Using Feminist Advocacy, Collaboration, and Arts-based Practices to Heal Ourselves and Others

Renee Sandell & Enid Zimmerman

Abstract

We are two art educators who discuss how our individual and collaborative art-making practices, viewed through a feminist lens, enable us to empower ourselves and others to help repair or heal the world. We explain our personal and collaborative art-making processes through political activism in public arenas and in our daily lives using a Marking and Mapping® process with our conceptions of personal, collaborative, and public voice. We each present two individually authored visual statements along with two accompanying artworks and a collaborative piece that combines a written explanation and graphic example of our views about healing ourselves and the world.

Keywords: feminism, advocacy, art-based practices, collaboration, empowerment

This visual essay is a feminist exploration of professional and personal navigations and discoveries within 40 years of friendship. As authors of this visual essay, we, Renee Sandell and Enid Zimmerman, share a Jewish and New York City heritage. We are both first generation Americans and over the years have worked together on a number of occasions both in our published written work and in creating collaborative, visual artworks.

A Feminist Lens and Empowerment through Voice

Retired from university teaching, we continue to be actively involved in art education advocacy and research at the national level and have returned to using our own art-based practices to nurture creativity, mindfulness, and critical thinking through a feminist lens. One of our goals is to help empower art educators seeking to expand their expressive potential as effective advocates for art education research and practice; and to make their voices heard locally and in public arenas. Our view of feminism is one in which financial, social, and cultural inequalities are at the forefront; and include protesting and activism for greater influence of women and women’s issues being included equally in politics, education, health issues, and the media (Rampton, 2015). As our own activism positions of feminism evolve, we continue to advocate for equity, diversity, and inclusion; and challenge the political nature of organizations and those who hold power that do not meet equitable and inclusive standards.

We use voice, as a ubiquitous metaphor for empowering suppressed expressions of those who often are not heard, to become agents for change rather than targets of change in an ever-shifting educational reform context. From the literature about feminist voice, our experiences teaching and conducting research over many years, and Enid and Frances Thurber’s (2002) Empowerment Leadership Model, we use private voice, collaborative voice, and public voice to enable us, through our writing and art-making, to help heal ourselves and others. In this model, self-empowerment, empowerment of others, transformation, and
social action can lead to belief in one’s self, knowledge of content and pedagogy, and creation of shared success and autonomy among a community of teachers and leaders (Figure 1).

**Empowerment/Leadership Model For Art Education**

**Public Voice/Public Practice**

Developing, presenting and publishing scholarly work
Exhibiting and selling art work

**Domain A**

KNOWLEDGE OF AND BELIEF IN ONE’S SELF
(self-confidence replaces self-doubt)

**Domain B**

KNOWLEDGE OF ART CONTENT AND PEDAGOGY
(knowledge informs practice)

**Domain C**

CREATION OF SHARED SUCCESS AND AUTONOMY
(collaboration exceeds competition)

**Domain D**

CREATION OF A CARING COMMUNITY OF LEADERS AND LEARNERS
(caring supercedes authority)

Assuming leadership roles and administrative responsibilities

Transformation

Social Action

Mentoring others through caring and promoting high professional standards

Networking and advocacy
Agent not victim of change

**Healing the World**

We envision our advocacy for creating a better world for future generations as a welcome alternative to the prevalent hierarchical power structures of society in which those who are privileged and have power, be it through wealth, religion, race, and/or sexual identity, deny access to those who often do not have the power to create positive change. In each artwork, be it a personal piece or a collaborative work, the words, marks, images, contrasts, colors, and their graphic arrangement, express our visual voices, giving graphic form to our ideas. We are guided by our notion of *Tikkun Olam*, which often is translated as *repairing or healing the world*. Modern Jewish practice of *Tikkun Olam* has become synonymous with the notion of social action and the pursuit of social justice. This perception of reparation not only references repairing or healing the world, but, also, improving it. *Tikkun Olam*, however, not only emphasizes political activism, as there are various ways to practice *Tikkun Olam* in our daily lives and improve the world and bring it closer to a harmonious state; but, at the same time emphasizes performing small acts of kindness as well as engaging in social action and pursuing social justice (Rose, Green Kaiser, & Klein, 2008).

