Entering the liminal through the side door: A 'Child+Adult Art Response Project' as portal for student voice and deep thinking

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Marnee Watkins, University of Melbourne, Australia

Gina Grant, University of Melbourne, Australia

Kate Coleman, University of Melbourne, Australia

Nigel Meager, University of Cambridge, UK

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Elisa's response to INSIDE | OUTSIDE

... On the front, there is an abstract from my grandfather's diary from 1958.

“ The coat is turned inside-outside as a symbol of something contained within and takes on the role of building a family narrative.

There, he describes his love for my grandmother, revealing that she was pregnant with my mother. It also gives the date they married and I realised that I had been born on the same day, 32 years later. At the back of the coat, I have attached embroidered images from my mum's photo album, starting with my grandma and leading up to my sisters and me. The piece is named after my grandmother, Mari Dolo, who I never met. ”

Elisa Juncosa Umaran, ADULT ARTIST
University of Cambridge, 2016
Artist Statement

“ How everyone sees him
on the outside [Image 1]

... and How he sees himself
on the inside [Image 2]

”

James, CHILD ARTIST, RHPS, 2016
Artist Statement

... and James' response to Elisa's artwork

INTRODUCTION

We increasingly position young people **as being and becoming active citizens** with valid and important knowledge about their worlds, with **evolving capacities and expertise needing to be valued and listened to** (MacNaughton & Smith, 2008; United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009).

However, there is a paradox—we also see them as being somewhat **cocooned from life's realities**, needing to be protected from the tensions, anxieties, and challenges experienced by adults. While we shield children from many of these experiences, they are inevitably and often **intrinsically a part of their own lived narratives**.

Emily's response to INSIDE | OUTSIDE ...

**“ This is an art piece on mental disabilities,
This art says that if you have a mental disability you can feel like
you are in a dark room and you cannot move and if you can't
stop having them you will end up having a mental breakdown. ”**

Emily, CHILD ARTIST, RHPS, 2017

Artist Statement

**“ I work in a wide range of mediums but after seeing
Emily’s artwork about mental health I felt that
my response would best be done in my original
love, painting. ”**

Georgia A, ADULT ARTIST, MGSE, 2017

Artist Statement

Emerging pedagogies for deep and critical learning are underpinned by a newer sociology of the child which considers **children as social actors with agency**, rather than as objects needing adults to make decisions on their behalf (Freire, 1970; MacNaughton & Smith, 2008).

Inspired by Pollitt and Blue's intergenerational art project (2011), the 'Child+Adult Art Response Project' **(C+AARP) developed in 2014** by two of the authors, Arts educators from the Melbourne Graduate School of Education (MGSE), The University of Melbourne, Australia, invites children artists and adult artists to generate visual conversations across time and space. This relational art project **is orientated towards finding the space in teaching for children's voices to be heard and acknowledged.**

In C+AARP each child artist and adult artist generates an **original artwork** to the provocation of **INSIDE | OUTSIDE** to send to their artist partner, and in turn, each receives their partner's artwork and responds with their own artwork, extending the **visual conversation as critical dialogue**. The final artworks are exchanged digitally via an online sharing platform and shared at culminating exhibitions in the participating school and universities.

Our 2016 iteration of C+AARP partnered **middle-years primary children** in Melbourne with preservice secondary artist teachers at **The Faculty of Education, Cambridge University** and in 2017 at the **Melbourne Graduate School of Education (MGSE)**.

Issy's response to INSIDE | OUTSIDE ...

“ My art symbolises not showing your true self. The bars are like trends and popularity locking away what you really love and keeping it from showing it to everyone else. I have experienced this before and it's not the most pleasant feeling so I felt like showing it

inside an art piece. ”

Issy, CHILD ARTIST, RHPS, 2017

Artist Statement

... and Cassandra's response to Issy's artwork

**“ Self Portrait — Jaded
I was once tormented.
Today I wear it all with pride ”**

Cassandra, ADULT ARTIST
MGSE, 2017
Artist Statement

Both cohorts of artist teachers were secondary specialists with limited experience or ways of knowing middle years aged children's knowledge of art making and practices, or technical abilities and skills as artist. To address this space, the project opens this aesthetically and **provides access to children's criticality, artistry and material practices.**

Our first glimpse into the rich potential to make the children's thinking visible around real-life issues came when brainstorming possible ways into **INSIDE | OUTSIDE.**

Finn's response to INSIDE | OUTSIDE ...

