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Empowering a Generation:

Integrating Community-Based Arts Pedagogy in Los Angeles Public Schools

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Culture and Performance

by

Davida Persaud

2019

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Empowering a Generation:
Integrating Community-Based Arts Pedagogy in Los Angeles Public Schools

by

Davida Persaud

Master of Arts in Culture and Performance

University of California, Los Angeles, 2019

Professor David Gere, Chair

Los Angeles has been a locus for arts activism and community-based muralism since the 1960s and 1970s when minority and immigrant communities began to engage creative methodologies to advance movements for social change. My thesis examines a contemporary history of community-based muralism in Los Angeles and considers how this provides a framework for community-based arts pedagogy, which can be integrated into K-12 public schools to empower youth in their cultures, identities, and aspirations. I explore the connection between community-based muralism and community-based arts pedagogy by looking closely at the lineage and artistic methodologies of the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC) in Venice, CA. My thesis includes a historical analysis of community-based muralism and I discuss *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* mural that was conceptualized and developed by Judith Baca and SPARC in 1976. I also present a case study of *The Emancipation Project*, a K-12 arts education program developed by SPARC in 2013, to illustrate how SPARC engages methods and practices

from community-based muralism to develop a community-based arts pedagogy that aims to empower students. My thesis positions community-based arts pedagogy as a critical approach to education that not only builds connections between classroom and community, but also supports students and families in addressing critical issues within their neighborhoods.

The thesis of Davida Persaud is approved.

Charlene Villaseñor Black

Allen Fraleigh Roberts

David Gere, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2019

*My thesis is dedicated to the students and educators
who aspire to make the world a better place
and inspire me to be a part of that journey.*

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Introduction:

Empowering a Generation

On the last day of painting *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* mural in 1983, nineteen-year-old Kelly Watts reflected on her experience as an artist on this seminal public art project. “I’m not just a mural-maker,” she wrote. “I’m a history-maker.”¹ Thirty-four years later, twelve-year-old Cristina Solis participated in *The Emancipation Project: Liberating Children’s Dreams*, a portrait and mural program at her school in South Los Angeles. The artist statement that accompanies her identity portrait says, “I might have the chance to be the first female president, or first Latina president” (Figure 1).² Kelly’s and Cristina’s creative journeys are separated by time and place but they both emerged from public art projects with new understandings of their power to make and to achieve.

The Great Wall is the cornerstone artwork of the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC), a non-profit organization co-founded by muralist Judith F. Baca in 1976 on the premise that public art can be a site for social change. *The Emancipation Project* is an arts education program developed and implemented by SPARC that began in 2013 at an elementary school in South Los Angeles. In my thesis, I consider a lineage of community-based muralism at SPARC and examine how leaders and educators within the organization have leveraged its history to develop a community-based arts pedagogy for K-12 schools. The key contribution of my research is that while *The Emancipation Project* reshapes *The Great Wall* methodology by integrating new processes, it continues to embody an ethos of collaboration and social action, and to engage key principles in community-based muralism. *The Emancipation Project*, like *The*

¹ Kelly Watts. “The Great Wall of Los Angeles: Great Wall Testimonials,” Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC), March 19, 2019, <http://sparcinla.org/programs/the-great-wall-mural-los-angeles/>

² Transcription of Artist Statement, June 2017, SPARC Digital Database, Venice, California.

Great Wall, engages youth in a creative practice through which they can reflect, deconstruct, and reimagine the world around them. My thesis provides a case study of *The Emancipation Project* and illustrates how community-based muralism offers a practical framework for the development of a community-based arts pedagogy that empowers K-12 students in their cultures, identities, and aspirations. Empowerment is a critical concept that I will examine and define in this document. My thesis positions community-based arts pedagogy as an education practice that emerges from a history of arts activism in minority and immigrant communities in the U.S. and it presents *The Emancipation Project* as a key example of how the arts can support students and families in addressing critical issues within their neighborhoods.

In the 1960s and 1970s, community-based muralism transformed public spaces in minority neighborhoods into sites for expression and exchange where art, as Eva Cockcroft explains, became a symbolic action that implied further social action.³ My thesis advances the idea that a community-based arts pedagogy can transform classrooms into sites for democratic education, which is defined by bell hooks as schooling that is “always a part of our real world experience, and our real life.”⁴ The Los Angeles public school system is positioned within a social and political landscape in which income inequality is rising and “racial segregation in education is being reinscribed,” education policies emphasize “test score gains for those ‘at risk,’” and national policies and practices discriminate against minority and immigrant families.⁵ A community-based arts pedagogy can be a critical intervention in public education that connects to the experiences, concerns, and aspirations of students. Building on a legacy of

³ Daniel Widener, *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 137; and Eva Cockcroft, John Pitman Weber, and James Cockcroft, *Toward a People Art: The Contemporary Mural Movement*, 2nd. ed. (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 73.

⁴ bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 41.

⁵ Ibid., 67; and Greg Duncan and Richard Murnane, “Rising Inequality in Family Incomes and Children’s Education Outcomes,” *The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 2 (May 2016), 142-158; and Sharon Chappell and Melisa Cahnmann- Taylor, “No Child Left with Crayons: The Imperative of Arts-Based Education and Research with Language ‘Minority’ and Other Minoritized Communities,” *Review of Research in Education* 37 (2013), 245.



Figure 1: Cristina Solis (Pseudonym), Portrait from *The Emancipation Project*, 2017, Acrylic on Canvas, 24" x 36". SPARC Archive.

Artist Statement: My name is Cristina Solis (pseudonym). I am 12 years old and I want to be president because I will have the power to help more people out there. I can help stop war or less homeless or less separated families. I might have the chance to be the first female president or first Latina president. Being president will be hard because of the paperwork but I can help people as much as I can.

community-based muralism, the classroom can become a site for community, transformation and discourse, where the next generation of leaders can discover their voices.

In the first section of my thesis, I will identify connections between the methodology for *The Great Wall* from 1976-1983 and the pedagogy for *The Emancipation Project*. My discussion is positioned within the histories of arts activism and community-based muralism in Chicana/o and African-American communities in Los Angeles during the 1960s to 1980s. I will first discuss the social and physical transformations of Los Angeles in the 1950s, and examine how post-World-War-II politics influenced culture and activism in minority and immigrant communities into the 1960s through the 1980s. In this section, I will revisit *The Great Wall* methodology (1976-1983) and trace a lineage of community-based muralism at SPARC that leads to *The Emancipation Project* (2013-2017). The first section of my thesis will illustrate the historical significance of community-based muralism in Los Angeles and begin to examine the transition from practice to pedagogy through *The Great Wall* and *The Emancipation Project*. The second section of my thesis will define keywords that recur in my writing, including community, empowerment, and emancipation. The keywords section aims to articulate what I identify to be critical aspects of community-based arts pedagogy, and to develop a conceptual foundation for my case study on *The Emancipation Project*.

The final section of my thesis is a qualitative case study of *The Emancipation Project* that examines the SPARC arts education pedagogy and its relationship to an earlier history and practice of community-based muralism within the organization. I will discuss how SPARC developed and integrated a community-based arts pedagogy for 6th grade students at a Title 1 elementary school in South Los Angeles, where 98% of the student body identifies as Latina/o or

African-American.⁶ My analysis of *The Emancipation Project* will include a discussion about project implementation and outcomes. My primary methodologies for data collection were in-person observations of *The Emancipation Project* and document analyses of student writings and artworks from two semesters of the program (Spring 2017 and Fall 2017). My research is at the intersection of art and humanities, and education, and it aims to engage best practices in both disciplines. In accordance with practices in education research, I will use pseudonyms in lieu of the real names of students in my discussion with the intention of maintaining confidentiality. The student identity portraits that are included in my thesis are part of a public artwork at the school campus in South Los Angeles. My study of community-based arts pedagogy emerges from my position as both an arts professional and a researcher.

I began my professional relationship with SPARC in the Summer of 2012 as a Getty Multicultural Undergraduate Intern (MUI), and in 2016, I accepted a position as their Arts Education Coordinator. Through my work with SPARC, I have been fortunate to collaborate with students and educators across Los Angeles. In Spring 2017, I worked with SPARC Co-Founder/Artistic Director Judith Baca, SPARC Interim Executive Director Carlos Rogel, and SPARC Artist and Educator Myisha Arellano, to refine the teaching philosophy and program goals for *The Emancipation Project*. The discussions at SPARC bridged 40+ years of experience in community-based muralism with critical insights on public education and the immediate needs of students and educators in Los Angeles. SPARC has provided programs for youth in public art and muralism since its inception. *The Emancipation Project* had already been successfully integrated in the school site for three years at the time of the internal discussions on pedagogy that I refer to in my thesis. The pillars of teaching that currently frame *The Emancipation Project*

⁶ Title I is a funding status available to public schools where 40% or more of the student body are enrolled in the free or reduced lunch program, which is available to students from low-income households (<\$25,750 for Household of 4 People). 95% of students at the elementary school discussed in this paper are enrolled in the free or reduced lunch program.

emerged from an empirical understanding of artistic collaborations with public schools in Los Angeles. The case study on *The Emancipation Project* will illustrate how SPARC transformed a community-based arts practice into a pedagogical framework that supports students in learning about their own cultures, communities, identities and aspirations in the classroom. My thesis intends to contribute to critical conversations on public education in Los Angeles and to identify community-based arts pedagogy as a creative intervention that empowers students from communities that have been historically marginalized by systemic racism and income inequality.

