

# Baltimore Uprising:

## Empowering Pedagogy for Change

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**The Baltimore Uprising was in response to the death of Freddie Gray**, who was fatally injured in April 2015 while in police custody in Baltimore City. The first evening of the Uprising, we were home, glued to the television, communicating with each other and our preservice teachers, worried about violent protests that were erupting in parts of the city.

*Shelter in place: imminent danger*

*They are just kids*

*What did you expect people to do?*

*This is not new*

*Cops were in riot gear*

*There's a fire outside my window*

*Is the dorm safe?*

*Are we going to the demonstration?*

*What do I say to my students tomorrow?*

The next morning, Baltimore City was under a state of emergency and public schools closed. Located one mile from the heart of the Uprising, Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) remained open, and we were scheduled to teach in the Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program. A few students asked to be excused to help clean up. Others wanted to meet and talk through circumstances leading up to the Uprising. Yet others wanted immediate change.

The Baltimore Uprising unfolded as a series of protests, community meetings, and actions throughout the city. We marched and chanted, wrote letters, and supported our community. As we fumbled through discussing issues of equity and fairness with our preservice teachers, we realized how unprepared we were at making sense of engaging with civil unrest, racial injustice, and issues of power in the classroom (Acuff, 2014). And if we were unprepared, then our graduates would be too. We felt a responsibility to make a change in our teaching practices.

We realized that the Baltimore Uprising was a catalyst for faculty and preservice teachers to enter conversations about race, privilege, and equity. We started the next school year guided by questions: “What are our responsibilities, as art educators, within schools and

communities?” “How do we talk about race, privilege, and equity in a still divided city within an elite art institution?” How do we prepare student-teachers to engage young learners with social issues, as they unfold in local and global communities? Should we prepare teachers as agents for change through a social justice-focused pedagogy?

### Pedagogy for Change Framework

As faculty, we struggled with how to approach the gaps we saw with our preservice and first-year teachers. Theoretically, we aligned with examining culture (Ladson-Billings, 1995) through confronting power dynamics and fostering critical inquiry (Chapman, 2007; Freire, 1970), and engaging with authentic, real-world problems that are meaningful to learners (Dewey, 1938). Pedagogically, we knew that these theories manifested through strategies such as the inquiry method, project-based learning, and dialogical practices. Our rousing questions and initial responses to the Uprising led each of us to engage our preservice teachers with critical analysis of what and how we teach. We began infusing issues of social justice (Anderson, 2010; Sheppard & hooks, 2014) into our classes. Upon reflection, at the end of the first year, we

# Should we prepare teachers as agents for change through a social justice-focused pedagogy?

Figure 1. Preservice teachers identify places of influence.

analyzed the strategies that we implemented and organized them into the Pedagogy for Change Framework that guides our practice.

If we, alongside our preservice teachers, engage with **SELF** (hooks, 1994; López, 2008) to understand the intersections of identities (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989) from our lived experiences, examined through the lens of the historical **CONTEXT** of established social injustices in schools and communities (Desai, 2010; Goldstein, 2014; Robertson, 2015), then we have an informed understanding of the complexities that **STUDENTS** contribute to the cultural assets (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) of every classroom, with the goal of developing a critical **PEDAGOGY** (Freire, 1970; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Shor, 1992) for effecting change where deemed necessary.

## Self

We wanted our students to understand the intersections of their personal and professional identities by investigating their individual and shared experiences (Kraehe, 2015). After the Uprising, we observed that our students, while having some shared experiences with their neighbors, were not aware of how their perceptions of the Uprising were influenced by their lived experiences. We used several strategies to support preservice teachers in articulating their intersections of identities that shape how we view the world. For example, in one activity, we pinned locations on a world map to signify experiences that influence who we are today and communities to which we belong (Congdon, Stewart, & White, 2002) resulting in a physical visualization that illustrated the paths we took to arrive there and then together (Figure 1).

To deepen our understanding of how we perceive others, we participated in a cross-cultural simulation, BaFa' BaFa',<sup>1</sup> where participants' engagement with fictitious cultures helped to illuminate how we perceive others through our own lenses. Another strategy we implemented to deepen self-reflection was to use spoken word poetry as a vehicle for personal and political reflection. Preservice teachers, alongside high school students, engaged with their personal stories and the ways in which their identities intersect with living and teaching in Baltimore.

