
The Arts in Individual Transformation: Examples from the Recycling Social Movement in São Paulo, Brazil

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ABSTRACT How does individual transformation unfold within social movement learning (SML), a territory that mainly embodies learning as a collective practice? What are the roles of visual arts in mediating such transformation? We answer these questions by exploring discourses that emerged during visual arts workshops facilitated with members of the recycling social movement in São Paulo, Brazil. To do so, we intertwine arts-based research, SML, and transformative learning theories informed by Vygotskian's cognitive development approach as an analytical tool. Findings suggest that during the art making process, recyclers construct their visual thought, which enables their empowerment and agency as fundamental mediators of individual transformation.

KEYWORDS social movement learning, arts-based research, recycling cooperatives

Social movement learning (SML) is “learning by persons who are part of any social movement and learning by persons outside of a social movement as a result of actions taken or simply by the existence of social movements” (Hall & Clover, 2005, p. 584). Such learning may happen informally, incidentally, and in experiential ways (Hall & Turray, 2006; Hall, 2006). Eyerman and Jamison (1991) agree that social movements are sites of learning because movements are “social actions from where worldviews, ideologies, religion, and scientific theories originate” (p. 14). Scholars who advocate the potential of individual transformation within social movements, speak of social movements as spaces of “cognitive praxis” (Eyerman & Jamison, 1991). Through this lens, they highlight the creative role of consciousness and cognition in all individual actions (Hall & Clover, 2005). The focus of this paper is on individual transformation as a mediator of learning in social movements. Thus, we are interested primarily in individual transformation through collective processes because according to Boyer and Roth (2005) “collective learning fosters individual transformation and vice-versa, whereby individuals produce resources in action and as outcomes of [group] activities. These resources expand the action possibilities of the collective and thus constitute learning” (p. 75).

Learning within social movements is a dialectic process in which individual transformation and social practice happen continuously and inseparably. Hence, collective learning cannot be understood separately from individual transformation. To understand how individuals learn

in groups, we understand that social movements are sites of collective learning, individual transformation, and emancipatory praxis (Welton, 2005).

In this paper, we intertwine arts-based research, SML theory, and transformative learning theory informed by Vygotsky's approach to cognitive development to frame discourses that emerged amongst recyclers (workers from the recycling cooperatives who are also affiliated to the National Recyclers Social Movement (Movimento Nacional dos Catadores de Materiais Recicláveis) from São Paulo, Brazil). These discourses unfolded over a period of seven months in arts-based workshops as part of this research project.

One way to understand how an individual learns in a group is through Vygotskian cognitive development approach. For Vygotsky (1962), individual learning is a social construct, and individual internal cognition is mediated by *external stimuli*, externalized by "learned" actions performed by the same individual. Thus, learning is a dialectic process. According to Vygotsky, such dialectic processes enable the individual to achieve higher levels of consciousness, which Freire (1978) identifies as *conscientização*. That is, individuals become aware that their actions have the potential to make social and political change; and this awareness is fundamental in social movements.

The key findings in this study broadly respond to the following questions that the principal investigator asked research participants during the art-based workshops: "What does it mean to be a recycler?" and "what are the challenges that recyclers face?" These two prompt questions guided the art making process while also setting the context of this study because they brought forth recyclers' reality of discrimination and fights for social inclusion. Another question asked to the participant recyclers, which also framed the research was: "What does your artwork mean to you?" From these questions we can understand how individual cognition plays out when participants are engaged in collective praxis. However, we must first contextualize our current research within the community engaged scholarship field, and more specifically in the domain of SML, to understand how individual learning has often been overlooked in the literature.

Collective and Individual Learning in SML Global Literature

Analyzing how individuals in the voluntary simplicity movement in the U.S. learn and experience their identities and become moral agents, Sandlin and Walther (2009) give great attention to the role of self but as a way to demonstrate that learning does not happen in solitude. As the authors observe, "practices of self and of self-regulation... help reinforce the moral identities simplifiers are creating and also help create a sense of collective identity that sets simplifiers off from the rest of mainstream society" (Sandlin & Walther, 2009, p. 307). Feelings of guilt and moral superiority, for example, that lead to the development of one's identity, and even practices of self-regulation are understood contextually but no attention is given to how the individual cognitive learning process occurs. In fact, the authors criticize the focus on individualized moral identities which pose an obstacle to the development of a collective movement identity. In that way, individual learning receives attention in the study but only insofar as a propulsor shift to understand collective learning that seems to be preminent.

