

Critical Pedagogy and the Visual Arts Curriculum in the Singapore Art Museum

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Abstract

This study explores the primacy of developing a critical pedagogy appropriate for art museum education, with particular reference to the curriculum in the Singapore Art Museum (SAM). To create conditions for a pedagogy which is meaningful to the experience of visitors, the art museum curriculum needs to empower visitors to construct and reflect about issues of identity and culture. The role that critical pedagogy might play in addressing the educational approaches in SAM is presented. Finally, the implications for practice are explored in the form of community-based art education. Together, it is argued that collaborative and interdisciplinary educational experiences should be the purpose and outcome for developing the Art museum as a vehicle / site for community empowerment.

Introduction

The rise of broad-based political and cultural movement towards pluralism has significantly challenged the accepted definitions and purposes of museums in the 21st century. The notion of 'pluralistic museums' (Edward 1996, 14) in the contemporary society is evident among museums which have moved beyond embracing traditional roles – collection, conservation, research, exhibition, interpretation – to acting as cultural centre and social instrument. As museums become more conscious that objects can be used to bring understanding and appreciation to contemporary life, as well as contribute to the community or social welfare.

The emphasis given educational functions by museums also had social implications.

Some museums tried to reach all parts of their audience and to use their collection, research, exhibition, and interpretive functions for the benefit of the entire community (*Ibid*,13).

The growing interest in the social and cultural roles that museums play within communities can be seen in research conducted in the fields of art and museum education (e.g. Karp 1992; Kaplan 1996). In general, art museums do not only contribute to the production of cultural knowledge but also influence the ways in which we imagine our community and ourselves.

At the national level, the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) has made considerable efforts in the development of the educational role of the museum through its exhibition and outreach programmes. Since its establishment in 1996, SAM has become part of a network of art centres and community centres to provide arts education for schools and the general adult population. As a national art museum, it is also accorded the role to engender a sense of nationhood through the understanding of the artistic heritage of Singapore. This however, raises a fundamental question: how might the curriculum in an art museum articulate the purposes of education from the perspectives of the individual (self-development, equality, empowerment and emancipation) and at the same time affirms the state's objective for promoting national and cultural identity?

To evaluate the mediation of theory and practice, it is the intention of this paper to bring forth the concept of critical pedagogy to address the educational role of museums. Although critical pedagogy has not been developed with museums in mind, it has arisen "from a need to name the contradiction between what schools claim they do and what they actually do" (Giroux 1992, 153). Schools claim to offer equality of education and opportunity to all, but children from different social and cultural backgrounds have manifestly different school experiences. Museums, too, claim to be for everyone, but research studies indicated that museums are not experienced equally by all (e.g. Bourdieu and Darbel 1990;

Hooper-Greenhill 1994; Merriman 1997). In the case of an art museum, not every visitor is equally motivated, equipped and enabled to experience art directly (Wright 1997).

Drawing upon the theory of critical pedagogy, this discussion is split into three sections: the first outlines the principles and assumptions of critical pedagogy in relation to art museum education. The second part deals specifically with the constraints of SAM's exhibition and educational programmes and the role that critical pedagogy might play in addressing issues of identity and culture. Finally the third objective looks into the outcome and purpose of the development of a critical pedagogy for art museum education. The potential for developing the art museum as a site for community empowerment through community-based art education will be discussed.

1. Critical Pedagogy and Art Museum Education

Museums are not neutral sites but are implicated in the construction of knowledge, we need to consider 'museum pedagogy' in terms of different ideas and values that shaped their formation and functioning. Hooper-Greenhill (2000a) maintains that 'museum pedagogy' can be defined and analysed in relation to both content and style:

Pedagogic content refers to what is said, or the subject matter of teaching; in museums this means the statements made by the museum with its collections, the subject-matter of the permanent displays or the temporary exhibitions. Pedagogic style refers to the way in which something is said, or the teaching method; in museums this refers to the style of communication in displays, which includes the way the objects are used or placed, the way the text is written, the provision within the exhibition for various forms of sensory engagement (including visual, tactile, auditory senses), the use of light and colour, the use of space and so on. (*Ibid*, 5)

To discuss how critical pedagogy can inform practice in an art museum, it is crucial to outline the principles of critical pedagogy and then employ them to examine the relationship between the content and style as the mode of communication in SAM.

