Unfolding Practice

Reflections on Learning and Teaching

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Arzu Mistry and Todd Elkin

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and Todd E

CODES USED IN THIS BOOK:

- Blue dot — Ideas that are **expanded** on *accordionbookproject.com*
- Yellow dot — Ideas that are related to the concept of **exchange**
- Red dot — Ideas that we are struggling with, disagree on, and want to **explore further**
- Gray dot — References, resources, and inspirations **listed** in full on *accordionbookproject.com*

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Mapping the Terrain: Exploring, Guiding, and Getting Lost

Exchange as Art: What Happens in an Exchange?

Things Talk to Me: Being Alert to What Grabs Me

What Would an Artist Do? Teachers and Students as Contemporary Artists

Getting Out of My Own Way: Trusting the Process and Resisting Closure

In order to make meaning of our worlds, our thoughts, and the new encounters that jostle against our current paradigms, **Todd and Arzu map**. We map to explore ideas, gather, curate, and make sense of our fields of art and education. Our maps often open up new pathways for future practice.

BORDER TOWNS
GIVING
LIMINAL SPACE
TRADING ZONE
TRANSLATION
LOV
EXCHANGE
AS
ART
CAUSALITY
SWAP
PERSPECT
BRACKIS
NEG
Institute for Contemporary Art
Educators for social Responsibility
Natural History Museum
Hotel
Cemetery
Darwins
Harvard
MIT Media Lab
How do we educate for the future when the future is unknown?
What support can we give students to help find emergent order in wild subject matter?
How does a map feel different to the eyes, feet and heart?
How can we map complexity?
What boundaries are we trying to break while making a different map?
How do I move beyond what I know and find the thing that is totally unknown to me?
What is the shelf life of maps?
How can new maps change our perception of what we know?
THE TEACHER I WANT TO BE
Break out of the structure of School - Beyond disciplines to keep the EARTH IN MIND
Love on Acts & ED practice Make it a place of BELONGING Sense of Purpose
THE TEACHER I AM
Questions concepts and curriculum that is relevant to kids contexts
Closing the circle. Bringing decontextualization back to kids.
STRENGTHS
CHALLENGES
THE ARTIST I WANT TO BE
Write better Run an ARTIST/TEACHER Social Practice project on EDUCATION
THE ARTIST I AM
Open, Playful and Detailed. A Disposition towards learning
STRENGTHS
I pack too much in. I get in the way of my own creativity
CHALLENGES
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TION practice
time in the studio.
om PLACE

ECO SYSTEM
EDGE
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A
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FLOW
FAULT LINES
THE TRICKY MIDDLE
IVE
DIALOGUE
H WATER
OTIATING
EQUITY
THE TIME MEMB
Once we began using **exchange** as an orienting lens, we started to see it everywhere.
GIFT ECONOMY. IDEAS YOU OWN BUT ARE NOT YOURS.
A TEACHING AND LEARNING SPACE WHERE YOU SWITCH ROLES AND PERMEA
I DON'T OWN IT AND IT DOES NOT MATTER
THE POINT OF ALCHEMY HAS BEEN REACHED
THE POSSIBILITY OF TRANSFORMATION AS A
AN IDEA IS POLLINATED AND A DAY DREAM.
MATERIALIZED. A LIGHTER SIDE, ALMOST A GIFT. BUT AS
SWITCH ROLES! WHO IS IN CHARGE OF THESE TUFTS OF FOAM?
I WILL BE, WITH THE UN CERTAINTY OF WHAT I GAIN IN THIS EXCHANGE
DOES ALCHEMY ALWAYS MAKE SOMETHING
MORE PRECIOUS?
EXCHANGE RATE
RISES, WHY DO
MY
CHANGE?
ABOUT
BOU
THE LAZY BRACKISH WATER, NOW FLOWING GREEN WITH
IS THIS A MIDDLE STEP IN THE
PUSH PULL GIVE AND TAKE NOT IN THAT ORDER. MY HE
THAT FEELS LIKE A WEAK RESPONSE. THERE ARE SO MA
LAUGHING IN BIKINIS ON THEIR HONEYMOON AS THEIR SKIN BU
AN ALCHEMICAL BIOSPHERE WHERE SPARKS OF INTERACTION
THAN THE SUM OF THEIR PARTS. A SPACE OF PUSH PULL, GIVE AND
ONLY MOMENTARY AND FLUID.
EXCHANGE ON A PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL, BIOLO
BUT NURTURING DIFFERENCE IS WHERE WE
GET STUCK. WE SEEM AFRAID OF THE ALCHEMY THA

THE WHOLE EARTH FEELS CHANGED
WHEN DID THE ALCHEMY HAPPEN?
ANE PERMEATED.
E MEMBRANES
EMBRANE IS PERMEATED
THE
MY TEMPERATURE
HAT DOES THIS SAY
HERE I AM, WHICH
DARY, I AM IN?
FTS OF FOAM
RT PLUMMETS, BUT
Y PEOPLE
NS.
ARE MORE
TAKE
CAL LEVEL, SEEMS ESSENTIAL FOR SURVIVAL.
IS POSSIBLE FROM THE COMING TOGETHER.
I am ATTRACTED by
I am DRAWN to...
I am
I am
to survive
that latch on
willing
attention.

Trees talk to me. They will interrupt my conversations in mid-sentence and force me to marvel at their shapes, smells, seed pods, sometimes loud fruits and sometimes silent flowers. Over the years of being **grabbed** by trees and plants, I've learned to read their clues and tricks for enticing me as well as all the insect, bird, and animal collaborators they lure and put to use. Plants have developed great skills and tools for grabbiness in order to survive. From their flashy flower advertisements to the spikey seeds that latch on and want you to take them for a walk, I become a willing participant in their fan club, propelled by their ability to **hold my attention**.

tail

ALERT...

