

Knitting Curriculum

Storied Threads of Pre-Service Art Teaching

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“Knitting is a living tradition—it’s physical knowledge of a culture.” (Jim Drain, as cited in Gschwandtner, 2008)

ASSOCIATIONS WITH KNITTING as craft and as product are multiple and widespread, evidence of its pervasiveness as a cross-cultural practice. While knitting and knitwear are a commercialized industry, knitting is often thought to be a pleasure craft, a relaxing repetitive act that is often associated with women’s work and wear such as scarves, afghans, and sweaters, or baby wear such as booties and blankets. These easily found knitted items have a practical and functional purpose, and often evoke thoughts of grandmothers, feminine hobbies, and domesticity (Greer, 2008). Once a male trade, with the invention of the knitting machine in the sixteenth century, it has been argued that as men followed a more lucrative industrial route, women inherited the knitting needles (Malarcher, 2002). Knitting came to be associated with domestic work, done primarily by women.

Throughout the past decade, there has been increased attention to the act of knitting as activism, engaged in as a way to change the world (e.g., craftivism) (Greer, 2008; Moore & Prain, 2009). In addition to knitting for pleasure, relaxation, and necessity (i.e., warmth), many people knit as a quiet protest against mass-produced goods and consumerism, as a response to the fast paced culture, to raise awareness of issues, to make political statements, and to make a difference in everyday life (Moore & Prain, 2009). Afghans for Afghans, a humanitarian project, knit hats, mittens, scarves, and other clothing to help keep the people of Afghanistan warm. This is similar to the Red Cross tradition of knitting clothing for soldiers in World War I and World War II. Even Martha Washington, the first lady of the United States, organized knitting groups and efforts to knit clothing for soldiers of the Revolutionary war (Afghans for Afghans, 2010). Many groups have used the aesthetic medium of knitting for protest. For example, protesting the

World Petroleum Congress in 2002, Calgary’s Revolutionary Knitting Circle, a group aimed to create community and local independence (Facebook, 2010), knitted a web to stop a military procession (Moore & Prain, 2009). Contemporary artists, including Lisa Anne Auerbach, Freddie Robins, Patricia Waller, Magda Sayeg, and Lauren Madsen, have knitted as an art form, which is displayed on the streets, in public spaces, and in museums and galleries (Moore & Prain, 2009). Artists such as Lacey Jane Roberts and Sophie Horton have used “knitting as a tool to critique both boundaries and institutions that have neglected to see the textile for its potential as a powerful mode of communication” (Hemmings, 2009). Knitting, thus, can be both a simple craft and an art form or artistic act with complex meanings.

The space of knitting can be an interesting place of curricular and pedagogical exploration. Its potential to communicate meaning and explore life stories suggests that knitting is more than the production of garments. It is the making of something bigger—the making of curriculum and pedagogy. Knitting is the interweaving of loops, and as a strand of loose thread becomes a woven fabric, a narrative surface materializes. In this paper, we argue that knitting is more than a surface of fabric, it is a woven storied life with embedded in/equalities (Gschwandtner, 2008), social meanings and cultural practices.

In this paper, we explore a knitted curriculum. Connecting the traditional craft of knitting with meaning-making, art, and activism, we attempt to understand live(d) curriculum through two pre-service teachers’ unique experiences. Based on a larger qualitative study of how pre-service art teachers make meaning of their student teaching experiences, we investigate the role that knitting played in their development as art teachers. We did not enter into this research study expecting to explore knitting. Rather, the concept of a *knitted curriculum* emerged from two student teachers’ classroom stories. Rethinking art curriculum through knitting provides us insight into two aspects of curriculum as relational and embodied practice. First, the two pre-service teacher cases we highlight how a knitted curriculum provides an entry point for critical thought and awareness as the two student teachers challenge what is traditionally accepted as art in the schools and the perception of knitting as gendered domestic craft (and the derogatory implications of craft), acknowledging the potential of knitting as social activism. Blurring the boundary between school, art, craft, knitting, and life, the examples in this article underscore student teaching as an embodied way of knowing, emphasizing knowledge-in-the-making (Ellsworth, 1997, 2005) rather than a fixed set of practices, and teacher/teaching as becoming (e.g., Unrath & Nordlund, 2006) rather than a fixed identity.