1.1 Principles and Issues addressed by Critical Pedagogy

As a politicised view of teaching and schooling, critical pedagogy raises serious challenges about traditional approaches to curriculum. Critical pedagogy is "primarily concerned with the kinds of educational theories and practices that encourage both students and teachers to develop an understanding of the interconnecting relationship among ideology, power, and culture" (Leistyna and Woodrum 1996, 3).

The writings of Giroux (1981, 1989) and Apple (1990) in particular highlighted the diminished emphasis upon solving the daily and technical problems of schooling and focused on analysing and revealing social justice problems such as domination, alienation and repression. Giroux (1981) contends that schools reproduce the values and attitudes needed to maintain dominant social groups. They do this through their formal and informal curricula. There is little opportunity given to students to generate their own meanings about knowledge. Knowledge is imposed overtly upon students or covertly via the subtle interactions of the 'hidden curriculum'. Under these circumstances, learning becomes a mode of control and domination. Critical pedagogy addresses the inequalities and differentials of power in and through education and ultimately, focuses on the empowerment or emancipation of individuals and communities.

The notions of 'emancipation' and 'empowerment' in critical pedagogy resonate Habermas' emancipatory interest in knowledge (1972). Habermas' theory of knowledge-constitutive interests, which identifies three fundamental human interests – technical, hermeneutic and emancipatory interests – have been applied to curricula analysis (Grundy 1987; Morrison 1995, 1996; Swartz 1996).

A Habermasian analysis of curricula can draw on Bernstein's typologies of educational codes, with reference to 'classification' and 'framing'. 'Classification' refers to 'the degree of boundary maintenance between contents' whereas 'framing' is "the degree of control teacher and pupil possess over the selection, organization and pacing of the knowledge transmitted and received in the pedagogical relationship" (Bernstein 1971, 205-206). From the perspective of this analysis, knowledge that is constructed in the museum context, with weak classification and framing, often presented in a more open and flexible manner than in the school context, embodies the potential to move from technical and hermeneutic interests to the emancipatory interest.

1.2 The 'Ideal Speech Situation' in Art museum education

To further understand the implications of Habermas' knowledge-constitutive interests for museum practices, it is necessary to consider the relationship of his *ideal speech situation* to communication. It can be argued that school knowledge serves the technical and hermeneutic interests rather than the emancipatory interest and that this contributes to the reproduction of the societal status quo – an inegalitarian society – rather than the egalitarian society and openly democratic society which Habermas sees as being the goal of the *ideal speech situation* – the principles are outlined as (Morrison 1995, 188): (i) equal opportunity to select and employ speech acts; (ii) orientation to a common interest ascertained without deception; (iii) freedom to reflect on the nature of knowledge; (iv) freedom to modify a given conceptual framework; (v) the consensus resulting from discussion derives from the force of the better argument alone and not from the positional or political power of the participants.

The possibilities to link the ideal speech situation in the art museum to construct knowledge among visitors are immense. At issue here are two areas that challenge curriculum planners in an art museum. The first concerns the issues of narrative and voice, and the second focuses on the issue of interpretation, understanding and the construction of meaning – both areas are identified by Hooper-Greenhill (2000b, 18) as challenges to art museums of the post-modern world.

A curriculum that leads visitors to question, constructively, their previously unexamined cultural assumptions and values is of particular importance in promoting understanding about cultural politics. Through critical engagement in discussing about art, teachers and museum educators could encourage visitors to be reflective, critical and inquiring individuals. The potential of using original art works to expand both teachers' and students' knowledge in art museums parallels the exploration of critical pedagogy in art classrooms. Yokley (1999) explores the principles of critical pedagogy in an art classroom by encouraging students to speak from their own histories and experiences and strive to engage critical and reflective examination on issues such as identity and culture through artistic expression.

