Mobile Sustainability and Emergent Art Curriculum

This paper introduces refugee youth’s mobile sustainability archive project that informs a social justice approach to media art practice and education. The project allows me to unfold a couple of ideas to rethink media/art education: approaches to environmental sustainability using mobile media; and understanding of emergent art curriculum. First, I will discuss what Emergent Art Curriculum constitutes, which sages into a discussion of environmental violence and sustainability in that refugee youth’s mobile media plays significant roles for social/environmental justice.

Emergent Art Curriculum

Emergent Art Curriculum (EAC) I propose opens up alternative ways to think of curriculum in relation to minoritized youth’s own desire and view to gain an educational justice. Concerning educational justice, progressive education has sought the importance of an inquiry on whose curriculum for past decades. It has reminded us that social hierarchy and unequal distribution of power by race, class, and gender in the U.S. colonial society undeniably mirrors the educational system. And curriculum has been viewed as a contestable space that undergirds and perpetuates the dominant ideologies and power, and questions on who creates curriculum for what is necessary to interrogate its hidden messages and the cannon (Anyon,1980; Pinar, 2004). Curriculum refers to what teacher generates for teaching in classroom context (e.g. class) and to a bigger social and educational context where determines what knowledge means and whose knowledge for what as well as how knowledge is produced and distributed.
Taking both, emergent art curriculum challenges art teacher’s prescribed design of curriculum that demands youth’ submission to the authority of teacher and the dominant knowledge system. It thus refuses youth as merely knowledge receiver and teacher as a knowledge producer and distributor. Paulo Freire’s (1970) critique on banking model of education helps us to critically observe educators’ task to fill the students with contents of teachers’ knowledge that are detached from reality. What he called “narration sickness” tells us teacher-student relationship as merely narrating Subject (teacher) and patient listening object (students), which creates lifeless, hollow, alienated learning and unequal power hierarchy (p.72). His emancipatory education highly endorses knowledge-making from the powerless to reposition its narrative to be present over the teacher’s narrative in the curriculum making.

The concern about the educator’s oppressive act of depositing knowledge when considering curriculum and pedagogy is also critically observed by Jacques Ranciere (1991) who sharply critiques preoccupation of an enlightened educator’s endeavor to make a student of progress toward emancipation by the educator’s explication. His metaphor of “Ignorant School Master” alerts that educators’ act of explication is “myth of pedagogy, the parable of a world divided into knowing minds and ignorant ones” (p. 6). He points out that educator as a master of explicator causes students to “avoid the chance detours where minds still are incapable of distinguishing the essential from the accessory, the principle from the consequence, get lost… to disengage the simple elements of learning, and the reconcile their simplicity in principle with the factual simplicity that characterizes young and ignorant mind” (p.3). Its expectation is to elevate students’ knowledge to high as the society demands so that students’ knowledge appropriates and subordinates to the social demands and order, which consequently leads to as what Ranciere calls “stultification” ( ), which coincides with Freire’s (1970) term “narrative sickness” (p. 72)
This socially pervasive reasoning has been blindly occupied in U.S. educational system and justified the necessity of educators’ act of explication.

Aligned with both Freire’s (1970) and Ranciere’s (1991) critical insight, the emergent art curriculum refuses educator-directed explication that distances students from authentic learning as well as relation between the educators and students. The emergent art curriculum speaks that it is necessary to recognize this social circle and hierarchical order of intelligence and how the social order prevents us from being recognize for what it is. This recognition is necessary for a departure of emancipatory curriculum-making.

The emergent curriculum’s emancipatory goal highlights minoritized youth’ life experiences and views, on which recent youth researchers and educators paid great attentions. The desire-based approach—understanding of youth desire as essential part of the curriculum—goes beyond merely allowing youth to freely engage in process of learning including selection of content subjects. Most importantly, this approach values their affective responses to social reality they face. As Eve Tuck (2009) advise, it is important to acknowledge their experiences of tragedy, trauma, and pain as wisdom that repositions them with the knowing subject.

In the U.S. social and educational system, minoritized youth in poverty has been usually viewed as uneducated, primitive, promiscuous, or criminal. The representation of the youth in the deficit model greatly pathologizes both the youth and its communities. Being concerned about this enduring issue the youth face in the social reality, youth studies as an interdisciplinary field is in search for both realistic representation of the youth and an alternative framework to reposition the youth, moving away from the damaged-centered images (Bae-Dimitriadis, 2016; 2017). Youth’s authentic voice and action thus are central to the curriculum-making and their counter-
narratives to what dominant scripts of education imposes are the animating essence to make emergent curriculum forward.

**Sustainability through Mobile Archive**

The mobile sustainability archive project introduces a refugee youth-led site investigations of the U.S. environmentally damaged land where indigenous, black, and refugee communities have been displaced and dispossessed. It responds to recent social and environmental challenges facing climate change and polluted land, water, and air in this planet. The major attention of environmental agenda has been paid on recovery of the planet from human-generated damages, rather than prevention. Some environmental educators concern about the recovery-oriented approach that centers on problem-solving so that children and youth may feel powerless and withdraw from the issue. Their suggestion is to have an exploration with the natural world to evoke innate connection with the environment (Song, 2008). Rather than submitting to either recovery or preventive approach, I propose both as whole are necessary when approaching to environmental issue.

