

Chapter 17

¡Adelante! El Mundo Mágico Creado, The Magical World Created: P-16 US Students Create an International Collage between Cuba and USA

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ABSTRACT

This chapter illustrates the unique cross-sector visual arts exchange program between Cuba and the U.S. This collaborative project is situated in the Cuban educational perspective of Pedagogía de la Ternura (Pedagogy of Tenderness) and La Clase Mágica (Magical Class), contextually driven bilingual model for diverse student population in the U.S. The role of art in Cuban context of national and cultural identity is also discussed. The CreArte in Cuba, a voluntary cultural community inspired organization, aims to improve the cultural life and the realities of all the local participants. In the U.S., CreArte project was implemented at a local high school to create a positive learning space for the most disenfranchised local high school students enrolled in a remedial reading program. The juxtaposition of two apparently disparate and contrasting realities formed an amazing collage of hope and trust beyond the visible cognitive, behavioral, and affective literacy outcomes for the students and adults in both countries traveling across 90 miles of troubled water between Cuba and USA.

IN THE BEGINNING: UNIQUE PARTNERSHIP

In this chapter, we present *El Mundo Mágico de CreArte: Ilustra un Sueño* (Magical World of Create: Illustrate a dream) situated in multi-sector project sites; pre-service art teacher program in the U.S. insti-

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tute of higher education, local public high school in the U.S and Cuba, as well as the community cultural project in Pinar del Rio, Cuba. The transcultural (Ortiz, 1995) project setting called for non-conventional and alternative curriculum thinking that presented both challenges and rewards. The instructional methodology implemented has been organic and grounded on transworld pedagogy exemplified by the concept of *La Clase Mágica* (Gutiérrez, 2014). The participating students' socio-cultural context, linguistic lived knowledge and personal narrative were actively sought after and validated as an essence of creative process, be it the literacy of language or visual arts, as an additive rather than a substrative factor or liability for instruction (Valenzuela, 1999). The project philosophy was conceived by collaborating partners in three different sectors of educational institutions; Western Kentucky University Art Education program, participating local high school Art 1 class, and Community Arts Project in Pinar del Rio, Cuba. How all the components of the collage fit together is a complicated story spanning over a decade, juxtaposing materials that might not have been associated with each other. Gradually, ideas began making praxis connections and provided a foundation as well as cultural space for alternative visual arts pedagogy.

In Cuba, *CreArte: Crecer con las Artes (Create: Grow with the Arts)* was founded as a community inspired social development project for the students of six to fourteen years old in Pinar del Rio. *CreArte* aims to:

1. Promote values related to traditions and regional identity;
2. Develop cultural spaces for the spiritual growth of people, and their healthy leisure and aesthetic values;
3. Develop a platform for community network;
4. Advance environmental awareness for food supplies, the use of renewable sources of energy, and love for nature;
5. Advocate research, exchange and cultural entrepreneurship, economic sustainability, and dissemination of results.

CreArte is a non-profit project based on the voluntary contribution of community members. It is coordinated by a steering group of teachers, cultural promoters, community-minded renowned artists, and the representatives of the local government council. From its inception in 2012, the management has been led by Dr. Juan Silvio Cabrera, former Faculty Dean of the College of Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Pinar del Rio and Project Specialist of UNEAC¹- CIERIC², Pinar del Río, Cuba with the help of resident artist and writer for children's literature, Néstor Montes de Oca. The historical context of UNEAC is a unique Cuban entity founded in 1961 by the Revolutionary government as a social, cultural and professional organization of writers, musicians, actors, painters, sculptors, and artist of different genres. The UNEAC still supports the professional interests of its members, represents new artistic and literacy values, but most importantly promotes the collective national values of Cuban culture and identity represented in all forms of the arts. This framework of arts and literature as a foundation of their national identity and collective societal values unmistakably underscores the heart of the Cuba and U.S. art exchange program, *El Mundo Mágico de CreArte: Ilustra un sueño* in the past three years. -

From the U.S. side, the foundation of this cross-cultural, cross-sector, and cross-disciplinary project between visual and language arts began as a field-based service learning activity where each pre-service art teacher enrolled in a capstone secondary methods course, and was assigned as a college mentor to individually work with high school student. The studio theme was based on their agreed upon ideas to explore. The project assigned was literature-based, collaborative, and conversational. As their field-based

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