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Arts Education in Third Spaces: A Future for Children's Cultural Participation in Spain?

Clare Murray

Teachers College, Columbia University

Email: cm4032@tc.columbia.edu

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Biography

Engaged at the intersection of impact analysis and the arts, with an academic background in Economics and Cultural Studies, Clare Murray was awarded a Fulbright Predoctoral Research Grant in 2018 to study Spain's independent cultural spaces and their pioneering arts educational programming. Clare holds an M.Ed. in Arts in Education from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a B.A. from Colby College. She is currently pursuing further graduate study in Early Childhood Education Policy at Teachers College, Columbia University.

Abstract

While stimulating children's cultural participation receives increasing policy attention across the world, this multicase study demonstrates that an arts education in *third spaces* may hold potential. Specifically, as community initiatives founded with the intention of both valorizing and enriching their surroundings with contemporary art, thought, and discussion, Spain's nine independent cultural spaces offer themselves as an exciting population to study. A careful thematic analysis of three sources of qualitative data regarding their educational programming reveals three ways in which they uphold the five pillars of Shier's (2006) model of best practices for organizations to increase children's cultural participation and thereby envision a future of active cultural participation for children in their communities. As examples of arts education in *third spaces*, their educational programs motivate policy consideration and further research into the long-term implications.

Keywords

Arts education, third spaces, children's cultural participation

Introduction

By definition, “education” equips people with the necessary skills to theoretically succeed. Add the word “arts” into the equation, and the likelihood of success resulting from an “arts education” increases exponentially, such that it has become associated with having a “wow factor” (Bamford, 2006, p.18). According to scholars, the benefits of an arts education go beyond simply teaching artistic habits of mind; there is much evidence that an arts education also influences literacy, academic abilities, community cohesion, graduation rates, innovation, and personal growth (Kennedy, 2006; Henry, 2002; McCarthy McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras & Brooks, 2005; Harris, 2009; Ellen & Stéphan, 2013). That list only continues to grow as researchers place a renewed emphasis on studying the benefits of an arts education. In fact, in rural villages across Spain there may be reason to believe that an arts education in alternative cultural spaces helps to increase children’s cultural participation.

The idea that an arts education holds the potential to inspire cultural participation is one that many scholars have considered (Errechea Cohas, 2014; Petre Glaveanu, 2010; af Ursin, 2016). In particular, Errechea Cohas proclaims that “the aesthetic experience, put into context for the integral formation of a pedagogical subject, makes him a protagonist in his own work and transformation of participatory and inclusive spaces of otherness” (p.78). The purpose of this research unfolds to examine how an arts education in alternative cultural spaces – such as the nine independent cultural spaces that make up Spain’s Network of Independent Cultural Spaces (translated: Red Transibérica de Espacios Culturales Independientes) – may offer potential with regards to inspiring children’s cultural participation.

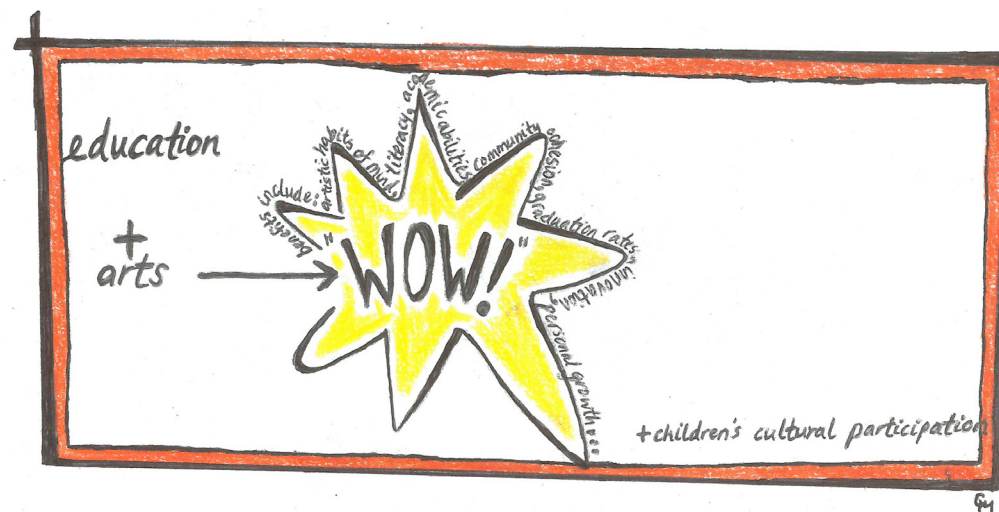


Figure 1: An original drawing by the author.