EPULSED by lazy politicians and misogynistic rap music

AWE of craftsmanship

DISGUSTED...

LOVE....

RIOUS ABOUT....

INSPIRED...

HATE...

OCKED BY....

CONFUSED BY...

WHAT GRABS YOU?

WHY?

eds dreams

GHOST SIGNS. RUSTED PIPES. CHIPPED PAINT. HU
LOVE. SWEAT. BLOOD. TYPOGRAPHY. REMNA
WEATHERING. THEY GIVE ME LEEWAY SOME
ALLOW ME TO ROAM. TO OBSERVE AND
UNOBSERVED. AS THOUGH NO ONE ELSE IS
THINGS TALK TO ME IN HALF-FINISHED NA
SCHEMATICS. SCRAPS OF PAPER
NEWSPAPER ADS. MEMOS. INVO
THREADS TO PULL - UNTANGL
FOLLOW. DECONSTRUCT.
PUT BACK TOGETHER.
OBSERVE. TRANSLATE.
NARRATE. ENVISION.
REVISION. MAKE.
REPEAT.
REPEAT.

MAN LABOR.
NTS.
EHOW.
REMAIN
LOOKING.
RRATIVES
CES.
E.

Contemporary artists don't have art teachers bossing them around all the time.

ARTISTS TAKE PART IN CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE C ISSUES OF OUR TIME

Making art can capture the ineffable in ways that conversations sometimes can't. Metaphors and symbols are evocative and open perspectives that can shift consciousness. When I experience art that really speaks to me, either resonating with or jostling against me—**it's a goosebump moment.**

How can we encourage PROACTIVE, OPEN, DIVERSE conversations about th world around us?

AGENCY

DOCUMENT

ENVISI

COLLABORATE

EXPERIMENTATION

Oliver Herring would i every single student to AREAS FOR ACTION studi to create a collaborat artwork.

TELL STORIES

NARRA

Marjan Sabr self taught Tejubehan makl novels about a year in the life of a student

EXP

Rebe RAC Sch Sch

GLOBAL COMPETITION

pipeline belt to jobs

lack of choice? For inner city youth is these corporate options the only possibility?

IBM CLAIMING BABIES

gender, STEM only focus?

QUESTION IS... WHAT IS INHERENTLY BAD ABOUT SCHOOL-JOB PIPELINE?

CRACK IN THE SYSTEM and IBM moves in.

What is lost if you are not allowed to be critical of corporate culture and supremacy?

MY ASSUMPTION TARGETED AT "MARGINALIZED" COMMUNITIES

KIDS ARE NOT EVEN READY TO GO TO COLLEGE AT 18

CRAZY TO DECIDE AT 14!

families would be excited about "job" after 6 yrs of highschool

4 YR. COLLEGES TOO EXPENSIVE AND NO GUARANTEE OF JOBS

art schools are also promising jobs

IS THERE VALUE IN GETTING A JOB & THEN FIGURE OUT WHAT YOU ARE REALLY PASSIONATE ABOUT?

AGENCY

NO

yes

constantly swinging as we try to "FIX" the world

local businesses

VP of IBM

stakeholders

Schools

parents

policy makers

What would be a non-coopted authentic framework for the relationship between education and work?

TEACHERS AND STUDENTS AS CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS

IEST

DICT

GGER

ATE

RANSLATE

TIPLE PERSPECTIVES

RUCIAL

Melani Cervantes would make posters to protest corporatization of education

PERSUASION

ON

BRIDGE

INTERVENTION

Pilvi Takala would get hired as a teacher for a week and do nothing in order to get the face of power to reveal itself

UNCOVER TRIGGER

ite
is
o
ve

TIVE

api and
olk artist
graphic

LORING DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

cca Solnit might juxtapose
AL and SPATIAL data of the
ool-to-prison vs
ool-to-job pipelines

OBSERVATION

Anna Deveare Smith would embody the multiple points of view around this issue

SEEK TO UNDERSTAND COMPLEXITY

ts

ticians

mmunity members

EXPOSE

I am trying to find the **tricky middle,** and it feels challenging. Where do I position my own practice as artist and educator within the larger field of education?

S BEAUTIFUL MAKES
S IS GOOD
EING
LETE

FAST MIND

FREEDOM

QUESTIONING

SLOW MIND

HER;
MAKE THE MUSIC
ORE AND AFTER
.
E SOUL DOES
CHES WITHOUT
S OF THIS
ARE. YOU
THEM.
NOT TO
AND NOT
M; TO DO
RK AND LET IT GO;
ETTING GO, IS
S IT STAY
-LAO TZU

REDUCTION

FLOW

DELIBERATE

OPEN

CLOSE

CONCEPT

IMPROV

STUCK

CONSTRAINTS

ANSWERING

SKILL

COMPLEXITY

STUDIO

LIVED PRACTICE is the daily, making building, thinking about and doing of life.

Why are young people learning and working with the land?

PRACTICE

When we feel we are losing a practice, we rush to preserve it. But preservation is the anti-thesis of lived practice. How can practice embedded in tradition continue to develop as lived?

rooted in practice

using visual metaphors and codes

IT'S A PERSONAL INQUIRY BOOK

handmade

not perfect or ever finished

developing my own criteria for quality

mapping and exploring

internal and external worlds

intuitive

improv and play

uncertainty and possibility

pace

slow deliberate revisiting

fast gathering

making my thinking visible

engaging questions cognitively, intuitively and emotionally

non-linear

memory

add ideas to other ideas. Building centers of interest and resonance

I hate white paper

not just a notebook

an aesthetic arena

I have a sense of my thinking because I am constructing it.