Critical reading about logics of environmental domination that undergirds the unjust and destructive social and economic ideologies and policies over indigenous, black, and refugee communities, is tremendously important to both recovery and prevention of environmental damages. Like other social unjust issues, environmental education and taskforce tend to be working for “majorities’ happiness” (Ahmed, 2010) in a democratic vision, disregarding particular complex circumstances that minoritized communities face to deal with. Experiencing and investigating the environmental violence in relation to Indigenous/Black/Refugee places have been undermined in critical art and media curriculum in particular, and the U.S. resettlement curriculum in general.
Therefore, significant to this mobile sustainability archive project is, first of all, to provide the (un)learning space to identify and document critical issues around privilege and environmental racial justice associated with the land. Particularly, minoritized poor neighbors including Native Indian reservation and Black and refugee ghettos have been targets for unwanted land uses such as waste disposal, gas pipeline installation, nuclear and military weapons testing facilities and resource extraction (Leonard, 1997; Hooks and Smith, 2004). Furthermore, climate change on food security and altering water flows that result in change of migration patterns and harvest time on various plants in local environment. Included is Ecosystem shift by government restrictions on hunting and access to tribal natural resources that result in complex spiritual and physical health problems of minoritized communities (Alkon and Norgaard, 2009; Lynn et al, 2013). Nevertheless, racial environmental violence on the minoritized community in poverty has not been unattended subject as if nothing happened in the places.

These environmental challenges above to deal with requires conceptual frameworks to address its struggle and educational directions and implications. Eco-critical studies suggest us to identify and analyze how social and environmental justice inextricably intertwined each other and are how social hierarchy has created value-hierarchized binary thought to justify valuing some lives over others (Lupinacci, Happel-Parkins, and Turner, 2018). In so doing, the eco-critical approach critically observes that anthropocentric\(^1\) worldview secures interlocking systems of Western domination. This view encourages us to recognize and confront the culturally constructed human-centeredness that governs both Western intellectual tradition and

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\(^1\) This term refers a human-centered belief system that privileges humans and functions to maintain the human-supremacy over non-human. Recently, philosophy, literature, art education adopts this concept responding to geological symptoms resulting from human activities and addressing ecological implication.
modernity. And its effort to reframe the environmental justice work has been made by focusing on the relationship of human with the non-human (human and earth) to find a remedy. While it seems somewhat more in sync with the broadly encompassing scope of *Indigenous* ways of knowing (Rich, 2012), it does not fully provide a proper conceptual framework to attend the urgent issue of racial environmental violence associated with the history of genocide, cultural erasure, and ongoing power inequities as life experience of the minoritized communities.

With awareness of this limitation, I take *Indigenous* way of knowing to seek mobile sustainability archive as a way of restoring “relationships between humans and the earth; between different peoples; between students and their communities; and within the individual, between the mind, the body, the heart, and the spirit” (Rich, 2011, p.136). The concept of healing in *Indigenous* cosmologies is not merely responding to environmental violence to strategically fix the issue that is often the mainstream responses to issues. Rather it is a collective restorative effort to make peace and balance within the community (Baskin, 2002). This concept of healing provides ways to see how Indigenous people view and connect to the natural world and other humans, not in isolation but in relation. Their life relation to earth (natural environment) as well as other humans refuse to be bound to a binary unequal power-driven frame, and the non-hierarchal thought as foundation of healing is believed to be also foundation of environmental sustainability through accountability. According to Indigenous way of life, the accountability is develop recognizable bodies which reflect their own culture and attitudes to land, water, and air and which refuse to subjugate the colonial dominance over environment. With this perspective, critical site investigation and reimagination of cultural system is a gesture of the mobile archive anticipating that a real change take place.
Secondly, the mobile sustainability archive is a counter-narrative of minoritized youth, particularly indigenous refugee youths in the project. It is significant to address the issue of sustainability in relation to land from their views, ideas, and actions that have been often disregarded. Youth’s use of media has been predominantly perceived as ‘uncritical’ habitual practice as well as youth has been perceived as their disinterest in social and political agenda. Some teacher education tends to use these assumptions to make a case to avoid these topics from art and media curriculum, diluting the meaning of being ‘critical’ in (art) education. Sustainability is real issues that minoritized youth encounters in their daily lives. This mobile archive challenges these assumptions and replaces dominant White European adult-centered, elitist perspectives with their own exploration, views, and narratives. This project would help to critically rethink of their relationship with the dislocated land and make a new relationship with it as new citizen.

Lastly, the mobile land archive in this project highlights mobile’s nomadic function—“seamless migrating computer environment that is moving along with the users” (Strauss, Fleischmann, & Zobelp, 2004, p.105). This function brings to new means of transporting and locates spatial proximity/distances into perspective by accelerating movement between locations. Thus, archive is no longer a static form of grand narratives in narratology but extends to recreate the narratives attached to the place as the experience of traveling by “using first-person point of view and by synchronizing the movement of the platform housing the audience with the movement of a virtual camera and sound recording, motion simulators” (Manovich, 2011, p. 246). In this disruptive “navigable space” (Manovich, 2011, p. 243), the mobile archive helps us to think the importance of shifting role of people who engage in the project and signifies the “gravity of place in the navigation” of paradoxical “copresence between virtual and actual,
online and offline, cerebral and haptic, delay and immediacy” (Hjorth, 2011, p. 440). This paradox of copresence in the place also envision the interruption and disruption of other minoritarian views in the White space to restructure the city as well as bring back the Indigenous/black/refugee people’s voices, body, land, environment, heritage, and sovereignty. The mobile land archive project of and with the refugee youth opens possibilities to both virtually and actually engage in social and environmental sustainability that has been considered to be White adults’ space, yet as a disruptive navigable space where transparency, non-linearity, continuum, spontaneity, mobility abound.

Overall, mobile stability archive highlights unattended lives of indigenous-refugee youth introducing alternative ways of mobile archives that are marked by minoritized youth’ participatory action and bodily movement to move the narrative of sustainability forward.

References


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