1.3 Critical Hermeneutics and Museum Pedagogy

Lumley (1988, 15) argues that "the notion of the museum as a collection for scholarly use has been largely replaced by the idea of the museum as a means of communication". It is important therefore, to note how museums communicate to their visitors and the ways visitors construct and interpret meanings in museums. The unique qualities of learning in a museum setting where the objects became the centre of the educational experience have been addressed in literature of the past two decades (e.g. Luca 1973; Berry and Mayer 1989; Hooper-Greenhill 1991; Karp et al 1992).

Of particular importance to this discussion is research conducted on the development of art museum curriculum along the lines of hermeneutic understanding, whereby learners actively interpret (Hooper-Greenhill 1999a), rather than act as passive recipients of knowledge. This approach echoes Hein's (1998) view of the 'constructivist museum' in which visitors act as active creators of knowledge.

In broad terms, arts education has the potential to promote understanding and construction of knowledge (Greene 1988). The contribution that art education plays in the development of cognition and in promoting intelligent thinking has been addressed in the context of multiple interpretation of artworks

(e.g. Perkins 1994). It has been noted that the presence of arts as an integral part of school curriculum enable students to follow their own expressive interests while using the artistic process as way for acquiring knowledge (Gallas 1991). Visual arts offer opportunities for reflection upon the content and the process of learning and foster a deeper level of communication about what knowledge is and who is truly in control of the learning process. By a 'deeper level of communication', it means the pursuance of in-depth critical examination of imagery through comparison, contrast, dialogue and debate. As such, the questioning and conversational encounters become political acts by opening possibilities for change through self and societal introspection and reflection (Yokley 1999).

In the context of an art museum, the construction of meaning from art objects is an active process, involving both individual interpretive strategies as well as social and cultural background/knowledge. While audiences actively construct what they experience in the museum, the meaning that is constructed grows from an individual's previous knowledge and experience, but also from the interpretive communities to which the individual is affiliated (Hooper-Greenhill 2000b, 23-24).

To encourage alternative and multiple interpretations in an art museum is to acknowledge that museums are no longer traditional authoritative institutions. Nor is the curatorial voice the only voice that could be heard. Roberts maintains that:

[b]y promoting interpretations that reflect visitors' worlds and experiences, museum educators have brought the debate about the canon into the institution. Questions about what collections represent and who controls their representation parallel closely wider disputes over how knowledge should be defined (1997, 72).

However, in Habermas' views, hermeneutics is insufficient for a critical pedagogy, it needs emancipatory interest, which can be achieved through the ideal speech situation. In other words, "everyone should be able to take part in a societal discourse or should be able to start such a discourse. All should be able to give legitimations of their actions and should be able to challenge the legitimations given by others" (Miedema and Wardekker 1999, 71)

To develop the art museum as a site for critical pedagogy, it must be grounded in critical theory. Apple (1990) states that curriculum theorists should be grappling with questions such as: Whose knowledge is taught in schools? Why is it being taught to this particular group, in this particular way? What are its real or latent functions in the complex connections between cultural power and control? These are pertinent questions which can be applied to the museum context. It is because

[t]he very nature of museums as repositories for knowledge and objects of value and visual interest makes them key institutions in the production of social ideas in many nations. Museum collections and activities are intimately tied to ideas about art, science, taste, and heritage. Hence they are bound up with assertions about what is central or peripheral, valued and useless, known or to be discovered, essential to identity or marginal (Karp et al 1992, 6-7).

Critical theorising in the museum context raises questions about the relationship between knowledge construction and power through:

- (i) Recognising museums as sites of contention and potential sites for initiating change;
- (ii) Understanding how curatorial power regulates discourses and legitimises notions of 'identity' and 'culture';
- (iii) Drawing upon individual visitors' own histories and experiences in developing an understanding of the relationship between the museum's 'narratives' and how a person's social and historical context shapes his/her view of museum collections and display.
- (iv) Promoting self-reflection through direct relationship with museum displays so that changes of perspective can be developed;

- (v) Being empowered or emancipated from dominant ideologies and power structures embedded in the curriculum of museums.