Unfolding Practice: R
published by the Wome
is funded in part by the
project was supported
the Windgate Charitabl

This book is a collabora
The prototype was deve
the Montalvo Art Cente
printed, and assembled
Workshop. Additional s
Panta Rhea Foundation

The book was hand an
on Construction Cemen
The type is Helvetica N

ISBN 978-1-943039-01

This is book no.____ of

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Special thanks to:
Chris Petrone, Mara Hy
Katie Wofford, Tatana K
Scott Denman, Jehan R
Jackson Porretta. Spec
who have taken this acc
it their own.

A brown grocery bag, torn apart and flattened, gathered burning questions, tangential thoughts, and rapidly recorded stream-of-consciousness sparks, jostling against diagrams and drawings on art and education. We folded this grocery bag, put it away, and revisited it later that day, that week, that month, that year—adding to it and growing it. Our journey with the accordion book project began as we stumbled upon a process that allowed for an unfolding dialogue on practice and reflection. We make accordion books collaboratively and separately and exchange them, as we navigate terrains that require further exploration in our quest to understand learning, teaching, and the world. We share them with teachers and students, and they in turn make and share them with their communities.

Ideas and practices that have emerged along the way are shared in this book and further elaborated upon on our blog. The front of this book is an art document reflecting on artistic process and educational practice. The back of this book is a guide, expanding on the practice of using accordion books as a tool for capturing, visualizing, and building upon reflective thinking. We share ideas, influences, and strategies about art and education practice.

At times we narrate together, and at times we narrate individually.

Arzu Mistry (Bangalore, India) and
Todd Elkin (Oakland, California, USA)
www.accordionbookproject.com

MAKE YOUR OWN ACCORDION BOOK

"When I am stuck … I just search for excitement, but not too hard. It is when I find myself playing more than trying that I find my way out of a block."

Aris Moore

Artists find it invaluable to **stretch and explore** and release themselves from repetitive patterns. Songwriter Bob Dylan throws I-Ching coins. Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt created the Oblique Strategies. Patti Smith consults tarot cards at decisive moments in her work. There are numerous strategies shared by artists and designers to break creative blocks through the strategic use of chance or randomness.

CONSTRAINTS: Abstract painter James Siena gives himself sets of directions, which he calls algorithms. Generative tensions arise between the rigidity of the rules he sets for himself and what his fallible human hand can actually do.

DE MECHANIZATION: Theatre artist, activist, and political visionary Augusto Boal developed numerous games for actors and non-actors alike, and believed they could be used to transform and liberate everyone. Within his concept of de-mechanization, the mind is tricked by the action of the body to free itself from the patterns of our upbringing and the conditioning of social acceptability. "...the process of 'thinking with our hands' can short-circuit the censorship of the brain..."

THE PARADOX OF CONTROL: In his work on *Flow Theory,* Csikszentmihalyi shares eight components of the phenomenology of enjoyment. Of these, the "paradox of control" is particularly relevant here. He writes about the distinction between **exercising control in difficult situations** and **being worried about losing control**. When we become dependent on being able to control, we start to lose control. Order and control can become addictive and result in an unwillingness to engage with life's ambiguities.

STRETCH AND EXPLORE: In their seminal work on developing the *Eight Studio Habits of Mind*, Lois Hetland and others propose that the essence of an arts education is the development of "artistic mind." Key to this development, and to the frame of this chapter, is the truth that artists are continually discovering new ways to explore and reach beyond what they know. Rather than viewing **mistakes** as dead ends, artists see them as opportunities to grow. **Stretching and exploring** are important parts of getting out of our own way.

"Sometimes when I make work, there is a moment when what I want to make and what I make it with fuse in such a way that the piece begins, against my intention, to take on a form of its own. It is as though I am no longer the prime mover. At this point what is in front of me becomes as strange to me as I am essentially to myself. This is the point I am always trying to reach."

Paul Chan

"At the moment of presentation, the whole point of performance is to have the confidence to lose your inhibition because you get rewarded for trying. You do not get rewarded for being inhibited. And when you go from having to do something to wanting to do something, only you know where the switch is. And the more you actually know where that switch is for yourself, the more you can be incredibly joyous and go from wedding to wedding night."

Yo Yo Ma

GETTING OUT OF MY OWN WAY: TRUSTING THE PROCESS AND RESISTING CLOSURE

In this chapter, we come back to the purpose and drive behind inquiries and reflective practice. While one motivation to inquire comes from **curiosity about the world**, others might come from a personal desire to **make our practice better,** to **move beyond what we know** or to get **unstuck**. Teachers as contemporary practitioners are constantly negotiating the shifting grounds of their field with their own beliefs, experiences, insecurities, and personal practice. There are many educational paradigms and positions bombarding us with ideas, challenges, critiques, mandates, and memes. Sometimes they provide pithy, quick answers to the daunting and messy issues of our time. By distilling the complexity of our world, memes offer us for/against pro/con binaries and catchy fixes that run the risk of causing people to form instantaneous allegiances. Some memes can feel reactionary and reductionist, and are actually false binaries which prevent us from seeing multiple ways and perspectives. A focus on predetermined outcomes or "products" or notions of "excellence" can also cause us to feel stuck and uninspired, numbly marching towards foregone conclusions or rushing towards "definitive" closure. In this jostle, what happens to the inner-selves of teachers and students?

It is easy to feel overwhelmed by the pervasive **noise** which can interfere with our ability to make meaning, and suddenly we cannot see the forest for the trees. We become immobilized by uncertainty—so uncomfortable with not knowing that we ultimately quit trying. Or we feel stuck in certainty, which makes it seem like there is just one way to think or act and blinds us from seeing alternative ways. Whatever the causes may be, our classrooms, workspaces, and indeed our internal thoughts and feelings can too often feel like predictable, constraining, non-permeable boxes that we want to escape. **How do we get out of our own way?**

We have found that this negotiation between personal process and internal and external noise makes having a **personal reflective practice** (accordion book practice) even more necessary. Through this practice we begin the journey of creating permeable learning; see continua rather than false binaries; begin to trust our process and thus become more comfortable with uncertainty; and are alive and alert to the possibilities of a given moment.