**A Collaborative Process of Art-making**

We both generate artwork in our own private spaces and sometimes, together, we use a collaborative process to create artworks in which we equally contribute to the final product. We do this through a procedure in which one of us initiates an idea and the other resonates with the conception, reclarifies, refines, or rejects it. Our collaborative work, both written and visual, is concerned with a practice that fosters power for women to act upon issues they identify as significant to use in their own lives and communities. For our collaborative artwork, once an idea is agreed upon then both of us propose an outline of a visual way or ways in which the conception can be presented visually. As soon as there is agreement, through an on-line, computer practice of sending an in-process artwork back and forth, we each work on parts until we reach a consensus that the visual representation is complete. Renee does her part of this collaborative process by using ProCreate on her iPad for digital visualization in addition to hand drawing to make changes and additions; whereas, Enid uses a physical, collage technique to add and alter parts and then photographs her additions and changes.
In 2018, we created our first joint artwork (Sandell & Zimmerman, in press) in which we collaborated during the entire process through on-line conversations about how and what was to be included. In this work, we depict, through artful Marking & Mapping, our collaborative community-building ideas about voice leading to empowerment through a contemporary feminist lens.

Marking and Mapping®

Since 2013, when we began to use Renee’s Marking & Mapping® (Sandell, 2013) methodology for visual journaling (Sandell, 2015; Sandell & Zimmerman, in press), our graphic conversations have been about how we art educators can be instrumental in transforming ourselves and our communities (Sandell, 2015). The transformative nature of Marking & Mapping® uses a highly accessible approach to visual expression and is designed to engage artists and non-artists in democratic visualization experiences that communicate authentic, personal, and creative expression (Sandell, 2015). Marking & Mapping® provides everyone with freedom of visual expression and ideas, by encoding authentic and inspirational narratives. Simple guidelines and tools help guide visual storytelling activities that use creativity to reveal each person’s ‘visual voice.’

Renee uses Visual Fitness, an ability to decode and encode meaning, as a vital survival strategy in our 21st century digital world where pocket devices persistently bombard us with graphic information. Towards this end, Renee uses Form+Theme+Context (FTC)® through A Balanced Way of Seeing® to decode and encode art, as well as museums, leadership, and other phenomena including political issues, in the form of FTC Palettes (Sandell, 2000). These open-ended graphic organizers, used in professional development workshops such as SummerVision DC program (Sandell & Zimmerman, 2017), utilize meaningful criteria that address the formal (what is seen), thematic (what is discerned from what is seen), and contextual (what cannot be seen but can be ‘googled’) dimensions for which specific evidence is identified for developing balanced creative work with deep insight.

During the 2018 #MeToo Movement, Renee created an FTC Palette for Decoding Sexual Abuse & Harassment. This FTC Palette reflects the Big Picture of Sexual Abuse & Harassment as comprehensive documentation of a complex feminist issue perceived in a balanced way that affects all citizens. Viewers are invited to mark up this document and make connections between the different columns, as well as the added Remediations Strategies in the bottom section of Figure 2.
Personal and Visual Narratives

What follows are personal visual statements with accompanying graphic visualizations that we made in response to certain events in our lives. These visual statements are introduced with brief descriptions about how individually and collaboratively, we responded to political and social issues, that helped us repair and heal ourselves and, thereby, the world around us. In each personal narrative, we first discuss two individually rendered artworks that we created for different purposes. Then we discuss our collaborative artwork in which we share ideas that bring our personal visions into a new configuration that would not be possible if we had created this artwork on our own. The process of creating through the Internet and making changes over time, also, adds a new element to our collaborative art-making.

Renee Sandell: Providing Access to Visual Fitness 4 All® through a Balanced Way of Seeing®

My artwork combines FTC® with Marking & Mapping® (Sandell, 2013) to create art installations that explore the human condition in time, space, and place. In particular, Marking & Mapping® embraces my personal artwork as evidence of my formal, thematic, and contextual visual voice, revealed for example in two different artworks created in 2017. Figure 3, “Leaving Berlin: My Mother’s Immigrant Childhood,” is my contribution to the ArtWatch Collective’s “The One House Project: Artists Stand Up for Inclusion, Tolerance, and Unity.” This timely, community-based exhibit brought together more than 300 participants, both artists and community members, who were given a 12x12-inch wood panel on which to tell the story of one of their ancestors who came to this country from elsewhere, whether voluntarily or involuntarily. ArtWatch Collective then constructed an underlying structure—a house—and attached the completed panels to the outside, covering it completely.11 The process of Marking & Mapping® my mother’s Berlin childhood and immigration story involved the creation of all of the images and text while I listened to my mother’s online recording from her 1999 Oral History from the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. Hearing her spoken words guided me to create this interpretive visualization of her unique and complex story as a Holocaust survivor who came to the United States in 1938.

Empathy (Figure 4) is an example from my ongoing Silk Meditations series. These images on painted silk, reveal positive energies contained in human virtues, reflecting sensory states of consciousness through spiritual expression. Immersed in universal gratitude, the works in this series become

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1. To learn more about the One House Project and view images of panels that were created for the first exhibit (which was presented in November 2017 at Touchstone Gallery in Washington, DC) and the second, larger November 2018 iteration at Black Rock Center for the Arts in Germantown, Maryland, visit the ArtWatch website: www.artwatchdc.com/one-house
meditative mindscapes of visual affirmations needed for healing in our turbulent times. Creating these silk meditations almost daily—and posting them on Facebook, contributed to my own healing while it generated extensive affirmations reflected in warm posted responses from others.

