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CHAPTER SEVEN

Manchester Craftsmen's Guild

Art, Mentorship, and Environment Shape a Culture of Learning and Engagement

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As a teenager growing up on the North Side of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, during the 1960s, Bill Strickland was not much different from other kids in his working-class, multicultural neighborhood. The social upheaval of the civil rights era was taking place, exposing inequities in the worldview of many people, and Bill was not immune. Disengaged and uninspired at school, he was unable to grasp any sense of a hopeful future. In one moment, that all changed. Awestruck at the sight of a skilled artisan raising and shaping the clay form, Strickland entered and approached the teacher, Frank Ross, who was working on a potter's wheel. Over the coming months, the relationship that Ross and Strickland initiated around a still, plastic vessel gave life to Bill's future and his vision of Manchester Craftsmen's Guild (MCG).

Ross was not a typical teacher. He brought records to class from his personal collection to play and shared stories about the legacy of Pittsburgh's jazz community. Through music, he drew connections to the clay artist's essential challenges: balance, harmony, intuition, improvisation, flow, and structure. While visiting the home of Ross and his wife, Strickland experienced how the family's way of life was enriched by aesthetic sensibilities. Hand-woven tapestries adorned the walls, and crafted objects were in daily use. As he gained mastery over the potter's art, Strickland began to experience success in school. Other teachers

could recognize that his newfound self-confidence transformed his self-image and affected his willingness to persevere and learn in all of his classes.

A few years later, in 1968, while completing undergraduate studies at the University of Pittsburgh, Strickland established Manchester Craftsmen's Guild, operating the nascent center in a pair of adjacent row houses in a North Side neighborhood named the Mexican War Streets. At the time, Pittsburgh was a city racially divided and economically distressed. Strickland's vision for MCG was to develop a neighborhood center to provide a safe haven for youth while combating the economic and social devastation experienced by the residents of the now predominantly African American community. Strickland and his father built a kiln in the garage of the center and acquired a few potter's wheels. Photography was soon added to address the interests of community members and because Strickland understood that artists needed visual representations of their work to promote and help sell it. Many decades later, with the addition of adult vocational programs, a jazz program and an international replication of the Manchester Craftsmen's Guild model, the youth studio arts program sustains its founding vision and story. In an interview with *Fast Company* magazine, Strickland spoke about his passion and single flash of insight on that long-ago Wednesday afternoon outside of Ross's classroom: "You start with the perception that the world is an unlimited opportunity. Then the question becomes, how are we going to rebuild the planet" (Terry, 1998, p. 173).

The primary purpose of this chapter is to give the reader an insight into the daily routines and practices of youth and teaching artists at MCG. A number of vignettes and observations from the three authors attempt to draw in the reader to witness and experience what makes MCG a success and identify three overarching themes: the physical environment, the culture, and the empowerment of youth and staff experiences. These are discussed in terms of how MCG provides space for these themes to have a direct impact toward promoting positive interpersonal relationships and trust, individual learning opportunities, reflective practice, and the key values incorporated to support active citizenship. These all underpin the success of the organization over a forty-year period in which young people shape their futures. Pseudonyms are used throughout the text for both staff and youth.

Introduction to the After-School Youth Program

Manchester Craftsmen's Guild's after-school program, known as the Apprenticeship Training Program (ATP), is the cornerstone of its service to youth and the community. From three o'clock to five-thirty in the

afternoon, from Monday to Friday, Pittsburgh high school age youth are able to access free art instruction; individualized advising; and visits to cultural institutions, colleges, training schools, and local professional settings that help students develop their vision for careers and for what and where they want to study beyond high school. Enrollment takes place at three times during the school year, and a continually renewing set of courses are offered through the MCG's four studios: ceramics, photography, design arts, and digital arts. All who come are welcome. There are no formal entry requirements, such as demonstrations of prior talent, experience, academic ability, or complicated applications. Accessibility is also maintained through a partnership with Pittsburgh Public Schools that enables any student attending one of the school district's high schools to attend without fee for instruction, materials, or supportive services.

Physical Environment

Numerous studies have examined how the physical environment has an impact on the learning of youth of all ages, particularly with respect to behaviors, attitudes, and achievement (Earthman, 2002; Kumar, O'Malley, & Johnston, 2008; Maxwell, 2007; Young, Green, Roehrich-Patrick, Joseph, & Gibson 2003). The learning environment should be planned, programmed, and designed to support the intended learning activities to contribute to the social and physical development of youth (Lippman, 2010).