PRINCIPLES, STRATEGIES, AND ORIENTATIONS FOR THE CLASSROOM: Many arts educators are taking a serious look at the methodologies of contemporary artists and organizing them into principles and strategies for use in the classroom. Looked at together, these lists of methods and dispositions paint an impressive picture of a deep and rigorous interdisciplinary practice, and make clear the unique contributions of artists to epistemology and to our felt experience of the world. Each artistic approach offers its own particular additions to the growing body of scholarship around contemporary artistic practice. Collectively, they make a compelling case for why artists are exemplary role models for learners, teachers, and transdisciplinarians.

Olivia Gude proposes **eight postmodern principles** as a counter to the traditional elements of art. She articulates methodologies of contemporary artists: appropriation, juxtaposition, recontextualization, layering, interaction of text and image, hybridity, gazing, and "representin."

Julia Marshall shares **strategies artists use for creating, communicating, and presenting their research**: projection, juxtaposition, mapping, formatting, metaphor, and creating a resource archive.

Using artists as role models, the documentaries and educational materials produced by *Art 21* deal with contemporary art practice and share not just the works artists create, but also their **processes and methods**. These processes are inherently about **learning** and are particularly useful to us as educators. They are: pursue questions and follow curiosities; focus on process experimentation and play; collaborate; move from the personal to the social, political and global; and make connections to the past.

Todd Elkin and Arzu Mistry have shared with teachers and students, ways in which they have observed **artists orienting themselves to the world** and their work. These orientations are: deep observation, persuasion, exploring different perspectives, constructing narratives, intervention, and experimentation.

"In these great times, when orders are being imposed on us from every direction—from student loan officers to secretaries of defense—the idea that we can change the order of things is truly ridiculous. Luckily, we traffic in the ridiculous. We are Artists."
"The art I admire the most is the kind I understand the least, and keep on not understanding. It shows, uncompromisingly, that another world is possible, and that neither the world the 99 percent struggles with, nor the one enjoyed by the one percent, are good enough to settle for."
Paul Chan

"I make my paintings out of necessity and like using the things around me—to communicate what I need to. Because I'm really bad at articulating how I feel vocally. Paintings do that for me."
"They're helping me figure out the things that I can't communicate to myself yet."
Jamian Juliano-Villani

"I consider myself more of a chess player—my opponent makes a move then I make a move. Now I'm waiting for my opponent to make the next move."
"Yes I think it is the responsibility of any artist to protect freedom of expression."
Ai Wei Wei

"The expertise of the artist lies, like [Paulo] Freire's, in being a non-expert, a provider of frameworks on which experiences can form and sometimes be directed and channeled to generate new insights around a particular issue."
Pablo Helguera

"For the past three or so decades visual artists of varying backgrounds and perspectives have been working in a manner that resembles political and social activity but is distinguished by its aesthetic sensibility. Dealing with some of the most profound issues of our time--toxic waste, race relations, homelessness, aging, gang warfare, and cultural identity—a group of visual artists has developed distinct models for an art whose public strategies of engagement are an important part of its aesthetic language. The source of these artworks' structure is not exclusively visual or political information, but rather an internal necessity perceived by the artist in collaboration with his or her audience."
Suzanne Lacy

WHAT WOULD AN ARTIST DO? TEACHERS AND STUDENTS AS CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS

We think **contemporary artists are excellent role models for both teachers and learners.** They are proactive, self-driven free agents. These artists are "fired up." There is a palpable sense that they are compelled to do what they do, and have an extremely high level of engagement and sense of purpose in their work. As teachers, we would love nothing more than to help ignite this kind of drive and "purposiveness" in ourselves and our students.

An artist's work is driven by a variety of catalysts but at its root, artists like scientists, mathematicians, and historians are trying to understand the world. They take part in conversations about the crucial issues of our time.

Artists' work is research; an inquiry process that often results in new insight.
Artists are both explorers and guides.
Artists understand that the world is an inherently transdisciplinary place, which means that they must adopt transdisciplinary approaches.
Artworks are catalysts for dialogue and the construction of meaning.
Artists give shape to internal and external worlds.
Artists are both critical thinkers and critical changemakers.
Artists perform functions that other types of practitioners do not. They affect transformations, operate simultaneously on intellectual and emotional levels, and dwell in liminal, interstitial spaces. They are shamans, tricksters, magicians, healers, and breakers of boundaries and taboos.
For these and other reasons, we strongly believe that the forms, methods, knowledge, purposes, and artists' ways of being and doing are essential and core components of teaching, learning, and being in the world.

ARTIST AS COLLECTOR: Many contemporary artists are collectors and archivists—either on the lookout for certain current obsessions or collecting in an undifferentiated way to increase "randomization" in their practice.

Trenton Doyle Hancock's studio resembles a somewhat more organized landfill, with giant piles of objects, paper, cardboard, and partially finished artworks.

Mark Dion has a large hangar-like storage space filled with all manner of objects and raw materials. He says, "I'm very much an artist who gets a lot from things—I really love the world of stuff."

Nancy Spero had an ever-growing collection of images of women, from the earliest drawings to contemporary representations, she remixed and recycled images from this archive to create monumental installations.

Chitra Ganesh is a collector of images and objects: comic books from India, sequins, jump ropes, insect wings, a decorative belt she wore in a dance performance as a child. Objects both mundane and rare are reclaimed and find a way into her work.

Follow a line of inquiry. Is the thing that grabbed you a clue to something? What? Can you go down the "rabbit hole" and discover a whole new world?
Read between the lines or go through the side door.
Generate questions by asking "what if…?"
Ask the 5W's and an H (who, what, where, when, why, how).
Start tangential, branching, diverging connections and interconnections.
Start simultaneous collections.
Think systemically.