**Figure 4. Empathy** by Renee Sandell (December 5, 2017).

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**Enid Zimmerman: Creating Visualizations for Self-Healing and Repairing the World**

Teaching and learning are changing in new environments where modes of communication are not limited only to writing, but include, multimodalities such as images, audio, video, social networks, and collaborative scholarship. I use art-making and writing methods, including drawing, painting, collage, and photography, to present my ideas visually as well as in written form (Zimmerman & Cooper, 2019; Zimmerman, 2015). Much of my own search for expressing myself visually can be traced back to my commitment to creating visual narratives that not only express what is transparent and evident, but often what is challenging and contain multi-layered meanings. I draw upon visual journaling using Renee’s *Marking & Mapping* methodology as an accessible, impassioned, and subjective way of communicating graphically to create almost daily visual and verbal diary entries that help me become more resilient in troubled times. I then use social media to share my ideas about self-discovery, creativity, and wholeness as a personal means of supporting and promoting equality and freedom for everyone. I have conducted workshops and developed correspondences with others, both who practice art-making and those who do not, who are seeking to repair or heal the world and use art-making practices to create restoration and change.

In these two examples taken from my daily practice, in Figure 5, I focus on the need to heal ourselves; and through such healing we also can help mend others as well as the world about us. In Figure 6, I emphasize that all of us have an obligation to welcome strangers and build an environment where tolerance and acceptance of others is fostered. I reflect on my own history as a first generation American as my father’s family left Polish Russia in 1913 after fleeing pogroms, in which violent attacks by non-Jews were carried out on the Jewish population. My family was forced to leave their home city of Dryska and after an arduous journey finally arrived in the United States. The soul of our country is built on the contributions of immigrants from around the world and we must continue to welcome, nurture, and honor their talents as a means of creating an enriched and democratic society.
Using Feminist Advocacy

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Figure 5. Instructions to Myself for Surviving Difficulties by Enid Zimmerman (May 13, 2017).

Figure 6. There is Hope When the Statue of Liberty’s Light Shines by Enid Zimmerman (August 3, 2017).
Renee Sandell and Enid Zimmerman:
*Tikkun Olam as A Proactive Feminist, Collaborative, and Arts-based Practice for Healing the World*

We collaborated on creating Figure 7, *Visualizing and Repairing through Collaboration in a Difficult and Unsettling World*, using graphic tools to make a statement about repairing or healing the world through loving the stranger and countering divisiveness with understanding and compassion. Through our mutual hands-on and digital art-making, our artwork envisions social action and teaching as processes of empowering ourselves and others to make a difference. We chose to make our collaboration emphasize the idea that through understanding multiple points of view polarization of ideas and intolerance can be mollified and broad-mindedness and acceptance can be integrated and prevail. The many aspects of repairing the world can be found in the words, surrounding images of ourselves, found in Figure 7, that include social justice, art education, feminism, collaboration, healing, spiritual expression, self-discovery, wholeness, critical thinking, equity, mindfulness, freedom, peace, gratitude, spiritual expression, healing, visual/voice, and global understanding all of which can lead to overcoming darkness and despair and bringing light and hope to a troubled world.

![Figure 7. Visualizing and Repairing through Collaboration in a Difficult and Unsettling World by Renee Sandell and Enid Zimmerman (August 24, 2018).](image)
References


About the Authors

Renee Sandell is founder/program director of SummerVision DC, an expeditionary museum professional development experience since 2010. Renee’s awards include the 2019 Lowenfeld Award, 2015-2016 Distinguished Lecturer in Art Education at Miami University and 2013 NAEA National Art Educator, for her leadership and scholarship on her Form+Theme+Context (FTC)® methodology as a balanced way of seeing. Sandell uses her Marking & Mapping® in her own artwork as well as *Visual Fitness 4 All: Engaging Creativity and Insight®* hands-on workshops in diverse venues. She can be reached at [reneesandell@gmail.com](mailto:reneesandell@gmail.com)

In her research, Enid Zimmerman, Professor Emerita of Art Education at Indiana University, focuses on creativity, feminist, global, history, and policy issues in art education. She has written extensively and has co-edited two recent NAEA books, *Connecting Creativity Research and Practice in Art Education* and *Cultural Sensitivity in a Global World*. Her current awards are the Distinguished Lecturer in Art Education at Miami University; the Davis Lecture in Art Education; and the NAEA Elliot Eisner Lifetime Achievement Award. She can be reached at [zimmerm@indiana.edu](mailto:zimmerm@indiana.edu)

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