Increasing Children's Cultural Participation

Despite the proclamation of "the [human] right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life" under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), there is a dearth of empirical research on children's cultural participation. In her review of the extant literature, af Ursin (2016) highlights the limitations of the field's three landmark studies. Those studies (Bourdieu & Darbel, 1990; Fritzsche, Kroner & Pfeiffer, 2011; Kroner, Vock, Robitzsch & Koller, 2012), she explains, suffer from selective samples and cannot fully explore the complexity of participatory behavior. Af Ursin (2016) goes on to suggest that valid instruments must first be established before more robust studies are conducted.

Given the limitations of past empirical research, it follows that this study looks to theory, and specifically models of children's cultural participation. Most general is Hart's (1997) "Ladder of Participation" model, in which participation increases as children gain more control of the process much like rungs on a ladder. More tailored to assessing the success of organizations at realizing cultural participation among children is Shier's (2006) "Pathways to Participation" model, in which children's cultural participation is achieved in five ways: (1) children are listened to, (2) children are supported while expressing themselves, (3) children's feedback is considered, (4) children are involved in decision-making, and (5) children share power and responsibility in decision-making. Considering the important role thrust upon cultural spaces to ensure cultural participation is a human right for all children in the twenty-first century (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989), Shier's (2006) model is useful.

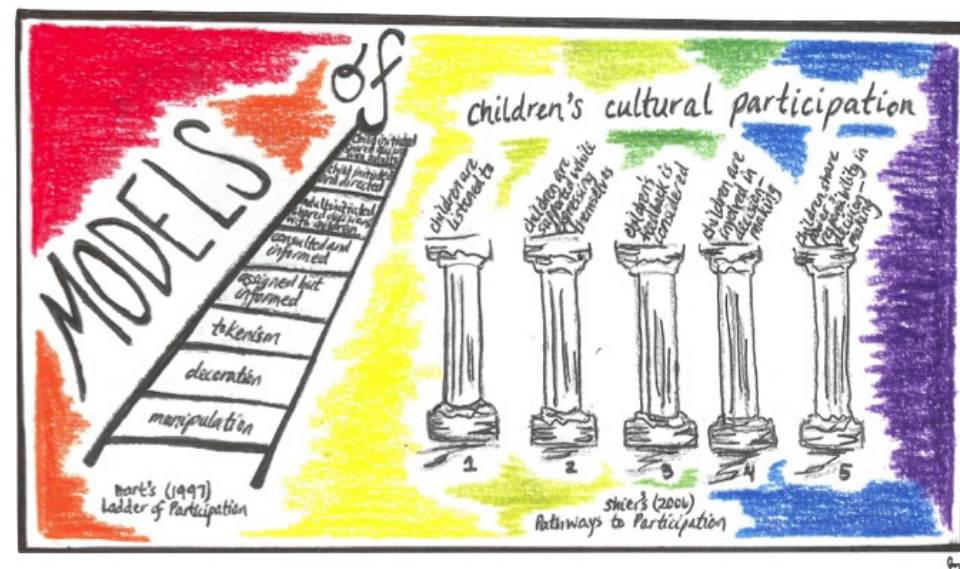


Figure 2: An original drawing by the author.