ART AS RESEARCH: For our students, the practice of grabbiness sets in place the disposition for **art as research**. Artistic inquiries are different from other forms of research, and although we may use the traditional research tools of observation, collection, analysis, and interpretation; creative inquiries are also branching, twisting, non-linear, intuitive, emotional, and cognitive journeys.

SKILLS-INCLINATION-ALERTNESS: In *Studio Thinking: The Real Benefits of Visual Arts Education,* Hetland and her fellow researchers outline eight habits of artistic thinking: observe, envision, stretch and explore, express, engage and persist, reflect, understand art world, and develop craft. Each habit is considered a disposition that includes not only the skill associated with that habit but the inclination to use that skill and the alertness to know when to engage the particular habit. In the context of this chapter, **inclination and alertness to noticing the world become motivations to develop a diversity of skills** to engage deeper and express our understanding of the world.

Re-look at your collection and documentation for themes.
Search for POWER. What resonates as strong words/images?
Interpret.
Share your collection with others. Ask for their interpretations.
Search for context.

We have found Julia Marshall's *Integrated Learning Habits of Mind* to be a useful lens to look at the dispositions involved in the inquiries that emerge when things talk to us. A student in Todd's high school class was inspired by both the artistic form and ideas conveyed in Yinka Shonibare's colorful and dramatic sculptural artwork entitled *The Scramble for Africa.* This student embarked on a **creative inquiry** of his own, making connections to a documentary he recently viewed about debt in Jamaica. His **empathy** for the disenfranchised people of Jamaica drove him to research the complex **systemic** ways in which third world countries are kept in poverty. He began a journey of **critical thinking**, delving deeply into **academic knowledge and disciplines**. He wanted to weave his developing understanding about geopolitics and economics into a conceptual art installation. He began to **make meaning** and express newfound understanding in his artwork. The process of conveying complex ideas in a work of art proved challenging, requiring him to **think flexibly** and to **be open and resilient.** Throughout the process, the student received feedback from his peers and teacher, which caused him to be **metacognitive** in order to clearly explain his ideas and decisions to others.

INTENTIONALLY GRABBY: Advertising, media, and popular culture shape our **noticing** muscles. In his seminal book, *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger offers us a plethora of critical lenses to unpack and understand the endless sea of persuasive imagery vying to intentionally grab and hold our attention, causing us to spend or vote. "Publicity persuades us of such a transformation by showing us people who have apparently been transformed and are, as a result, enviable. The state of being envied is what constitutes glamour. And publicity is the process of manufacturing glamour."

Document your response.
Capture first impressions.
Do a free-write.
Draw all the tangential ideas flooding your mind.

EMOTION AND COGNITION: Far from taking an unreliable backseat to cognitive processes, our emotions play a crucial role in the types of things we notice and the meaning we make of that which grabs our attention. In *Considered Judgment*, Catherine Elgin argues that emotions function cognitively, guiding and structuring our **patterns of attention.** Emotions "orient [us], focus attention, and supply grounds for classifying objects as like or unlike."

DOCUMENTATION: The artifacts we collect when we document an experience are not meant to be tucked away, never to be revisited. Carlina Rinaldi writes about the Reggio Emelia model of early childhood education, where documentation of experiences are brought back for re-reading, revisiting, and the reconstruction of the experience so that they "...intervene during the learning path and within the learning process in a way that would give meaning and direction to the process."

"I was paying so little attention to most of what was right before us that I had become a sleepwalker on the sidewalk. What I saw and attended to was exactly what I expected to see; what my dog showed me was that my attention invited along attention's companion: inattention to everything else."
Alexandra Horowitz

The world is talking to you.
Do you hear it?!

GRABBINESS: Things we notice can be visual or conceptual, repulsive or attractive. We call these types of things **"grabby."** Something is grabby if it catches, and most crucially, holds your attention. Becoming alert, and looking for themes and patterns in the things we notice, is the beginning of a journey. It is a habit you tweak and nurture into a greater alertness until it affects your practice and your artwork. We believe that supporting students in developing alertness to things in their world, both internal and external, sets them on a path of their own personal practice. This is a cornerstone of our practice as educators.

TRUSTING: One of my concerns about mainstream education (particularly in India) is that we are not encouraged to trust our internal compass. Many children and adults don't trust enough—what they observe, what they hear, what they feel. Value is placed on trusting "authoritative sources" over one's own observation. There is an internalized belief that someone else knows better: the textbook, newspaper, internet, teacher, boss, or parent. Can we encourage young people to trust that their observations are worthy and valid?

I've been noticing crows lately. Taking pictures of them, drawing them, collecting artworks which feature them, wondering what they are up to, what they are thinking and even feeling. A few weeks ago when I was waiting for a ride in front of my apartment I saw a murder of crows gathered around a chip wrapper, taking turns lifting the wrapper up with their beaks and then flying up to the telephone wire above (or is it a power line? now I'm really wondering.) This seemed like a coordinated effort. What were they "saying" to each other? I have become acutely sensitive to crows as somehow kindred beings. I now care about them and am concerned for their well-being.

I'm alert to and aware of both anecdotal and scientific evidence of their intelligence and abilities. I perk up when I see or hear anything about crows in print or online. My interest in them has become a strand of semi-formal research. I've collected several books about them and my research has led to a heightened awareness and curiosity about the other animal life in my urban world. My inquiry has led me down divergent disciplinary paths, involving art, literature, behavioral science, ecology, and biology. These tangled interest- and emotion-driven pathways emerge from my listening to the world.

THINGS TALK TO ME: BEING ALERT TO WHAT GRABS ME

The world is talking to me. How do I pay attention and talk back? At the core of our practice is **noticing**: being alert to how the world talks to us; developing a deep, nuanced sense of curiosity; engaging in "extreme noticing;" and then reflecting about the nature and qualities of the things we notice.