If the fundamental interest of emancipated knowledge is equity and social justice through participatory democracy in and through education, it can be argued that critical pedagogy empowers the visitors to reflect, analyse and understand as well as reconstruct the meaning being presented through the displays for transformation and empowerment. The empowered learners are those who choose to construct their own understandings, “to navigate their own course of learning, to decide for themselves what they will and will not look at and what information best facilitates the unique understanding they are constructing” (Davis and Gardner 1999, 103). Museum educators will no longer be standing in front of a group of visitors, pouring facts into ready but empty vessels. Knowledge is no longer conceptualised as something that can be transferred from one mind to another. The emancipated museum visitors are those who identify dominant patterns of knowledge, reconstruct them and demonstrate how to replace them with patterns that are multi-perspectival and antithetical to privileging relations of power.

2. What role might critical pedagogy play in addressing the educational approaches in SAM?

Having established a conceptual linkage between critical pedagogy and art museum education in the former section, it is important to discuss the role that critical pedagogy might play in addressing the tensions between the functions of SAM and the state’s socio-cultural agendas.

On a macro level, Kong (2000) highlights the possible conflict between the social and cultural development priorities as envisaged by art practitioners as opposed to economic development priorities as embodied in the state’s cultural economic policies. The government’s interest in the culture business (or arts industry) is seen as a way to promote economic growth and a way to preserve traditional values admired by the government (Tamney, 1996: 154-7). The national museums are therefore accorded the role to engender a sense of nationhood through the understanding of the history and heritage of Singapore. The National Heritage Board stated that more than 150,000 school children visit the museums as part of their national education curriculum annually (SNHB Online).

Although the last decade witnessed a gradual opening up of the arts scene in Singapore, the government’s penchant for central planning leads to the state’s dominating approach to the arts (Kuo 1999, 21). This raises the issue of artistic freedom in the context of a national art museum, in which self-censorship becomes a deeply entrenched phenomenon. In face of the constraints within the Singaporean context, what arrangements are perhaps necessary for developing the art museum as a site for articulating the diverse experiences of the visitors? As mentioned earlier, the pedagogic functions of museums can be analysed by reviewing both what is said, and how is said. This is closely linked to the ideal speech situation as discussed in 1.2. The following will discuss the content and style in SAM’s museum pedagogy by examining issues relating to ‘collections’, ‘display’ and ‘public education’.

2.1 From collection to display

Exhibitions form the basic the museum experience for a vast majority of visitors. Exhibits are not simply displays as they express message about objects and the worlds from which they came. The very act of creating an exhibit is thus subject to the same conditions and limitations that apply to the production of knowledge. In other words, they are hermeneutic interpretation in the museum context as “many exhibits are driven by messages from which the collections, when they exist, serve as a vehicle, since an object’s presented meaning is ultimately shaped by decisions about its interpretation and display... Messages no longer emerge from an object’s ‘inherent’ meaning. Messages express meanings that people create” (Roberts *ibid*, 75).

The vision of SAM as a cultural site for fostering a sense of local and regional identity can be seen in the approaches of the exhibition programmes. The assertion of a sense of local identity through

exhibitions is a deliberate move on the part of the museum. The exhibition content has also revolved around the interrogation of artistic issues in contemporary Southeast Asian art (Leong, 2003).

However, the role of art exhibitions in defining national and cultural identity is problematised as the question about whose 'voice' is being represented in the museum could be posed. It foregrounds a larger issue of the power of the state in constructing a 'local heritage' in its visual arts development. The Singaporean tension lies in its attempt for asserting a sense of local identity (uniqueness and individuality) and the desire for gaining parity with the West and to be part of the international art scene. In the visual arts scene, there is a tendency for the state museum to 'honour' selected local artists as a means to construct a sense of 'cultural identity'. The question of why some local artists were chosen to present their works in the art museum over the others has yet to be addressed. In other words, "what we see and do not see in art museums – and on what terms and by whose authority we do or do not see it – is closely linked to larger questions about who constitutes the community and who defines its identity" (Duncan 1995, 8-9).