The structure at 1815 Metropolitan Street houses the anchor operations of Manchester Craftsmen's Guild, which opened in 1987 and was designed by architect Tasso Katselas, a student of Frank Lloyd Wright. The design shows Wright's influence in its sense of materials, proportion, light, and the integration of interior and exterior space. Circular and arched window and door openings, along with warm terra-cotta-toned exposed masonry inside and outside the building, call to mind a modern interpretation of indigenous African mud-wattle structures. Quilts, paintings, and hand-wrought furnishings, vessels, and sculptures are everywhere in this structure, creating a palpable sense of warmth, inspiration, and hope. In *Safe Havens*, a 1993 study of the Manchester Craftsmen's Guild by Project Zero of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, MCG is described as "a place of cultural and educational renaissance where the futures of urban youth are transformed from risk to promise[,] . . . a place in the sun." Strickland states, "My vision of a school is that it looks like your house. . . . [P]eople feel comfortable and they feel at ease. You feel safe psychologically. That is a very important thing" (Davis, Soep, Remba, Maira, & Putnoi, 1993,

p. 82). The theme of safe havens recurs throughout the building. Nearby spaces such as the youth area, the fountain outside the building, and the hallways near the studios that act as galleries for professional and student art are some of the destinations where youth go to be alone or with one another. In our observations, the youth seemed to flourish and respond to the open responsibility and trust that the staff have in them as they sat among unique furnishings designed and built by Tadao Arimoto, a designer and craftsman who worked under the great George Nakashima. Nakashima was a Japanese American architect and wood craftsman who was a leading innovator in modern furniture design and an important early figure in the revival of the American fine craft movement.

Strickland has always added to the craftsmanship showcased throughout MCG that represents all members of the community, locally and internationally, so as to allow people “to get comfortable with art” in providing “a perfect human shelter” to all who enter the premises, which adds another layer of softness and beauty to the space (Strickland, 2007, pp. 12–14). This creative space has a strong resonance among youth and staff members alike:

It’s different than in business because there is so much art and there is so much physical space that it lends itself to this notion that you really are here to create and that creative process is valued because it’s really mirrored and reflected around you—that is one thing that really contributes to the artistic culture. It suggests massively that there are no limits; it suggests that the possibilities are truly limitless. When you walk into the rotunda and you look up and you see giant tapestries or giant pieces of art, you think, “[W]ow that must have taken a really long time to create[,]” and, “[W]ow, and you must have a space large enough to hold it.” And your eyes elevate to the top of the building and you see through the building and into the sky. I think, but maybe I’m over-analyzing and being entirely too cerebral, but I think that environment suggests quite strongly that we want you to think beyond the boundaries, that we want you to engage not only in realistic possibilities but in those possibilities that might not be so readily apparent or obtainable—it lends itself to creativity—the physical environment does that. (Teaching artist interview, December 1, 2009)

This building shows the role of creativity and craftsmanship of staff and youth alike. Public and private spaces in MCG create model

environments for education, exhibitions, performances, professional gatherings, and social events for local and wider audiences in the Pittsburgh area. Youth and staff inspiration are found in photo exhibitions, ceramics, paintings, handmade objects, furniture, and artworks by youth and adult artists (resident and visiting), which are shown throughout the hallways and two galleries. One teaching artist spoke of the effect that the building had: "when you walk in here or you're walking up to the building, it's a warm feeling, it's not a cold feeling. . . . [T]hat definitely affects the mentality of people's thinking" (teaching artist interview, October 22, 2009).

A youth described the physical environment in this way:

It's just friendly and easy to work with. The building is spacious and has room for everybody to do what they need. Like, there's three or four kilns in the ceramics studio just inside the building, then we have one outside. There's artwork everywhere from various mediums that people do, that are submitted by students and instructors. So it's sort of hey this is what I can do, but it influences you. And then you can implement different works into yours. You see different shapes or patterns you want to try that might work in different ways. (Youth participant interview, November 17, 2009)

The youth's work is showcased throughout the four studios and exhibited at the end of every trimester, which provides occasion for young people to invite friends, family, and neighbors to celebrate their efforts, to network with peers from other studios and with community members and other art enthusiasts, and even to sell some of their pieces. According to Strickland (2007), "making a big deal out of showing the youth's art is mostly a new experience for most of the youth that shows support and recognition and does wonders for their souls" (p. 15).

The event has a significant effect both personally and socially on how young people communicate with new people, how they respond to constructive criticism of their pieces, and how these activities make them think critically and reflect about their pieces in relation to themselves and others. This dialogue and discussion happens every day in the studios, so the youth are well prepared to talk about the art process and about how other pieces inspired and influenced. The mission and educational philosophy of MCG clearly identifies a value system that endorses Bill Strickland's vision, focusing on the personal and social development of every young person to achieve meaningful success.

Manchester Craftsmen's Guild Philosophy and Culture

Strickland (2007) passionately talks about what he has learned from life experiences that became the essential ingredients of the philosophy of MCG:

Every human being, despite the circumstances of their birth, is born full of potential, and . . . the way to unlock that potential is to place individuals in a nurturing environment and expose them to the kind of stimulating and empowering creative experiences the feed the human spirit. . . . [Y]ou cure poverty by understanding that poor folks are human beings before they are poor, and by providing them with access to the fundamental spiritual nourishment every human heart requires: beauty, order, purpose, opportunity—the things that gives us a meaningful human. (p. 194)

In Bill's narratives about MCG it is clear that culture is what drives the center to achieve this philosophy. Anna Craft, an expert in creativity in education and learning futures, commended Strickland's work at MCG, stating that Strickland fundamentally believes that "what is going on is self-expression, finding a unique voice for each person . . . and once people develop their voices they can develop as human beings" (Craft, 2005, p. xvii). A senior MCG staff member stated that "impacting lives and communities has a domino effect, as students define their own culture of learning" (management interview, November 11, 2007).

