

Introducing Creative Placemaking to Undergraduate Students through a Case Study

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Introduction

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the Kresge Foundation have led the Creative Placemaking (CPM) movement by accentuating the role of arts and culture in the transformation of communities over the past decade. The CPM movement also leverages arts funding to support socially innovative arts activities that increase the creative capacity, social integration, and cultural resilience of communities. Meanwhile, the wicked problems of displacement and gentrification challenge the arts community to reflect on the “politics of belonging and dis-belonging” (Bedoya 2013) and to develop arts-based strategies for effective civic engagement against injustice. The CPM offers a comprehensive topic for arts management undergraduate students to learn about the social and economic impact of the arts, the relationship between arts and communities, and the latest arts funding and programming trends. This article presents a case method of teaching the CPM policy and practices based on the author’s original research on a local CPM project along with companion class activities that have the following student outcomes:

- a) To understand the complex community contexts of creative placemaking
- b) To identify community challenges and assets by using public data
- c) To think critically about the role of artists and arts organizations in creative placemaking
- d) To be creative and realistic about community engagement goals and practices through the arts
- e) To increase understanding of practices and outcomes of arts-based civic engagement through the real-world applications of the tools and rationales of the *Art & Civic*

Engagement Tool Kit (Americans for the Arts¹, 2008) and the *Continuum of Impact* (AFTA, 2017) to real-world problems in a community development process.

Theoretical Rationale

The CPM policy differentiates itself from other variants of creative city strategies by emphasizing the significant role of the arts in fostering bottom-up partnerships, civic dialogue, and citizen participation in community planning and development (Markusen & Gadawa 2010; Borrup 2016; Guo 2019). The involvement of artists and arts managers are both artistic and political. The CPM essentially is an arts-led collective action that requires a deep understanding of a community's context, which encompasses the geographical, social, economic, and cultural characteristics that define a community. For this article, I define community context as the socio-demographic history, culture, governance system, and social structure of a community (Guo 2019).

The NEA and ArtPlace America have developed a series of best CPM practices for policy learning and knowledge dissemination, which inspires the author to use a storytelling approach through a case study method. As a popular teaching vehicle, the case study method tells stories in abundant detail for students to identify problems, analyze data, and apply concepts and theories (Barnes et al. 1994). The rich details of the case method approach help students who do not have a lot of in-field experience to visualize the situation in real-world scenarios. The case method generates relevance and motivation for students to develop realistic perceptions of the challenges that the arts community tackles in CPM projects.