Second, we extend the concept of knitting to rethink curriculum as “knitted, which provides insight into the relational, embodied aspects of curriculum—the ways in which curriculum exists within and around each teacher and student in their everyday lives and the embedded intertwined threads of culture and society. We thus present a wider perspective on knitting through two student teachers’ experiences with a curriculum of knitting as they dwell in the space of becoming an art teacher and discover what it means to be an art teacher, as well as relate these practices of knitting to curriculum theory in order to explore educational implications beyond the art classroom. Our use of the term “knitting” or “knitted curriculum” suggests two meanings: knitting as an artistic medium—its tactile, textured materiality and its aesthetic form as an actual curricular practice – and knitting as metonym. In contrast to metaphor, a substitution of similarities across terms, metonymic substitution (e.g., Aoki, 2003) is based on an association, a contiguous relationship of meaning, for example, between knitting and curriculum.

The first case we describe is of an after school knit-a-thon at an urban elementary school. Inspired by a fifth-grade Muslim student from Nigeria, the pre-service teacher introduced

knitting as an art form that also explored activism, society, and culture. Creating a classroom environment of tolerance, the student teacher cultivated a relationship with the students and encouraged them to share their experiences and cultures with classmates through the art making process. The second project we depict is a public art installation that took place on the middle school grounds. Using knitting as her art form, this student teacher created knitted installations with her students that wrapped everyday school features (e.g., handrails, drainpipes) in order to change public perception of these places and engage people in novel tactile experiences of everyday objects.

Pre-service teaching: Encounters with a knitted curriculum

The knitted curriculum explored in this paper are based on two pre-service teachers' storied accounts (e.g. Denzin, 1989) of a knitted art curriculum during an eight-week long placement in two urban public schools. These two teachers and their accounts are part of a larger qualitative study of a pre-service practicum (Powell & LaJevic, 2011) in which we sought to understand how pre-service teachers made meaning and sense of their experiences, successes, and failures during their initial field teaching placements. Participants were 11 of 14 pre-service art education teachers (those who gave their consent). A total of 42 interviews were conducted (audio recorded and lasting about 40 minutes). At least one interview was conducted with each participant; nearly all were interviewed twice. We chose five participants as case studies in order to more closely follow their process. They were chosen on the basis of their availability, accessibility, and reported experiences. For each case study, we conducted four semi-structured interviews, one or two videotaped classroom observations, post-observation informal interviews, a video elicitation, and photographed and collected relevant documents and materials such as lesson plans, seminar assignments, student art projects, and websites that documented their experiences. The analysis of our data was largely thematic and informed by our theoretical framework on knitting as well as postmodern curriculum theories. Our analysis was also grounded in the data itself (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) in order to identify critical issues and patterns that might not be accounted for in our initial categories.

The two examples presented in this paper focus on two of the case studies in which the theme of knitting played an important role in their pre-service practicum and development as art teachers. Our primary data was the pre-service teachers' spoken words during the interviews, which were recorded and then later transcribed. But other data sources included videotaped observations, the pre-service teachers' blogs and their own video documentations of their projects. Hoping to learn how the pre-service teachers make meaning of what it means to be an art teacher and how they make meaning of "art," the interview questions were general and focused on their student-teaching experiences. The semi-structured interviews allowed us a level of flexibility in guiding the interviews; we asked participants to expand upon statements or anecdotes that they mentioned as they were freely talking.

During the interviews, many of the pre-service teachers shared emotional stories and examples from their experiences in the schools. Referring to narrative accounts, art educator and scholar Tom Anderson (2000) wrote,

Just as certainly as there is something real to experience, we also bring our subjective attitudes, predilections, and prior experience to our perceptions. Meaning, then, lies not in the objective world nor in the subjective self but in the transaction between them. (p. 9)

As the pre-service teachers internalized and externalized their experiences as personal stories, the reflective process seemed to help them sort out and make meaning of their daily interactions, events and experiences; in fact, many of the student-teachers remarked that the interview sessions were very therapeutic. Their voices allowed us, as interviewers, to learn how they were developing their own understandings of art education and what it means to be an art teacher to each personally.

In the interpretation of meaning, we relied heavily on our informed sense (Anderson, 2000) of what it's like in the art classroom for pre-service teachers and in the field of art education. We were not concerned with the historical accuracy of the stories, but on their perspectives--how the pre-service teachers understood, interpreted and reconstructed their unique experiences and events in the context of her own lives (Riessman, 1993)--which we believe provided insight into the lives of novice teachers and art education. Based on the transcriptions, we re-told/re-wrote the stories, piecing together information from different interviews that took place throughout the course of the study. Our approach was similar to that of a storyteller, in which Anderson (2000) explains,

S/he sincerely attempts to represent through the construction of a persuasive narrative some aspect of a felt, "real" experience, believing that there is a transactive meaning and human significance embedded in it. S/he represents...a sort of subjective reality--a narrative--which can be tested for veracity...in life. (p. 9)

By re-telling the pre-service teachers' storied accounts below, it is almost as if we re-constructed the co-constructed lived narratives along with them.