During youth interviews on the culture of MCG, two youth summarized their understanding and conception. The first said, "We are on an equal playing field here. We have the same opportunities to create something, and we're not singled out as the new kid or as a different ethnicity. You're just another kid who goes to MCG who wants to learn something and make something of ourselves (youth participant interview, November 13, 2009). The second said, "If I look at MCG I think peace, culture, artwork. So when I think of the culture of MCG, it's like someone took a whole bunch of fruits, threw them in the blender, put it on high, poured it out, made a fruit smoothie and was like ahhh" (youth participant interview, November 17, 2009).

Teaching artists spoke about the MCG culture in a positive manner:

MCG has the equipment, materials and process knowledge in addition to artist instructors to follow a kid in any direction they are interested in as they become interested in it. I don't really know many places in the world where you could go where the answer to your question is yes. Like can I do

this? Can I try this? Can I think this? And it's like yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. It's crazy. . . . The environment that Bill wanted to create wasn't a "no but maybe" environment. We've created we're going to do it. You're going to do it. We're going to do it the best we can. It's going to be wonderful. (Teaching artist interview, January 14, 2009)

Another artist commented:

Having a nice environment is very important, definitely people that respect themselves and respect the students, I think that's very important. Having top of the line equipment and materials, that's definitely very important. I think these are things Bill has said as well. I think it's instilled in the staff and what he's trying to create. He's trying to create that culture—having the nice building, having the passionate staff, making sure we have all the equipment and materials we need. Those are probably the main factors; everything else just falls into place. (Teaching artist interview, November 21, 2009)

VALUES FOR LIVING, WORKING, AND LEARNING (THE BANNERS)

A series of banners created by youth and staff are repeatedly encountered in spaces and studios throughout MCG, each highlighting a single word along with a corresponding metaphorical photo image featuring hands. The featured words are *respect*, *listen*, *influence*, *shape*, and *embrace*: "I will Listen with the intent to understand to be responsive. I will be aware of how my work Influences others. I will acknowledge my limitations and Embrace life-long learning opportunities. I will Respect others and conduct self with reason, focus and belief. I will Shape solutions to problems." The corresponding meaning of each banner is woven into an honor code that each participant signs as part of registration with MCG, and the youth sign collectively during their first class meeting in each studio. The overt message of each value has a dramatic effect on the attitudes of young people and staff members, as they explicitly declare what MCG represents.

The values are at the core of the MCG culture as staff and youth respect and appreciate what the banner words enforce. The words not only are used within MCG's walls but also seem to have significant consequences during external visits and field trips, and even in school and home life:

It's something you can implement into your life and help to form relationships with people you wouldn't think possible

because it gives you a different perspective on things and how people may think. (Youth participant interview, November 13, 2009)

I think they're a good idea. It's not the rules, but the environment that you want to create. So we do talk to the students on the first day of classes about the values and how important they are. It's how people should act in the building and beyond the building. It's like life sort of, keep these things in mind as you're making decisions with your life. . . . It's all about keeping an open mind and how they behave with other students and how they can affect or influence other students. They're definitely a good thing; thumbs up. (Teaching artist interview, November 21, 2009)

For the most part I think they are really good core values to hold. Especially the honor code, those are all super legit, especially because it's about respecting each other, that's one of my favorite things, just respecting one another, your personal belongings, your space, your time, respecting all of that. . . . For as long as I've been here, I think the traditions have been up held pretty well. I think we're all on the same page. (Teaching artist interview, November 15, 2009)

The studio culture and values are established from the start of the first day for each course in each trimester. The teaching artist introduces the banners and honor code to those young people returning to MCG, and particularly to those who are there for the first time, so that all have an understanding of the expectations and cultural aspects of MCG. Each member of staff has their own way to use, develop, and discuss these values with young people when the need arises, through open discussions, informal chats, peer explanation, or individual consultation.

One day in the ceramics studio, a teaching artist mingled and chatted with youth, greeting them at the door and suggesting particular tasks, such as cutting clay plugs and patting balls to throw on the wheel later. The experienced youth immediately started up wheels and began to throw pots. After about sixteen young people were in the room, the teaching artist began to look around and asked another young person, "Where's Jeremy?" Shortly thereafter, Jeremy, a young man with a few years' experience, arrived with a smile, and the teaching artist turned over the task of presenting the honor code and banners to him.

Jeremy begins, "You are now at the Manchester Craftsman's Guild and people here, well, they basically trust you. We live by a few rules

but they trust you. There haven't been any fights, any graffiti. You just have to use your common sense and to live by these rules while you're here—and hopefully outside of here too!" In talking about the banners and values, Jeremy provided personal examples: "This is a studio. Wipe your feet on the mat before you go, especially in this studio, when new students are here there's often a big mud path down the hallway." This wasn't on the list, but the staff members in the room agreed it was a good one to mention. "That's part of respect!" one of the veteran girls shouted out. "Don't wear headphones because once this guy had them on and the teacher was trying to tell him something and he couldn't even get the advice. We try to keep it social here and be open to each other." "Oh and don't eat or drink in here, because of all the chemicals." The list went on, with Jeremy stating something, and the staff or other kids piping in with embellishments, stories, and reasons for the rules. The new kids listened and looked from person to person. "Use time wisely and work to your ability," Jeremy kept saying. "You know, basically, just be appropriate!"