An Introduction to SPARC and Key Projects

The Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC) has provided arts programs in communities across Los Angeles, and internationally, since 1976. SPARC was founded by muralist/UCLA Professor Emeritus Judith F. Baca, painter Christina Schlesinger, and filmmaker Donna Deitch. SPARC's mission is:

to produce, preserve, and promote activist and socially relevant artwork; to devise and innovate excellent art pieces through participatory processes; and ultimately, to foster artistic collaborations that empower communities who face marginalization or discrimination.⁷

Over the past 42 years, SPARC has continued to refine the methodology of *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* to produce socially engaged public artworks in collaboration with diverse communities. *The Great Wall* is a half-mile visual narrative that honors the histories and contributions of immigrant and minority communities in California, from prehistory to the 1950s. Baca envisioned *The Great Wall* in 1974, and through funding from Project HEAVY (Human Efforts At Vitalizing Youth), Baca and SPARC hired 90 youth from the juvenile justice

⁷ "About SPARC: Our Mission" Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC), March 19, 2019, <https://sparcinla.org/about-sparc/>

system to paint the first sections of the mural in the summer of 1976.⁸ SPARC employed over four hundred youth between 1976 and 1983, bringing young people from different neighborhoods and cultural backgrounds together to paint a collective past in the Tujunga Wash, a concreted channel of the Los Angeles River. Each week, artists and scholars led interdisciplinary workshops on the project. They began with critical reflections on historical narratives and embracing embodied knowledge, and progressed towards building applied skills in muralism and creating visual metaphors that connect moments across history.⁹ Testimonials by youth artists, including Kelly Watts, illustrate how the mural became a site of transformation, community, and cross-cultural discourse for participants. *The Great Wall* was also a site for learning, for sharing, and for self-determination. It is where Kelly became a history-maker, a voice for her community and for others whose stories have been silenced.

The Great Wall engaged and advanced methodologies for community-based muralism that emerged alongside national movements for liberation in Chicana/o and African-American communities.¹⁰ Collaboration between professionally trained artists, scholars, community members and youth contributed to “the birth of a wholly new art derived from the people themselves.”¹¹ *The Great Wall* methodology continues to provide a framework for collaboration at SPARC, resulting in public artworks and programs that lift the voices of community members and advance movements for justice and equity.

When *The Great Wall* was completed in 1983, Mayor Thomas Bradley asked Baca to replicate her methodology in neighborhoods across Los Angeles, addressing critical social issues

⁸ Carlos Rogel. “Decolonial Arts Pedagogy and the Visual Metaphor: The Great Wall of Los Angeles Mural Project.” Master’s Thesis, UCLA (2015), 21.

⁹ Carlos Rogel. “Decolonial Arts Pedagogy and the Visual Metaphor: The Great Wall of Los Angeles Mural Project.” Master’s Thesis, UCLA (2015), 84.

¹⁰ Eva Cockcroft, John Pitman Weber, and James Cockcroft, *Toward a People Art: The Contemporary Mural Movement*, 2nd. ed. (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 15; 59.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 64.

through collaborative processes and strengthening communities.¹² Baca and SPARC developed the Great Walls Unlimited: Neighborhood Pride Program (1988-2002) that employed over 95 muralists and hundreds of apprentices to create 105 public artworks in almost every minority community in Los Angeles. In 1996, SPARC established the Digital/Mural Lab (D/ML) with support from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and national foundations. The D/ML is the primary site for artistic production and community collaboration at SPARC. It is also an educational facility for students and artists-in-residence to learn new techniques in mural production and community engagement. The D/ML includes mobile tools for digital art production that enable SPARC artists to lead workshops in community spaces. Education has always been a critical part of SPARC programs, from training the next generation of muralists to engaging youth and community members in creating artworks that advance social movements.

The Great Wall and the Neighborhood Pride Program have been key resources for developing arts education curricula at SPARC that inspires innovation and integrates community-based arts practices into K-12 schools across Los Angeles. *The Emancipation Project: Liberating Children's Dreams* is a seven-week afterschool program at an elementary school in Los Angeles that leverages the power of the arts to help students learn about identity, culture, community, and social justice. Students from the 6th grade class work closely with SPARC artists and student-mentors from UCLA to digitally compose and hand-paint 24" x 36" identity portraits that represent their aspirations for the future. The identity portraits are permanently installed on the school campus each academic year, creating an ongoing mural that depicts the hopes and dreams of the next generation. There are now over 125 identity portraits wrapping around the school campus.

¹² Carlos Rogel, "SPARC: Igniting the Community-Based Mural Movement," in *Baca: Art, Collaboration and Mural Making* (Los Angeles: Angel City Press, 2017), 196.

Pedagogy for *The Emancipation Project* emerges from a history of community-based muralism and arts activism at SPARC. The workshop integrates interdisciplinary strategies to encourage introspection and reflection, and fosters meaningful dialogue about transformations students hope to see in their neighborhood, city, and world. *The Emancipation Project* is a practice in liberatory and democratic education through which students can lift their voices, express their concerns, their hopes, their dreams, and reimagine the world. Students have created portraits of themselves as professional skateboarders who build safe parks for the community, as performers who use their platforms to raise money for powerful movements like Black Lives Matters, and as protectors of undocumented families from separation. The dreams of students are liberated and unbound.

Students apply to participate in *The Emancipation Project* after school, and the program serves between twenty and thirty 6th grade students each academic year. In addition to *The Emancipation Project*, SPARC facilitates 10-week multidisciplinary arts workshops in vocal music, baile folklórico, poetry, printmaking, photography, and animation at the same elementary school, providing long-term arts instruction for K-6th grade students as a part of their core curriculum. SPARC develops arts education curricula based on the principles of community-based arts pedagogy that arise from a history of arts activism in minority and immigrant communities.

Part I:

Creative Resistance: A History of Community-Based Muralism in Los Angeles

U.S. contemporary history is infused with social, economic, and political tensions that continue to permeate social landscapes today. Metropolitan cities have been crucibles for

capitalism and racism to interact, creating systems that reproduce injustice and inequality.¹³ They have also been critical sites for resistance and counterhegemonic actions. The Civil Rights Movement is recognized as a defining moment in the struggle for Black Liberation, and as a nation, we continue to learn about systemic injustice and activism from this era. The Civil Rights Movement also inspired a “new cultural ambience” through which new possibilities for creative expression and action emerged across communities on a national scale.¹⁴ Eva Cockcroft, author of *Toward a People’s Art*, explains that there was a movement towards “communal modes of creation” within the arts of the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁵ The creative resistance emerging across communities in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s contributed to arts activism in Los Angeles. Community arts initiatives in Los Angeles during this era were also a response to post-World-War-II politics that transformed the geography and infrastructure of U.S. cities in the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁶

Art and Community in Postwar Los Angeles

Los Angeles was a key site for the defense industry during World War II, and a wave of westward migration occurred as people sought jobs and opportunities to advance socially and economically. During World War II, five million African-Americans left the South, and a vast majority came to Los Angeles.¹⁷ Postwar Los Angeles is inextricably linked to mass suburbanization, a migration of exclusively white families to suburban neighborhoods. Non-white communities, particularly African-Americans and Chicana/os, lived in under-resourced

¹³ Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” in *On Ideology* ed. 3 (London: Verso, 2008).

¹⁴ Eva Cockcroft, John Pitman Weber, and James Cockcroft, *Toward a People Art: The Contemporary Mural Movement*, 2nd. ed. (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 15.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁶ Eric Avila, “The Folklore of the Freeway: Space, Identity and Culture in Postwar Los Angeles,” in *Aztlán* 23: 1 (1998), 15; and Daniel Widener, *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 53.

¹⁷ Kellie Jones, *South of Pico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 4.

inner city neighborhoods, which was “the intended consequence of homeowners, realtors, developers, and government officials who sought to preserve Southern California’s legacy of building separate and unequal communities.”¹⁸ Freeways were constructed in the 1950s and 1960s, creating pathways to move wealth and capital out of downtown and into the suburbs. The freeways sharpened the contrast between white and nonwhite spaces in postwar Los Angeles, and exacerbated the division of the city along axes of race and class.¹⁹

Housing and real estate policies in postwar Los Angeles, and the militarization of police forces, deepened frustrations and tensions in black and brown communities.²⁰ The Watts Riots in August 1965 erupted after a violent altercation between California Highway Patrol officers and members of the Frye family. However, Watts residents were also responding to the discrimination and inequality African-Americans experienced in Los Angeles. Daniel Widener, author of *Black Arts West*, explains that, after the Watts Riots, a shift in black politics occurred “toward a working-class-led re-definition of the meaning of black freedom.”²¹ In the 1960s and 1970s, Watts became a locus for the Black Arts Movement and a key site for black expressive culture and community activism. Several notable African-American artists became leaders and advocates for community arts initiatives in Watts.