Shifting from North America to Africa, a study conducted by Westoby and Lyons (2017) in Uganda contends that learning “is not primarily either a rational or an affective process but rather a relational one that is linked to this social structure” (p. 228). Different from the two previously analyzed studies, here “individual habits of thinking” are present but only insofar as *subjected to* the collective: transformative learning is conceived as contingent upon and conducive to collective action. As the authors bluntly conclude, “the transformative learning process for the individual cannot be conceptually separated from the social and organizational dimension” (Westoby & Lyons, 2017, p. 238). While we agree that the two dimensions are inseparable, we argue that individual learning must have a place of its own in community engaged scholarship.

In Brazil, the Landless Workers Movement (Movimento Sem Terra - MST), which represents an education system on its own provides relevant insights about the role and complexity of individual learning in social movements. For instance, Thapliyal (2019) explores narratives of unequal gender relations and domestic violence against women who are part of MST. Besides fostering social change as a collective movement, “the Education Sector has constituted a space in which women have challenged conventional gender roles and division of labor not in small part due to the creation of multiple mechanisms to facilitate collective and participatory decision-making” (Thapliyal, 2019, p. 16). Thus, we hope that the present paper will contribute to the advancement of knowledge of engaged community scholarship and more specifically of the social movement learning field by beginning to unearth these complexities based on this case study in Brazil.

Recycling Cooperative in Brazil and the National Recycling Social Movement (MNCR)

Worldwide, the collection, separation, and sale of recyclable materials represents survival strategies for many unemployed and impoverished families, men and women of all different ages, including children and seniors, especially in urban sites (Gutberlet & de Oliveira Jayme, 2010). In Brazil, any person who makes a living from such an activity is called *catador(a)*, which literally translates into English as collector. These individuals separate recyclable goods from garbage and reintroduce these materials into a stream of new production. In the Global North, they are called *recyclers*. Collecting recyclable materials represents not only income generation for the recyclers, but it also improves overall environmental health because the recyclers save materials that would end up in a landfill if not reintroduced into the production stream through the recycling industry. Although working as environmental agents (Baud et al., 2001; Medina, 2001), the recyclers still represent one of the most oppressed and vulnerable groups of the population (Rodrigues, 1998; Tremblay & de Oliveira Jayme, 2015). Their history of poverty perpetuates their marginalization and discrimination, which produces and reproduces inequity and uneven development.

The organization of recyclers into cooperatives represents a significant mobilizing strategy because recycling cooperatives have the potential to improve the livelihoods of recyclers by valuing their work and reinforcing the importance of it to the environment as a whole (Gutberlet, 2008). Besides resource recovery, recyclers also provide an environmental service

via environmental education initiatives promoted by the cooperatives. In addition, recycling cooperatives can be an important partner with local government, the private sector, non-profit organizations and the general public since cooperatives can create inclusive solutions to waste management (Gutberlet, 2008). Recycling cooperatives operate on principles of participation, capacity building, and democratic decision-making, thus being in themselves motors for individual empowerment while generating collective agency (Tremblay & de Oliveira Jayme, 2015).

Most of the recycling cooperatives in Brazil are affiliated with the National Recyclers Social Movement (Movimento Nacional dos Catadores de Materiais Recicláveis - MNCR), a new social movement that became formalized in 1999 (Gutberlet, 2008). The MNCR emerged as an anti-discrimination, poverty, and social exclusion movement during the first national meeting of recyclers in Brasília in June, 2001 (Gutberlet, 2008; MNCR, 2011). At that time, over 1,700 recyclers met to discuss their livelihoods and produce a document called *Carta de Brasília* [Letter from Brasilia] (MNCR, 2011). The *Carta de Brasília* aimed to legalize the work of the recyclers as *catadores de materiais recicláveis* (collectors of recyclable materials) and to establish that countrywide, selective waste collection should be accomplished primarily by local recycling cooperatives and not by the City or by a private firm. More recently, in 2007, the former Brazilian President, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, established the National Sanitation Law (11.445) to support the recycling sector. This policy authorizes all municipalities in Brazil to contract recycling cooperatives to perform the collection, separation, and sale of recyclable materials (IPEA, 2010). In 2010, former Brazilian President, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, approved the National Solid Waste Legislation (Law number 12.305/2010), a new policy recognizing the formal inclusion of recyclers. All these governmental initiatives aim to further the social inclusion of recyclers by reinforcing the urgency of inclusive waste management initiatives and by generating dialogue between governments, recyclers, and the general public on issues around environmental health. The MNCR is a very dynamic space where immediate goals are debated and actions and strategies to tackle these goals are decided in participatory processes. Out of this dynamic, many new leaders emerged (Baeder, 2009). One of the main characteristics of the MNCR is its participatory, solidarity, and action-oriented approach to the inclusion of recyclers in political discourses and political participation in decisions that impact their well-being. Nunn (2011) suggests that the cooperatives in conjunction with the MNCR have created “a space for a common identity” (p. 33). Such common identity has the potential to mediate recyclers’ *individual understanding* of who they are, their struggles, and to assist them in finding shared ideas to challenge authorities that prevent their access to tools of empowerment (Baeder, 2009). In other words, MNCR works towards individual transformation and *conscientização* by making power structures visible to individuals that are part of the movement as well as to those outside of the movement. From this perspective, individual transformation becomes the core of SML.