The tension between the open-ended creativity of the arts and the role of a state-funded national art museum raises the issue of artistic freedom in deciding the content of exhibition programmes, especially experimental art forms. To a certain extent, the government continues to reserve their power to determine whether any particular form of expression counts as art. Kuo (1999, 19-22) argues for the necessary empowerment of the arts community in order for creativity to truly flourish. One of the major concerns for contemporary artists has been the question of what constitutes art. Artistic freedom means "allowing artists to explore this question without suddenly having arts' cloak torn from their shoulders" (Jeyaretnam 2000, ix). The censorship incident in the 1998 'Artists' Regional Exchange 5' exhibition in SAM is a case in point. The artworks by a Hong Kong artist, depicting local political figures in the style of 'cartoon caricatures' were removed by museum officials prior to the exhibition opening on the grounds of 'insensitivity' to the cultural context of the exhibit's venue (Lenzi 1999; Lee 1999). That SAM has yet to embrace humorous political art as a valid and acceptable art form remains a contentious issue.

It can be argued that to attain a balance between the voice of the state and the rest of the community, the curatorial power should be mediated through more frequent dialogues with artists and the public about the exhibition programme. If this were done on the basis of 'critical policy' (adapting Giroux's notion of critical pedagogy) there is considerable potential for the museum's role in developing a critical mass for visual arts appreciation, and in empowering the public and schools in defining their cultural experiences. Furthermore, where Giroux (1989, 149) advocates that the school curriculum policies and modes of pedagogy have to "draw upon student experience as both a narrative for agency and a referent for critique", so the strategies in SAM's education provisions might also be developed to critically engage student/visitors' knowledge and experience. In fact, the museum could develop partnerships with private galleries and non-commercialised art spaces to give a 'voice' to more artists in the community, and to engage larger audiences.

Giroux (1992) uses the term 'border pedagogy' to denote the shifting borders that affect the different configurations of culture, power and knowledge. The term also signals the need for teachers to create learning situations so that students become border crossers – allowing them to write, speak and listen in a language in which meaning becomes multi-accentual and dispersed and resists permanent closure. He speaks of a 'language of possibility' in which 'one speaks with rather than exclusively for others' (*ibid*, 29). The opening up to richer and deeper possibilities will bring museums closer to an expanded range of communities, including allowing minority groups in the society to voice their cultures and identity. Instead of privileging dominant perspectives, it is high time for museums to discover new ways to democratise working practices that give sub-groups and difference a voice (Hooper-Greenhill 1999b, 23-24).

To perceive the educational role of the museum as a form of critical pedagogy entails the recognition of the museum displays not as authoritative meta-narrative, but museums as a site for negotiating meanings and significance of collections, and view their displays as provisional statements only. Museum visitors should be encouraged to reflectively construct or reconstruct meaning, as

‘emancipation does not follow automatically from enlightenment’ (Grundy 1987, 112), but lies in the possibility of taking action autonomously. By encouraging input and feedback, it will pave the way for empowering visitors through the *ideal speech situation*, by acknowledging that museums present information that is ‘interpreted’ and communicated in a particular manner based on particular assumptions and decisions. As such, “the work of interpretation becomes an act of empowerment, as it provides visitors with both the knowledge and consent to engage in critical dialogue about the messages museums present” (Roberts *ibid*, 79).

On the contrary, by omitting any mention about the decisions behind the determination of an object’s meaning, museums exclude visitors not only from an awareness that knowledge is something that is produced but also from the possibility that they themselves may participate in its production. The opportunity to develop a dialogic approach in the museum curriculum will be addressed in section 3.

2.2 The promotion of cultural identity through educational programmes

The Art Museum as a cultural site for fostering a sense of cultural identity among its visitors remains a key issue for exploration. The educational programmes offered by SAM have been designed to promote an understanding of the nation’s visual arts history as well as nurture an appreciation of the art of Southeast Asia and the world. These include school programmes that cater for schools, ranging from kindergarten to tertiary levels, and public programmes for the general audience.