We trust that what catches and holds our attention is entirely valid and worthwhile of our focus. When we begin capturing, documenting, and being thoughtful about what we notice, we embark on a journey of divergent paths. Following these paths, and creatively capturing, analyzing, and building upon the things we gather, **is our practice.** Olivia Gude describes this practice as being "intensely conscious of both inner experiences and of the prompting of the outer world—this heightened dual awareness is a defining characteristic of artistic process." Things are talking to us, and we are in dialogue with them. In this process, emotion and cognition are inextricably woven together. Thus, it becomes possible to develop a sense of personal agency by engaging in creative inquiry, meaning-making, and systemic thinking. It is worth mentioning that the proactive, self-driven, "noticing-centered" practice described above sits in contrast to business-as-usual versions of education and work life. Orienting ourselves to internal and external worlds represents empowering and democratizing notions of practice.

POLLINATION fight
INTERCONNECTEDNESS
independence rejection
COLLABORATION
giving without receiving
competition
LOVING ACCEPTANCE
SUPPLY and DEMAND
thirdspace
VALUE

In Jack Watson's classroom, you see teens crowded around a wall filled with small slips of paper containing words and phrases like "Bullying," "The Catholic Church," or "Native American Rights." You will also see them adding notes to this concept wall, making connections, and adding new thoughts. A few minutes later, Jack's students huddle together at their tables, deep in discussion about how they might create works of visual art, installations, public space interventions, or videos triggered by the ideas from the classroom concept wall. Jack is present in the room, posing provocative or clarifying questions to the students and taking on the role of coach or catalyst. The students' concept wall allows for long term, non-linear conversations on thematic ideas, questions, and issues that they find important. Ideas are built together, which then become the basis for a series of solo or collaborative artistic inquiries.
Collaborative Concept Wall, Jack Watson

"Student voices are rarely heard in the literature of assessment."
Olivia Gude

It is the first week of school. A group of 10th graders in a Bay Area classroom intently focuses on the words and body language of their English teacher as he paces the front of the room and leads a discussion about his rules and expectations for the school year. They take notes as he riffs and extemporizes: "He said he FAILED ENGLISH IN HIGH SCHOOL," one student enthusiastically writes. Another transcribes his words, "If I can't sleep in here, you can't either!" Later that day, in their art class, the students share, compare, map, and discuss their observations. In the coming weeks, they will develop research questions based on daily observations of their teacher; create an installation at a Bay Area museum, illuminating their research; and interview their teacher to gain further insight into his teaching philosophy. All the while, their teacher observes the students and develops his own research questions. He also engages the students in conversations about his findings. This is Assessment as Dialogue.
Assessment as Dialogue, **Todd Elkin**

On a Saturday morning, children from Selvipura Village, families from Bangalore, youth from the Baiyapanahalli Slum, art students from Srishti College of Art and Design, and a few other artists and scientists, gather in response to an online post for an event at Hesserghatta Lake outside Bangalore city. A group of about 40 people has come together to explore the dried lake bed and simultaneously experiment with alternative spaces and models for learning. One set of people set off with GPS units, tagging trees with a local tree expert. A young girl leads a group on a blind walk. Another group creates looms in the trees and makes weavings with twigs, leaves, and seedpods. Through the course of the morning, questions and responses emerge from the multi-age, multi-lingual, multi-socioeconomic group. Questions like: how does a GPS work? Why is the lake dry? How was the lake created? What is the function of thorns? Both adults and youth explore these questions in multi-modal ways.
Bangalore STEAMERS, **an initiative by Project Vision**

A group of teachers are sitting in a circle of chairs immersed in a free-write exercise in handmade accordion books. The topic of their free-write is "love." After five minutes of stream-of-consciousness writing, they trade accordion books with the person sitting next to them. After reading their partner's free-write, they borrow from it a few words or phrases that resonate with them. They write these borrowed words in their own accordion books, adding to their original text, extending it or weaving in new phrases. Now they stand in a circle and take turns reading aloud their remixed free-writes. The catch is that when a participant hears a phrase mirrored in their own free-write, they interrupt that person by reading their own text from the connecting point. As participants jump from readings to interruptions, a group free-write emerges, with the many meanings of "love" echoing, building, contradicting and combining in surprising, unplanned ways.
Collaborative Writing Process, **shared by Evan Hastings**

A group of teenagers in Bangalore are closely scrutinizing photographs of structures made solely of newspaper and masking tape, posted in a blog by their peers in Fremont, California. The youth in Bangalore, who had just built newspaper shelters of their own, analyze the designs from California for their architectural soundness, differences in materials, styles, and decisions. Through the blog, students in both places post observations, questions, and critiques of each other's work. The act of seeing their separate and connected contexts through the exchange of photographs, designs, and feedback, brought conversations on material culture, socio-economic dynamics, identity, and differing perspectives on home and shelter, intimately into the classroom.
The Shelter Project,
Todd Elkin, Ariel Roman, Jackson Porretta, and Arzu Mistry

EXCHANGE AS ART: WHAT HAPPENS IN AN EXCHANGE?

What exactly is taking place in an exchange? What changes in an exchange? And why are some contemporary artists organizing their work around different types of interpersonal exchange? These questions seem generative and important as we endeavor to open up spaces in our classrooms, where social-relational, emotional, and interpersonal realms of teaching, learning, and collaborative artmaking can thrive.

Why is the idea of exchange a generative lens with which to look at our practice as teachers, artists, and world citizens? The word exchange evokes diverse ideas from love, gift, argument, garage sale, to collaboration and globalization. We are hardly conscious of the many daily exchanges we make within the capital, social, and redistributive economic systems that we live in. Exchanges of power in classrooms, in workspaces, and between individuals are happening all the time. Relationships in nature are sometimes mutually beneficial, sometimes exploitative, sometimes parasitic, and often transformative in both positive and negative ways. Looking at the various dynamics and qualities of these different types of interpersonal exchanges can reveal a lot about degrees of democracy, who is empowered, who is being disempowered, and what new forms and ideas are arising out of the exchanges.