Although the K-12 students in the pre-service teachers' classes were/are an integral component¹, we are interested in the student teachers becoming art teachers and how knitting played an important role in their development as an art teacher; thus, we try to reconstruct their voice/words, and highlight their experiences and reflections. The examples represented in these two cases highlight a knitted curriculum and the potential for curricular and pedagogical practice. The remainder of this article depicts how such a focus on knitting enabled the pre-service teachers to engage in the process of making meaning of their experiences and becoming a teacher. We attempt to sincerely convey the stories of the pre-service teachers, offer related background information, and give a sense of what it means to engage in a knitted curriculum and pre-service teaching.

Knitting as... An afterschool session: Threading together art, activism and culture

Our first case study highlights how Allison,² a pre-service art teacher, introduced knitting as an art form that also explored activism and culture. Working in a magnet urban elementary school during one of her student teaching field placements, the school was composed of just over 400 students, approximately 52% African American, 32% white, 8% multiracial, 2% Hispanic, and less than 1% American Indian or Asian, and emphasized the integration of the arts and

humanities into the other subject areas (school website). Working in the art room, Allison designed and taught art lessons for students in pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade.

Reflecting upon how her student teaching placement was “going,” Allison explained that a few weeks back, a fifth-grade Nigerian student, Sade, commented on her macramé bracelets. Allison explained that she enjoys knitting and often makes bracelets and other articles of clothing. Much to Allison’s surprise, the young student excitedly began to describe how she knits and crochets, and that knitting is a popular craft in her homeland. Sade shared personal information—the fact that she was Muslim, and that her mother was very good at knot tying (from whom she learned to knit). She further explained that in her culture, a man chooses a wife based on her skills and talents, and since her mother was very skilled at knot tying, her father choose her mother to wed. In an interview, Allison recounted that conversation and how it became the impetus for introducing knitting as a social activity:

The reason why she told me she started knitting was because in Nigeria, when you turn 6 years old, you have to pick a craft as a child. Women are not allowed to read in her village, and they can’t go to school. Boys start going to grammar school and girls have to pick a craft, [one of] which is knotting... A lot of them pick a cooking craft. ... [Sade’s] mom picked knitting. And, then you are chosen [as a wife]. They can get married young to older guys. So you are chosen as a wife for your craft and for your looks and stuff like that when you are able to be married, which seems pretty young. Each man was allowed to have five wives. Her dad has three, her uncle has five.

It's interesting when this comes up with ... the other fifth grade girls and I'm afraid that girls will be like, “Why is your dad--,” you know. And girls will say that, and she's just like, “That’s how things are.” And I've even had to say [to the other students], “You know there are different cultures.” ... But she told me that the dominant wife then is a lot of times the one who is best at her craft or best at that stuff. So her mom really *did* knitting or whatever their form of knotting is. So her mom taught her when they came here [to the United States].

Allison continued to explain that as Sade spoke, the other students overheard and became interested in the knitting conversation. Students began asking Allison to teach them how to knit, and Sade also wanted to knit alongside her.

This experience was surprising to Allison since Sade’s perceived “otherness” seemed to affect her ability to “fit in” with the rest of the fifth-grade class. According to Allison’s observations and perceptions of the classroom dynamics, Sade was perceived as “different” from many of her American classmates and teachers--she dressed in a head covering, had an accent, and held cultural beliefs that were dissimilar to most of the students in her class. But as Sade shared aspects of her unique life history, Allison noted that the otherness seemed to disappear as many of the classmates wanted to learn more. Although Allison attempted to treat each student fairly, she was “warned” by the teachers about certain students: “I was told that the fifth grade class were terrors and the kids from Nigeria were really weird because they were from Nigeria--not in a mean way, but the other teachers say this.” Allison’s experience had been different: “I didn't have a problem with them and all it took was something like tying knots, something simple like that,” she reasoned. Allison shared her newly acquired information about Sade’s knitting interests with the other teachers, and many were surprised that the young student conversed and “opened up,” since she was often very quiet and reserved. Slightly disappointed that no other

teacher took an interest to get to know this particular student (i.e., discover a topic or hobby that the student was passionate about and make connections in school), Allison took it upon herself to attempt to dissolve the boundaries between Sade and her classmates through knitting, exploring art as activism.