Over the years, art museum educators have adopted an interdisciplinary approach by encouraging children to study art exhibits in their cultural context through making links with history, literature, drama and religion. Some of the recent workshops for school children involve art production techniques as well as developing critical and analytical skills through art writing. Furthermore, teacher-training workshops, art camps and art competitions are among the proactive ways of involving schools in the museum educational programmes. Schools are encouraged to use the art museum as a resource centre for developing their art curriculum.

As mentioned in 1.3, the development of an empowering curriculum by using art objects as the centre of learning should be the guide for programmes designed for school visitors. The exhibitions presented in the recently established Art Education Galleries and Corridors in SAM are designed to provide multidisciplinary access points for students and young visitors to engage with art (C.A.S.T brochure, Online).

It is equally important that in-service courses and workshops be conducted to prepare teachers to meet the challenges of integrating museum resources in the art curriculum. Although the Art Museum has made considerable efforts to develop its educational services for schools, there are still barriers that hinder the success of such programmes (Leong, 1997). It is crucial for museum educators to develop an understanding of the factors that inhibited teachers and students from using the art museum as a resource for educational purposes.

If teachers are to use critical pedagogy as a framework to approach the art museum curriculum, it is necessary to rethink and restructure the role of teachers as ‘transformative intellectuals’ who “treat students as critical agents, problematizes knowledge, utilizes dialogue, and makes knowledge meaningful, critical, and ultimately emancipatory” (Aronowitz and Giroux 1986, 36-37). Thus, a network of collaborations could be created to facilitate the sharing of ideas and resources among school community, museum educators and visual arts research institutions to raise the discourse about arts education in museums.

The objective of the public educational programmes in SAM is to nurture a wider range of audiences by raising their awareness of the artistic heritage of Singapore and the Southeast Asian region. The notion of an abstract mythical body ‘the general public’, however, impoverishes our view of the characteristics, agendas and desires of museum visitors. As the visitors of museums are not a uniform group, the museum curriculum should address differentiated audiences through research of their needs (Hooper-Greenhill 2000b, 29). At present, not all the curators at SAM are responsive to the fact that

exhibitions should be fundamentally interpretive (the basis of a hermeneutic curriculum which has the potential to foster empowerment).

The exhibition, entitled “Landscapes in Southeast Asian Art” (August 2000- December 2001) is a case in point. As the curator(s) aimed at broadening the boundaries of the term ‘landscapes’ from the geographical to a metaphysical level, visitors were encouraged to choose their own route when viewing the artworks displayed in various galleries according to five interrelated themes. A closer look at the exhibition design, however, reveals that the curator(s) assumed the conventional authoritarian stance when presenting information of each artwork using lengthy captions and jargon in the accompanying texts (Pereira 2001). Instead of empowering the visitors (i.e. to promote understanding and interpretation of the artworks), the overuse of ‘academic language’ and curatorial jargon might disempower ordinary viewers (i.e. to thwart understanding and autonomy of interpretation). If SAM is to promote an understanding of local and regional artistic heritage, the challenge for curators is to experiment with exhibition designs that try to present multiple perspectives or at least admit the highly contingent nature of the interpretation offered.

There is an urgent need for SAM to develop methods to evaluate visitors’ experience in both the short and long term. Merriman (1997) notes that the cultural context of museum visiting can be examined through the study of visitor experience as well as that of non-visitors. This is certainly one of the research areas for SAM as it could survey the main characteristics of its museum visitors. For instance, a study of the difference in attendance patterns by age, social and educational background of its visitors will benefit curators and educators in the planning of the museum curriculum. After all, this has profound implication on the assertion that the art museum aims at promoting a ‘cultural identity’ through its educational programmes. It is important to elucidate the notion of ‘identity’ as constructed through a dynamic interaction of personal, social and cultural factors. It is also significant to highlight that one can neither sustain a ‘pure’ tradition/heritage nor a ‘whole’ identity in the contemporary environment. The concrete expressions of a tradition, and traditions more generally, do not develop ‘automatically’. For a tradition to continue, it cannot remain the same because human history unfolds with new circumstances and new challenges (Kwok 1994).