Social Movements and Individual Transformation: The Case of the MNCR

As a space for learning, the MNCR can be conceptualized as cognitive praxis for individual transformation. Cognitive praxis in the context of this study refers to “the relations to

knowledge that characterize particular social movements, the concepts, ideas and intellectual activities that give the social movements their individual and cognitive identity” (Eyerman & Jamieson, 1991, p. 3). Klandermans et al. (1988) similarly refer to this key aspect of social movements as packages of ideas, clusters of issues, organizational ideologies, or profiles. That is to say, “the very process by which a movement is formed, by which it establishes an identity for itself, is a cognitive one” (Holford, 1995, p. 104). This process is evident in the MNCR. These scholars also explain that cognitive praxis is critical within social movements because they mediate individual transformation giving the social movements their particular meaning or consciousness.

Research on transformative learning theory (TLT) emerged in the 1970s (Mezirow, 1995). It refers to how people become critical adults by learning to think for themselves, rather than act upon the assimilated beliefs, values, feelings, and judgments of others (Mezirow & Associates, 2000). It is a process where people change in significant ways by taking into consideration their own previous experiences, their history, and culture (Scott, 2001). Moreover, TLT explores “how to negotiate and act upon our own purposes and meanings, rather than those we have uncritically assimilated from others” (Mezirow & Associates, 2000 p. 8). These are also core concepts in SML. TLT is a lifelong journey that embraces contextual influences such as feelings and holistic ways of knowing and how they mediate the construction of individual identities. Furthermore, the concept of *conscientização*, a process in which an individual learns to recognize social, political, and economic constraints and to (re)act upon these constraints (Freire, 1978), has expanded TLT into an even stronger political framework.

Under the bigger umbrella of TLT, we use a cognitive development approach (Vygotsky, 1978) to analyze the data because individual learning is a social construct and a dialectic and cognitive process. We explain this approach for analysis later in this paper. Additionally, this study is informed by feminist approaches to individual transformation because feminism troubles power structures by confronting, resisting, and subverting social, cultural, and political injustices (Clover, 2011). Feminist theories (de)construct and (re)configure the lives of marginalized women (and men and non-binary people) and help them create new knowledge and (re)act upon the patriarchal status quo that perpetuates oppression. Broadly, feminism empowers people that have historically had limited access to power (Ackerley et al., 2006; Moss, & Al-Kindi, 2008). Empowered individuals are transformed individuals, able to “understand and transcend constraints placed upon them by particular ideologies, structures, and cultural practices” (Clover et al., 2013, p. 14). In this study, empowerment is evident in participants’ self-esteem and in its emphasis on the development of a positive self-concept, but also includes an element of recognizing human agency for positive change.

Arts-based research methodology

This research study is arts-based. Artistic approaches to explore SML “uncover biases, power relations and ideological obfuscation that people cannot or may not even want to see” (Clover et al., 2004, p. 282). What this means is that the heart of arts-based research are opportunities for empowerment (Gallo, 2001; Wang & Burris, 1994).

Over the course of seven months, three different types of arts-based workshops (abstract painting, impressionist painting, and mosaics) were conducted in public spaces, such as public libraries and community centers, involving 12 recyclers from the metropolitan region of São Paulo. The main goal was to use participants' artworks to help them verbalize their personal stories of individual transformation by making visible the importance of their work to the public with the ultimate goal of decreasing the prejudice they suffer as a result of their work with waste. By using creative and arts-based tools, new ways of knowing and exchanging knowledge are applied to interdisciplinary studies, often with *foci* on social and environmental justice issues. Thus, new ways of conducting the research as well as positioning the researchers within anti-oppressive and community-engaged scholarship help co-create and disseminate knowledge, further contributing to social and environmental action for change.

From data generation to analysis of key elements

After receiving institutional research ethics approval, the first author facilitated abstract and impressionist painting and mosaic workshops once a week during a period of seven months with 12 members from recycling cooperatives from different locations within the metropolitan region of São Paulo. Two camcorders were positioned on opposite sides of the art studio and focused on the group as a whole to capture participants' interactions amongst themselves, with the art supplies, and with their artworks as they were being created. The decision to video-record the workshops was because we are interested in the free discourse that emerges from free conversations amongst recyclers during the art making process and what can be learned from these interactions.