Involved with a knitting group during her college years, Allison reflected on her experiences with “knitivism” (O’Donald, Hatza, & Springgay, 2010)—knitting as activism. She explained to the students that she and her fellow classmates used to get together and collaboratively knit blankets, and had recently participated in a 24-hour knitathon, organized by a women’s studies course, while visiting one of her friends back on campus. The knitathon was held to raise money and awareness about the conflict in Darfur. According to the university course website (2009):

Knitivism is activism peacefully devoted to defending human rights one stitch at a time. We find it necessary to make our community aware of not only injustices, but what we can all do to help. Through numerous public knitting events we have addressed local and international concerns and continue to knit for peace around the world.

Similar to the concept of knitivism, Betsy Greer (2008), an author, knitter, and founder of the website *Craftivism.com*, combined two words: craft and activism (which she acknowledges are negatively stereotyped each on their own) to create the term “craftivism.” She attempted to reclaim craft from domesticity, and in explaining its origins, refers to artist, activist, and theorist Nicole Burisch’s (n.d.) description of craftivism as:

Emerging out of the renewed interest in social justice/activist issues that came in response to global trade issues/antiglobalization politics of the early 2000s and increased media attention for the WTO protests in Seattle, and take-back-the-streets parties, etc., at that time. Alongside those, it seems there was a lot of interest in using alternative strategies for protest and action. (as cited in Greer, 2008, p.127)

Knowing that she enjoyed knitting as a way to make a difference in the world, Allison decided to provide her elementary students with a similar opportunity (i.e., to engage in knitivism/craftivism). Based on positive responses from the students regarding knitting, she organized a one-day after-school knitting session for interested fourth and fifth graders (the session lasted one and a half hours). She did not incorporate it into the regular art classroom because the curriculum as planned by her cooperating teacher did not allow for it (e.g., time constraints). Allison explained that they would knit a blanket that would then be auctioned off on eBay for the One campaign, which according to her, “basically lobbies for the government to give money for international programs, mainly in Africa. It mainly goes toward fighting AIDS in Africa.” Additionally, Allison invited a friend who was involved with the knitathon on her college campus to participate in and talk about her experiences with knitting during the after-school knitting session. Explaining the project, Allison stated:

Yes, we're making one [blanket] and we'll probably sell it on eBay. I will send home letters to parents saying this will be up [for auction] and the money goes to this [One campaign]. Oh, and because we invited my friend who is a women’s studies major we have gotten [knitted] squares from artists at our University, like BFAs, and students who will be student teaching here next semester; like a couple of pre-service teachers who are

coming in the fall, so that's cool. I am going to put everyone's [student and artist] names and take pictures so we have a formal thing [art piece] to hang up. I really want to raise money, but then maybe the school wants to display it and buy it and we'd get the money.

Allison found another teacher to help participate in the after-school program to meet the district's policy mandating that a full-time teacher must be present for after-school academic based programs.

Although Allison encountered some problems--finding money to purchase needles for all the students who wanted to participate and teachers complaining that students were running in the halls with needles-- she was excited that the students seemed to be inspired, wanted to get involved with the project, and enjoyed the act of knitting. However, Allison's mentor teacher did not share their enthusiasm. Allison explained:

Like, I don't blame my teacher for not, well, my teacher doesn't like knitting. I think that's why one of the reasons when the kids were running with them, she was fed up. Because we were knitting one day and she came in and was like, [as if to say] "That's so useless, I have never seen a purpose for that." And it's a just different interest...It's just our different personalities. I don't think I am this amazing person who saw all this in her [Sade], I just think I am interested in it and I am new. Also, that's how I got to know her, the girl who told me about knitting. It's really neat. I think that's how good art works.

Students soon began knitting in between their other classes, in the morning while students waited for their bus, and during lunch and recess. Allison noted that she felt "bad" because the other teachers began "figuring out" that she was the one who was responsible for the knitting project (which meant she was also responsible for students knitting in other classes and running in the halls with their needles). She said that she quickly became known as *that* student teacher--the one who "started the knitting stuff."

Attempting to reach all her students through art and create a classroom that is tolerant and accepting of others, this example reveals how she used a knitted curriculum as a way get to know her students and promote social change. Beginning to discover who she is as an art teacher (and her goals and beliefs pertaining to art), Allison wove her identity as a teacher and knitting artist into her teaching. Sharing similar interests, Allison found that her relationships with the young students strengthened through the act of tying knots as she learned about their life experiences and cultural backgrounds.

