

## Art Hive

### *A Relational Framework for Social Change*

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#### 1 Introduction

In line with the work of Timm-Bottos (2006), we have been researching various applications of the Art Hive framework in community settings in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) since 2015. Between 2015 and 2017 our projects included newcomer programming with immigrant and refugee youth in a local high school in the form of weekly pop-up art hive sessions. Our focus was on establishing a sense of belonging and inclusion in a new place and art making in a social context. Adler's Crucial Cs (children need courage, they need to connect with others, feel capable, and know that they count,) as Bettner and Lew (1990) have reminded us, informed our observations of how the hive process affected the experiences of newcomer students. The next round of sessions responded to the requests of newcomer young people to invite local students to participate with them in studio sessions; here social engagement increased. Outcomes demonstrated that the Art Hive sessions provided space for social connection and exchange, fostered creative competency, and supported social connection. Students experienced a home-like support and felt noticed by others. A student-curated exhibit and open house was hosted by the young people who took charge of mini-printmaking workshops and demonstrated an overall pride in ownership of the hive space and program.

Based on our high-school programming and responding to a call for more permanent Art Hive programming, we expanded our Art Hive to a studio located in a local Indigenous organisation, where we have been hosting community-embedded programming since November 2018. In addition to having shifted from a pop-up style to a permanent rented studio space of our own, our participant focus has also evolved and expanded from a newcomer-only process focusing on inclusion and belonging, to an expanded and integrated culturally diverse engagement that includes newcomer young people and families, as well as Indigenous young people, families, and elders whom we have met through our hosting agency, our region's Native friendship centre.

In the Art Hive model, a profound power of relationship, based in and created through artmaking, informs our experiences and our perceptions

and practice of community-based scholarship. We find ourselves engaging more intentionally with the colonial history of our region in response to our developing relationship with our Indigenous colleagues who, as mentioned above, are our current studio hosts. Inevitably, we ponder our roles as research collaborators and practitioners responding to current calls for reconciliation.

In this chapter we reflect on the cultural context of our research that includes both recent immigration and a long, complex, and traumatic colonial history that has affected our Indigenous communities. We consider our learning as scholars and educators, and also as socially invested citizens producing new knowledge collectively and collaboratively. Our experiences with newcomer young people at a local high school segued into an expanded cultural landscape with the addition of Mi'kmaq, Inuit, and Innu participants. This expanded relationship has informed the ways in which identity and context affect knowledge creation; our research process has inevitably been shaped by our current socio-political context in NL in relation to both the complex colonial history of our province and its current engagement with reconciliation, as well as to the current shifting cultural landscape being created currently by increasing immigration.

We reflect critically on what it means to engage in responsible and accountable knowledge creation when identities are informed by oppressive colonial histories, trauma, and/or profound othering that results from the refugee experience of being a newcomer. Through the relational framework of an Art Hive, we strive to increase our awareness of cultural identities and histories in order to avoid inflicting repeated harm through disrespect and practice based on cultural appropriation (Baskin, 2016; Vowel, 2016).

## 2 Art Hives as Practice

While considered therapeutic spaces, Art Hives are not clinically modeled; they do not engage with concepts of treatment in response to diagnosis (Allen, 2008; Timm-Bottos, 2016). Rather, Art Hives are publicly accessible studio spaces that are grounded in a community art therapy approach that sees art making as the primary site of engagement and exchange. This differs from medical model art therapy approaches that engage with clinical diagnosis and assessment and operate out of clinical settings, such as psychiatry units and hospitals. Art Hives, based on holistic wellness models, are community-situated. They provide free programming, including access to art making materials, and provide a loose form of facilitation by practitioners familiar with community art therapy practice and a person-centred and non-evaluative

style of facilitation. Art Hives privilege human connection, independence, and autonomy as vital to holistic wellness and functioning. Through art making practice in a shared and collective setting that might be called a held space, hives focus on the person over the art, while also acknowledging the art as an extension of the artist. Allen (2008) has described hive practitioners as being the space holders possessing a compassionate disinterest in the art-making process. It is the creative doing that is encouraged as the site through which connection is achieved.

Art Hives intentionally consider cultural nuance and safety and do not rely on common spoken language (Kapitan, 2015). Instead, the primary shared activity is creative process via media and technique in art making. Creative process is accessed within the collaborative space and is supported through non-evaluative input that does not judge or evaluate technique, but is, instead, descriptive and reflective. Such nuanced moving away from critique encourages exchange and conversation that is art-focused while at the same time acts as a means for joining in relationship (Christensen, 2011). The act of making as well as creative exploration and discovery at the site of the individual is a focal point for developing communication and connection (Moon, 2002). We highlight technique as contributing to participant comfort and sense of ease in the act of making art. We provide materials that minimise anxiety and self-scrutiny about art making by introducing techniques that require little skill but produce satisfying outputs. Small pallet cardboard, off-loom weaving, paper weaving, Styrofoam printing, and papier mâché sculpting all provide creative engagement with satisfying outputs while demanding little knowledge of technique.

