Mapping and Interpretation of Cultural Identity using the Arts

Janet Pillai, Yoke Pin Chen

Reaching out to a diversity of socio-cultural contexts and specificities: 2.1 Global citizenship, cultural identities and arts education

ARTS-ED, Community-based Arts and Heritage Education Program, Malaysia

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ARTS-ED, Community-based Arts and Heritage Education Program is a program that provides innovative and best practice non-formal arts and heritage education for young people aged 10-23. Arts-ED programs focus on helping young people retrace their cultural heritage through site-specific projects with a range of dedicated partners; local institutions, artists, community, schools, societies, government, and private sector.

This paper will highlight some pedagogical methods used by arts-ED to engender young people’s dynamic interaction with the living culture and generation of ‘cultural energy’ for community cultural revitalization:

- Intergenerational/ intercultural interaction
- Creative modes of inquiry and documentation
- Interpretation using artistic medium
- Re-integrating knowledge and capital

Arts-ED projects call for intergenerational and intercultural interaction with all sectors of the community who are the repository of history and culture. The team of young people working on a cultural project is expected to handle language, age and cultural challenges. Each project team attempts to have a mixture of participants from different cultural, income, ethnic, age and gender groups. This
profile foreshadows the kind of social, intellectual and creative sharing that will take place on-site within the community itself.

**Inquiry and documentation of the site is done through the process of ‘cultural mapping’**. Through the mapping process young participants identify, document and map specific cultural assets within the site and study how people, activities and environment are connected through time, space, social and economic interaction.

To be able to conduct inquiry and documentation, participants are equipped with creative tools and techniques. As part of the program, young people learn how to elicit information or material from the environment, transcribe and document the information, and make sense of it through mapping.

**Data collection techniques** such as listening, observation, interview, recording, are introduced to participants. Participants also get a hands-on introduction to documentation techniques such as digital photography, videography, sketching, mind-mapping, body mapping etc. Young participants then attempt to make sense of their individual findings by creating a collective cultural map.

Young participants utilize the data from their mapping exercise to develop a creative product that can communicate their impressions or social reflections of the site through artistic interpretation. **Creative interpretation** is an end product requiring participants to compose and arrange their findings using an aesthetic art form such as dance, musical drama, storytelling, visual exhibition, graphic publication etc. These performances/exhibition/publication are a means for participants to communicate as their findings from their study of the site to the larger community.

In the process of interpreting culture through an artistic form, young people have to deal experientially with merging the contemporary and the historical, the personal and the communal. The arts in this context become a means of
developing and communicating a new culture with a distinct inter-communal vocabulary of materials, images, aesthetics and themes. These creative initiatives encourage young people to act as positive agents of change for cultural sustainability, diversity and vibrancy.

Unesco & the Government of the Republic of Korea
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Seoul 25~28 May 2010

Identification form for the submission of abstracts on Arts Education
(research/case studies/experiences of best practices)

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<th>First Presenter:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Surname: Pillai</td>
<td>Name: Janet</td>
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<td>Surname: Chen</td>
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Past and present occupation (detailed description):
First Presenter: Janet Pillai

Janet Pillai is a senior lecturer at the School of Arts, University Sains Malaysia, Penang. Besides formal teaching at the University, Pillai specializes in program development and training in non-formal arts education. She has facilitated more than 20 major training workshops at regional level for actors, directors and facilitators. She also runs workshops on arts pedagogical for teachers at state, national and international level.

Pillai is also a veteran director of theatre for young people, producing at least 25 major creative works at the commercial, educational and community level. She works in collaboration with performing and visual artists to produce multi media productions for young audiences. Pillai’s current areas of research and specialization are in
i) Theatre for Young People (Tools and Processes)
ii) Arts and Heritage Education (Mapping and Interpretation)
iii) Learning Theories (Multiple Intelligence, Conflict literacy, Cultural literacy)

Conference papers include topics such as cultural sustainability, role of the arts in heritage conservation and pedagogical approaches to art education presented at International Conferences.

Pillai leads Arts-ED an organization specializing in heritage education and research into cultural mapping and conservation. Programs are conducted for young people aged 11-23 in urban and rural settings. The organization produces curriculum, publications, performance, exhibitions and audio-visual material for educational purposes for both community and as teaching resource.
Co-presenter: Yoke Pin, Chen

Chen Yoke Pin is currently working at ARTS-ED, a community arts and heritage education program as senior program officer. She is involved in cultural heritage education and cultural mapping research since 2004 in George Town and Balik Pulau. Chen is also actively involved as project and publicity coordinator in communicating productions, exhibition and performances in community settings. Chen as also been on study visit within Malaysia, Thailand, India and Taiwan to exchange methodology as well as make paper and workshop presentations to other groups working with community particularly on conservation of cultural identity.

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