STUDIO AND WORKSHOP VIGNETTES

Manchester Craftsmen's Guild has also established itself as a professional-level artistic center, attracting accomplished artists and musicians who through residencies produce new works and public programs as they engage the broader regional arts community. These artists make use of the same studios, galleries, and supports as the youth, essentially working alongside them. Sometimes this takes place through intentional workshops and sometimes, less formally, as part of the daily environment.

During the 2009–2010 season, the artist Julia Mandle led a residency on performance art, civic action, and urban revitalization. Working with the MCG youth, Mandle aimed in the workshop Paths to the Park to engage the artistic process as a form of civic activism.

Mandle and the youth produced chalk shoes, the soles of which were composed of massive casts of bright green-pigmented chalk. The performance would enable the group to achieve a sense of agency as they worked to reclaim a public-city space by drawing people's attention to the striking visualization of bright green (chalk) lines throughout the park. Adult leaders from eleven different cultural organizations accompanied the youth. The purpose of pairing the young people who had made and first learned to walk in the shoes with adult leaders who were learning to use the shoes for the first time during the performance was to transform traditional teacher (adult) and learner (young people) roles. The deliberate process of teaching and learning to walk during the performance created a situation that slowed the pace of urban life,

opening space for contemplation and discussion among the pairings (Mandle, 2009).

On entering the youth area at MCG during the first day of the workshop, there was a sense of enthusiasm and appreciation for the artist and her work. Two short videos were shown of performances that incorporated the process of making the chalk shoes, with emphasis on the background and meaning of what previous projects represented. Immediately, the young people were intrigued with what was happening and were asking whether they could go beyond the project plan to record video and make music for their performance. Others offered and promoted their skills and talents to the artist about doing the project and the final video.

Originating from their strengths and interests in music composition and editing, interview skills, project management, and photography, the young people were delighted to take on these critical secondary roles to enhance the project. One had written a piece of music and was willing to use it for the final video clip because he thought it was perfect for the project's particular message. Another then offered to edit the video and to include subtitles. The artist knew about the culture and philosophy of MCG, so she went along with the ideas and developed them further throughout the week. The degrees of commitment, resilience, and passion toward the project revealed self-confidence in those willing to take risks and be open to criticism. Expressing a sense of responsibility for their own learning and empowered to get involved in a new project, the young people took on additional work roles, thus ensuring the best result. This confidence was highlighted with excitement when one youth said, "This is going to be good, man." This kind of experience, regularly created at MCG, encourages innovation, young people's engagement with possibilities, and critical thinking as inherent in the process of creation. Awareness of peer knowledge and transferable skills among youth are exactly what is meant by MCG's culture in action, a culture expected and promoted at MCG in multiple ways. In this example, young people were given a voice and a strong sense of agency; they responded by embracing the opportunity for project control, responsibility, and ownership, and ultimately, they directed the workshop. All their suggestions were used in some form in the final production of the performance.

Youth Experience at MCG: Ethos

On entering any of the four studios at MCG, you are hit by color, inspiration, warmth, and noise. Your eyes do not know where to look

first—at the wonderful art pieces being produced or at the selection of showcased art scattered around the room. There is a sense of calmness (almost a slow-motion feeling) among the chaos and noise, and everyone (youth and staff) manages to find their own space to work, reflect, and develop the concepts they are working on. From informal conversations to deep engagement about an art process, lightbulb moments of euphoria occur, as when a young learner exclaimed, “Why was it never explained like that before?!” or “I get it. It’s that simple when it’s explained like that!” The noise and energy draw you in and make you want to roll up your sleeves and start working on an art piece. In these creative spaces you can get lost in thought as you are inspired by the work that surrounds you.

On entry to any studio, an immediate friendly smile greets you from both staff and youth. Conversations initiated by youth can spring from curious questions about who you might be, your artistic background, or why you’re interested in MCG. It is standard procedure at MCG to have an entourage of local and global visitors to observe in the studios, whether new researchers, board members, university students, other teaching artists, administrative staff, or an international group tour.

One youth mentioned how MCG makes people feel:

[It allows for] a good opportunity to express yourself and learn different disciplines of art and also learn more about yourself and further yourself in ways you don’t think of at the time; you can educate yourself in a way that school doesn’t provide. Discipline and patience, stuff you can learn through like physical activity and repetition that you can’t learn out of a book. (Youth participant interview, November 13, 2009)

Another said:

Learning at MCG is like being thirsty and having a glass of water in front of you. . . . In school, the glass of water is in front of you, but it’s further. Here, it’s kind of already there for us, all we have to do is drink.