This case study also reveals the ways in which knitting as a curricular activity begets knitting as a framework for conceptualizing curriculum. We might think of Sade's practice with knot tying, or Khipu (or quipus),³ as a metonymic moment midst self/other (Aoki, 2003), a hybrid translation of cultural practices surrounding knitting that underwent continual transformation as it encountered an other. The "felt phenomenology" (Paterson, 2007) of knitting allowed for empathic channels of communication between the pre-service teacher and student, and potentially among other students as well. Curriculum thus potentially becomes a breathing transparent interface between bodies and worlds, a site of overlapping boundaries: The many threads (e.g., teachers, students, experiences, interactions, academic content/subject matter) are influenced and affected by overlapping threads of culture, society, economy, race, gender, religion, history, and so forth. Although the "knotted" information may not be easily discernible, memories and experiences are recorded in the act of knitting.

Knitting as... An installation: Threading together public art, students, and school objects

The second student art teacher we highlight is Sarah and her student teaching placement in an urban middle school. Through her knitted curriculum, she began to make meaning of becoming an art teacher, challenging students to question traditional forms of artmaking by displacing the boundaries of craft and art, and the place of knitting in contemporary society. Exploring their own contemporary understandings of knitting, Sarah and her students merged the disciplines of installation art, the craft of needlework, street graffiti art, curriculum, and pedagogy.

A white, female student, Sarah was assigned to Rollington Middle School for her first eight-week student teaching placement. Located on a residential street, the urban school housed 341 students ranging from sixth to eighth-grade, and was composed of approximately 56% white students, 33% African American students, and 11% multi-racial, Asian, and/or Hispanic (school website). Rollington, a creative and performing arts magnet school, required student applications and auditions for acceptance into the different majors (e.g., creative writing, dance, theater, visual arts). She taught five art classes a day, including both “major” and “non-major” courses. Although Sarah felt that school had a strong art program, she was concerned that many of the lessons she observed focused primarily on Realism and traditional media such as pencil and paint. Sarah aimed to weave the technical skills with abstraction and conceptual thinking and to offer students an opportunity to experiment with various materials. She stated, “I feel a lot of them had problems just drawing for one period. I don’t know if they were feeling a sense of accomplishment with that.” Furthermore, she sensed a lack of historical and contemporary artists in these basic lessons and approaches in art making.

Sarah recalled the ways in which knitting found its way into her curriculum. Having planned for the students to work in the computer lab on an artist research report, a requirement of the eighth grade portfolio, she had to quickly think of something else to teach when the computers which she had scheduled her students to use, were not working properly. Because the gifted students were on a field trip and only half the class remained, Sarah was hesitant to begin the next lesson. She remembered that a few days prior when she was knitting (an art form that she regularly engages in), a few students expressed interest in learning to knit. Knowing there was yarn in the art supply room and having her own knitting needles at school, she thought it would be a good last-minute, one-day filler activity, and she taught knitting to the students.

The next day, the students wanted to continue to knit. Sarah enthusiastically began to make connections between knitting and contemporary approaches to artmaking. Having learned about yarn bombing (Moore & Prain, 2009), the art of knit graffiti, and the knitting movement of Knitta Please (also known simply as Knitta) during her coursework, Sarah spoke to her mentor teacher about the possibility of covering objects around the school with knitted pieces. She was interested in how Magda Sayeg, the founder of Knitta Please, wrapped urban objects (e.g., parking meters, lampposts, stairway railings, door handles) in order to juxtapose a traditional art form with street art, responding to the “dehumanizing qualities of an urban environment” (Sayeg, 2010).

Many yarnbombers (i.e., people who tag public spaces with yarn without seeking out the necessary approvals) use knit graffiti as a way to reclaim public space. The term “graffiti,” translates to mean writing on walls and has been found through history. For example, graffiti traces at Pompeii have been preserved by the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius. U.S. soldiers would leave graffiti throughout Europe during WW II to record their presence and re/claim different places that were stationed (Moore & Prain, 2009). Yarn bombers, such as Knitta Please, Janice

