

Mentor's Introduction for Kevin Slivka

Kimberly Powell

**Pennsylvania State University,
State College, PA**

© 2015 Kimberly Powell

In the act of researching, what does it mean to be in relation with those whom one is intending to research? What are the ethics in relation to field practices regarding Native cultures? How, and though what means, do spaces of communication open? And, important to the field of art education, how does art function as a living practice in relation to culture, ethics, and communication? These are but some of the questions that Kevin Slivka has attempted to ask and pursue in his doctoral research, on which his current essay is based. Building on his Great Lakes field experience in Minnesota with Bruce Martin of the University of Minnesota, he conducted an ethnographically informed study of five Ojibwe artists from the Leech Lake, White Earth, and Mille Lacs Reservations. Kevin examines issues such as cultural identity, ecology, place, materiality and innovation pertaining to Ojibwean artistic practices, a holistic and relational examination of art education. In addition to studying the relational aspects such as the one between art and local ecology, Kevin has also attended to the relational aspects between participant and researcher, what he refers to as critical proximity and Nel Nodding's (1998) concept of an ethics of care in an effort to remain sensitive to practices pertaining to indigenous research. Indeed, a large part of his dissertation deals directly with notions of reciprocity, communication, and ethics in relation to fieldwork. With his study, Kevin seeks to offer alternative accounts of American Indian ways of life as they are constructed through, and with, artistic cultural practices.

Throughout his doctoral studies, Kevin has been interested in examining questions such as those above, both contributing to and expanding upon the current research on diversity in art education with postcolonial conceptualizations of identity, place, ecology and art. As his co-chair and co-advisor, he and I regularly met to discuss his methods of data collection, which consisted of oral historical methods of interviewing, art making, fieldnotes, and artifact

analysis, ultimately situated within the approach of multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 2011) in order to follow the relations of objects, people, and activities across multiple locations and to activate the spaces between the local and the global. The artistic practices and products, which include quill boxes, stone sculptures, and birch bark canoes, are examined and interpreted not just as traditional artifacts but as contemporary, living practices via contemporary theories of art and culture.

As an important form of inquiry, Kevin Slivka engages with what he refers to as arts-mediated events – engaging in Ojibwean creative endeavors with participants—and the role such engagement can serve as creating generative spaces of shared meaning-making and social relations as embodied through shared activities. This is a long-held practice in anthropology, yet one that does not receive significant attention in *educational* anthropology, perhaps due to our frameworks through which we view educational practice as divided into categories of teacher, learner, and curriculum. Kevin’s account of working alongside Ojibwean artists reveals the slippages between researcher and participant, between self and other, between teacher and learner, and between materials and makers.

Kevin’s research has the potential to contribute to research on diversity in art education. It has been a pleasure to work and learn alongside him. I am proud to introduce Kevin Slivka’s essay.

References

- Marcus, G. (2011). Multi-sited ethnography: Five or six things I know about it now. In S. Coleman and P. von Hellerman (Eds.), *Multi-sited Ethnography: Problems and possibilities in the translocation of research methods*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Noddings N. (1988). An ethic of caring and its implications for instructional arrangements. *American Journal of Education*, 96(2), 215-230.