And another youth in the same interview agreed:

There ain’t no beating around the bush. The water, at school, you lose that water, you knock it over or something. But here, you keep the water and it keeps you hydrated for a long time. (Youth participant interviews, November 15, 2009)

YOUTH STORIES: EXPOSURE TO MATERIALS AND ART CULTURE
AND THINKING

Celine was a diminutive and talkative ninth grader when she first came to Manchester Craftsmen's Guild at the encouragement of an older sibling. Of Vietnamese descent, her family settled in Pittsburgh following a paternal grandmother who had married an American GI. Her parents soon separated, and Celine, along with four siblings, remained with their dad, who worked in building maintenance. Vince was a shy and quietly thoughtful boy from a different school who lived with his dad and two siblings in public housing. He began to attend ceramics classes at MCG the same year as Celine. Although their social styles and cultural backgrounds were different, they soon became friends in the studio. Celine began to master the basic steps of the potter's wheel, which enabled her to produce shallow bowls and modestly sized plates. Many days she devoted large amounts of her time to talking with peers and teaching artists. Initially, the focus of her work was to produce as much as possible as quickly as possible and turn it into cash through selling her pottery.

The problem was that after developing some initial skill, she was not pushing herself to make more challenging or distinctive pieces. Teaching artists could often be heard talking with her about the sloppy bases of her plates, which might easily break after firing or at least require a lot of physical effort to file smooth. She would shrug it off and say, "I'll make more!" Vince was almost always focused on his work, and on helping others with theirs, but he seemed to struggle with expressing his thoughts and in the playful social interaction that comes naturally to many teens. One day while an observer was trying her hand at a pot, Vince came over to her and asked whether he could help. When his advice was welcomed, he reached in and pulled the pot himself, losing control at the end because of his standing position and then apologizing with some embarrassment. Assuring him that this was not a problem, the observer asked how long he had been working at MCG. He responded, "Oh, a long time . . . three weeks." This deep sense of belonging, sense of confidence in trying, and willingness to reach out to teach others is the general ethos of MCG, and it is taken in by teens who are learning to understand and who are growing their own abilities and skills.

In the winter of 2008, Hiromu and Mieko Okuda, Japanese artists and a married couple, came to MCG from the historical pottery center of Shigaraki to participate in a six-week residency during which they executed large-scale collaborative works to be exhibited during the annual conference of the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts. Celine and Vince had each been studying Japanese in

their respective schools. Celine also had a deep-seated fascination with Japanese pop culture, especially the storytelling and graphic expressions of anime and *manga*.

Hiromu embodied the traditional understandings of materials that were part of his heritage as a fifth-generation potter of an important artistic dynasty. While continuing to make traditional tea bowls, he also broke from tradition by making large sculptures that integrated ceramic forms with steel and wood. Mieko, who had come to ceramics through an interest in textiles, had a method of working with clay that often expressed the detailed texture of fiber-based works. One of the ways she accomplished this was by using a cutting wire tool held tightly between her hands to make gestural reticulated slices through clay, producing delicate leaflike forms that called to mind exotic sea creatures or flowers. Mieko's project involved interacting with hundreds of community members, from preschool age to the elderly, to teach them the technique. Her vision was to incorporate thousands of elements made by many hands in the community into a constellation-like arrangement that would transform a nearby greenhouse into an environment that expressed the diversity of the community while drawing implicit connections to the seas and heavens. Over the course of a few sessions in the ceramics studio, two researchers observed the way Mieko's presence in the studio moves through the young people and through both their personal work and their role as leaders in the studio.

The Japanese artist arrived with two bags of white clay and a board. Moments later I look over and Celine has a wire with paper flowers on either end and she and the artist are cutting pieces of clay off the edges of the clay blocks and then twisting them into interesting shapes. The artist is showing her how to make a zigzag cut using the wire and pulling it up and down as she pulls it across the clay. Each time they peel it off a little surprising fish-fin like creation appears. Celine shows her what she has made and the artist takes it in her open palm and considers it, pointing out beautiful parts of it and saying, "Very nice."

Vincent arrives and watches. The artist gives him her wire. He cuts some with very large zigzags and she shows him how to tighten up the cut to get more finlike results. The two of them pull one slice after another off the blocks, give them a little bend or twist and place them carefully on the slab. No one really notices what they are doing or seems to want to join them. The Japanese artist is with them for about 15 minutes and then she and her husband leave and the two young people continue to make the pieces.

Two days later a second researcher observed this experience take on a new form:

The artwork by the visiting artists seems to be taking over more space. The teaching artist and a student carry a tray of small pieces by the visiting artist into another room. Another tray of small pieces is sitting on a nearby table. One of the guys with short brown hair asks the teaching artist about the pieces that are sitting on the table. He explains that the visiting artist will glaze them and lay them on the gallery floor in an installation. The student asks how the pieces were made. He says they were made with a wire tool. Vincent must have said something to the teaching artist after that exchange, because the next thing I noticed was that the teaching artist told the boy with short brown hair that Vincent offered to show him how to make one. Vincent got a lump of red clay and a wire tool. Without saying a word, he worked the wire tool through the clay, wiggling it up and down, to slice off a couple of wavy slices. He pinched them together into this little wing-looking piece that looks very much like the ones the artist made.

A visitor who was working at the table commented that it was a good demonstration. The teaching artist picked up the piece and said that it would make a nice handle—that it could be attached to the kind of pots they were making today. Vincent continued to silently pull a few more wings and added one more to his piece.