The noted sculptor Noah Purifoy was one of the founding directors of the Watts Towers Art Center (WTAC), and he worked to develop “practical programs that infused creativity with activism” for local youth and adults.²² For example, in April 1965, the WTAC and Student Committee for Improvement in Watts (SCFIW), organized Operation Teacup, a neighborhood

¹⁸ Eric Avila, “The Folklore of the Freeway: Space, Identity and Culture in Postwar Los Angeles,” in *Aztlán* 23: 1 (1998), 16.

¹⁹ Eric Avila, “The Folklore of the Freeway: Space, Identity and Culture in Postwar Los Angeles,” in *Aztlán* 23: 1 (1998), 16.

²⁰ Daniel Widener, *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 53.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 89.

²² Nathan Rosenberger, “Art in the Ashes: Class, Race, Urban Geography and Los Angeles’s Postwar Black Art Centers,” *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing* (2016), 93.

beautification project that brought over one-hundred local youth together for one week to repair neglected spaces, plant new trees, and paint a community mural.²³ Operation Teacup demonstrated a commitment to community and cultural development that emerged in arts organizations across minority neighborhoods in postwar Los Angeles, where programs began to encourage youth and adults “to identify personal liberation with community struggles.”²⁴ In *South of Pico*, Kellie Jones proposes that there was a similar ethos in the art-making processes of organizations in Watts, East Los Angeles, and Little Tokyo in the 1960s and 1970s, creating a linkage between liberation movements in African-American, Chicana/o, and Asian-American communities.²⁵ In postwar Los Angeles and across the United States, arts organizations in minority and immigrant neighborhoods developed community-based methodologies to empower residents in the fight for justice and equality.

The methodology for *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* mural is positioned within a history of creative resistance in postwar Los Angeles. Judith Baca was commissioned to paint *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* in 1974 as part of an effort by the Army Corps of Engineers to beautify the Los Angeles River, which was formed into a 51-mile network of concrete channels between 1938 and 1960. The vision for *The Great Wall* developed in response to a legacy of colonialism in Los Angeles where indigenous land was sculpted into infrastructures that disappeared histories and separated communities. In 1970s Los Angeles, muralism began to advance from affirming culture and identity to representing community concerns and advocating for resolutions in places where minorities and immigrants lived and worked.²⁶

²³ Nathan Rosenberger, “Art in the Ashes: Class, Race, Urban Geography and Los Angeles’s Postwar Black Art Centers,” *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing* (2016), 93.

²⁴ Don Adams and Arlene Goldbard, *Community, Culture and Globalization* (New York: Rockefeller Foundation, 2002), 8; and Eva Cockcroft, John Pitman Weber, and James Cockcroft, *Toward a People Art: The Contemporary Mural Movement*, 2nd. ed. (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 115.

²⁵ Kellie Jones, *South of Pico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 97-98.

²⁶ Judith F. Baca, “Birth of Movement” in *Community, Culture and Globalization* (New York: Rockefeller Foundation, 2002), 112.

The Tujunga Wash, the site of *The Great Wall*, is outside of the inner city neighborhoods of Los Angeles, and it became a neutral territory for young people from rival gangs to come together and to learn about intersections between histories and cultures.²⁷ The methodology for *The Great Wall* integrated interdisciplinary workshops and strategies for youth that encouraged cross-cultural discourse and understanding. Sergio Moreno painted on *The Great Wall* during the Summer of 1983 when he was sixteen years old. His reflection identifies a personal transformation at *The Great Wall*, a critical moment where he begins to see himself as a part of a larger community:

When I started working here, I did it for the money, then I began to take great pride in the mural and in the Chicano section in particular. At first, I didn't think an assortment of races could work together because in my neighborhood there is primarily one race. This project made me realize that the prejudices I had inside me were not only false but also ignorant. I only wish all mankind could have gone through this experience with me.²⁸

The Great Wall became a site for reflection, dialogue, learning, and community engagement between artists, scholars, residents and over four-hundred youth between 1976 and 1983. *The Great Wall* defined a new methodology within community-based muralism that continues to contribute to the philosophy and artistic practice of SPARC.

Methodology to Pedagogy: From The Great Wall to The Emancipation Project

The Great Wall incorporated a key pillar of community-based muralism in the 1960s and 1970s by bringing youth and local residents together “around common problems, discovering their common values, and developing their sense of solidarity.”²⁹ *The Great Wall* began to integrate the principals of community-based muralism into interdisciplinary workshops for

²⁷ Judith F. Baca, “Birth of Movement” in *Community, Culture and Globalization* (New York: Rockefeller Foundation, 2002), 116.

²⁸ Sergio Moreno. “The Great Wall of Los Angeles: Great Wall Testimonials,” Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC), March 19, 2019, <http://sparcinla.org/programs/the-great-wall-mural-los-angeles/>

²⁹ Eva Cockcroft, John Pitman Weber, and James Cockcroft, *Toward a People Art: The Contemporary Mural Movement*, 2nd. ed. (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 72.

youth, defining the site as a place to learn and create as a community. SPARC continues to advance community-based muralism in the Digital/Mural Lab (D/ML) at its headquarters in Venice, CA. SPARC artists develop and integrate new processes to strengthen community collaborations. The D/ML is also an interactive learning facility where Baca, who became a Professor Emeritus in 2018, continues to teach UCLA courses on muralism and community engagement for undergraduate and graduate students. The history and progression of community-based muralism at SPARC has been critical to developing a community-based arts pedagogy for *The Emancipation Project: Liberating Children's Dreams*.

The Emancipation Project is a 7-week afterschool portrait and mural program for 6th grade students at a Los Angeles elementary school where young artists work closely with UCLA student-mentors to digitally compose and paint identity portraits that envision their aspirations. Muralism at SPARC has always been a practice to strengthen the voices of diverse communities and advance movements for social justice through collaboration, dialogue, problem-solving, and action. The pedagogy for *The Emancipation Project* engages strategies from community-based muralism to create and implement arts curricula that affirm the identities and aspirations of students and build meaningful connections between students and their communities.

The Emancipation Project reshapes *The Great Wall* methodology to build a nuanced understanding of community that emerges from the real-world experiences of students, rather than through critical reflections of a multicultural history. *The Emancipation Project* is a praxis that combines strategies from a progressive history of community arts activism in Los Angeles with the principles of democratic education and a pedagogy for liberation.³⁰ The pedagogy for *The Emancipation Project* aligns with a transformative body of scholarship on education, including Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and bell hooks' *Teaching*

³⁰ bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (New York: Routledge, 2003); and Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972).

Community: A Pedagogy of Hope (2003). Artist and educator, Amalia Mesa-Bains, discusses the SPARC arts education initiatives that emerge in the D/ML, writing that “the continuous linkages between graduate students, community youth, and the digital lab establishes a model for moving young people forward in the future toward a goal of self-determination and community service.”³¹ The pedagogy for *The Emancipation Project* brings arts activism to public education. It empowers students to affirm their identities and experiences, and to envision the ways they can contribute to positive change within their communities. The pedagogy for *The Emancipation Project* is a critical intervention in public education because it challenges policies and practices that perpetuate inequity in the classroom.³² Community-based arts pedagogy continues a legacy of creative resistance in Los Angeles and intends to liberate the voices of the next generation.

Part II:

Keywords

My analysis of community-based muralism and *The Emancipation Project* engages several terms that are key to understanding the gravitas of community-based arts pedagogy and its potential to transform public education. This practice in defining key terms is inspired by Raymond Williams, Marxist thinker and author of *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976). Williams analyzes terms that are common in both scholarship and modern colloquialisms, including *culture* and *civilization*. In the spirit of Williams, I will present a brief analysis and definition of seven terms that will continue to reappear in my writing. The terms are

³¹ Amalia Mesa-Bains, “Art and Life: Judith F. Baca’s Legacy,” *Baca: Art, Collaboration & Mural Making* (Los Angeles: Angel City Press, 2017), 222.

³² bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (New York: Routledge, 2003); and Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” in *On Ideology* ed. 3 (London: Verso, 2008).

arranged alphabetically. This section intends to provide a foundation for a detailed discussion about *The Emancipation Project* in the final part of my thesis.

Community: In the most fundamental sense of the word, community means a group with shared characteristics, whether it is geographic or social. It is derived from the Latin term *communitatus*, which can be further broken into three root words: 1) *Com*, a prefix that means with or together, 2) *Munis*, which means the exchanges that link, and 3) *Tatus*, a suffix meaning small, intimate or local.³³ Community is distinct from society because it moves beyond the idea of commonality and toward the effect of exchanges between people. The boundaries that delineate a community are often changing based on new social, cultural, and political contexts. Just as individual identities are intersectional and continuously transforming, so are communities. My thesis discusses community as a locus for collective learning, exchange, support, and action. My work advances the notion that communities, particularly those that have been marginalized by social and political systems, have the power to reflect on their shared experiences and to build a collective vision that begins to address critical issues affecting them. The person-to-person exchanges that shape community are also moments of possibility that can strengthen community.

Community-Based Arts: The term “community-based” implies a phenomenon that emerges from within a community and represents the values and aspirations of that community. Community-based arts initiatives aim to engage community members in creative processes where they have influence over the final product and are able to contribute their own perspectives and narratives.