**“ My artwork is about life. Life is all around us,
on the inside and on the outside.**

**It is a concept that is very important to me.
The images I have chosen to represent life are the person,
the northern lights (green area) and the universe.** ”

Finn, CHILD ARTIST, RHPS, 2017

Artist Statement

... and Ana's response to Finn's artwork

“ My artwork is about life. Life is all around us,
on the inside and on the outside.

It is a concept that is very important to me.
The images I have chosen to represent life are the person,
the northern lights (green area) and the universe. ”

Ana, ADULT ARTIST, MGSE, 2017

Artist Statement

The artworks (the original responses to the provocation and the response artworks to their partners' works) are highly sophisticated, often personal, and metaphorical. Surprising and moving, the artistic and written artefacts generated through earlier iterations of the project **raised questions:**

for the children artists

'What was it that appeared to elicit the deep engagement and thinking that were necessary adjuncts to the creation of these artworks?'

and for the adult artists,

'What did this project afford preservice teachers when engaging remotely with middle years-aged children via artmaking and responding?'

An interactive conversation of questions and ideas challenged us to probe and investigate the 2016/2017 **INSIDE | OUTSIDE Child+Adult Art Response Project** through a small unfunded qualitative study involving observations, interviews, and text and artwork analysis. We aimed to get closer to understanding the conditions inherent in these cross-generational **art exchange encounters which disrupt more traditional notions** of teacher/student–adult/child power relationships, time, choice, and expectations.

Ella's response to **INSIDE | OUTSIDE** ...

“My piece for this project explores the relationship between internal and external both in terms of the physical world and in relation to mind. Drawing ants on a numerous scale has become a meditative, somewhat obsessive process for me...

... On a more literal level, the ants represent and grant importance to a component of the natural world often overlooked – something very much associated with outdoors, most often found crawling across the ground.

The choice to draw on a piece of material in the shape of pants was an obvious nod to the rhyming phrase ‘ants in your pants’, whilst also providing contrast in terms of a private, personal item conventionally

associated with something on the ‘inside’.”

Ella, ADULT ARTIST, University of Cambridge, 2016

Artist Statement

...and Charlotte's response to Ella's artwork

“ My topic is Ants in your Pants.
My message is if you like having ants on yourself be proud
of how you are. I used flicking the paint for the ants all over
the place. I learnt that persisting is the best thing to do
when you are doing art work.”

Charlotte, CHILD ARTIST, RHPS, 2016

Artist Statement

Children's agency is activated within interdependent relationships influenced by **generational positioning**, and this 'generagency' (Leonard, 2015) framework provides a conceptual tool for thinking about how childhood is lived and experienced by the students we teach. The data suggests that trusting the children's ideas and positioning them as artists in this art response project empowers them with **agency to voice their critical and creative thinking through art**, written words and spoken voice.

Emerging themes suggest that as critical pedagogy, the project's design for critical dialogic exchange and its social context parameters work conceptually to create **an environment for creative thought**. Dialogues—visual, written, spoken—form an important component, lifting the art response encounters beyond a mere exchange of images into **a dynamic intergenerational conversation**.

Gabby's response to INSIDE | OUTSIDE ...

“ EQUALITY

...women are made to have babies and look after their husbands. On the outside they look like they can't do anything but on the inside they are very strong and they are capable of doing lots of things.”

Gabby, CHILD ARTIST, RHPS, 2017

Artist Statement

**“ Don’t ever stop pushing against society’s gender bias.
(I borrowed the image to make this drawing from
<http://thrusherskate.com/>
If you haven’t heard of them before go check them out!) ”**

Jack, ADULT ARTIST, MGSE, 2017
Artist Statement

**... and Jack’s response
to Gabby’s artwork**

The young people are **positioned** by their classroom teachers, their artist teacher partners and by us, the arts educators, not as Grade 5/6 students with the particular boundaries and expectations tended to be imposed on at this age level, but more **as artists in their own right** with open-ended and untethered possibilities. The children are privileged with first hand and personalised access to sophisticated adult rendered artworks which engage them in open-ended artmaking processes of making and responding with support—all requiring **rigorous critical and creative thinking.**

This **positioning** is also **reflected in the adult artists' statements**—evocative pieces of writing artworks in themselves—which serve to add yet a deeper and richer layer to the art exchange **as critical pedagogy**. Significantly, these responses are positioning these 9–11 year-olds as equal partners in the artmaking collaboration, with capacity to process the depth of thinking the adult artists had invested themselves.