The use of the camcorder for data collection allowed us to play the recorded material on the computer. As the video data were being generated, a content list was created where, right after the data collection, the first author made any pertinent annotation and explication of the events about everything that happened during the workshop. The content list was indexed by the time and location of each video or audio file. Each index consisted of a heading that gave identifying information, followed by a rough summary listing of events as they occurred on the videos. This procedure was followed consistently in recording the events that happened in the art studio, right after each workshop, while the researcher's memory was still "fresh." The content list was useful in providing us with a quick overview of the data corpus, for locating particular sequences and issues, and as a basis for doing full transcripts of segments of particular interest.

Discourse analysis through Vygotsky's approach to cognitive development

Recorded sections that illustrate individual transformation within social movement were further fully transcribed and translated. Once the video segments were created and selected, discourse analysis (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Roth & Alexander, 1997) was used as an analytical tool for interpreting the videotaped workshops. This tool helped us understand what was going on during each art class. Discourse analysis is the study of language in use, in the sense that language cannot be understood apart from the context in which it is used, thus the researcher must be able to understand the context.

The cognitive development approach to discourse analysis elaborated by Vygotsky (1962) helped deconstruct the events on the videos as they unfolded because this approach seeks to understand how individual learning plays out in the material world. According to Vygotsky, cognitive development is context bound. Hence, individual learning is a social construction even when this type of learning internally unfolds because all the tools that mediate learning are historical and cultural artefacts. Vygotsky also believed that all higher mental functions (or consciousness) are initiated by *external stimuli* in the form of social events. These social events are then internalized into individuals' thinking through the use of language. This dialectic relationship (internal and external) is continuous throughout the individual's life span and it increases, becoming more and more complex over time (Wink & Putney, 2002). Through this process, higher functions originate. From this perspective, the individual is a learning system. We further explore the Vygotskian approach to cognitive development later in this paper.

What Does Your Artwork Mean to You?

Inter- and intrapersonal cognition and the construction of visual thought

Vygotsky's cognitive development approach to understanding how individuals learn within a group recognizes two processes of human cognition: *interpersonal* and *intrapersonal* (Vygotsky, 1978). Interpersonal (or experiential) cognition refers to the interactions between an individual and their environment, including other individuals as well as artefacts—for instance, the interactions between a painter and a blanked canvas and all the infinite possibilities that could happen on that canvas. This cognition develops when mental processes exist first in external and shared contexts (e.g., involving a certain community or certain artefacts) and then are internalized. In this case, individuals are active agents in their learning because they are immersed in a social context. That is, learning is mediated in an interactive and experiential manner by the close relationships between the individual and the community they part of as well as the artifacts available (Brooks, 2005, 2009; Vygotsky, 1962).

Intrapersonal (or internal) cognition refers to new knowledge that is internalized, sparking an internal dialogue at a metacognitive level; this level is when critical thinking unfolds, which leads to individual transformation (Brooks, 2005). From this perspective, the intrapersonal movement is initiated by and through interpersonal movements via external stimuli. If this is the case, both movements happened concomitantly, continuously, and in inseparable ways with and within the individual at any given time. Take a piano player, for example. Even though they may play the piano in isolation, they are not really participating in an isolated individual mental process; rather, they are operating within a social and historical context because the piano itself is a cultural and historical artifact (Leont'ev, 1981; Vygotsky, 1962). The same concept is applied to the visual arts. Even if the recyclers who participated in this study were standing alone in the recycling cooperative by working independently, they would be still bound to the context in which their actions are performed and to the context in which their materials (e.g., recyclables, recycling machines) are defined.

Traditionally, the intrapersonal and the interpersonal movements have been understood as primarily verbal (Brooks, 2009) given that verbal language (i.e., speech) is perceived as a primary mediator of communication amongst individuals in a community. In this sense, the interface between thought (intrapersonal movement) and speech (interpersonal movement) establishes what Vygotsky (1962) identifies as *verbal thought*, as shown in Figure 1. For Vygotsky (1962), verbal thought is key to human nature because once verbal thought is established within the individual, they achieve a high level of consciousness, enabling the individual to think critically and make sense of their world(s). For Vygotsky, this does not mean that thinking is an intramental activity whereas speech is vocalizing thinking. Rather, thinking and speech comprise a unit that contributes to the developmental process of the individual's learning and is always bound to the social context. Moreover, it is within this interface (i.e., thought and speech) that thought becomes verbal and speech becomes thinking (Kozulin, 1994).

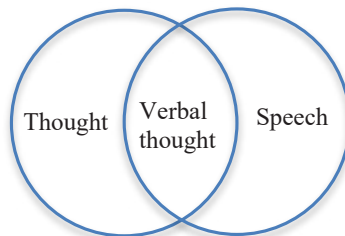


Figure 1. Verbal thought (Bodrova & Leong, 1996, p. 97).