Morton, and the U.K. group Incogknito (Moore & Prain, 2009) often make meaningful statements (about politics, race, gender, etc.) using humor in their works. The works challenge the viewers (i.e., the random passer-by) to question: Who made this? Why is it here on this street? Who is the owner? Why is this inanimate object wrapped in a knitted blanket? Is this art? What does it mean? How does it make me feel? These works bring new meaning to the objects, along with color, warmth, and energy to the monotonous urban structures. The domestic craft of knitting intersects with public art—art has moved from the art museum walls into everyday life and there is no curator deeming it as “art” or as having monetary or approved “worth.” Infusing a dynamic element into art, Sayeg states:

People have responded. They see this obviously hand-knitted piece that has been wrapped around something that is completely inanimate, and it turns alive. In fact, it not only turns alive, there is something comforting and loving about it. (as cited in Moore & Prain, 2009)

Their work disrupts, activates, and unravels the traditional boundaries of art and public space and of art and knitted craft. Highlighting the embodied experience of aesthetics and how we learn and experience the world through touch, Knitta Please builds on the concept of knitting as a gendered domestic routine and the “loving” touch that is associated with it, reconceptualizing knitting as an art form that, through its aesthetic properties, has the potential to alter public perception of everyday objects by building new associations that are “comforting,” “loving,” or otherwise.

Connecting knitting to graffiti art and to a recent field trip to a contemporary installation art museum Sarah’s mentor encouraged her to explore this lesson idea. Inspired by both personal interests and knitting as a larger public art movement, Sarah and her students created a knitted public installation of wrapped objects that took place on school grounds [Figure 1: Student artwork]. She veered from the planned curriculum, allowing for her knitted curriculum and pedagogy to organically emerge. Sarah stated that it took her weeks to learn how to teach the knitting process, and even though she regularly knitted, the act of teaching how to know was different from engaging in the act of knitting itself. She also explained that the girls seemed to “pick it up” more quickly than the boys (perhaps because a few of them had previously learned how to knit from their grandmothers), and that many of the boys resisted knitting because its association as a gendered, domestic craft. But as the students learned about public and site-specific art and related topics such as graffiti and vandalism, discussed the historical and social constructs of knitting, and decided what objects to wrap in their school building, Sarah noticed that the boys became more involved with the lesson. Reflecting on the class knitting sessions, Sarah commented that her relationships with students developed as they knitted and conversed and as a comfortable classroom culture that promoted community and dialogue emerged.



Figure 1: Student knitted artwork. Photo taken by authors.

Although Sarah had originally planned to knit with only one class, as other students saw their peers knitting, they wanted to participate as well. Another art teacher heard about the lesson, and invited Sarah to teach her art students to knit. Her lesson evolved into a school-wide project, and students began to knit at home, during lunch, homeroom, study hall, and between class periods.

Each student knitted rectangular pieces with colored yarn, which they then knitted together to create long wrap-around pieces. They collaboratively "knitted" sites around the school: the stairway handrail, a vertical pipe in the school, and a 75-foot horizontal railing by the parking lot [Figure 2: Student artwork]. Sarah knitted alongside the students, helping to knit the pieces around the

objects. Additionally, students from the media department decided to document the process, and as they video-recorded the lesson, they too engaged in the knitting. Impressed with the installation, the teachers expressed interest in doing a similar large-scale collaborative public work every year.



Figure 2: Student knitted artwork. Photo taken by authors.

The installation altered public perception of the built school environment and engaged people in novel tactile experiences of everyday objects. Many students were excited to leave their mark by “beautifying” the school--the colorful yarn added life, warmth and decoration to the institutional building. Their way of knowing (their surroundings and self) changed--touching the cold metal railings now wrapped in knitted blankets made them feel “cozy” and welcoming, according to a few students. The school body and nearby residents were invited to look, touch, question, and create their own meanings and experiences with the knitted objects.

Throughout the lesson, Sarah pushed student understandings of art. She reported that her students were surprised that knitting could be part of their art course. Teaching nontraditional art materials, collaborative artmaking, and conceptual thinking, Sarah presented students with different perspectives (i.e., art can be more than a framed, drawn, realistic life representation hanging in a museum). Explaining her goals for students, Sarah stated:

I want them to learn about art. Changing the way they look at things. Being able to make connections between things...being aware of things....I want them to question and not

accept things for the way that they are. I want them to analyze...and create their own meaning....I want them to be active participants.

Her experiences with a knitting curriculum suggests that she was learning the ways in which curriculum became un/planned (Aoki, 2005) and emergent. This example reveals the way in which a knitted curriculum brought an awareness to the gendered/social constructs of knitting, art, and the school environment. Sarah encouraged the social exploration of knitting--as the students knitted, they engaged in dialogue about art, their lives, and daily experiences in and out of school. She explained, "I knew I wanted to develop relationships with the students. The more you do, then the more you'll get back from them." Knitting together, they transcended the barriers of the femininity of knitting and challenged the notion of the domestic craft. Many students began to connect art with their personal experiences (e.g., knitting with their grandmothers).