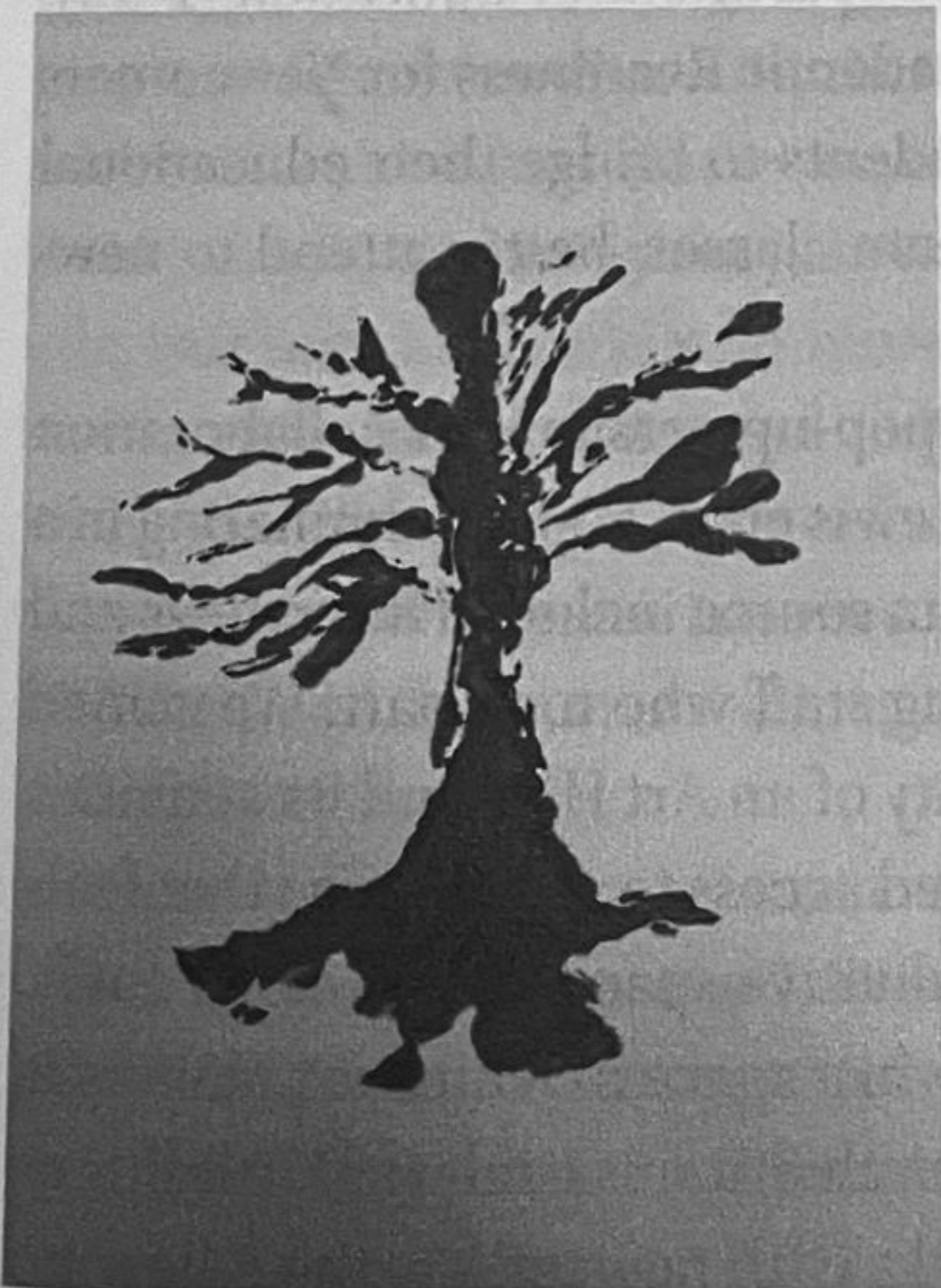


FIGURE 4.1

Styrofoam printing technique

### 3 The Open Studio Project and Its Background

Our first project, The Open Studio, took place in collaboration with Holy Heart High School in St. John's, which hosts the bulk of local newcomer programming (Lewis, McLeod, & Li, 2018). Newcomer students hailed from a wide variety of countries including Syria, Eritrea, and Ethiopia. The demographic landscape of NL is historically Euro-Christian, with visible minorities representing less than 2% of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2012). This contrasts with other Canadian cities, like Montreal or Toronto, where visible minorities represent approximately 40% (Association for New Canadians [ANC], 2017). Following an influx of Syrian newcomers in 2016 in response to Syria's humanitarian crisis, NL sponsored approximately 300 Government Assisted Refugees, 200 of whom were from Syria (ANC, 2017). Over 1,000 newcomers were sponsored between 2017 and 2018 in all and the provincial government has committed to increasing immigration to 1,700 per year by 2022. As is clear, NL is experiencing a historical shift in population diversity. Government response has involved welcome programming, identifying the needs of newcomers including language learning and employment, as well as supporting social interaction as a feature of fostering mental wellbeing (Gilroy Inc., 2005).