Arts Education In *Third Spaces* May Be Key

Third spaces, or “in-between” spaces, have been known to stimulate participation (Timm-Bottos, 2014; Oldenburg, 1999; Foucault, 1986). In fact, by definition the concept of a third space, which emerged from Bhabha’s third space theory (1994), refers to any space co-created by individuals who each seek ownership of their own learning and participation in cultural practices. According to Oldenburg (1999) *third spaces* achieve such participatory effects because they: (a) are on neutral ground, (b) level the playing field, (c) promote conversation as the main activity, (d) are accessible, (e) are welcoming, and (f) ensure a playful mood.

With regards to cultural participation, scholars are beginning to identify opportunities in which traditional arts education formats can be transformed such that engagement increases (Stevenson & Deasy, 2005). Steve Seidel recently affirmed that imbuing classrooms of art education with alternative visions such that *third spaces* emerge may offer new opportunities and may “build a new community of learners, a community of creators” (Stevenson & Deasy, 2005, p.viii). As the first of its kind, this research uses a multicase study approach to examine how an arts education in third spaces may offer potential with regards to inspiring children’s cultural participation.

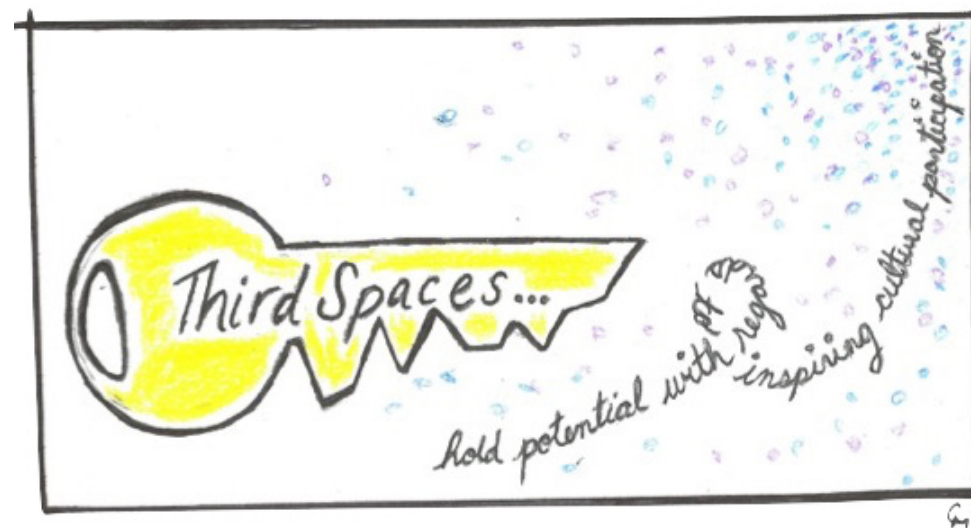


Figure 3: An original drawing by the author.

The Multicase Study In Spain

In a country where arts education has been very nearly erased from the national curriculum and exposure to arts education in formal cultural institutions remains concentrated in larger cities, Spain's independent cultural spaces are filling in the gaps one quaint village at a time, and the results of which may be auspicious for the field of arts education. In the small towns where Spain's independent cultural spaces reside, not only is depopulation a serious threat, but children's cultural participation also remains low. Though the nine independent cultural spaces that belong to Spain's Network of Independent Cultural Spaces (as of December 2018) share lofty ideals of overcoming the doubly-difficult reality they face while both valorizing and enriching their isolated communities, they have chosen to make those goals attainable by starting with youth in their communities and focusing determinately on their educational programming.



[<http://bit.ly/2BQ116S>]

Figure 4: A Snapshot of Spain's Independent Cultural Spaces.

Spain's Independent Cultural Spaces As *Third Spaces*

Unlike formal and established classrooms or museum galleries, Spain's independent cultural spaces can be considered *third spaces* when it comes to the provision of arts education. That is to say, there "individual curiosities [are] played out" (Timm-Bottos, 2014, p.5) and "all other real sites that can be found within a culture are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault, 1986, p.24). Moreover, just as Greenwood (2001) asserts that third spaces must be places predicated on the concept of creating something new, all nine spaces highlight words and phrases like "creation," "new thought," and "innovation" in their marketing materials and in conversations (Figure 5).