## Context

We moved from focusing on self to examining historical contexts of established local and national inequities. For local



perspective, we read authentic narratives about growing up in Baltimore through *The Other Wes Moore* and *The Beast Side: Living and Dying While Black in America*. To further our understanding of inequities in our city, a community psychologist juxtaposed maps of public services, resources, and wealth distribution in Baltimore City (Figure 2). Preservice teachers drew their own conclusions about the relationships between local policy and systemic (in)accessibility of resources.

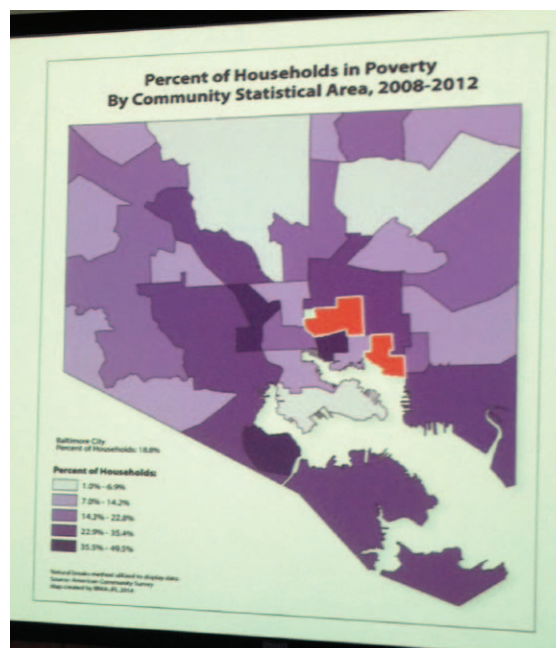


Figure 2. Community psychologist illustrating inequities via maps.





Figure 3. Preservice teachers map their internship placement community.

Since our preservice teachers are all artists, we continually asked them to make meaning through artmaking. For example, they responded to their teaching contexts by visually documenting the community and social structures at their school placements (Figure 3).

After reading about inequities within a larger historical fabric (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994) we attended a symposium at MICA, Black Lives Matter: Structural Racism in 21st Century America, and watched Oyler: *Can a School Save a Community?*, a documentary of a struggling school, to better understand theory as visible through practice.

## Students

By engaging with *Self* and *Context*, we made explicit how all of the selves in the art classroom contribute to the dynamics of learning. Through a series of guest speakers and podcasts, preservice teachers explored strategies for engaging with students who are often overlooked, misunderstood, and mistreated. Guest speakers presented about intersections of

race and learning disability bias in American schools. We watched videos of classroom teachers and analyzed what their teaching style revealed about their embedded beliefs. We listened to podcasts that discussed the school-to-prison pipeline, impact of discipline measures on young people, current forms of segregation in schools, and correlation between social class and academic success. The goal of each engagement was to understand the context of situations and change deficit-model-thinking toward recognizing funds of knowledge (González et al., 2005) to guide artmaking.

## Pedagogy

We could not predict how our Pedagogy for Change framework, activated by the Baltimore Uprising, would inform



Figure 4. Sarah Bushin's lesson objective: Students will know that artists can use their work as a form of activism and be able to brainstorm and storyboard for a product that will make the world a better place in order to be collaborative to accomplish a common goal.





Figure 5. Erin Lehrmann's lesson objectives: Students will know that regardless of how we identify (race, ethnicity, gender, age), we are all agents of change and have the power to make a difference. Students will be able to create Zines using copy paper and a variety of media in order to position themselves as agents of change in their own families, communities, and school, through personal reflection and voicing ideas.

our student teachers' curriculum development, but we found that a number of students developed a critical pedagogy for change. Enduring understandings implemented by preservice teachers in their elementary school internships included: Art, like activism, is often a collaborative effort in which things can be accomplished by working together (Bushin, 2016) (Figure 4); and, Artmaking can effect change that is challenging yet feels authentic to who we are (Lehrmann, 2016) (Figure 5). Next, we highlight a unit prepared and taught by Matthew Adelberg.