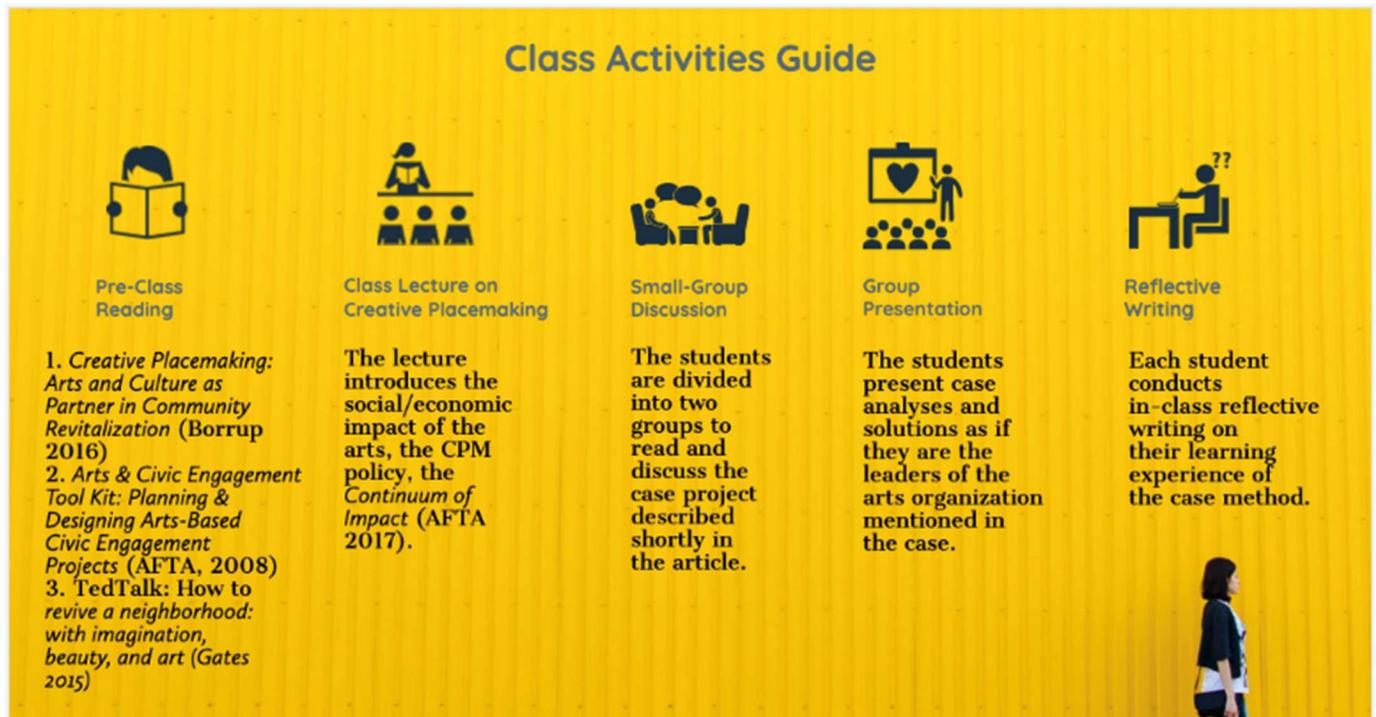
In addition, the case method needs to be accompanied with class activities and projects that allow students to be engaged in critical thinking, problem-solving, and reflective writing (Dunne & Brooks 2004). These activities and projects create a problem-based and action-oriented learning opportunity (McInerney & Adshead, 2013) for students to explore how they can address and respond to the previously mentioned social problems via their creative and administrative skills. Besides, the application of case studies described in this article promotes democratic and inclusive values by situating students to respond to social injustice with their artistic and research skills.

¹ The rest of the article uses AFTA as the acronym of Americans for the Art.

Instructor's Guide to the Case Study

This section introduces the case method class activities and analyzes the students' performance in relation to these assignments. The instructor designed five activities for the case method: a pre-class reading on the CPM theories and practices; a class lecture on the CPM and the civic-engagement outcomes defined by the *Continuum of Impact* (2017); small-group discussions and a group presentation on a CPM case story; and, an in-class reflection writing exercise regarding the learning experience. Depending on the length and goals of a class, an instructor could choose to go through the 5-step process in one or two class sessions. The specific activities of the five steps are illustrated in the infographic below (Figure 1). This section also includes the case story, the prompts offered to students for their group discussions, and their in-class reflection exercise.

Figure 1: Class Activities Guide²



² The work of Borrup (2016) introduces the rationale and practices of the CPM to undergraduate students in arts management through a concise overview of key concepts and theories regarding space, planning, and cultural assets. The toolkit of AFTA (2008) provides a step-by-step guide that teaches students how arts organizations and artists plan effective engagement activities in response to community issues. The TedTalk of Theaster Gates (2015) demonstrates the best practice of an artist and his opinions on how artists can become creative agents of community transformation and social change.

Before diving into the case study materials, please refer to Table 1 for a clear outline of how each class activity of the case study aligns with the intended learning outcomes mentioned at the beginning of the article.

Table 1: Aligning Class Activities with Intended Learning Outcomes

Activities	Intended Learning Outcomes
Lecture, Pre-class Reading, Reading the case story	c), d), e)
Group discussion and prompts	a), b)
Group presentation	a), b), c)
Individual reflective writing	Discover students defined learning outcomes and personal growth