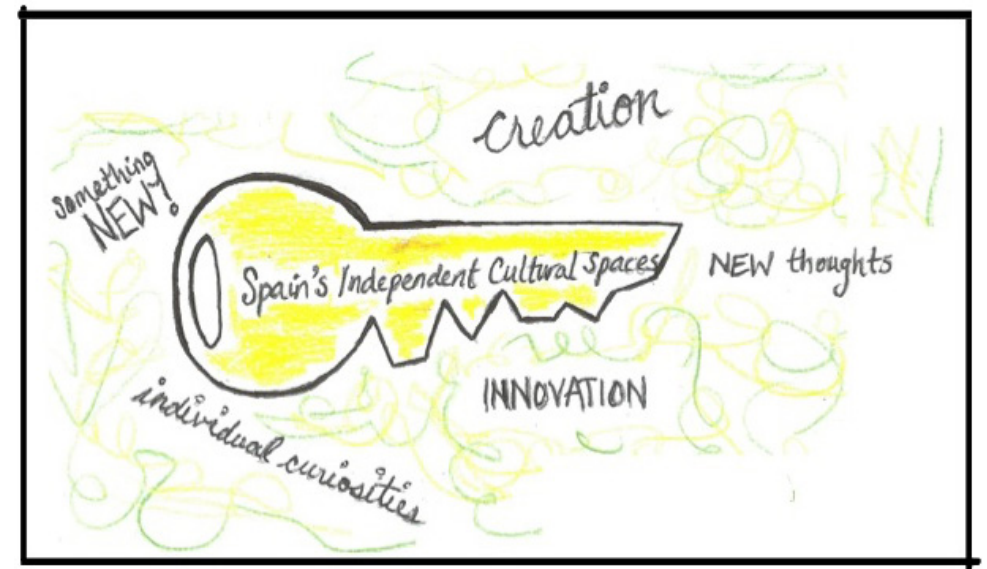


Figure 5: An original drawing by the author.

Analyzing The Potential For Arts Education In Third Spaces

To assess the potential for arts education in *third spaces* like Spain's independent cultural spaces to increase children's cultural participation, a multicase study is fitting because patterns may be replicated and established over multiple cases and the findings' robustness may increase, according to Yin (1994). Given the tendency of arts education research to "[describe] specific instances from many viewpoints and [discover] several variables in the process" according to Stokrocki (1991, p.42), qualitative methods of thematic analysis are paramount.

For this study, three forms of data were collected, translated (as needed), and organized, as detailed in the Appendix (I): (a) interviews with the leaders of the nine independent cultural spaces, (b) observations of each space's educational facility and programs, and (c) notes on photographic and written documentation from each space's educational programs. Though each form of data sought to complement the others, the youth perspective remained absent from data collection due to the time limitations of the researcher's grant period. However unfortunate and flawed, the absence of the youth perspective does not limit this study from making hypotheses regarding ways in which arts education in alternative spaces may hold potential for mobilizing children's cultural participation. In fact, after engaging in "careful reading and re-reading of the data" as headed by Rice and Ezzy (1999, p.258), themes regarding how Spain's independent cultural spaces aim to stimulate children's cultural participation emerged within and across the cases. The process of identifying those themes implicated a close study of how Shier's (2006) model of best practices for organizations to increase children's cultural participation aligned with the efforts and documented impacts of the spaces' educational programming. Ultimately, the close study revealed three ways in which the spaces' educational programming, as examples of arts education in third spaces, hold the potential to mobilize children's cultural participation: (1) it upholds Shier's (2006) second pillar of participation, thereby supporting children as they express their own views; (2) it upholds Shier's (2006) first and third pillars of participation, thereby ensuring that children and listened to

and that their feedback is considered; and (3) it upholds Shier's (2006) fourth and fifth pillars of participation, thereby involving children in decision-making.