Charlotte's response to INSIDE | OUTSIDE ...

Charlotte, CHILD ARTIST,
RHPS, 2016

Elisa, ADULT ARTIST
University of Cambridge, 2016

**...and Elisa's response
to Charlotte's artwork**

The project has **opened the eyes of the adult partners to see the intellectual capacity of the children to think and respond as artists,** something that instrumental, didactic, hierarchical relations between adult teacher and child learner can easily miss. We are observing how teachers and students, child and adult partners appear **to enter a liminal, transitional space** where "hierarchical orderings of values and social status" (Turner, 1981, p.162) do not impinge on learning, but serve to catalyse critical, creative and artful thinking as practice.

Furthermore, the data suggests that the project acts as **a form of disruption** to teachers (and preservice teachers) as to where to expect learning to take place; crossing "in school" and "out of school" borders and turning on its head the notion of the **classroom-as-container** (Leander, Phillips & Headrick Taylor, 2010).

**“ Homelessness Outside, Wealthiness Inside.
I think that they [my artist partner] will be clever
and do the opposite of what I did. ”**

James, CHILD ARTIST, RHPS, 2016

Artist Statement

**James' response
to INSIDE | OUTSIDE ...**

... and Elisa's response to James' artwork

“ I liked the **light and dark contrast** and it reminded me of photographs I have taken through the years in different parts of the worlds. Initially, I wanted to use the skyline of New York at night. However, after a few trials I decided to use Photoshop to photomontage the light coming through the ceiling of Penzance train station in England. I then added a dark silhouette of my friend, which in a way is **the opposite of what you did!** ”

Elisa, ADULT ARTIST, University of Cambridge, 2016

Artist Statement

Dear James,

I was very impressed with your response to my artwork. I can see a clear link between my concept and yours, and I love how the art works are presented together. The titles you propose are also very interesting.

Although I know you wanted me to do the opposite to you as a response to your work, I was mesmerised by your composition and I wanted to exaggerate it more. I liked the light and dark contrast and it reminded me of photographs I have taken through the years in different parts of the worlds. Initially, I wanted to use the skyline of New York at night. However, after a few trials I decided to use Photoshop to photomontage the light coming through the ceiling of Penzance train station, in England. I then added a dark silhouette of my friend, which in a way is the opposite of what you did!

It has been a real pleasure to work with you. I think you have been very brave experimenting and your skills have improved during this months! I hope you continue to develop your art practice and to see your work in the future. Sincerely,

Elisa

The classroom teachers foster reciprocal relationships with their students by including them in co-creating learning opportunities, giving them choices, allowing them to voice their ideas, and to reflect in and on process. They are reinforcing a shared "learning stance" that affirms **"the image of children and teachers as capable, resourceful, powerful protagonists of their own experience"** (Wien, 2008). They are opening up spaces and ways for students to demonstrate their ideas and share their thinking.

The teachers navigate the fine act of negotiating **balance between trusting the children and intervening**, to ensure and maintain the integrity of student voice and ownership. This allows the children artists to shape and steer their own learning journey—they are, in essence, each their own captain.

CONCLUSION

As a **critical pedagogy and relational art project** this reciprocation and critical exchange of artist knowledge, aesthetic values and material practices created a series of pedagogical and experiential moments, and events where the relations in the exchange of ideas and concepts as processes between the participants took prominence over the finished artworks as products. Notably, while the relational processes at play unfolded (and, indeed, continue to unfold), the final products serve as tangible artefacts of voice, creativity and criticality, able to stand alone both as virtual and physical exhibition components. **The dialogue between the adult and child artists contain actions of social justice, visual literacy, creativity, critical thinking and criticality as practice.**

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