³³ Iannone, Don. “Roots of the Word ‘Community.’” *Conscious Communities Blog: Creating Places of Heightened Awareness and Expression*. 2007. <http://consciouscommunities.blogspot.com/2007/02/roots-of-word-community.html>

Jan Cohen Cruz, author of *Local Acts: Community-Based Performance in the United States*, suggests that community-based work is often personal or political. Cruz considers the exchange between community members and artists, and explains that “the desired relationship between community-based artists and participants [is] mutually nourishing.”³⁴ In this way, community-based arts initiatives are forums that foster dialogue and exchange, and create ways to represent the nuanced perspectives of a community to a wider audience. Community-based arts methodologies are often leveraged in arts activism and movements for social justice. For me, community-based arts initiatives are closely tied to larger concepts of empowerment and voice that I will also define in this section.

Creative Space: In my thesis, I discuss both community-based muralism and *The Emancipation Project* as creative spaces that empower communities. In the context of projects that occur within historically under-resourced communities, community-based arts initiatives become a physical site where people come together to engage in critical and creative work. It is a physical site that reminds students and residents that art and creative resources exist within their own community and within their own stories. In community-based muralism, it was a space for organizing and action. In community-based pedagogy, it is a space for students to begin engaging in the practice of critical reflection and begin learning about social justice within their own communities.

Dreams: *The Emancipation Project* engages the metaphor of liberating students’ dreams, which embodies notions of freedom, expression, and imagination. In this project, student dreams are the futures they envision for themselves. It is anchored by their individual hopes and aspirations, but

³⁴ Cohen-Cruz, Jan. *Local Acts: Community-Based Performance in the United States* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

it extends out to a larger vision of what they want to see within their neighborhoods, communities, and cities. The community-based pedagogy in *The Emancipation Project* builds a bridge between the individual and their community. The dreams of *The Emancipation Project* are a look towards a future where students are leaders and change-makers. It is a personal aspiration that connects to a collective and pluralistic vision.

Empower: The prefix *-em* means to put in place. The verb empower evokes the action that power is being put in place, or that power is emanating and emerging. There is a legacy of racial and economic inequality in the United States that continues to frame policies and institutions, and this works in service to a false narrative that there are people *with* power and people *without* power. For me, to empower is not to “give” power but rather to support communities who have been marginalized in developing and asserting their inherent power. In my analysis of community-based arts methodologies and pedagogy, I discuss the process of self-reflection and self-determination that participants experience. I believe that these are critical aspects of empowerment, and further, that power can emerge from within communities in resistance to the systems and structures that perpetuate racial and economic inequality. In the context of community-based arts pedagogy, to empower students is to support a generation of youth in finding pride in their cultures and identities and recognizing that they have the power to confront injustice and reimagine the world.

Voice: In my thesis, voice is connected to the notions of self-determination that I briefly mentioned in my definition of empowerment. I do not discuss voice as an utterance, but rather, an expression of agency. Community-based muralism emerged as a form of creative action in black and brown communities during liberation movements in the 1960s and 1970s. Many

community-based murals in the 1960s and 1970s were visual expressions of the concerns and hopes of communities. It was a public declaration that represented the voices of the community. My analysis of community-based arts pedagogy is deeply tied to the principles and conventions of community-based muralism. *The Emancipation Project*, standing on the pillars of community-based muralism, aims to support students in articulating their concerns and hopes and exercising their agency. In working class minority and immigrant communities, where local histories and aspirations are often overwhelmed and silenced by dominant narratives, voice becomes radical.

Part III:

The Emancipation Project: Pedagogy, Implementation, and Intervention

The Emancipation Project was first developed by Judith Baca for the Foster Kids Project (2006), an arts partnership between SPARC and the National Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Association. Eighteen-year-old youth approaching emancipation from the Los Angeles County Foster Kids Program shared their experiences of the foster care system and expressed themselves through painted self-portraits. To develop their artworks, participants first engaged in a workshop that asked youth *De Donde Vienes y A Donde Vas I* (Where do you come from, and where are you headed)? The participants took self-portrait photographs, which were then digitally posterized by Digital/Mural Lab (D/ML) staff, and printed onto 24" x 36" canvas prints to serve as an underpainting guide. Participants then used acrylics to paint their self-portraits while incorporating concepts and symbols from their earlier workshop. The finished artworks were exhibited, published in a book, and displayed as part of a citywide Foster Care Awareness campaign.

The current methodology for *The Emancipation Project* is adapted for 11 to 12 year old students completing their 6th grade year. The adaptation of the Emancipation Project is meant to meet the needs of students in South Los Angeles, engaging the metaphor of a liberation of student aspirations amidst an environment that withholds acknowledgement and achievement. *The Emancipation Project* began in 2013, and since then, has served five cohorts of graduating students from the elementary school. The first *Emancipation Project* at the elementary school was facilitated by Baca's *Beyond the Mexican Mural* course through SPARC's Digital/Mural Lab. UCLA undergraduates developed community-collaborative skills, and learned to create digital compositions in photoshop. In anticipation of the self-portrait workshop, Digital/Mural Lab staff upgraded the school site's computer lab and installed the necessary software. The workshop began with meditative and movement exercises meant to create a rapport between the university students and elementary youth, then transitioned into digital photography and the creation of compositions on who the student wanted to be as adults. University students carried out the digital composing while the elementary students watched and guided them.

In 2016, the SPARC team advanced the Emancipation Project workshop by developing a new curriculum that incorporated digital tablets and mobile imaging software. Baca and SPARC Interim Executive Director Carlos Rogel collaborated on training *Beyond the Mexican Mural* students with the new approach, and using tablets, the elementary students were able to directly assemble their compositions. University students took on a greater role as facilitators in support of the student ideas, and when needed, assisted the students to achieve certain effects. The artworks were then printed on canvas at the D/ML and painted by the elementary youth with Baca and the university students.

In Spring of 2017, the Emancipation Project advanced its conceptualization exercise to address the depiction of power, and self-serving imagery that had regularly emerged in previous

portraits. To address these concerns early in the program, Rogel and SPARC staff developed the Concentric Circles exercise as a way of shifting student thinking from success for oneself to creating change for the benefit of others. Using the metaphor, change as a ripple in a pond, participants began with a practice in reflecting on their relationship to familiar and not so familiar places. Rather than developing concepts on where they are from and where they are going, the students were asked to imagine local and global change, and describe how their transformations would address their concerns. Students write individual reflections that begin to outline creative responses to critical issues affecting their neighborhood, city, and world, while facilitators work with them to identify visual metaphors, symbols, and ideas that can become part of the participant's portrait. This refinement led to shifting the student's self-portraits towards being agents of social change in their community, while challenging them to posit solutions to these major concerns.

The concepts for student identity portraits emerge from their personal reflections and one-on-one conversations with SPARC artists and mentors. The identity portraits bridge aspiration and civic engagement, envisioning ways that students can achieve their dreams and effect change in their communities. In Spring 2017, Patricia King, for example, envisioned her future as a singer on a "Kids Lives Matter Tour," writing an appeal in her artist statement (Figure 2):

I would want to help the kids that are struggling, hurting, homeless, and in really terrible conditions. Kill the negativity, and let us all bring back the joy and happiness. Give kids something to live for instead of just living. Make people more positive, and then more kids will follow in their footsteps.³⁵

In her early reflections, Patricia discussed how gun violence impacts families and youth in her neighborhood, and how sometimes, children grow up without parents or a safe home. Patricia's

³⁵ Transcription of Artist Statement, June 2017, SPARC Digital Database, Venice, California.

identity portrait realizes her vision of being both a singer and an advocate for youth, connecting her dream to her ability to effect change. She worked closely with a SPARC artist and mentor to conceptualize her visual narrative before digitally rendering or hand painting her artwork. The concept for the “Kids Lives Matter Tour” establishes a linguistic connection between her passion for supporting youth in South Los Angeles to the national Black Lives Matter movement that has rightfully received widespread attention. Patricia curated her pose for her identity portrait and her mentor used an iPad to take a photograph of her to be integrated into the digital artwork. She holds a microphone in a raised fist, simultaneously communicating a message of success and solidarity, while she stands on stage during the “Kids Lives Matter Tour” with concert lights shining in the background. Patricia’s pose and rendering embodies not only her dream of becoming a singer but also her intention to use her platform to support youth in her community.

The Emancipation Project is premised on an understanding that real-world experiences shape the perspectives of youth and are integral to their personal and academic development. *The Emancipation Project* develops and integrates a community-based arts pedagogy in a Title 1 elementary school in a historically working class minority and immigrant community.³⁶ It achieves this by creating a bridge between the classroom and the communities students live in; it connects to the cultures, identities, and aspirations of students and aims to empower their voices. My interpretation of community-based arts pedagogy is shaped by my earlier analysis of arts activism in minority and immigrant neighborhoods during the 1960s and 1970s – an era where artists and organizations worked to transform community spaces into sites for creative expression and action. By examining programs like *The Emancipation Project*, we can see how community-based arts methodologies can be reinterpreted through the prisms of education and pedagogy to

³⁶ Title 1 is a funding status available to public schools where 40% or more of the student body are enrolled in the free or reduced lunch program, which is available to students from low-income households (<\$25,750 for Household of 4 People). 95% of students at the elementary school discussed in this paper are enrolled in the free or reduced lunch program.