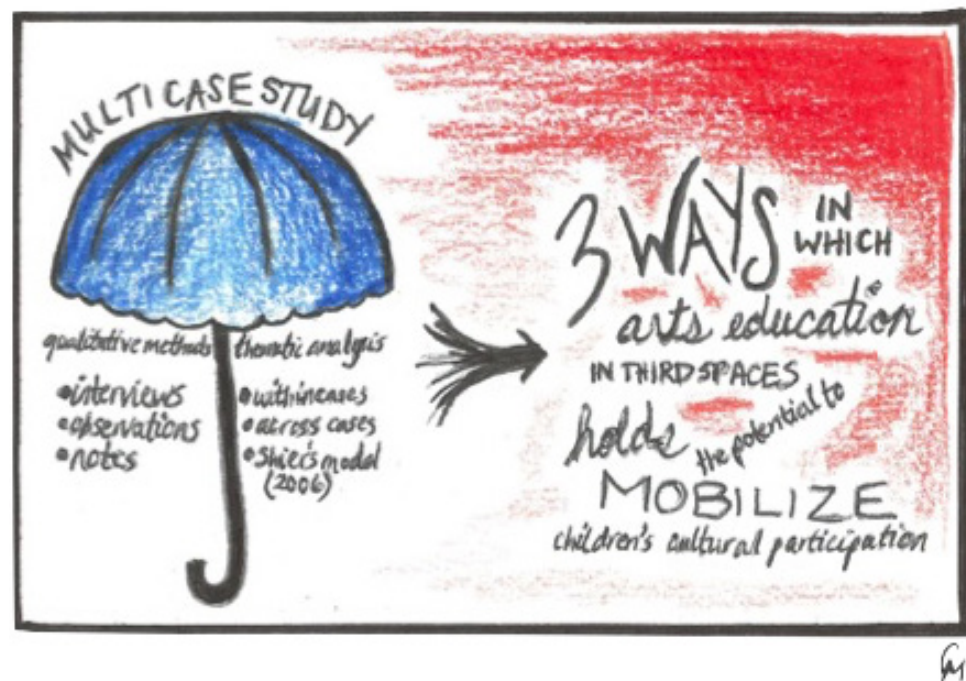


Figure 6: An original drawing by the author.

First, arts education in third spaces holds potential because it upholds Shier's (2006) second pillar of participation; it supports children as they express their views. In the case of Spain's independent cultural spaces, this manifests in evidence of their educational programs allowing youth to learn to participate. For all nine spaces, allowing children to direct the course of their own learning and experiment with different materials, thoughts, and ideas is prioritized in such a way that positive associations with cultural participation are established. Moreover, words and phrases like "debate," "experimentation," "unique experiences," and "unique perspectives," populate the websites and/or publicity materials of

all nine spaces, and demonstrate their internal devotion to allowing youth to learn to participate, each at their own pace. Photographic documentation of the educational programming at the spaces also shows youth deeply engrossed in conversations and projects, as detailed in the documentation from El Hacedor's open-ended workshop programs over the past three summers, at which time students were led through the space's workshop and instructed on key safety measures, only to then be let loose to reimagine old scarecrow parts with paints and other textural materials gathered from around the village or play around with professional visiting artist-left printing blocks in the hopes of creating some new masterpiece (Figure 7). In conversation, the leaders also highlight their faith in the power and need for "living one's own experience."



Figure 7: Photographic evidence of children learning to participate.
Credit: Dorien Jongsma (El Hacedor).

Next, arts education in third spaces holds potential because it upholds Shier's (2006) first and third pillars of participation; it listens to children and considers their feedback. In the case of Spain's independent cultural spaces, this manifests in evidence of their efforts to ensure that youth feel comfortable. By consciously presenting youth-directed art equally alongside professional artist-directed work, Spain's independent cultural spaces assure that youth feel valued, confident, and comfortable when participating in their local culture. Additionally, each space has demonstrated interest in making children feel more comfortable by explicitly responding to and

accommodating the evolving needs of their educational programs with physical changes to their spaces (Figure 8). At Bambara Zinema, for example, this meant reading through anonymous student notes in the organization's suggestions box before embarking on a total reconstruction of the space in 2016 so as to accommodate more space for student performances and computer work. Among a few of the many remarks shared regarding their prioritization of making their spaces welcoming, Isabel Medarde notes "here they can come...here they can ask for help," Joan Vendrell adds "in our space they feel comfortable," Pedro Perez Grande points out that "anyone can feel comfortable in such public spaces," and Paco Ventura concludes "our environments are intimate, very person to person... very natural."