In the Singaporean context, public policies about cultural identity assume that there are naturally defined ethnic groups, and each person belongs to only one of them (Tamney *ibid*, 189). The local/official interpretation of ‘multiculturalism’ is based on a four-culture framework (Chinese, Malay, Indian and Eurasian) and becomes more of an exercise to keep the different communities peacefully apart than to draw them dynamically together. Indeed, the concept ‘multiculturalism’ has been turned into part of the arsenal of government to rationalise policies and administrative practices on issues of race, ranging from macro-national language policies to micro-processes of allocation and the use of public spaces (Chua 2003, 75-76). Some local art practitioners and academics have proposed an ‘open ended’ and global approach to cultural and artistic development rather than a single authoritative approach (e.g. Kwok 1994; Kuo 1998, 1999). Although the art museum is well placed as a location for the community to engage in a cultural dialogue, a tension still exists as such an aspiration contrasts sharply with the current cultural and educational reality of Singapore.

3. The Art Museum as a Social Instrument: Implications for Practice

To develop a critical pedagogy as applicable in the educational context of an art museum, it is not sufficient to raise questions about the relationships between the construction of knowledge and power. A framework for practice could be developed so that critical pedagogy will not be just a utopian ‘concept’ with limited comments on practice. As mentioned earlier, contemporary museums have realised the potential for transforming themselves as a ‘social instrument’ by contributing to the community and social welfare. In the Singaporean context, it can be argued that SAM could develop as a site for community empowerment by encouraging various communities to articulate about notions of cultural and national identities.

3.1 Towards community-based art education

Marché (1998) noted the various interpretations of the term ‘community’ as applied to the educational context by researchers. On the one hand, ‘community’ may refer to a collection of individuals within the school settings, who participate directly in the educational process. On the other hand, the same term may refer to the local environment that exists outside classroom walls. In art educational research, there has been a renewed interest in community arts, in which art educators actively explore community history, cultural traditions, popular art, and material culture with students (e.g. Binns 1991; Blandy and Hoffmann 1993).

Insofar as education is concerned with the construction of identity through knowledge and experience, and it is perhaps here that art museums can begin to fulfil some of the potential for individual and group empowerment through the promotion of collaborative art projects. Giroux (1992, 170) maintains that critical pedagogy can make a difference by making marginal cultures visible, and by legitimating difference. To follow this line of argument, the museum curriculum should aim at developing museums as sites of multiple contact zones where different histories, languages, experiences and voices intermingle amidst diverse relations of power. A ‘language of possibility’ can be used to engage different groups in the community to explore issues about identity and culture, and permeate the apparently homogeneous borders of dominant cultural practices.

The following presents a successful example of an affiliated Art Museum project which implicitly incorporated critical pedagogy principles and has potential to develop into a framework for community-based art education in Singapore.

The project was initiated by Plastique Kinetic Worms (PKW), a local art space managed by a group of artists, in response to the curatorial theme ‘City/Community’ in the *1999 Singapore Art* exhibition held at SAM. It is significant that the project, entitled ‘Cow Car Water’ (牛車水), a literal translation of Chinatown in Singapore, was chosen as the theme. During the exhibition, PKW was located in one of the shop spaces in Chinatown, a district where traces of Singaporean history have not yet been erased, despite the incessant onslaught of urban redevelopment. A diversity of small business survives in the current neighbourhood of PKW, including stores for Chinese medicine and dried ingredients, for instance.