Although Vygotsky (1962) focused his studies on the relationship between speech and thought, he listed other tools such as symbols, algebraic systems, and the arts, in which verbal thought—thus individual-learning is co-constructed. In positioning drawing as a learning meditation tool and language Brooks (2009) extended Vygotsky's work by suggesting that drawing contributes to the formulation of thinking and meaning. In addition, the interface between thought and drawing initiates what Brooks identifies as *visual thought*, as illustrated in Figure 2. In the same way that verbal thought awakens a higher level of human consciousness, visual thought operates in the individual's mental development by offering new and different possibilities for an extended dialogic engagement that speech cannot afford (Brooks, 2005). For instance, when the individual for any reason cannot verbally articulate what they have to say, then visual thought, which is mediated by the process of creating art, offers a possible tool for communication, meaning-making, and critical thinking because the arts “uncover or create new knowledge, highlight experience, pose questions, or tackle problems” (Clover, 2011, p. 13). In addition, such visual thought helps participants to critically think about their position in the world and to (re)imagine new possibilities for themselves.

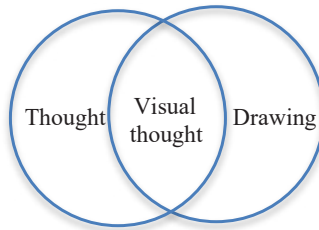


Figure 2. Visual thought (Brooks, 2005, p. 81).

To understand the relationship between speech, thought, and art making, and how knowledge is created in these environments, the researcher must be able to deconstruct the discourses that emerge in these contexts. This is because discourse is indeed a central part of our lives, and what we do with others is always mediated through some kind of communication. Based on this premise, discourses amongst the research participants provide us with robust material to understand how individual learning plays out within the group to which they belong. Next, using excerpts extracted from the database, we analyze participants' discourses taking into consideration the Vygotskian cognitive development approach described above.

As an example of how the intrapersonal and interpersonal movements play out in the material world, we present the following episode that unfolded during the impressionist painting workshop. Here, we introduce Dona Telma: a 56-year-old recycler from the União de Vila Nova, and an active member of the MNCR. The principal investigator had spent a whole day alone with Dona Telma when the following conversation unfolded

Principal Investigator: *What is your biggest learning moment on today's art workshop?*

Dona Telma: *I think it is very important to show that [art making] is possible by showing one [artwork] already created in addition to just saying: "art is free, you create, you invent". You show it: "Look, a universe of possibilities."*

Principal Investigator: *That is very powerful, Dona Telma, is there anything else?*

Dona Telma: *I enjoyed everything that is happening here. I have been talking so much about this workshop to my partners at the cooperative, to see if the same desire is sparked on them too. My first painting was such a beautiful story that I was able to reproduce onto the canvas. And now, so many people want to know more about my story. But today was the most beautiful day, expressionist workshop. It will be forever in my mind and in my life.*

Although hours of conversation amongst the author and Dona Telma were recorded in the art studio, the episode above best illustrates the relationship between speech and thought and how this relationship is intertwined with Freire's pedagogy of possible dreams. Even though it is succinct, there is so much happening in Dona Telma's speech that gives us insights on

her perspectives on the potentialities of art marking in mediating peoples' personal stories. So much so, she hints to her peers the power of the art marking process in hopes that they will also get involved with the art workshops. Thus, in the next paragraphs, we deconstruct this episode to describe and articulate the potentialities of visual arts in materializing individual stories, and how it can enact the pedagogy of possible dreams.

According to Dona Telma, it is critical that the art facilitator shows one previously created artwork or a concrete/finalized piece to participants, rather than *just* talk about what can be done. Dona Telma brought forth three different and yet interrelated units: the individual (i.e., whoever participates in the workshop), the facilitator of the workshop, and an already created artwork (i.e., artefact). These three units establish a possible social context (e.g., an art studio). This social context is important because it can initiate the individual's interpersonal movement. Movement often begins with an exploration of the artefact accompanied by verbal dialogue between the participant and the facilitator (Brooks, 2005), which opens up opportunities for the co-construction of new knowledge.

Dona Telma's words present us with two dialectical relationships. First between the physical "artwork already created" (i.e., a concrete visual artefact) and its concept ("art is free, you create, you invent"). This first dialectical relationship helps the individual to internally construct "a universe of possibilities," because they will not just hear from the facilitator about this universe, but will actively help to construct this universe of possibilities through the art-making process. Dona Telma suggests that there is a complementary relationship between the concrete visual artefact and its concept. That is, they (should) exist in inseparable ways during arts-based workshops. For Dona Telma, the complementary relationship between the concrete visual artefact and its concept can help participants create their own artwork or at least realize a universe of possibilities because, in this way, participants will have a visual reference of what is possible.