In this way, Celine and Vince often greeted visitors and demonstrated and assisted them in the technique, whereas Mieko increasingly became the artistic director of the work. This transition of roles, subtle at first, enabled Mieko to devote greater focus on relaying her vision behind the work and to share information about her culture and its influence on creative production. By the time of the conference, the works were ready to install. The Okudas, with the assistance of MCG staff and youth, transformed the greenhouse and filled another gallery in downtown Pittsburgh with related works, some of which they had shipped from Japan. The national conference took place in the large David L. Lawrence Convention Center in the heart of the city's business and cultural districts. Vince and Celine accompanied and assisted the Okudas as they demonstrated their work before the thousands of conference visitors. The young people's prior knowledge and interest in the Japanese language also enabled them to provide some simple translations for observers.

Following the Okudas return to Japan, Celine and Vince both continued to share the wire-cutting technique with visitors and other young people at MCG. Their works also grew more ambitious in scale and creative vision, pushing materials and process in new directions. They each became active participants, delivering artists' talks at their exhibition openings. Celine's talks ceased to focus so exclusively on the price she wanted for her work and shifted to critical analyses of successes, failures, questions, decisions, and directions. Vince began to work more with ceramic figures and larger vessels.

The role of authentic art making, collaborative relationships with visiting artists, and opportunities to contribute to public art happenings are an authentic art-practice base that supports the strong culture of youth empowerment and ownership at MCG. But in daily interactions, young people have emotional, conceptual, and skill-building support from teaching artists. This combined youth work and art mentoring is both instinctive and intentional. The MCG attracts artists with a passion for supporting the ability of individuals to follow their interests, but the community of educators also structures the approach to art making and social development through a very intentional reflective practice.

Teaching Artists' Story

Without formal training in the process of drawing language-based evidence of learning from their students, many teaching artists initially feel most adept focusing on the technical aspects and production stages of the art-making process. Because MCG aspires to use the studio environment and the mentoring relationship that develops between young people and artists as a pathway to social, emotional, and academic development, building the ability to express ideas, feelings, challenges, and goals are key concerns of the instructional process. One youth said, "I like MCG cause . . . the instructors, they are really helpful and they really teach you a lot and they care about your learning, so as long as they care, I care" (youth participant interview, November 15, 2009).

One teaching artist stated, "In the beginning I was kind of resistant. I didn't want to talk so much in studio, just make art, but now I'd rather have meaningful talk about art than just make it. It lets me know if the students are picking up on the ideas, [and] it's helping me as a teacher" (teaching artist interview, December 1, 2009). To develop beyond traditional practices of craft and to push learning to higher cognitive levels, MCG's teaching artists have participated in biweekly meetings dedicated to reflective practice. One staff member described the goal of these meetings as to find ways to create "feedback between staff and youth in order to inform studio activities, help young people realize

their potential by reflecting on their thinking and work.” In turn, it is hoped that the overall program will continually improve by providing youth and adults alike with time dedicated to explaining the value and meaning of their learning. It is further believed that the information exposed in these art-based discussions will help MCG explain the extraordinary strengths of the program to others, including funders, the school district, family, and friends.

For some instructors, the reflective practice routines enabled them to see successes in courses that they felt were not going well. In the context of a course on observational drawing, the teaching artist initially encouraged young people to talk about what they liked and what they did not like about their work. He shifted the discussion to attend to the kinds of activities and decisions they made in the process of creating the drawing. Some of the youth talked about how they used their fingers to form a viewfinder or frame, to determine the composition of a sketch. Others talked about how their drawing experimented with compositional strategy, like the rule of thirds, wherein important elements of the image are located along the imagined guidelines that divide the picture plane into nine equal parts to create a more interesting, off-center composition. Being able to recognize the rule applied in other artists’ work generated much excitement among the group. Such discussions ultimately led to the kind of thinking and personal choices made on the basis of this framing of experience.

The leader of a course on functional pottery has been teaching in the ceramics studio at Manchester Craftsmen’s Guild for about six years. College educated with a studio focus, she had no formal teacher training before coming to MCG, other than what she had developed through previous instructional experience in a museum-based program. As an artist, however, she describes herself first and foremost as a maker of useful pots for daily living. Rather than sketch out plans for a new piece or body of work, she makes a series of related forms and works through variations of decoration, handles, and lids until she arrives at a new and satisfactory solution to the problems associated with integrating form, surface, function, and visual appeal.

As her instructional practice at MCG evolved, her engagement in reflective practice meetings with other teaching artists deepened. She recognized how the meetings provided a space to develop specific routines to support shared studio practice. To make more apparent the effects of teaching and learning, teaching artists use these meetings to share breakthroughs and to wrestle with barriers to teaching and learning. If what was so important in her own creative practice was for her to quietly and mindfully work through subtle variations and evolutions in a body of work, how might traditional pedagogical strategies like

quizzing, testing, and critique affect her ability to create a nonthreatening environment without editorial intervention? Rather than provide the group with model examples and expect them to replicate their elements, this artist wondered whether there might be different ways to elicit thoughtful and divergent explorations of traditional pottery forms.