Positive changes have also been happening in high schools. Students from refugee families with financial constraints and low parental educational attainments are most vulnerable to increased barriers to completing their education (Bitew & Ferguson, 2010). Earlier local research in NL indicated that the support for newcomer children, particularly refugee children with educational gaps, is insufficient (Burnaby, 2010; Sarma-Debnath & Castano, 2008). Currently, new guideline documents by the Department of Education (DOE), 2010, and a new Literacy Enrichment and Academic Readiness for Newcomers (LEARN) program that assists newcomer students to bridge their educational gaps and prepare them for joining mainstream classes, better attend to newcomer students' educational needs.

Beginning in 2015 we facilitated weekly pop-up sessions in collaboration and consultation with newcomer students (Lewis et al., 2018), culminating in a student-led open house and art show. Our data source included interviews and focus groups with both students and teaching staff who took part. We gained an in-depth understanding of the applicability of an Art Hive and its activities to culturally diverse contexts. Themes included access to social space that feels like home and learning English in a non-evaluative space (Lewis et al., 2018). Our data addresses experiences of inclusivity in a space in which art making is the primary activity and in which academic evaluation is irrelevant. Additionally, our findings supported a further five weeks with newcomers the following

year, during which students opted to invite local peers to join in the Art Hive sessions. Focus group outputs from this second set of sessions highlighted the role and importance of hope in being a newcomer to NL.

#### 4 The Hearthstone Community Art Hive

Our second project, the Hearthstone Community Studio Art Hive, (hereafter Hearthstone) started in late 2018. It is informed by our work in the high school and participants' desire to expand programming to merge newcomer and local groups. Hearthstone is funded by Canada's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). Our studio, located in downtown St. John's, is in a shared space hosted by First Light Centre, our local native friendship center, where we hope to remain after our initial pilot phase of two years. We have established ourselves and now avoid the disruption of set up and break down that is inherent to pop-up programming. Permanence allows for continuity of programming, flexibility of art making activity, constant availability of materials for visiting participants, and overall continued community presence and visibility. We host closed programming with specific groups, as well as open-studio sessions for anyone wishing to attend. Our participants continue to include newcomer populations and other diverse groups. Our group work also includes working with adults transitioning from the prison system, a group of trans youth, and seniors. Additionally, we have collaborated with First Light to provide closed programming with Indigenous families. Since permanency allows for time to establish our space and our community relationships, we have been getting to know our immediate community. Participant art decorates the walls, there is a table for self-service tea and coffee to which members contribute snack food, and our cupboards are full of card stock, acrylic and tempera paint of many colours, collage supplies, glue, pencils, markers, art books and more. We have found that our materials change in response to the space and cultural needs of participants. In consultation with our Friendship Centre colleagues, we now include caribou leather, seal skin, and beading materials since these are culturally meaningful to our local Mi'kmaq and Inuit members, and offer enhanced opportunities for learning and cultural exchange.

As a multidisciplinary academic team consisting of an arts therapist, art educator, and newcomer scholar we reflect on the past four years from pedagogical and scholarly perspectives. Through our lived experiences of community, our reflective stance is informed by arts scholarship, identity, culture, and colonial history. We explore the nuances of culturally informed research that

is community situated and collaborative as a core feature of culturally safe and inclusive scholarship. This is presented through the community art engagement of our Art Hive experiences, partnerships, and developing relationships. We find ourselves critically considering our roles and responsibilities in such work. This means engaging with our own privilege, which includes cultural assumptions that are informed by colonial histories. We remain aware of the precariousness that often surfaces when privilege meets challenge for change (see Lu, 2012; Maracle, 1996, 2017; Vowel, 2016).