Figure 2: Patricia King (Pseudonym), Portrait from *The Emancipation Project*, 2017, Acrylic on Canvas, 24" x 36". SPARC Archive.

empower minority and immigrant youth in K-12 schools today. This case study builds on an interdisciplinary body of scholarship to identify how community-based arts pedagogy advances public education in minority and immigrant neighborhoods for students and educators.

The Emancipation Project is a creative praxis that combines community-based arts methodologies with critical theories in education to empower the voices of students. When SPARC began to refine its K-12 teaching philosophy and program goals in Spring 2017, Baca and staff invoked the principles presented in Paulo Freire’s 1970 publication, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire argues that the narrative structure of education – where teachers are positioned as speakers, and students as listeners – is a method that “serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed.”³⁷ Freire proposes an alternative model for education where teachers and students are in “a permanent relationship of dialogue,” creating a space for students to recognize their consciousness and fight for their liberation.³⁸ One of the key pillars of *The Emancipation Project* is fostering meaningful, and ongoing, dialogue between students and mentors. The reflection on the first day of *The Emancipation Project* encourages students to embody a critical consciousness, or *conscientizacao*, where they identify social, political and economic contradictions and begin to envision transformation.³⁹ This practice in critical consciousness becomes the thread that weaves throughout *The Emancipation Project* and shapes dialogue between students and mentors. The pedagogy for liberation proposed by Freire is a core part of *The Emancipation Project*; the program builds on Freire’s pedagogy by integrating a visual arts practice that creates new possibilities for expression and transformation.

³⁷ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 73.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 69; 86.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

In its current methodology, *The Emancipation Project* brings the SPARC Digital/Mural Lab (D/ML) to the school campus, training students to use iPads and professional digital art software to create powerful artworks that transform reality and envision their aspirations. Students begin by creating digital compositions with iPads and Adobe Photoshop Mix to create a portrait of themselves achieving their dreams and contributing to their communities in critical ways. The software enables students to set their portraits against imaginative landscapes and to integrate imagery that tells their unique stories. In his early reflections, 6th grade student Michael Parras discussed environmental issues in Los Angeles, including litter and air pollution, and his desire to be a secret service agent running through cities to save the world. The conversation between Michael and his mentor progressed into a combination of his ideas, and he began to envision himself as an agent in the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) (Figure 3). Through digital composition, Michael created a portrait of himself set against blue skies and a dramatic mountain range, running to save the world as he wears a ranger hat on his head and holds an EPA walkie-talkie in his hand.

Michael curated a series of dynamic poses for his composition and his mentor took several photographs to be integrated into his digital artwork; he decided on one of the most active poses to illustrate his visual narrative. During digital composition, the conversation begins to focus on what elements in the background and foreground are key to communicating his vision. Michael used his iPad to research options for his background, from city streets to forests, eventually deciding on a mountain range to illustrate his intention to protect natural sites from environmental destruction. In the foreground, his pose and facial expression invoke an understanding that protecting the environment is a critical issue for Michael, and for many of his peers. Michael included the EPA logo on his outdoor attire to further illustrate his position as an



Figure 3: Michael Parras (Pseudonym), Portrait from *The Emancipation Project*, 2017, Acrylic on Canvas, 24" x 36". SPARC Archive.

Full Artist Statement: I want to be a EPA agent (Environmental Protection Agency). And I'll tell you why I want to be a EPA agent - because people litter too much and that pollutes the air worse. People drive cars and that creates gas smoke and trees do extra hard work to make us fresh air to breathe. If people keep littering grass and plants die. By being an EPA agent, I hope people around me would stop littering and they would learn a lesson about life.

EPA agent who is committed to saving and protecting the environment and preserving natural sites.

The digital art process becomes a conduit for students to translate their experiences and reflections into visions of hope. SPARC places the tools for artmaking into the hands of students where they become authors of their own stories. The digital compositions created by each student are printed on canvas as underpaintings in the D/ML and installed in the Multipurpose Room at the school campus where students mix and blend acrylic paints to bring their portraits to their full vibrancy. *The Emancipation Project* culminates with an on-campus exhibition for educators, parents, and peers to see the identity portraits and speak with the artists. The original, hand-painted identity portraits are permanently installed on the school campus by SPARC to create an ongoing mural that represents the aspirations of each class of graduating students.

The pedagogy for *The Emancipation Project* interfaces with several factors that shape public education in minority and immigrant neighborhoods in Los Angeles, including local geographies, national policies, and a broader history of public education within a capitalist economy. It combines a critical body of scholarship in education with a history of creative resistance, developing an arts program that aims to effectively navigate challenges in public education and to empower minority and immigrant students. My case study of *The Emancipation Project* examines community-based arts pedagogy within the context of public education in Los Angeles today. My analysis positions community-based arts pedagogy as a critical intervention in public education that begins to disrupt systems that perpetuate inequity in the classroom.

Community-Based Arts Pedagogy in The Emancipation Project

SPARC developed a detailed teaching philosophy and pedagogical framework with the intention of defining the key curricular goals and advancing the workshops to reflect and connect

with students' cultures, communities, identities, and experiences. The pedagogy emerges from Baca and SPARC's community-based methodologies in muralism, and engages with scholarship on democratic and liberatory education by both Freire and bell hooks. SPARC positions its pedagogy within the larger social and political climate, considering how capitalist frameworks contribute to students' understandings of power, success, and their selves. Developed in 2016 in anticipation of expanding the arts education program to schools across Los Angeles, SPARC identified six pillars in their teaching philosophy for *The Emancipation Project*:

1. **Connections:** Learning is connected to the life experiences of our students.
2. **Dreams:** Students' dreams are valuable, and possible.
3. **Stories:** Students can tell their own stories, and make their voices heard.
4. **Community:** The bonds of community are strengthened when students share/hear stories.
5. **Support:** Sharing stories reveals ways for people to support students' aspirations.
6. **Achievement:** When learning connects to the student, they become more engaged in school and recognize themselves as students who can achieve personal and academic success.

These pillars have been critical to developing a community-based arts pedagogy for *The Emancipation Project*. SPARC artists and UCLA student-mentors are trained in community-based pedagogy and best practices before working with students. During the course, students engage in critical readings and gain key insights about community-based muralism from Baca's extensive work as a muralist in California, and nationally. The course also introduces students to the SPARC teaching philosophy and program goals, and trains them on the full scope of work, from dialogue with students, to support digital composition and hand-painting.

SPARC identifies connections as a fundamental basis for community-based arts pedagogy. It emphasizes the need to build connections between curriculum and community, and

it advances the notion that learning is always connected to real-world experiences. A pedagogy that values connections to real-world experiences encourages students to explore their identities, cultures, histories, and aspirations through the subject matter. This is at the core of *The Emancipation Project*, and it frames the exercise in reflection on the first day of the program, generating concepts for the identity portraits and beginning a relationship of dialogue with students and mentors. A key part of *The Emancipation Project* is liberating children's dreams, which means encouraging students to imagine, create, and achieve. A discussion on dreams and aspirations can provide an opportunity to begin addressing the ideologies of power that Althusser identifies as key to the reproduction of capitalism and exploitation. SPARC artists and mentors engage in conversations with students about their aspirations where they pose questions that encourage students to expand their definitions of success. Collectively, students and mentors begin to transform the narrative of success from acquiring wealth to creating a positive impact within their communities and for the people around them.

The identity portraits in *The Emancipation Project* are visual narratives that tell the stories of students' identities, concerns, hopes, and dreams. For SPARC, community-based arts pedagogy supports students in looking critically at the world around them and amplifying their voices as they imagine social change. *The Emancipation Project* encourages students to affirm their identities, but it also creates a space for students to share their stories, and listen to the stories of their peers. SPARC explains this as "transforming the conversation from *yo soy* (I am) to *nosotros somos* (we are)."⁴⁰ The moment of sharing stories through artworks and dialogue strengthens the bonds of community in the room, and reinforces the fact that we are not alone in lived experiences. The identity portraits become a tool to help students discover, build, and strengthen their community and their relationships within the classroom.

⁴⁰ "SPARC Teaching Philosophy," SPARC Archive, 2016.

The SPARC teaching philosophy establishes a link between the goals of building community and supporting students. The identity portraits illuminate the stories of students for educators on campus; this is a powerful experience for classroom teachers and administrators who learn something new about their students during *The Emancipation Project*. In a landscape of standardized curriculum and testing, the connections to student experience and community are too often absent in the classroom. For many teachers, the identity portraits in *The Emancipation Project* provide a deeper sense of a challenge a student may be facing or a passion a student may have. This builds a sense of community between students and educators, but it also provides educators with a new perspective on how they can support their students and help them to achieve their dreams. This extends to the families of students, many of whom learn about the dreams of their students for the first time as they walk through the exhibition of identity portraits. It begins a conversation that can lead to further action.