Making something tangible (i.e., a knitted artwork), Sarah and her students embodied the learning/teaching experience through the creation of works of art and engaged in meaning-making as they connected with knitted objects (i.e., artworks). As passersby physically "touched" the artworks (i.e., the knitted railings), the artworks in return "touched" the students--the knitted objects provoked them to re-evaluate their relationship with the school environment, recreating a "typology of relationality" (Ellsworth, 2005). This project exemplifies Sarah's responsiveness to student interest and available materials and her ability to connect her teaching with her own knitting interests and public contemporary art.

As with the previous case study teacher, Sarah's work with knitting as a curricular activity also carries metonymic associations for curriculum as knitted. The concept of relationality and the entangled nature of knitting as process and product emphasizes aesthetics as dialogical, between and among persons, objects, and contexts. Writing about the art of the 1990s and its concern with social issues, French critic and curator Nicholas Bourriaud (2002) saw the audience as a community in which the meaning of art is collaboratively created. The relation of which Bourriaud writes is not just between people; it is also and often between viewer and artwork, including the space in which the artwork appears. He called this the "criterion of coexistence." Similarly, Grant Kester (2004) highlighted the idea of "intersubjective exchange," in which dialogue becomes an integral part of the art work in community and public art projects, informing the person as much as the artwork itself.

Knitting as Lived Curriculum

Throughout this paper, we have presented the idea of knitting as a multi-layered curricular and pedagogical site. Exploring the experiences of two pre-service art teachers reveal the relationship between knitting and curriculum as a complex dynamic space that not only informs knowledge, but also invents knowledge. The intertwined threads of life, art, education, and society unravel to expose a narrative fabric. Hence, we can think of a knitted curriculum as a rewriting of history, or rather, as a history in-the-making.

Thinking metonymically, we use knitting as a suggestive physical object, material, and act to embody a more general idea of working with curriculum, and suggest potential of the concept of knitting within curricular studies. *Knitting curriculum* refers to the making/becoming of subjects (i.e., the pre-service teacher-in-the-making and art-in-the-making). In the two examples we

present, knitting and curriculum are intrinsically related to one another as the pre-service teachers engage in the process of becoming art teachers (e.g., forming one's own beliefs about teaching and what content should be included within the subject of art). Just as each knitted stitch reveals an intimate thought, conversation, or experience, stitches also document what is happening in life and society, what happened in the past, and perhaps hints at what may happen in the future.

Developing personal meaning of what it means to be an art teacher, one's own inner understanding is directly linked to her/his everyday experiences in the outside world (e.g., in the classroom, working with students, experimenting with art material, etc.). Conceived of in this way, a knitted curriculum suggests that it is a relational practice that unfolds through time, and that the knitted object is fabricated through and alongside dialogic encounters with self, other, and society. The product itself may be pre-established or emergent; either way, the process of knitting may reveal dialogic encounters that could not be anticipated. Curriculum as live(d) (Aoki, 1993) and un/planned (Aoki, 2005), emphasizes the ways in which curriculum evolves as connections between teachers, students, and the larger community open up possibilities that could not be preplanned, wherein a middle curriculum resides. These concepts allow for an exploration of the complexities of curriculum--the interconnected dynamic layers of experiencing-- that are constantly unfolding, changing and materializing. It is curriculum as *currere* (Pinar, 2004), moving beyond an understanding of curriculum as course objectives toward "a complicated conversation with oneself...an ongoing project of self-understanding in which one becomes mobilized for engaged pedagogical action" (p. 37). Teachers and students negotiate the space(s) of teaching, learning, making and doing that challenge preconceived and prescribed ideas and stimulates new ways to view, understand, and engage with curriculum. Hence, curriculum, along with the teacher and student, is simultaneously and continually becoming as it is un-becoming, or unraveling.