Classrooms, artistic collaborations, and other social settings have become experimental spaces for looking at and intentionally structuring different types of exchanges. Social Practice and Socially Engaged artists have been exploring this terrain for many years, creating relational situations in which exchanges between artists and audiences are foregrounded. Here, the role of the artist becomes that of a catalyst, setting off chains of interaction and inquiry. We find it exciting to think of educators and classrooms in this same way. We have entered a space of collective, collaborative, and relational possibility and action, looking closely at **exchange as art practice.**

MAPPING

"We organize information on maps in order to see our knowledge in a new way. As a result, maps suggest explanations; and while explanations reassure us, they also inspire us to ask questions, consider other possibilities. To ask for a map is to say, "Tell me a story."
Peter Turchi

"That thing the nature of which is totally unknown to you is usually what you need to find, and finding it is a matter of getting lost."
"...getting lost was not a matter of geography so much as identity, a passionate desire, even an urgent need to become no one and anyone..."
Rebecca Solnit

"In most of the places we've investigated, we find a landscape vocabulary that is taken for granted. We are interested in how this vocabulary has become embedded — in how these places are imagined and visualized, what images and maps show and demarcate, and what they exclude."
Dilip da Cunha and Anuradha Mathur

"Once I started to work with local community organizations for longer periods of time and in less central towns areas, where people lived in and cared about (and not just worked or shopped), the annotations changed dramatically. Instead of being just about their momentary sensations in the space, participants told stories that intermingled their lives with the place, local history and politics."
Christian Nold

"The arts are not a product delivery industry. They are a personal relationship industry."
Doug Borwick

"The artist can be more accurately viewed as the "catalyst" in relational art, rather than being at the centre."
Nicolas Bourriaud

"These three concerns — activation; authorship; community — are the most frequently cited motivations for almost all artistic attempts to encourage participation in art since the 1960s."
Claire Bishop

"Talk to people you know. Talk to people you don't know. Talk to people you never talk to. Be intrigued by the differences you hear. Expect to be surprised. Treasure curiosity more than certainty."
Margaret Wheatley

"...and the small industries of the inner cities were being replaced by artists and the smooth affluence that sometimes follows and imitates artists."
Rebecca Solnit

"Artists began looking at social systems that emphasize other priorities than relations of capital."
Ted Purves

"[Walter Benjamin] argued that when judging a work's politics, we should not look at the artist's declared sympathies, but at the position the work occupies in the production relations of its time."
Claire Bishop

"...it's necessary to begin again to understand the nature of the political through a practical return to the most basic relationships and questions; of self to other, of individual to collective, of autonomy and solidarity, and conflict and consensus, against the grain of a now dominant neo-liberal capitalism..."
Grant Kester

"One of the main impetuses behind participatory art has been a restoration of the social bond through a collective elaboration of meaning."
Claire Bishop

"Culture is about relationality — the relationship among individuals within groups, among groups, and between ideas and perspectives. Culture is concerned with identity, aspiration, symbolic exchange, coordination, and structures and practices that serve relational ends..."
Vijayendra Rao and Michael Walton

EXCHANGE

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Graphic maps such as visualizations, concept maps, context maps, target maps, and Venn diagrams can represent ideas and their relationships. A simple concentric circle map, the **artist I am—artist I want to be**, as a graphic organizer, uses the spatial break up of an inner and outer circle to represent the strengths and challenges of the artist I am right now (inner) and the goals and aspirations of the artist I want to be (outer). Once these ideas are articulated, I can think about the small and large concrete steps I will take to get from where I am, to where I want to be.

Mapping is a **layered process** and each layer is anchored by an intention.

Exploration mapping is being fully steeped in the emergent moment. The map unfolds while I am discovering a place or idea. I document the immediacy of the first person experience, capturing and collecting, exploring and getting lost. At the start of the journey there are no categories.

Reflection mapping happens upon my return from an experience. It taps into memories by sorting collections, organizing, and beginning to analyze the journey. This layer can paint an overarching picture by illustrating connections, systems, and relationships.

Inquiry mapping evolves from the connections that surface in a reflection map. A place or idea grabs me and pulls me back to dig deeper. There is still an element of exploring the unknown, a set of unanswered questions, but now I have an inquiry that is driving my map so that new patterns, deeper meanings, and new avenues for exploration and practice may emerge.

Exploding and opening up questions is an exciting artistic journey in itself. Lynda Barry, in her beautiful artist's book *What It Is*, never answers a question directly but rather circles around them. Using collage, drawings and text, she posits multiple, often contradictory responses to the same question. **What opens up a question rather than drives it towards easy closure?**

"Artistic creation is a voyage into the unknown. In our own eyes, we are off the map. The excitement of potential discovery is accompanied by anxiety, despair, caution, perhaps, perhaps boldness, and, always, the risk of failure. Failure can take the form of becoming hopelessly lost, or pointlessly lost, or not finding what we came for (though that last is sometimes happily accompanied by the discovery of something we didn't anticipate, couldn't even imagine before we found it). We strike out for what we believe to be uncharted waters, only to find ourselves sailing in someone else's bathtub. Those are the days it seems there is nothing new to discover but the limitations of our own experience and understanding."
Peter Turchi

maps...
are INHERENTLY REDUCTIVE
also CONFUSE US
can EXCLUDE & DIVIDE
sometimes OBSCURE CONNECTIONS

"Educating for the unknown favors a vision of learning aggressive in its effort to foster curiosity, enlightenment, empowerment, and responsibility in a complex and dynamic world. It favors a broad and visionary reach for meaningful learning."
David Perkins

"Artists and writers throughout the continent are currently involved in a ... redefinition of our continental topography. We imagine either a map of the Americas without borders, a map turned upside down, or one in which ... borders are organically drawn by geography, culture, and immigration, not by the capricious fingers of economic domination."
Guillermo Gomez-Pena

MAPPING THE TERRAIN: EXPLORING, GUIDING, AND GETTING LOST

To "map" is...
to document,
to give shape,
to explore,
to guide,
and crucially, to **interpret and make meaning.**

The (shifting) boundaries, relationships, places, things, and ideas being mapped are personal. They are chosen and presented by the cartographer. Our maps are iterative, recursive, constructivist, and not necessarily linear, often circling back upon and even contradicting ideas previously explored. Mapping is inherently about exploring and guiding (learning and teaching). It is the art of slowly unraveling the things we are curious about.