To learn more, she began to bring to class each week at least one piece of pottery from her personal collection of other potters. After working for an hour or so, she would call the group together and invite them to handle the piece, think about it, formulate an observation, and pass it on to the next student. As the next student was handling the work, the previous handler would share her insight about it. During one course meeting early on in the term, she brought with her a favorite serving piece, a shallow stoneware bowl about fourteen inches in diameter. The bowl was thrown on a potter's wheel and the marks of the throwing process, known as rings, were visible through a glaze surface that broke from blue to brown depending on the relative thickness of the surface, as it flowed into the indentations left by the potter's fingers or crested thinly over the ridges between. In the center of the plate, the potter rendered a gestural decoration of a fish. Turning the plate over, one could find a surprise—another layer of glaze on the underside of the bowl with a decoration of smaller fish, which one would never see without taking the time to patiently admire the piece from all sides. The piece required a high level of personal interaction to take it all in.

The bowl had thin, uniform walls, a lightweight and elegant contour. As the bowl passed from hand to hand, some young people commented on the technical expertise of the potter. The glaze was smoothly melted, without defects, and had a rich and variegated color. Others commented on the quality of the firing and the pleasant tone the glaze might give to the food that it would contain. The decoration was delightfully energetic. Some commented on the skill of the drawing. As the conversation continued, the nature of the responses began to shift from the facts of the object to speculations as to the maker's intention and imagination. One young man wondered whether the potter intended users to serve a fish-based dish from it. Another young woman began to ponder the meaning of the large fish inside the bowl in relation to the smaller one hidden on the underside. She speculated that when the fish was removed from its environment and became a meal, it was important to recall this; it was once part of a larger life system. Even in this early course discussion, the levels of attention to detail, meaning, analysis, and synthesis were remarkable. Moreover, the teaching artist was able to listen and observe with awe and delight in the young people's capacities to observe, describe, and imagine. They began to teach one another that day.

Transformations: Today's Youth and Teaching Artists Who Model Their Founder's Story

In his middle teens, Jonah was caught in an act of public graffiti that authorities called vandalism. Arrested, fined, and sentenced to community service, he soon found his way to Manchester Craftsmen's Guild after hearing from friends that it was a cool place to spend time. Although he enrolled in several courses on painting and drawing, Jonah continually gravitated toward producing his work not on canvas or art paper but on discarded cardboard and clothing. This piqued the interest and curiosity of the teaching artist and studio coordinator Thomas. Once Thomas and Jonah began to talk with each other about their motivations and sense of excitement when creating art, they began to find surprisingly common ground in nineteenth- and twenty-first-century ideas about the creation and appearance of art in the open. Over the coming months, this dialogue developed into a concept for a new type of course for the design arts studio: art for social change. The pair used the MCG course development guidelines to create a plan and curriculum for the new course. Jonah began to do research on other contemporary artists working on social activism and prepared PowerPoint lectures for the course. Although much of the work began in the studio, it became public in intervention art events, an art form developed in the 1960s to refer to an artist's conceptual and performance events engaging public space and communities.

The first work created during the course by a group explored the idea of a perfect moment. Each young person recalled and wrote a brief memory of a perfect moment and shared it with another person in the group. These brief narratives were then transferred to sheets of cardboard with stenciled letters similar to those used on billboards in the predigital era. They then wore these cardboard panels like walking advertisements while occupying a public park one afternoon in Pittsburgh's Cultural District, a loose network of galleries, performance spaces, and arts organizations. The youth made efforts to interview and record passersby's comments about their perfect-moment memories. One youth documented the event using digital video. Once the class returned to MCG, the video and audio were edited and the cardboard panels assembled into a large-scale, collaborative text-based artwork.

Jonah and Thomas had bridged a gap in artistic traditions from different eras to build a new relationship while creating, collaborating, mentoring, and leading. Jonah had the opportunity to design and teach a course, and in this course more than any other, the young people in the course experienced and shared their memories, hopes, fears, and dreams. This facilitation process and codesigned course resulted in an engaged experience for the teaching artist, the youth instructor, and the

other participating youth. The design and implementation of the course corresponded with the initiation of reflective practice, and Thomas's enthusiasm for the practice allowed the space for Jonah's ideas to be the center of a new course. During the semester Thomas continually brought moments from the course back to reflective practice. Early on, Thomas shared his surprise and delight when Jonah took on the instructional role for the first class, setting the tone for the course:

Then the group went to the youth area for a slide show presentation—Jonah did a slideshow he created and Thomas said, "He crushed it! He wanted to do it and loved it and he was able to relate to the youth and brought great examples—the best slide presentation. Best part of the day—he took questions at the end. He was like an adult—talking about art legalities and the lines you might cross." (Reflective practice notes, April 16, 2009)

A big idea that the teaching artists had been working on was creating space and time to discuss ideas together. As the program unfolded, Thomas had new examples of youth leadership to share at every session, including a story about a young woman in the class asking whether she could lead the transition discussion: "A teen asked about the transition discussion and I asked her if she would lead it. She said 'something short maybe.' She started the discussion and was the one the group looked to if they wanted to talk. She kept the conversation going" (Reflective practice notes, May 15, 2009).