The Case Story/Case Study: “Gentrification sucks!”³

Community History

Riverview is a historical neighborhood founded in the urban center of a big metropolitan city in the Midwest with predominantly White Appalachian descendants. In the late 1970s, a few hundred Cambodian refugees fled their country after the invasion of the Vietnamese army. They went into the Riverview area and received help from residents in the neighborhood and called Riverview home. The neighborhood had been a working-class community since the city closed down its only high school during the 1980s. For a very long time, Riverview Community House (RCH), Riverview Vineyard Church (RVC), Vineyard Hospital, Vineyard Health Intervention, Metropolitan Homeless Association (MHA), Metropolitan Library Riverview Branch (ML-RB), and a few small business owners played critical roles in helping the disfranchised populations deal with critical social issues, including drug dealing, prostitution, food access, vacant properties, homelessness, unemployment, gangs, and gun shootings. They offered after-school programs, addiction prevention and intervention programs, and health programs for people without health insurance and teenage mothers.

³ This case study is adapted from a scholarly research project on Creative Placemaking. The names of the community and organizations are replaced by pseudo names. It takes about 5-8 minutes to read through the case.

Table 2: Demographic Info of Riverview Before Development (36,000 people)

Category	Local Data	National Data
Annual Household Income	\$16,000	\$59,039
Unemployment (age 16+)	19.9%	5%
High School Diploma (age 25+)	39%	92%
Infant mortality	16.5 per thousand	5.9 per thousand
Vacancy rate	27%	8.5%
Crime Rate	7133/100k people	2745/100k people

Community Development Context

During the 2000s, artists in the city found Riverview a great place to work and live due to the low rent and the spacious vacant factory buildings. A part of the neighborhood became a habitat for small arts organizations and artists of different kinds. A few entrepreneurs, small developers, and artists facilitated the movement by forming two closely connected grassroots organizations: Development Association for Riverview (DAFR), a community development corporation, and Riverview Art District (RAD), an arts service organization that organized arts events in the neighborhood.

The DAFR built more than 300 new affordable houses in Riverview in less than nine years while facilitating other real estate investment projects in the neighborhood. The DAFR also worked on partnering with a real estate investor from California with an expertise in redeveloping vacant and historic buildings through a creative approach. The investor bought two vacant factory buildings in Riverview and changed them into studios for artists. Businesses, arts organizations, and community service organizations believe that the local manager hired by the company did a great job of managing the property and building networks in Riverview. In 2012, the DAFR applied for a national CPM grant and used the money to relocate a for-profit co-working and makers’ space to Riverview, which boosted Riverview's reputation as an innovation hub of the city. The DAFR also worked with the Riverview Board of Commerce (RBC) and its members, significantly improving community issues regarding safety, littering, food access, infant mortality, health care for residents without insurance, among others. However, drug-dealing and prostitution still existed in this neighborhood.

Table 3: Primary Case Study Small Group Prompts

Group Discussion Questions:

The case story contains rich information regarding various stakeholders and their interests pertaining to the revitalization project. Small group discussion guided by the prompts below helps students to discover the different facets of the complex issue, understand the importance of the right question, and develop evidence-based reasoning.

- 1) Identify the main issues, problems, and resources presented in the case?
 - a. What does the demographic information and historical background suggest?
 - b. Who constitute the different parties mentioned in the story? What are their concerns regarding the redevelopment of Riverside, respectively?
 - c. What is the paradoxical situation indicated by the case?
- 2) If you were founders of AK, what steps would you take to address the main issues of Riverview's revitalization as presented in the case?
 - a. What is the relationship between your organization, the new and long-term local residents, the developers, and the city?
 - b. What are the tangible and intangible resources presented in the story?
 - c. Which partners do you plan to work with?
- 3) What kind of impact do you want to achieve based on the continuum of impact introduced in the lecture?
 - a. What types of social outcomes does your group want to make? Knowledge, discourse, attitudes, capacity, action, or conditions? What does it mean for the context of Riverview?
 - b. Why do you think your programs can make a difference in your selected type of outcome?
 - c. How do you know whether your program works or not? What evidence can you use to demonstrate your successes to the funder?

Group Presentation:

Please work with your team and create an arts-based strategy to achieve your outcomes by using the tables provided by the [*Arts & Civic Engagement Tool Kit*](#) (AFTA 2008). Please create a 15-minute presentation as if you are going to attain funding from a potential funder for your strategy.