Dona Telma was able to articulate what is important for her because she was operating within her internalized visual thought, which is represented by a universe of possibilities. This universe of possibilities was established by the facilitator's speech and the artwork itself, as shown in Figure 3. The fact that Dona Telma verbally expressed what is important to her is evidence of her internal dialogue or her intrapersonal movement. This relationship between inter- and intrapersonal movement represents a second dialectical relationship that is observed within the dynamics of the individual's intrapersonal movement in relation to the interpersonal movement; the former sparks the latter, continuously and simultaneously.

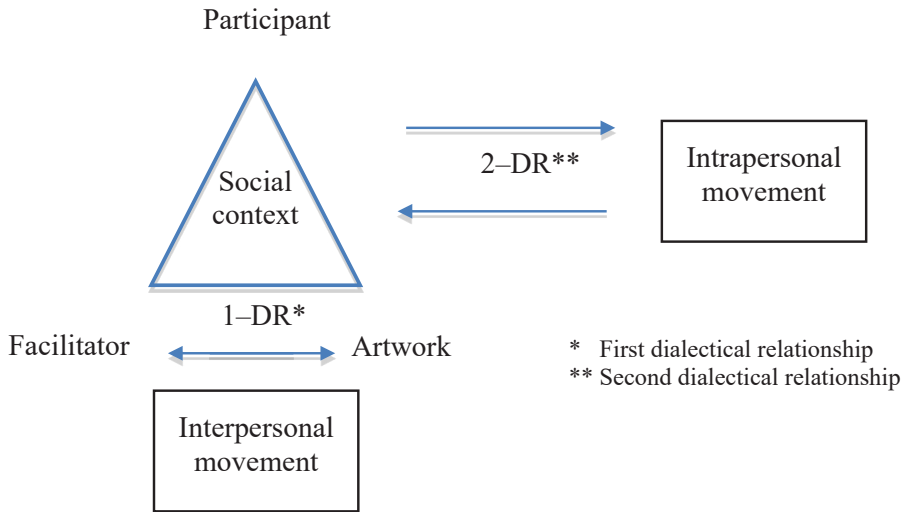


Figure 3. Intrapersonal and interpersonal movements and their dialectical relationships that mediate the co-construction of new knowledge by individuals involved in an art-based workshop.

Although the interpersonal movement happens externally between the individual and their environment and the intrapersonal movement refers to the internalization of new knowledge, they both happen simultaneously and continuously in a dialectical relationship. The interface between both movements is what Vygotsky (1962) recognizes as verbal thought. Brooks (2005) expands Vygotsky's concept of verbal thought by suggesting that the interface between speech and drawing establishes what she identifies as visual thought. In addition, whenever the individual cannot verbally express themselves for any reason, visual thought offers alternative ways of communication in a context of an arts-based workshop. In Dona Telma's case, visual thought was established after the interface between the intrapersonal and the interpersonal movement, which opens spaces to a universe of possibilities, as shown in Figure 4.

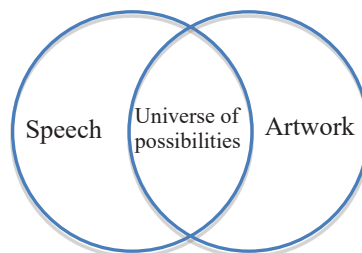


Figure 4. Universe of possibilities established by the interface of the interlocutor's speech and a previously created artwork.

By identifying interpersonal and intrapersonal movements of individuals in arts-based environments we can better understand how they relate to each other and how they engage with the tools that mediate their communication, the production of artworks, and the construction of new knowledge. This understanding can help us tailor relevant arts-based workshops that will spark meaningful dialogue between participants while informing the ways in which individual transformation unfolds through inter- and intra-relationships.

Imagination and the Pedagogy of Possible Dreams

In this section, we illustrate the role of visual arts in mediating individuals' transformation. To do so, we introduce Luiza, a 55-year-old recycler and former kindergarten teacher. Luiza is one of the members of a recycling cooperative located in a low-income neighborhood in the city of São Paulo. The following episode unfolded right after Dona Telma's conversation discussed in the previous section. It took place toward the end of the impressionist painting workshop when participants and the principal investigator gathered in a circle to debrief about the event they had just experienced. This is what Luiza said:

Principal Investigator: *What about your, Luiza? How do you feel about today's workshop?*

Luiza: *The imagination of anyone who participates in an impressionist workshop will take them to another horizon. The dolls stayed in my imagination. Not an imagination I dreamed of, but an imagination I know it is possible.*