## 5 Fostering a Socially Engaged Studio: Relationship, Space, and Social Justice

### 5.1 *Art Hive as Relational*

A core feature of Hearthstone's being a socially engaged space is our consideration of the significance of relationship in how programming is planned and facilitated. The island of Newfoundland is the original home territory of the Beothuk and Mi'Kmaq, while Labrador is the home of Innu and Inuit peoples. We understand that personal connection and consideration of this context is important to Art Hive practice. Part of that connecting is informed by the positioning of the hive facilitator or therapist. The identity of the practitioner is an important part of the creative work. Moon (2002) has pointed out the significance of holistic practitioner identity that cannot operate in isolation from personal, family, and other aspects of their life. The perspective of the practitioner informs how connecting with others and relationship-building occurs. This includes an assumption that for both practitioner and participant the artistic perspective, or, put differently, the engagement with metaphor and symbol, contributes to "attending to the stories of our own lives" (p. 33). It is in relating to creative process through relationship that we begin to access a heightened awareness of our life events, which inevitably includes the cultural contexts with which we engage. Creative process is further fostered through the consideration of language, the two Rs of relationship, which are responsibility and reciprocity (Baskin, 2016), and supportive non-evaluative support.

### 5.2 *The Two Rs of Relationship*

The core components of relationship are the two Rs of responsibility and reciprocity (Baskin, 2016). Responsibility in relation to cultural history and formed identity implies learning about this history and the importance of cultural imagery and ritual, as well as seeking out important information so as to understand how cultural appropriation can happen. Reciprocity is the

way we respond within relationships. Decision making occurs in a relational context, informed by the two Rs. Inherent in reciprocity is shared responsibility that is non-evaluative but supportive within the creative process. This emphasises the learning that occurs at the site of relational engagement and exchange.

### 5.3 *The Language of Connecting*

In both Art Hive spaces, language played a role in relation to connection along with careful consideration of the relevance of identity as it relates to spoken language and other forms of communication. In our high school pop-up Art Hives, the space was animated by multiple languages, and exchanges took place in students' language of origin. This style of exchange continues at Hearthstone, with the addition of Indigenous languages including Innu-aimun and Inuktitut. Welcome signs are translated into these languages and cultural images, such as ulus (Inuit carving knives) are depicted in artwork.

### 5.4 *Art Hive and Context, Art Hive as Cultural Space*

We argue that justice must be part of practice, and we consider how Art Hives challenge oppressive structures through active engagement with publicly shared spaces that foster identity through relationship building and mutually creative processes. Because Art Hives are grounded in philosophies of social justice and feminism and based on community practice models, we consider how notions of justice contribute to the interplay of relationships within a creative space. Baskin (2016) has noted that in helping contexts Indigenous knowledge does not differentiate the importance of body and mind, so "there is no separation between physical health and mental health" (p. 196). Wellness is a holistic and inherently collective concept. Individual mental health and wellness exist in conjunction with community wellness; when a community thrives, so do the individuals in it. Justice-oriented intent, especially in cultural contexts that are negotiating colonial histories, can contribute to an enhancement of identity and cultural pride (Baskin, 2016).

In the Art Hive space, identity is considered through the techniques learned, shared and practised, and through cultural artifacts like talking sticks, as well as the materials available for use. Identity is also supported by the ways in which cultural images are displayed and shared since this informs how and whether cultural exchange takes place. The Art Hive protects and invites; on behalf of community members, we protect how the space is used, and we invite all to attend, participate, and contribute. Baskin (2016), Vowel (2016), and Moon (2002) have all highlighted the importance of critical awareness of the power of space and context for culturally safe and inviting practice.

We need to keep two questions in mind: “Does space foster connection and encourage emerging identity?” and “How might space be at odds with participant identity and culture?”

### 5.5 *Hive Programming Merges Relationship and Space*

Environmental space is important for wellness (Baskin, 2016; Timm-Bottos & Reilly, 2015; Vowel, 2016; Maracle, 2017). Land, animals, birds, and fish all live alongside humans and our wellness is linked to theirs. Through this understanding of connection, we must share space, responsibility, and consider reciprocity. Land and space should represent participants' contexts by engaging with and learning about imagery and cultural materials. When programming reflects community and responds to communal need, it is a form of enacting just ways of being together and this helps to acknowledge the value of cultural images and materials. It is significant that health and wellness are a result of a holistic relationship with others, self, and environment (Baskin 2016; Timm-Bottos & Reilly, 2015; Vowel, 2016).

## 6 Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter we have engaged with what it means to practice responsible scholarship with different communities. We recognise the need to make room for much subjectivity since identity is a diverse and broad concept.

In our exploration of the Art Hive framework and the ways in which it aligns with culturally sensitive work, we privilege relationship-building and shared ownership of art-making practice with the aim of fostering independence and autonomy for and with Art Hive participants. We acknowledge the significance of the studio as a space in which knowledge creation, informed by materials and technique, can take place. Practicing cultural humility informs our community scholarship and our engagement with Indigenous ways of knowing.

Positive relationships that avoid assumptions and are open to learning include a recognition of responsibility in the work process. For us, art making, and arts focused programming precedes scholarship. The research, while its goal is to foster new perspectives and knowledge, is always secondary to creative programming and participant engagement. We conclude that in practicing culturally safe relational scholarship, we critically engage the complex colonial histories and marginalisation in Newfoundland and Labrador.



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