SPARC believes that a community-based arts pedagogy is key to student development and achievement. This is premised on a belief that when students begin to value themselves, their experiences, and their stories, it builds self-esteem and encourages students to believe that they can achieve their dreams. When dreams become achievable, and real, it empowers students to take control of their futures. Community-based arts pedagogy recognizes that “the arts and social imagination are intertwined,” and it aims to inspire students to look at their own narratives and voices as a part of their education.⁴¹ To position students and their communities at the center of their education is a radical action that engages the pedagogy of liberation proposed by Paulo Freire. It also begins to challenge the capitalist structures of ideology and power that Louis Althusser identifies within educational institutions.

⁴¹ Sharon Chappell and Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor, “No Child Left with Crayons: The Imperative of Arts-Based Education and Research with Language ‘Minority’ and Other Minoritized Communities,” *Review of Research in Education* 37 (2013), 247.

Project Infrastructure and Implementation

In *The Emancipation Project*, SPARC worked closely with school administrators – namely the Principal and Assistant Principal – to select students for the program, and to give SPARC administrators and facilitators a deeper understanding of participating students. For example, we learned about a student’s experience with homelessness and how the family of their closest friend at school provided support and shelter to the student and their family. These two students were both part of the Special Education program on campus. Conversations with school administrators prepared SPARC artists and educators to meet their learning needs and to be respectful and supportive of the personal experiences they carry and share with each other. The support of administrators also comes in the form of their observations and comments during the program. Conversations with educators and administrators on campus have been key to developing a mutual understanding of the nuance and value of *The Emancipation Project* for students. Administrators often walk through the Multipurpose Room as students are painting their portraits, and express how surprised they are to learn that this student wants to be a doctor, or how impressed that a typically shy student would do such a dynamic pose for their portrait, or how another portrait clearly illustrates a student’s passion. It is in this exchange that SPARC learns more about the goals of administrators and what they would like to learn about their students. Moreover, administrators begin to see their students and their hopes in new ways.

The Emancipation Project requires at least eight facilitators, all paid, in order to maintain a manageable and personable student-to-mentor ratio (approximately 4:1). When Baca is teaching her UCLA course, *Beyond the Mexican Mural*, in the Digital/Mural Lab (D/ML), she introduces undergraduate and graduate students to community-based muralism in preparation of their fieldwork experience. When UCLA student-mentors participate in the program, the student-to-mentor ratio at the school site moves closer to 1:1. In Spring 2017, SPARC hired educators to

facilitate *The Emancipation Project* for 27 6th grade students under the direction of SPARC Interim Executive Director Carlos Rogel. In Fall 2017, Baca's *Beyond the Mexican Mural* course was offered in the D/ML and approximately 30 student-mentors joined SPARC staff at the school site for *The Emancipation Project* once a week for seven weeks. Mentorship is a critical component of *The Emancipation Project* and SPARC supports educators and student-mentors in fostering respectful and meaningful relationships with mentees. Mentors are often from Los Angeles and come with lived experiences similar to that of the mentees, including being from working class families, being from a minority group, being a first generation student in higher education, or even being undocumented. Mentors support students not only in creating an identity portrait, but also building skillsets in conceptualization and problem-solving and ultimately, recognizing themselves as agents of change within their communities.

From Start to Finish: The Arc of The Emancipation Project

The first day of *The Emancipation Project* sets the foundation for students to conceptualize, compose, and hand paint visual artworks that represent their aspirations. The program meets once a week for seven weeks and each session is three hours long. The first day is a moment of coming together, learning about each other, and opening the door for deeper, sometimes difficult, reflections and conversations. The Concentric Circles exercise supports students in their reflection, and in building out their ideas. The exercise emerges out of the pedagogical framework for the organization. It is grounded in both individual identity and communal identity, in the stories that students share and the connections that emerge within the classroom. The Concentric Circles exercise guides students through personal reflection, from micro to macro.

The questions center on notions of transformation, change and progress. What would you transform about yourself, your family, your neighborhood, your city, your world? Each category is a circle, beginning with the innermost, the self, and rippling outwards, building towards the largest ring, the world. Students sit with SPARC educators or student-mentors as they reflect on each circle and write their response. The role of the educator and mentor is to help students understand the question and to deepen the conversation as students begin to articulate their answers. It is not to help students write or restructure their initial responses. Students write about their hopes to be better students, to make more friends, to be better at soccer. They write about their hopes for their families, to have a robot that would do household chores, to have a bigger home for their family, to change their parents' immigration status to protect them from the threat of deportation, and much more. When considering their neighborhoods, students write about wanting safe spaces to play basketball, putting an end to drive-by shootings, helping to pick-up litter, and having more trees and green spaces. When it comes to their city and their world, students write about helping the ocean, addressing damaging policies that are emerging from the Trump Administration, and helping immigrant families.

After the Concentric Circles exercise, the lead facilitator, educators and student-mentors would guide students through identifying two ideas that resonate the most with them. It could be about the transformation they hope to see in themselves and their city, or their family and their neighborhood, or any combination that feels right for them even if the ideas seem to be unrelated to each other. The conversation then shifts to their own goals in life, what they want to be and how they can use their platform to enact the change or transformation they want to see. The Concentric Circles begin to be a map of their hopes, and the students begin to understand that their dreams for themselves and their ambitions are not separate from the change they want to see in the world around them. The conversation begins to connect the individual to the

community, to build a bridge between ideas that seem to be unrelated, for example, how an actress could use their platform to advocate for the well-being of youth, or how a basketball player could contribute to building parks in the neighborhood. The first day of *The Emancipation Project* is the day students begin to conceptualize their identity portrait – a self-portrait that visualizes who they are today, and who they imagine themselves to be in the future, and the changes they will achieve in the future.

The following week – Day 2 of *The Emancipation Project* – students bring objects from home or wear uniforms or outfits that they want to be a part of their narrative, and begin to digitally compose their identity portrait. Students and mentors could work together to take a curated photograph of the student holding a pose that would help to communicate the story they want to tell. Using Adobe Photoshop Mix, a free composition software that students and parents are able to download on their own devices, students can integrate the backgrounds and objects that would articulate their visions. In the Concentric Circles exercise, one student said that she would transform her family life in a way that would protect her parents from deportation under the Trump administration. She began to conceptualize a digital composition where she is an officer working to protect the rights and freedoms of people in her community. She worked with her mentor to take a photograph with her arms folded in front of her, invoking a sense of determination. She integrated the photograph into the software and positioned herself in front of a police car where she is standing, arms folded, in a police uniform. A bold sign with red letters saying “We can Stop Donald Trump” is positioned to her left.

When the digital compositions are complete, SPARC prints 24” x 36” underpaintings on canvas for each student to work on. The underpaintings are lightened versions of the digital artwork composed by each student that they would paint over with acrylics, learning to mix and blend colors. Students worked on their painting for the rest of the program, weeks 6-7. During

the final week, students write their artist statements, which are installed alongside their artwork that a culminating exhibition for parents and the school community.

SPARC transforms the multipurpose room into an art gallery, featuring student work from the multidisciplinary arts workshops SPARC facilitated for K-6th grade students at the campus, as well as *The Emancipation Project*. Students stand by their artworks as parents, peers, administrators and teachers walked around to see the work and talk to the young artists. Many of the parents take an hour off of work to see their student's art in an on-campus gallery. And, for many of the parents, this is their first experience in a gallery space and their first time seeing their students in a fine-art exhibition.

The culmination event was, and is, one of the most profound and moving parts of *The Emancipation Project*. It is the when parents, teachers, administrators – the adults in these students lives – begin to see their students' dreams represented – their concerns and hopes. Parents were moved by their student's work – they took photos of their students and their siblings by their artworks, the spoke to SPARC artist and mentors about downloading the software for their students to keep on creating. It is the culmination, but also a beginning for the adults in the room in a sense – a way of seeing their students, the next generation of leaders and change-makers.

The Emancipation Project as a Critical Intervention in Public Education

Analyzing *The Emancipation Project* within the context of community-based arts pedagogy will deepen discussions on how this model for arts education can intervene in public education, and challenge policies and practices that quiet the voices and experiences of students. Policies that affect public education in the United States have historically been shaped by a capitalist framework that perpetuates systems of oppression and inequity. In his essay, "Ideology

and Ideological State Apparatuses,” Louis Althusser argues that the conditions of production in a capitalist society – including labor and market forces – must be reproduced in order for capitalism to continue reinventing itself. Althusser suggests that education is an apparatus within a capitalist economy that reproduces “capitalist relations of exploitation.”⁴² One of Althusser’s key arguments is that educational institutions perpetuate dominant ideologies that align with the interests of the State and a capitalist economy; he argues that schools ultimately prepare students to enter the work force where they become agents or subjects of exploitation. Similarly, Freire identifies a troubling relationship between education and ideology, stating that:

Education as the exercise of domination stimulates the credulity of students, with the ideological intent (often not perceived by educators) of indoctrinating them to adapt to the world of oppression.⁴³

Althusser and Freire published their works in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and public education has transformed and progressed in many ways since then. However, the structures of ideology and power that Althusser and Freire identify continue to frame public education today. Students and teachers are impacted by national and local policies that emphasize standardized curriculum and test scores; this, alongside “budget cuts to education programming considered not core,” functions to reinforce the educational structures that Althusser and Freire link to a culture of exploitation and oppression within a capitalist society.⁴⁴ *The Emancipation Project* is not an initiative to reform public education, but rather, it is an arts pedagogy for K-12 schools that intervenes in public education and creates a space for students to exercise their creative power. In that sense, *The Emancipation Project* is a direct response to the concerns articulated by Althusser more than 40 years ago.