For Vygotsky (2004), imagination refers to a resourceful faculty or action for constructing new ideas, images, or concepts of external artefacts by someone's creative thought mediated by external stimuli – that is, “the ability of our brain to combine elements” (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 9). This ability is mediated by our environment, which includes the tools available and the community we are part of, as shown in Figure 5. In Luiza's case, her community refers to everybody that was part of the workshop and the tools refer to all the materials (e.g., art supplies) she used during the workshop. In line with Vygotsky's definition of imagination, Luiza claims that one's ability to construct new ideas can move one to another place. Here, she does not refer to a geographical place, but rather a state of being or an alternative way of perceiving the world; not a simple move from one place to another, but an internal individual transformation. Such transformation is possible when the individual perceives and understands his or her position in the world as an active historically situated agent of internal and external revolution – what Paulo Freire (1978) calls *conscientização*. Luiza identifies this new state of being as “another horizon.” It is important to note here that the transformation Luiza talks about does not imply the individual loses what they already know about the world, the elements that constitute them as a human being, and the individual's previous knowledge formed by their history and culture. Rather, their views are integrated into this new experience (moving to another horizon), which in this case was mediated by the process of art making. Such mediation is evident when Luiza states that “the creativity workshop will take her to other horizons.” Seeing other horizons

(*ver por outros horizontes*). Seeing things through different lenses mediates individual transformation because it requires moments of critical reflection upon our personal interpretations of what is seen and of our *milieu*. These moments of critical reflection occur when we attempt to make sense of our surroundings, taking into consideration our own culture and history (Freire, 1978; Vygotsky, 1962). Luiza implies that art-making mediates people's critical thinking because it helps individuals to see the world through different lenses.

By assembling recyclable materials during the workshop, Luiza created a doll on a canvas. Her artwork was memorable because it stayed in her imagination. Luiza's art mediated her construction of internal new ideas or concepts (imagination) because she saw another horizon.

Luiza makes a clear distinction between what is concrete (possible) and what is "dreamed of" (impossible). Luiza again brings forth the word "imagination" to explain that in these new horizons her new ideas and concepts are concrete and therefore achievable.

In this section we can conclude that 1) art making mediates people's internal transformation because they can see the world differently; and 2) artworks are material evidence of such transformation because these artworks illustrate participants' new thoughts.

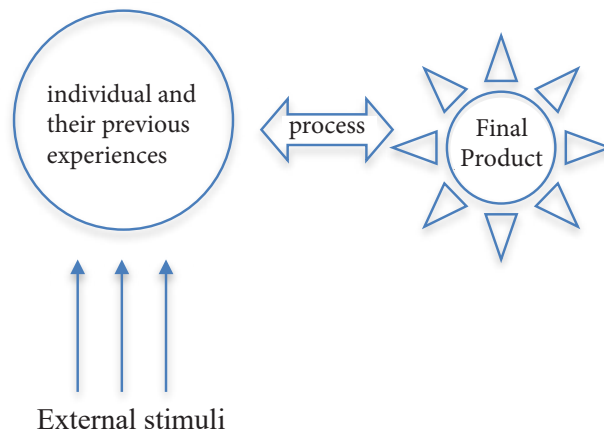


Figure 5. Process of individual transformation is illustrated here. In addition to an individual's previous knowledge, they are also affected by external stimuli (e.g., community or art supplies), enabling the individual to perceive alternative realities. The final product is concrete evidence of these alternative realities.

Luiza's episode illustrates what Freire (2001) identifies as "pedagogy of possible dreams," which refers to a type of learning that emerges from the individual practice aiming to make "possible, what may sound impossible" (p. 27) at first glance. This type of education allows educators and learners to (re)imagine another reality for themselves and perceive alternative ways of operating in the world.

There are also other three remarkable points that emerged from Luiza's discourse above. First, the role of the arts in transformative learning. As alluded to above, people who are involved

in transformative learning processes experience a series of meaningful events that change the way they perceive the world around them. In Luiza's case, for instance, her participation in the arts workshops helped her to see things differently. This is a very important event in SML because social movements are spaces for learning through collective and emancipatory praxis (Welton, 2005). In Luiza's case, such experience happened when she was moved to other horizons, a non-geographical place where she was able to perceive her world differently, where an alternative reality, not just for herself, but anyone involved in the art making process was possible. The kind of transformation that Luiza experienced is often felt as a liberating process and as emancipation (often from oppressed situations) of the human spirit (Freire, 1970). Such human liberation is achieved by learning the language necessary for the individual to "name" their experiences and worlds (Freire, 1978; Scott, 2001). Luiza uses words such as "imagination," "other horizon," and "dream of" to describe her own experiences during the workshop and the other worlds and alternative realities she knows are possible.

Second, visual arts represent powerful research tool because arts-based research draws from what people have to say, which may not be accessible in certain situations (Silverman, 2000). Arts-based research opened the space and triggered free conversation amongst participants. Moreover, Pink (2001) suggests that arts are reflections of people's different world(s). From this perspective, social science researchers can use art to get at how people see and create their own realities, the kind that Luiza calls "other horizons," which she knows are possible.