Knitting explicitly calls for tactility and touch as ways of knowing, emphasizing lived curriculum as embodied meaning-making. Exploring knitting as pedagogies of touch in a feminist classroom, O'Donald, Hatza, and Springgay (2010) explained:

Knitting as an active reworkings of embodied experience involves pedagogies of touch (Springgay, 2008) where knowing is constantly interrupted and deferred "by the knowledge of the failure-to-know, the failure to understand, fully, once and for all" (Miller, 2005, p.130). It is the unthought, which is felt as intensity, as becoming, and as inexplicable that reverberates between self and other, teacher and student, viewer and image, compelling a complex interstitial meaning making process.... Whether knitting or engaging in other relational encounters, pedagogies of touch enhance moments of knowing and being that are unfamiliar. Touch becomes a commitment to knowing that is engaged, emphasizing bodied encounters that are interrogative and unsettling. (p. 331)

While touch is a part of everyday embodied experience, it is often overlooked as a critical form of sensory experience that enables us to make sense of the world. Yet, touch is essential to our embodied existence. It is communicative, receptive, expressive, and empathic (Paterson, 2007). In touch, people and objects connect. Paterson coined the term "felt phenomenology" and "haptic aesthetics" --the embodied experience of aesthetics (sensing and feeling). Touch can be thought of in two ways: as the "immediacy of our everyday, embodied tactile-spatial experience" (p. 2); and as empathic or affective, "the opening of an entirely new channel of communication"

(p. 3), as in being touched by someone's speech (Paterson, 2007). Experienced through bodies and materials, the act of knitting is an embodied space and place.

Curriculum theorist Elizabeth Ellsworth (2005) emphasized the corporeality of space, place and time. She draws implications for a curriculum and pedagogy that is built on experimentation, emphasizing alternative places of learning—e.g., art, media, architecture—as pedagogies “yet unmade” (p. 6), knowledge in the making that provoke new pedagogies in new ways. Introducing the notion of felt reality as an anomalous place of learning, Ellsworth wrote:

When we look at test scores or curriculum content, we are looking at only one dimension of the reality of learning. That other dimension of learning's reality—its nondecomposable continuity of movement and sensation, its felt reality of the relation that is experienced couched in matter—is as real as test scores or curriculum content. (p. 35)

Knitting is more than something one merely does (i.e., an act); it is something that can be experienced, a way of questioning how we (and others) understand our surroundings, how we make meaning of life, and how we can change the world (i.e., act-ivism). Both pre-service teaching cases are examples of the ways in which anomalous places of learning, such as knitting, created “topologies of relationality” (Ellsworth, 2005) between self and other, inside and outside, and the ways in which topologies release potential thoughts, feelings, and interaction that “in other old configurations are captured and not free to emerge” (p. 117). These places created pedagogical pivot points that challenged what was expected and how one typically learns and that reconfigured the conventional somatic experiences of school. Similar to a felt topography (Paterson, 2007), through the nature of touch and tactility, one embodies ways of learning and teaching.

A place of critical discussions, knitting offers insight into life, self, experiences, education, culture, gender, art, history, and so on. As the pre-service teachers stumbled upon a knitted curriculum, they engaged in an active space of becoming and un-becoming teachers. They negotiated between the spaces of what art education is and what it can be and how art educators can push the traditional and planned approaches to art teaching. Although knitting was not welcome as part of the actual curriculum, introducing it as an alternative place of learning was a challenging yet fruitful endeavor. The pre-service teachers broadened understandings of what many of their students (and even cooperating teachers) commonly accepted as art in the schools and explored how knitting, which is often mis-viewed as simply a domestic gendered craft, can provoke conversation and attempt to open up dialogue between what is known and what is unknown in hopes of creating new ways of knowing, learning, and teaching. It is thus in the felt topologies of relationality that knitting operates as a metonym. In writing about living pedagogy, Aoki (2003) suggested that it occupied the space between representational (e.g. knitting as craft/art) and non-representational discursive--and, we might add, embodied--practices.

Notes

1. Although we received IRB approval to study the pre-service teachers, school district policy dictated that we were not permitted to record or photograph the students.
2. All names are pseudonyms.

3. Khipu, or quipu, is a knotted-string artifact used by the Incas to record the movement of goods and people and to communicate messages. Translated from the word, khipu, meaning “knot,” (National Geographic, 2009), this textile article is composed of threads of cotton with one main primary cord from which many pendant cords hang, and then from the pendants hang subsidiary cords (Urton & Brezine, 2009). On the cords are placed knots. The knot type, position, color patterning, and size on the cords have numerical significance, which is how information was recorded and interpreted. Although the Inca empire had no formal written language during the sixteenth century, the threads that were continuously tied and retied were “read” by touch and sight, thus communicating its “written” history (Gschwandtner, 2008). By adding more threads, a khipu could be extended to allow for the addition of new information, which would not alter the preexisting information.

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