⁴² Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” in *On Ideology* ed. 3 (London: Verso, 2008), 29.

⁴³ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 78.

⁴⁴ Sharon Chappell and Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor, “No Child Left with Crayons: The Imperative of Arts-Based Education and Research with Language ‘Minority’ and Other Minoritized Communities,” *Review of Research in Education* 37 (2013), 245.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into United States federal law in 2015, giving states more control over curricular standards and accountability, and paving the way for Common Core State Standards in reading, math, and science. Common Core State Standards is a practice in decentralizing education policy, and enabling states to integrate curriculum that meets the needs of their student populations. The State of California has also adopted Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) standards to encourage arts integration in K-12 classrooms. However, the ESSA continues to use test scores in reading, math, and English-language as a key measure of student success. This contributes to a standardized curriculum that positions core subjects at the center of the classroom, and pushes “non-core” subjects and programs to the periphery where they are at risk of budget cuts. Many schools in minority and immigrant communities do not have the budgets to sustain arts programs on their school campus, and this is due in part to the fact that local funding for public schools is generated through property taxes and parents in wealthy neighborhoods can often afford to contribute additional funds towards resources. Limited access to the arts has the greatest impact on minority and immigrant youth, “who tend to be hypersegregated in schools with more limited budgets, less culturally and linguistically responsive practices, and highly controlled curriculum based on discrete skill development.”⁴⁵ In Los Angeles, the discrepancy in funding for the arts reflects the geographic divide of the city along the axes of race and class.

Funding for arts education in Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) decreased by 76% in five years after the economic recession in 2008, from a high of \$78.6 million to \$18.6 million.⁴⁶ This has contributed to a widening gap in arts resources between affluent and working

⁴⁵ Sharon Chappell and Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor, “No Child Left with Crayons: The Imperative of Arts-Based Education and Research with Language ‘Minority’ and Other Minoritized Communities,” *Review of Research in Education* 37 (2013), 245.

⁴⁶ T. Abdollah. “LAUSD arts funding cut 76% in five years,” Southern California Public Radio, KPCC, 2012; Vanessa Romo, “Rory Pullens confronts challenges of art, money and LAUSD,” LA School Report, 2014.

class neighborhoods in Los Angeles. In 2015, the LAUSD Arts Branch conducted the first Arts Equity Index (AEI), which measured student access to the arts based on twelve factors, including income levels, bilingual education, and professional development programs for teachers to integrate the arts into their classrooms. The AEI ranked schools on a 1 to 4 scale, where 1 means students are “grossly underserved” in the arts and 4 means that students receive “strong” arts instruction. Out of the 639 K-12 LAUSD schools that participated in the 2015 AEI survey, only 18 schools received a ranking of 4 or “strong” in arts instruction.⁴⁷ The LAUSD Arts Branch, under the leadership of Rory Pullens (2014-2018), has implemented new programs and strategies to support arts equity in K-12 schools. In 2016, the LAUSD Arts Branch established the Arts Community Network (ACN), which provides funding for local arts organizations to integrate arts programs at select LAUSD schools with a ranking of 0-2 on the AEI; *The Emancipation Project* was funded through the ACN from 2016-2018. The LAUSD Arts Branch has taken measures to address the issue of arts equity in public schools. I believe that educators and advocates in Los Angeles are well positioned to advance the conversation from access to the arts, to sustainability and efficacy in arts education.

Arts education is one methodology to begin addressing the limitations of the public education system and supporting the personal and academic growth of K-12 students. Art can engage students in activism and advocacy. Arts education can help students recognize and celebrate their identities, cultures, neighborhoods, and to see themselves as agents of change that can help to shape their communities. Community-based arts pedagogy that builds on the activist arts movements of the 1960s and 1970s can transform the classroom and empower youth in

⁴⁷ Vanessa Romo, “LA Unified’s new Arts Equity Index find ‘art poverty’ in district,” LA School Report, 2015; and “Arts Education Branch: Arts Equity Index (AEI),” Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), April 10, 2019, <https://achieve.lausd.net/Page/13380>

similar ways to how *The Great Wall* or Operation Teacup brought neighborhoods together to tell their stories and to envision change.

Minority and immigrant communities continue to experience systemic challenges and it is important to acknowledge the current social and political climate that has emboldened anti-immigrant policies under the Trump Administration. National discourse on immigration is laced with xenophobic language and metaphors that aim to instill fear of immigrants and worse, to support policies that separate families and strip human rights. And, minority and working-class communities continue to live in life-threatening conditions, often with limited access to healthcare or clean water or employment opportunities. This is the social and political climate that surrounds youth and schools. These are the moments that define a generation, and these are experiences students witness on television, through social media, as they listen to parents, guardians, older siblings talk, and through lived experiences. Just as community-based muralism empowered residents to articulate pressing issues and imagine new modes of celebrating identity and achieving change, students in Los Angeles today can become civically engaged and empowered in their selves.

Places of learning must connect to the experiences students are having outside of the classroom. It would be a disservice to not fully meet students' needs, but they must also support them in discovering their voices. Critical thinking should be engaged not only within the framework of curricular standards, but also, to look reflexively and reflectively at their own stories and experiences of the world around them. *The Emancipation Project* aims to achieve this, and to advance a community-engaged methodology by using technology found through the Digital/Mural Lab (D/ML) to support youth in authoring their own artworks, and contributing to a collaborative mural that grows each year.

Student and Educator Outcomes

Community-Based Arts Pedagogy

The Emancipation Project is a model for community-based arts pedagogy in K-12 education, and it presents a powerful framework that can be applied to new social, political and geographic contexts. *The Emancipation Project* emerges out of arts activism in Los Angeles, and it strives to connect to the history and contemporary experiences of the specific community it will be integrated into. Further, *The Emancipation Project* is a simultaneous looking backward and forward within a community context; it encourages students to consider local and global histories as well as the aspirations of residents who make up the community today. The relationship between past, present and future within *The Emancipation Project* can be understood as a form of collective remembering, which James Wertsch discusses as an act of narrating events from the past with the intention of understanding an event in the present. In *The Emancipation Project*, students engage with the past not only to make sense of the present, but also to imagine the future.⁴⁸ The relationship between memory and aspiration within *The Emancipation Project* is a unique intervention in community-based pedagogy that deepens the significance of place and locality within the program.

The Emancipation Project contributes to community-based scholarship in two key ways: 1) shaping it into a pedagogical framework for 21st century public schools, and 2) creating a space to not only reflect on the past and present, but also to envision a future and imagine transformation. The pedagogy emerges from revisiting and refining earlier methods and practices and defining new ways to support communities through art. For SPARC, the *Great Wall* methodology defined a public practice that continues to serve as a model for community

⁴⁸ Catherine Compton-Lilly and Erica Halverson. *Time and Space in Literacy Research* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

muralism in Los Angeles. *The Great Wall* is a part of the legacy of community-based muralism in the 1960s and 1970s. SPARC has continued to develop this methodology in the Digital/Mural Lab (D/ML) to serve new audiences across California. The arts education pedagogy emerges from SPARC's 42-year history of community-based public art. In the context of Los Angeles, it is valuable for pedagogues and leaders in education to revisit the impact of postwar politics in the city and social movements on the 1960s and 1970s; these histories continue to shape the city and to remember the resilience of its minority and immigrant communities. Arts education programs in Los Angeles would benefit from studying the history of community-based organizations in the city and considering how their methodologies can be adapted to empower youth today. This multiplanar look at past, present, and future can be applied in different social, political, and geographic contexts. A community-based arts pedagogy honors the past, present and future of a community and supports students in embracing their cultures, identities, and their ability to effect change.

Active Learning and Procedural Thinking

The pedagogy of *The Emancipation Project* aims to support students in reflecting on the aspects that distinguish their identities, and imagining ways they can address the social issues that are most concerning to them. It positions the students' voices and experiences at the center, and from there, supports them in building creative and critical thinking skills that can be applied across domains. This approach emerges in part from Paulo Freire's problem-posing model for education which is premised on an understanding that people who face inequity and injustice can and must identify the issues they face and the structure that allows for these injustices to continue. Freire's problem-posing model is a response to the banking model of education where students become repositories for information and are filled with the ideologies

of the school system.⁴⁹ Freire's argument is a critique of how education has been shaped within a capitalism infrastructure. Both Freire and Althusser suggest that the dynamics of power between the bourgeoisie and working class exist within the classroom and often influence pedagogy and curriculum. *The Emancipation Project* engages Freire's problem-posing model for education by fostering the agency of each student and creating a platform for individual and collective expression. *The Emancipation Project* pedagogy also aligns with bell hooks' notion of critical hope. hooks believed that each student brings their experiences to the classroom with them and this fundamentally impacts their academic and personal growth. A pedagogy of hope, for hooks, is one that engages in the difficult work of understanding the cultural, social, racial, and economic experiences of students, and creating a space where that becomes a part of the learning experience.