Finally, Luiza's episode contributes to the debate around two important dimensions of arts-based research: process (the act of making) and product (the resulting work). For Butterwick and Dawson (2006), the process and product of arts-based research represent "a more holistic approach to learning and inquiry" because arts-based research "draws on an aesthetic, non-instrumentalist orientation where the heart, mind, spirit, and body are engaged" (p. 282). This aspect of arts-based research is evident in Luiza's story, because the process of making her doll moved her to other horizons helping her to see other possible realities, while the doll (the final product) is the materialization of these possibilities.

Two epistemological conceptualizations

The recyclers who participated in this study are associated with recycling cooperatives and are members of the Brazilian National Recycling Social Movement (MNCR) in São Paulo. Although they contribute to overall environmental health they still suffer from stigmatization by the general public. This is because this type of work has historically been done by low-income families and also because such activity is often associated with "filth," as illustrated in the first episode in this paper.

Numerous governmental and non-governmental institutions, universities, and environmental education organizations such as the MNCR have been working closely with recycling cooperatives, promoting capacity-building initiatives and community and participatory-action research projects. All of these institutions not only respond to the prejudice suffered by recyclers on daily basis, but also work toward the inclusion of recyclers in public decision-making about recycling so that public policies around waste management across the country are strengthened.

The Brazilian organizations (i.e., the recycling cooperative and MNCR) that contributed to this study operate through the lens of environmental adult education informed by feminist theories, in the sense that these two organizations work as political and educational spheres and represent openings to question hegemonic ideologies and power structures. These two organizations also bridge social-cultural-ecological issues to raise awareness within the general public that waste management and the social inclusion of recyclers is a civil right and everybody's responsibility.

These findings reinforce the idea that stigmatization is indeed a social construction and suggest the arts can help to decrease such stigmatization as the images created by the recyclers brought forth their stories of struggle, hardship, and fighting for social inclusion. This was accomplished through dialogue amongst recyclers and the general public, initiated during the art exhibit. The findings also suggest that the art-making process helps participants to socially, culturally, and historically situate themselves in contrast with the Brazilian social context. This helps them to think critically about the power structures and the hegemonic status quo that produces and reproduces their social exclusion. In doing this, they can perceive a different reality for themselves. From these explorations through the arts, the recyclers constructed their visual thought, which empowered them to (re)imagine a different reality for themselves, which is evidence of individual transformation. From this perspective, two general epistemological conceptualizations emerge: human power and human agency. These conceptualizations are not separate phenomena but operate internally and simultaneously, growing as the individual grows into a critical subject.

The artworks and exhibits produced during this research potentially bridge the gap between recyclers and the public because the art not only contains recyclers' personal stories but they also (re)present dialogical spaces where learning happens, emotional connections are established due to the holistic and humanistic character of the arts workshops, and working networks are created. For instance, agreements between different institutions and recycling cooperatives were established after the art exhibit, so these institutions are now committed to saving and sending their recyclable materials to the recycling cooperatives.

Agency Becomes Visual and Visual Reiterates Agency

While exploring his approach to cognitive development, Vygotsky (1978) highlights that during an individual's learning process within a group, they experience a great sense of worthiness that materializes into human agency. This sense of agency adds imagination to individual consciousness (Kilgore, 1999). This is critical to help recyclers imagine a different reality for themselves. By imagining a different reality, recyclers can fight and change their present. From this perspective, we can infer that agency is both socially constructed and dialectic. Agency is a social construct because humans' actions, even when they are experiencing loneliness, are still mediated by artefacts that are cultural and historical products (even their thoughts), and thus social by nature. Agency is also dialectics because the recyclers, for example, while producing their artworks were in fact (re)producing onto the canvas their stories of empowerment. In turn, the artworks empower the recyclers because they represent newly gained skills. As one of the recyclers exclaimed, while contemplating her artwork at the gallery, "*I didn't know I could do this.*"

Final Considerations

This study reveals that individual transformation is indeed social, but without internal cognitive process, learning would not unfold. Therefore, individual and group learning happens continuously and in inseparable ways.

Moreover, due to the organic and holistic approach to the arts-based workshops described in this study, safe places were created where participants felt comfortable sharing their deepest fears, frustrations, and hopes for social inclusion and better working conditions as recyclers. This impact was possible because of the arts-engaged approach toward qualitative research. Even though the art workshops we presented here did not require any previous art experience from participants and facilitators, these workshops still moved people out of their comfort zones, helped them to situate themselves into historical contexts as well as dream and fight for different realities.

We hope that this study inspires further research on the role of individual transformation in the context of SML and community engaged scholarship as a whole, and that individual transformation is no longer overlooked within the context of social movements. More importantly, we hope that arts-based research receives growing attention in interdisciplinary research as an emancipatory and empowering tool to help understand the process of individual and collective transformation.

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