During this reflective practice session, Thomas went on to talk about how the issue of race came up during the teen-led discussion and how hard it was not to have an answer. Building on this experience, the teaching artists discussed how to allow space to be vulnerable as an instructor, how to be OK with no answer or silence and yet not cut off expression. By sharing this process with his colleagues, Thomas gained strategies, support, and excitement about the process, which in turn gave him confidence to keep broadening what was possible in his studio.

The survival of MCG is closely related to its learning culture and the dramatic effect this has had on the many youth who attended. The relationships and friendships formed among youth and staff are the core of MCG. Informal interactions among staff and youth have led to trusting relationships and lifelong friendships. This social networking provides a respectful, supportive, and caring environment that has a direct influence on self-discovery and the retention of young people at MCG. A young person discussed how a teaching artist has influenced her to look for a career in which she can be passionate about her work:

I think the teachers are always pushing you to learn something new. Usually in every class every day, they're teaching you something new. And it seems like most of the people that come here are really interested in their artwork. . . . A TA influences me because she loves what she does[;] she loves being here and helping everybody out. When I'm older I want to have a job like that. . . . [H]ere I love what I'm doing. . . . [S]he influences me the most because she has a job that she loves and wants to get up to do it everyday . . . and that's the kind of job I want to have, even though I don't know what that is yet. (Participant interview, October 30, 2009)

Bryk and Schneider (2002) discuss values education in terms of “trust relations as a dynamic interplay among four considerations: respect, competence, personal regard for others, and integrity” (p. 23):

Trust relations culminate in important consequences at the organizational level, including more effective decision-making, enhanced social support for innovation, more efficient social control of adults' work and an expanded moral authority to “go the extra mile” for the children. Relational trust . . . is an organizational property. . . . [I]ts presence (or absence) has important consequences for the functioning of the school and its capacity to engage fundamental change. (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, p. 22)

The freedom to be creative and trust extended to young people also builds among staff a sense of confidence and risk taking that does not exist in more formal learning organizations:

And if I want to try something new, I have the liberty to do things and it's not like I'm supposed to be doing this or that at a certain time. I have a lot of freedom, too, just like the students so that's pretty cool. And everyone trusts everyone that they're working with 'cause we're not watched over, we don't have punch clocks, we do our own times and everything. I'm pretty OK with that. (Teaching artist interview, November 15, 2009)

Fielding et al. (2005) discuss the “considerable investment of time, resources and commitment” (p. 11) needed for “joint practice development” (p. 16), which is based on trusting relationships. This is seen at MCG, where staff members often collaborate informally with young

people to learn about the youths' home or school life and to offer guidance and direction, particularly to those disengaged from the formal school system. Staff members often collaborate with youth to provide feedback on studio projects or guidance on future courses. There is an exchange of ideas and knowledge about what worked and what needs improvement. Fewer curricular demands, the lack of high-stakes assessment, and the absence of focus on external, competitive learning allow for focus to rely on a culture of personalized learning, innovative teaching, interpersonal relationships and reflective practice. Manchester Craftsmen's Guild provides a safe and supportive environment in which staff members provide educational guidance, peer coaching, mentoring, advice on creative work and college applications, and in which they share their passion for art and transmit the core values of MCG.

Conclusion

The informal approach of MCG does not happen casually. It begins with a vision for the potential of people to learn and create, it supports that vision with a beautiful and well-equipped environment, and it nurtures that vision with a culture of trust and mentorship. The empowerment and freedom afforded through respect for the youth and staff sustains Bill Strickland's vision. The personalization and intimacy of Strickland's story about making a simple connection with a mentor artist remains the present-day driver of teaching artists at MCG. Their belief that every young person who walks into the studio embodies the potential to make the impossible possible is echoed in their daily choices and efforts to support a creative process, to make a safe space to talk about that process, and to build relationships. Their care and concern in this endeavor is echoed in turn by the young people who return again and again to enjoy the relationships and express themselves.

Reflection Questions

- In what specific ways can the context of work, site, and agency influence actual day-to-day civic youth work practice?
- Can one do and be a civic youth worker without knowledge of this practice, a relevant vocabulary, or training in this practice?
- What makes civic youth work practice a type of youth work? What would have to change in civic youth work ethos, practice, skills, and knowledge to use this approach with adults or the aged?

- How might the guild's banners be framed in a civic youth work ethos?
- Why might experienced and effective civic youth workers want to talk about their practice with teaching artists? What might they have in common in their ways of thinking, seeing, and working with young people? What about their philosophies and conceptions of their praxis?
- How might young people's engagement with possibilities in an arts world oriented to the process of creation fit philosophically and existentially with their civic engagement?
- When a new student asks an experienced student how a pot was made, the latter can tell how. Can young people involved in civic engagement tell how they failed (and succeeded) in their group work?
- Why is reflection basic to civic youth work practice?
- Is mentoring a practical civic youth work practice?
- How does the craft metaphor work in discussions and analysis of civic youth work?
- Are classical craft mentoring strategies and practices in the arts useful approaches to mastery in civic youth work?