We think maps allow re-seeing in a multiplicity of ways:
They illuminate connections and present the **big picture** and the small details.
They involve criticality, intuition, and **multiple readings** of information.
They uncover **patterns and relationships** and make systems visible.

To map our experiences is to get lost, to be comfortable with uncertainty, and hold and entertain all these dissimilar ideas simultaneously.

terrain...
GEOGRAPHIC
TEMPORAL
CULTURAL
PHILOSOPHICAL
EMOTIONAL
CONCEPTUAL

We use **codes** as a way to re-see all the treasures we have gathered while organizing them in multiple ways. Like symbols on maps these codes allow us to quickly locate important ideas in our books. We use symbols and visual strategies to represent significant themes and questions in our practice. Coding, sorting, and categorizing can be done in the **moment of gathering** or as one revisits a book and identifies emergent recurring patterns.

COLOR CODING: Todd and Arzu have been teaching a course called *Exchange as Art*. Across all our books, anything that speaks directly or tangentially to the concept of exchange is color coded using a yellow dot. Dots of different colors help us keep track of connected ideas.

CODES USED IN THIS BOOK:

- Blue dot — Ideas that are expanded on *accordionbookproject.com*
- Yellow dot — Ideas that are related to the concept of exchange
- Red dot — Ideas that we are struggling with, disagree on, and want to explore further
- Gray dot — References, resources, and inspirations listed in full on *accordionbookproject.com*

VISUAL METAPHORS: Arzu uses the symbol of an eye to mark any idea related to making her **thinking visible.** She uses different visual metaphors to tag recurring themes, questions, and ideas in her practice.

MANIPULATION OF SCALE: Todd uses text of relative sizes to emphasize and convey the importance of certain ideas. He makes particular words and phrases bigger, smaller, or bolder based on how significant the idea is to him.

The use of accordion books for capturing, visualizing, and building upon reflective thinking emerges from a long lineage of hand-crafted bookmaking. These many book-like forms include illuminated texts, codices, illustrated field notebooks, artists' books, sketchbooks, journals, and fanzines. We hold these antecedents close to us and are inspired by them.

- The form and structure of accordion books lends itself to circular, non-linear, and divergent thinking. We see our **accordion books as maps** of our learning and teaching. We want to develop in ourselves, and support our students in developing an attentiveness to the world and a disposition of **extreme noticing.**

There is a changing **pace** to accordion book practice. Rapid when one is inspired, reflective later. When an idea has to be captured fast, this is an act of collecting and gathering. At other times the pace is slow and thoughtful, like looking back at a box of treasures that are memories that one relives. This is a time for organizing and connecting. Although **creating is primary**, revisiting to analyse, remix, re-position, and re-see, is where the magic happens in accordion books. This is core to the practice.

"Don't try to create and analyse at the same time. They are different processes."
Immaculate Heart Art Department, Rule Number 8, Sister Corita Kent

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Unfolding Practice: Reflections on Learning and Teaching was published by the Women's Studio Workshop in Rosendale, NY. WSW is funded in part by the New York State Council on the Arts. This project was supported by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Windgate Charitable Foundation.

This book is a collaboration between Arzu Mistry and Todd Elkin. The prototype was developed collaboratively during a residency at the Montalvo Art Center in July 2015. The book has been designed, printed, and assembled by Arzu Mistry at the Women's Studio Workshop. Additional support for this project was provided by the Panta Rhea Foundation.

The book was hand and laser cut, and silkscreen and digitally printed on Construction Cement Green and Brown Box Kraft French Paper. The type is Helvetica Neue 9 point.

ISBN 978-1-943039-01-2

This is book no. artist proof of ____copies

Arzu Mistry Todd Elkin

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Special thanks to:
Chris Petrone, Mara Hyman, Emma Bilyeu, Rachel Myers, Katie Wofford, Tatana Kellner, Ann Kalmbach, Arvind Thyagarajan, Scott Denman, Jehan Rivetna-Bell, Genevieve DeBose, and Jackson Porretta. Special thanks to all the teachers and students who have taken this accordion book practice, shared it, and made it their own.

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This is book no.____ of _

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Special thanks to:
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who have taken this acc
it their own.

A brown grocery bag, torn apart and flattened, gathered burning questions, tangential thoughts, and rapidly recorded stream-of-consciousness sparks, jostling against diagrams and drawings on art and education. We folded this grocery bag, put it away, and revisited it later that day, that week, that month, that year—adding to it and growing it. Our journey with the accordion book project began as we stumbled upon a process that allowed for an unfolding dialogue on practice and reflection. We make accordion books collaboratively and separately and exchange them, as we navigate terrains that require further exploration in our quest to understand learning, teaching, and the world. We share them with teachers and students, and they in turn make and share them with their communities.

Ideas and practices that have emerged along the way are shared in this book and further elaborated upon on our blog. The front of this book is an art document reflecting on artistic process and educational practice. The back of this book is a guide, expanding on the practice of using accordion books as a tool for capturing, visualizing, and building upon reflective thinking. We share ideas, influences, and strategies about art and education practice.

At times we narrate together, and at times we narrate individually.

Arzu Mistry (Bangalore, India) and
Todd Elkin (Oakland, California, USA)
www.accordionbookproject.com