The pedagogical frameworks that shape *The Emancipation Project* must be understood through the prisms of public art and public practice that SPARC has continued to refine over the past 42 years, beginning with *The Great Wall*. *The Great Wall's* methodology fostered massive collaboration, and it continues to be a model for community engagement and cultural development. *The Great Wall* engaged a problem-posing pedagogy in a visual arts practice that was largely conceptualized by Baca and her team as the mural progressed. *The Great Wall* is a unique example of Freire's pedagogy; it engaged strategies, including visual metaphors, to help participants identify critical historical events that connect with their own experience.⁵⁰

The pedagogy of *The Emancipation Project* disrupts standardized models for education in the classroom, and creates a space for dialogue, personal reflection, imagination and innovation. It is a space where students can begin looking at their selves and their communities through their

⁴⁹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972).

⁵⁰ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) and; Carlos Rogel. "Decolonial Arts Pedagogy and the Visual Metaphor: The Great Wall of Los Angeles Mural Project." Master's Thesis, UCLA (2015).

own memories and embodied knowledge. It is an active learning space, defined by Charles Bonwell and James Eison as “anything that involves students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing.”⁵¹ The practice of reflection in *The Emancipation Project* encourages metacognition within students where they are critically examining their visual artwork and determining the next steps to illustrate their stories. This is also tied to notions of procedural thinking where students develop an original concept from ideation to visual artwork.

A student affected by homelessness imagined their self as a mechanic in the future, a business owner who provides free food and family fun nights on Fridays for the local community. Their best friend became a toymaker, using social media to teach others how to create their own toys – this emerged out of a conversation about loving games and toys but not necessarily being able to buy them, so why not make them? Another student who wrote that he wants to be the next Kendrick Lamar creates a portrait that celebrates his Mexican heritage and articulates how, similar to Kendrick, he can use rap to talk about where he comes from, his neighborhood and the experiences that bind his community together. Each student combines the ideas they began to articulate on the Concentric Circles exercise, creating original and personal concepts for composition and painting.

With the support of their mentors and workshop facilitators, students go through the process of reflecting on the world around them, articulating the transformations they want to see, as well as their personal hopes and dreams, and conceptualize identity portraits that capture who they are and who they aspire to be. This disrupts the banking model of education that continues to be the dominant form of education in many classrooms due to core standards and a heavy emphasis on standardized testing. It provides students with a skill-set that they can apply in their day-to-day lives, a way of seeing themselves as creative thinkers and artists and change-makers.

⁵¹ Charles C. Bonwell and James A. Eison. *Active Learning: Creating Excitement in the Classroom*. (Washington, DC: George Washington University School of Education and Human Development, 1991).

Transformation and Empowerment

The Emancipation Project is grounded in exploring change and transformation and empowering youth. The notion of “change” can be thought of in two ways, each articulating a unique outcome of *The Emancipation Project* for students. The first articulation of change is the reconceptualizing – or the deepening – of certain ideologies that students have grown up with. One of the central questions that students grapple with in *The Emancipation Project* is how they see themselves in the future. The idea of “success” becomes a critical point. One of the intended outcomes of *The Emancipation Project* is to support students in reexamining and expanding their idea of success. For many of us, success is tied to financial wellness and even further by owning the best homes and cars. It is tied to an “American Dream” of the 21st century, largely influenced by the media around us. To “make it,” for many people growing up in a capitalist society with a growing gap between the rich and poor, is to be on the rich side of that equation. It is too easy – and an immense disservice – to disregard when students initial ideas of what they want is grounded in material wealth. Material wealth is precisely what capitalism in America is built on and it is perpetuated by a visual symbol of success.

The transformation in the classroom does not disregard the perspectives of students nor does it critique students’ thoughts on what it means to be successful in America, or what they want in the future. Rather, SPARC artists and mentors are trained to deepen the conversation with students, and to encourage them to think of how they can leverage their positions in the future to address the transformations they wrote about in the Concentric Circles exercise. It is in these conversations that the notion of success begins to transform and grow from “having what I want” to “creating the change I want to see.” Contributing to their community and advancing social progress becomes a part of their understanding of success.

This connects to the second understanding of change/transformation *The Emancipation Project* aspires to – that is, the transformation students see of themselves, from students with hopes and dreams, to future leaders and change-makers. *The Emancipation Project* aims to liberate children’s dreams and further, to make sure that students know that their dreams are achievable. The student visualizes that version of themselves and the change they want to see. The resulting artwork lives on the wall of their campus, a reminder of their dream and a mark to measure themselves against later on. Each student also receives a fine-art print of their work to take home, a keepsake of their experience and their hopes.

Network of Support

During discussions on pedagogy at SPARC, staff members began to consider how facilitators can better support the growth of students, and what students and the school community can gain from this program. SPARC began to consider program outcomes based on three previous years of experience in *The Emancipation Project*. Educator Myisha Arellano, brought up the fact that each year, teachers, administrators and parents tell us that they learned something new about their student. Oftentimes, the adults in the room did not know what the students imagine themselves doing in the future. The identity portraits become a narrative, telling that student’s story and dreams and ambitions. For many of the students, this is their first time going through the procedural thinking process about their own experiences and dreams, and creating a portrait of their identity and visions of their future.

This creates an opportunity for the adults in the room to learn about each students’ goals and how to help them achieve those goals. It is the beginning of building a network of support for each student – not necessarily geared towards achieving the future visualized in the identity portrait but rather, towards keeping the communication open and the reflection and aspiration

growing for each student. The identity portrait is a story and it is that communication that teaches administrators, teachers, and parents more about that student. And hopefully, the identity portrait can serve as a reference point for the students and the adults in their lives, opening or deepening a line of communication about the student's perspective and future, creating new pathways for adults to support their students.

Conclusion

Public sectors in the U.S. have progressed in notable ways since the Civil Rights Era of the 1950s and 1960s including legislation that prohibits discrimination on the basis of race and gender in the workplace (i.e. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, 1964), advances in housing policies for communities of color (i.e. Fair Housing Act, 1968), and the legalization of same-sex marriage in all fifty states through federal law (i.e. *Obergefell v. Hodges* Supreme Court Case, 2015). However, our systems and institutions continue to be framed by the history and contemporary iterations of racism and capitalism. Across the nation, working class minority and immigrant communities continue to face challenges in affordable housing, job security, public education and more.⁵² Public schools in minority and immigrant communities have been historically under-resourced; Title 1 funding and monies for Targeted Student Populations (TSP) help schools to meet the needs of their students but it has not been enough to integrate strong social development programs that empower students and families. *The Emancipation Project* advances K-12 arts education and moves the conversation forward from *access to the arts* to *art as a modality for empowerment*. Community-based arts pedagogy intends to recognize the key

⁵² Greg Duncan and Richard Murnane, "Rising Inequality in Family Incomes and Children's Education Outcomes," *The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 2 (May 2016), 142-158.

social and political issues affecting students and their families and to support students as they begin to articulate their lived experiences and their hopes for the future.

It is critical for leaders in public education to understand that the current social and political climate affects students in deeply personal ways and that this shapes their academic experiences. The U.S. Presidential Election in 2016 ignited anti-immigration rhetoric across the country that has since informed national policies and practices including the separation of families at the U.S/Mexico Border. Many students and families in minority and immigrant communities are also affected by poor labor practices, environmental destruction, and police brutality. These injustices continue to be challenged by powerful civil and human rights organizations across the country. However, they remain prevalent within many working class minority and immigrant communities. Students and families affected by these social and political issues carry a heavy emotional burden as well as a spirit of resilience. Public schools aim to be safe spaces for youth where they can develop academically, socially and emotionally. The realities that students face within their communities contribute to their experiences at school. In this social and political moment, it is urgent that leaders in education begin to build bridges between classrooms and communities; and, to support students in developing critical skills in reflection, deconstruction, and problem-solving that can help them to navigate immediate issues and imagine a more just and equitable world.

The Emancipation Project provides a model for community-based arts pedagogy developed by SPARC and inspired by a legacy of creative resistance during the liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The principles and strategies of community-based arts pedagogy discussed in my thesis can be applied to develop new programs and curriculum for K-12 students in public schools across the U.S. Community-based arts pedagogy can guide the development of programs and projects on school campuses, in youth enrichment programs, and

in arts organizations and institutions that serve K-12 students. School districts should look closely at community-based arts pedagogy as a mechanism to support and empower all students and families in their identities, cultures, and voices. It also creates pathways for school districts to build strong relationships between arts integration and student academic achievement. My thesis intends to illustrate a vital relationship between arts activism and arts education in K-12 public schools, and to provide a history, methodology and case study for community-based arts pedagogy through an analysis of SPARC and *The Emancipation Project*. My goal in this document was to contribute a study and general framework for community-based arts pedagogy that can support arts leaders and educators in their work to empower the next generation. The key questions that will remain at the center of my work moving forward are: How can the arts support students and families in addressing immediate needs within their communities? And, how can the arts empower communities and advance their movements for justice?



Figure 4: Spring 2017 Identity Portrait Section of *The Emancipation Project* Mural, South Los Angeles.

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