Matthew completed student teaching in a traditional Baltimore city school. In alignment with our Pedagogy for Change framework, Matthew began by closely observing his students, getting to know them, and reflecting on his role(s) in relation to the context of the school and students. Guided by his reflections, he developed a unit appropriate for his context. The unit's big idea (Walker, 2003), "Belonging and Not Belonging: What it Means to be 'Other,'" guided the enduring understandings (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005): (a) belonging/not belonging can significantly effect and impact individual and community identity, and (b) art can serve as a reflection of self, culture, and/or community values (Adelberg, 2016). Matthew's students addressed issues of gender inequality, bullying, racism, and socioeconomic status through artmaking, discussion, and sharing, which developed students' abilities to be confident agents of change and social reformers (Adelberg, 2016; Figures 6 and 7). Engaging middle school students

with belonging as a big idea created a foundation for subsequent engagements with race, power, privilege, and equity.

## Conclusion

In order to prepare student-teachers as agents for change, we developed the Pedagogy for Change framework that conceptualizes how we: (a) examine ourselves in relation to others, (b) consider contexts for teaching and learning, and (c) incorporate the learners' assets to make decisions about social issues appropriate for inquiry in local and global communities. As we continue to grapple with translating the framework into practice, we acknowledge that our framework must remain dynamic and responsive to the needs of our students and community. As we have considered our initial questions, we have learned that it is our responsibility to mind the gap between our lived experiences and

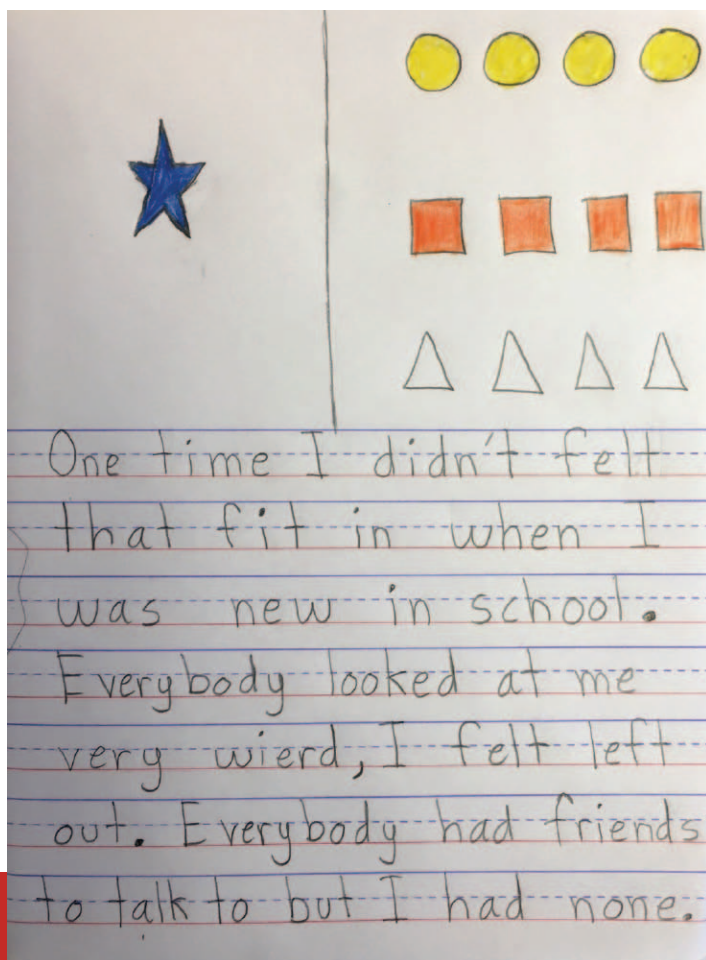


Figure 6. Matthew's student work sample from the Belonging unit.

Figure 7. Lesson objective: Students will know that art has a role in expressing topics people are often uncomfortable verbalizing and be able to complete a collaborative sculpture using found objects to address themes about (not) belonging in order to practice making meaning with pre-made objects.



those of our students. As professors, we have learned that when we share our own stories and unanswered questions while talking about race, privilege, and equity with our preservice teachers, we situate ourselves as participants in a community of concern. It is through understanding the privilege and power that artists hold in a democracy and the ways in which art can promote equity that we are empowered to affect change where deemed necessary. ■

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## Endnote

- <sup>1</sup> Simulations for schools and charities. Retrieved from [www.simulationtrainingsystems.com/schools-and-charities/products/bafa-bafa](http://www.simulationtrainingsystems.com/schools-and-charities/products/bafa-bafa)