activity can create generative opportunities to reconceptualize learning structures, and if spatial practices needed to be formed anew in the pandemic context, what potentials and challenges

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