By exploring the ‘community’ in Chinatown, a group of artists, architects, designers, students and trainee-teachers brainstormed, shared common knowledge, and in the process generated questions about the community within and beyond the selected location. The objective of the project was about making art collectively – revolving around the ‘car’t’, a symbol of mobility, which is embedded in the Chinese transliteration of Chinatown (‘*niu che shui*’). An old car was eventually chosen as the mode of artistic expression. (See Appendix A)

A series of dialogues was conducted before the construction of the ‘car’t’. Role-play was employed throughout the discussion sessions and the art-making process to allow participants to investigate their thoughts and feelings about the chosen theme. The possibilities of creating memories and inventing myths are also explored through the two workshops, in which the participants transformed the used car into an art work at the pedestrian walkway outside the gallery. The choice of working in the vicinity of the gallery enabled the group to engage the nearby shops and business to participate and contribute to the project.

This project challenges the traditional divide between art and life and the notion of display in the museum. The car was eventually parked outside the Art Museum throughout the two-month exhibition period. Viewers/audience participation was involved as visitors took rides on the car along specified routes in the city. A commentator provided information about the concept and development of the art project during the short journeys around the city’s historic monuments.

This project has further implications for the schools and can be adapted for various communities to transform individual and groups’ understanding of issues relating to identities and culture (as addressed in 2.2). Through a collaborative project, the participants worked as a group, yet each speak

from a distinctive perspective by articulating from different ethnic backgrounds, occupations and experience. It is crucial that learning takes place in a 'contingent' environment as communities define their own ways of knowing through exploration and interrogation.

Based on the above analysis, the "Cow-Car-Water" project has successfully integrated some major principles of critical pedagogy, as identified by Morrison (1996) in an emancipatory model of curriculum (which derives from the notion of the *ideal speech situation*) and can be served as a guide for the development of community-based art education:

- i. The need for co-operative and collaborative work;
- ii. The need for extended discussion based work;
- iii. The need for autonomous experiential and flexible learning;
- iv. The need for negotiated learning;
- v. The need for community-related learning;
- vi. The need for problem-solving activities
- vii. The need to increase students' right to employ talk
- viii. The need for teachers to act as 'transformative intellectuals'.

CONCLUSION

This paper has considered the viability of critical pedagogy within the art museum context through a close analysis of the art curriculum in SAM. It began by outlining the concept of critical pedagogy and main issues for debate when applied to the art museum context. The second part deals specifically with critical pedagogy theories as applied to art museum pedagogic approaches and discussed the significance of such theories in relation to SAM's approaches and strategies. Finally the third section highlights the principles of critical pedagogy when fused into a community-based art education project, thereby serving as a guide for collaborative educational experiences in the art museum.

In relation to the educational role of art museums in the contemporary society, SAM is regarded as a significant contribution to the cultural development of the nation. The following implications are drawn from this study and constitute key messages for art museum curriculum planners:

The Art Museum has potential to develop into a 'discursive space' where the community debates and defines meaning by drawing on their experiential base – it is therefore important for museum educators to develop programmes based on an understanding of the differentiated needs of visitors.

Development in audience research will inform curators of visitors' experience and the survey of visitors' profiles in the long term will help identify the various ways that museum exhibits may communicate to its audience.

The provision for a diversity of programmes and the needs for regular review and assessment are crucial to ensure that the museum curriculum stay abreast of the global developments in the 21st century. Furthermore, the implications of learning theory and visitors study will be essential to museum professionals in their planning and management of educational programmes.

There is a need for collaborative planning by museum educators, school teachers and students in developing a framework for integrating art museum programmes more fully into the school curricula. It is crucial to take advantage of museum learning to broaden the existing educational environment, while maintaining a certain degree of flexibility so that the museum identity would not be sacrificed.

To spearhead the community-based art education approach, the museum could devise 'outreach programmes' by bringing art to the various institutions of the community, including hospitals, nurseries, elderly care centers, and those with special needs.

SAM as a seat for learning and as a space for cultural dialogue is crucial to the development of the nation. Using critical pedagogy as a theoretical underpinning for museum curriculum offers the principles for both educators and museum professionals to chart future directions of museum pedagogy. The art museum has the potential to develop into a discursive space for empowering the community through the arts – the ‘language of possibility’ (Giroux 1992) for articulating the diverse experiences of the visitors.

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