Figure 8: Photographic evidence of the intimacy and comfort established at Spain's independent cultural spaces.
Credit: El Solar Acción Cultural.

Lastly, arts education in *third spaces* holds potential because it upholds Shier's (2006) fourth and fifth pillars of participation; it involves children in decision-making and children share power and responsibility in decision-making (Figure 9). In the case of Spain's independent cultural spaces, this manifests in evidence of their educational programs involving youth at all stages. Including children

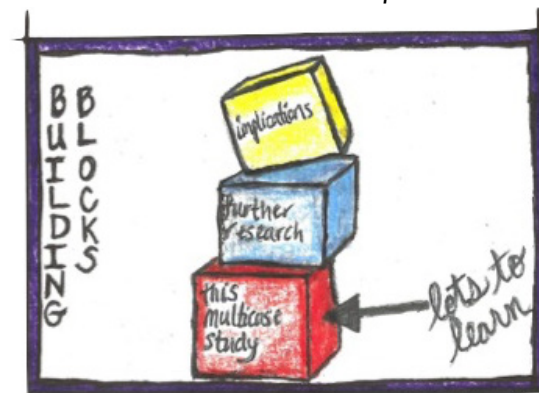
in the design and future of independent cultural spaces was not only the topic of discussion at the 2017 conference of independent cultural spaces, but it continues to be central to the philosophy of the network, according to the director, Dorien Jongsma: “you have to include children and so we do.” Regarding their priority of involving youth, Medarde notes that “it is all about self-learning...[and for that reason] we offer activities rich in experimentation and freedom,” while María Glez affirms that “the needs of the children impact the development of our project” and Carlos Bueno adds that “including youth in management holds potential to create connections.” At each space, this inclusion of youth at all stages manifests as open opportunities for children to design their own visits in essence: they come to the space, pick up whatever materials interest them, and organize an art installation or performance together. And as a programmatic example, at CACiS, this meant that each school group that visited the space would be led on a nature walk past ephemeral installations by professional, visiting artists, only to then be let loose amongst the surrounding natural materials to dream up ways of bringing together different mosses, sticks, rocks, and leaves, such that a collective work of art might emerge.



Figure 9: Photographic evidence of children involved at all stages. Credit: Roser Oduber and Joan Vendrell (CACiS).

Increasing Children’s Cultural Participation: Looking Forward

An exciting stepping stone, this multicase study demonstrates that the field of arts education can learn a lot from Spain’s independent cultural spaces; whether it is leading children on nature walks only to let them loose with the natural materials around them, considering children’s remarks before renovating or refurbishing spaces, or encouraging children to reimagine old parts and printing materials for collective purposes, there are many ways in which traditional arts education programs can involve themselves in the conceivable cultivation of more culturally-participatory children. Even more specifically, building upon extant literature studying the benefits of third-space community arts initiatives (Timm-Bottos, 2014), this multicase thematic analysis suggests that there is much potential for arts education in third spaces with regards to raising children’s cultural participation. The implications of an arts education helping to inspire children’s cultural participation could be significant, as some researchers are already suggesting links between children’s cultural participation and adult’s cultural participation (Oskala, Keaney, Wing Chang & Bunting, 2009), which would be gratifying at a time such as the twenty-first century, when increasing participation remains a central goal of policy-makers across the world. Moreover, considering the demonstrated benefits of increased cultural participation on civic engagement, economic development, education, and preservation of place in other contexts (Jackson et al., 2003; Jackson & Herranz, 2002), it is imperative that further research into the long-term effects of arts education in *third spaces* be conducted.



An original drawing by the author.

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