Individual Reflective Writing:

After the presentations by all the groups, the students individually spent 15-minutes writing about their learning experience using the following four prompts:

- 1) What did you learn through your group project?
- 2) What did you learn by watching others' presentations?
- 3) How did you like the toolkit used for your project?
- 4) How did the CPM concept and practice inform your artistic practice and/or arts administration career?

Current Challenges

Because of the Mayor's passion for the "creative class"⁴ development approach, the city is drafting a development plan to revitalize Riverview to develop a creative mixed-use community as an integral part of the downtown area. Many large developers quickly became involved in the planning process of the development plan, envisioning the next SOHO and waiting for investment opportunities in this emerging art district. While new residents and businesses moved into the neighborhood, some artists and long-term local residents moved out of the neighborhood due to the increasing rent and demanding house maintenance requirements. Meanwhile, the city's public housing nonprofit relocated the residents living in the three public housing towers on the land of Riverview, the nonprofit acquired for new mixed-use development projects. With rumors of an upcoming high-end development spreading in the community, a group of artists was deeply concerned about the future of the arts district they had built and their fate in general. Although artists and arts organizations were active in the community, and the neighborhood attracted many visitors, most artists and arts organizations rarely interacted with the long-term local residents living in the neighborhood. The artists and arts organizations were concerned that long-term local residents might be displaced. Some artists also felt they contributed to the displacement.

⁴ Richard Florida (2002), an American economist, coined the term "creative class" (p. 8) to define a broad array of knowledge-based workers in science, education, research, engineering, healthcare, business & finance, arts & entertainment. Their "economic function is to create new ideas, new technology and/or creative content." (p.8). He argued that cities that can build infrastructures and offer policies that serve the lifestyles and spending patterns of the creative class could stand out in the growing global intercity competition in economic development. The theories and policies derived from the ill-defined concept, "creative class", are criticized for its privileged view of economic development and ignorance of the vast differences between the professions covered by the concept.

Several artists who just moved into Riverview endeavored to offer arts education opportunities for children and arts-based social activism projects on development injustice. Recently, this group of artists decided to collaborate towards a better coordinated community effort to address the ongoing displacement and gentrification. They registered a 501(c) arts organization called Art Keeps (AK), to resist gentrification and protect the authenticity and affordability of the arts district at the same time. After a few discussions, the four founders decided that the organization's mission is to fight against gentrification in arts-led urban development by using the arts as a vital service for disadvantaged populations and a powerful tool for the local arts community to take actions for development justice. After a difficult recruiting process online and offline with the help of Riverview's human and social service organizations, AK only found one long-term local resident willing and able to join in their strategic planning meetings as a community liaison/consultant. The founders of AK started working with the community liaison to discuss further actions they might take to have the voices of the residents and artists be heard.

Debrief and Appraisal

This case study project is designed for upper-level undergraduate and graduate courses in arts management. It can also be incorporated into courses of cultural policy and urban/regional planning. This case was taught twice to two cohorts of undergraduate students in their arts administration senior seminars. The case was introduced to the students after a few weeks of readings and assignments about the social and economic impact of the arts. The instructor facilitated the students' discussion by checking on their progress and giving them questions or hints that pushed them to think deeper about the case and apply data to support their arguments. The students also used the worksheets in the [*Arts & Civic Engagement Tool Kit*](#) (AFTA 2008) and the different types of civic engagement outcomes introduced by the *Continuum of Impact* (AFTA 2017) effectively to come up their civic engagement ideas and goals. Table 4 illustrates how a group adapted one of the worksheets in the tool kit to generate a program.

Table 4: A Student Group’s Example Worksheet Adapted from the *Art & Civic Engagement Tool Kit* (AFTA 2008, p. 12) and Sample Instructors’ Comments

Arts and community organizers determine	Thoughts/ideas	Instructors’ Comments
What is the event, program, art, or cultural experience? Who are the artist(s) involved?	We want to develop several workshops that teach artistic and creative skills to the long-term local residents of Riverview. The artists of AK and Riverview’s homegrown artists should be involved.	Great! It is important to identify and include Riverview’s own artists to better engage the long-term local residents.
What is the civic/social concern, issues, or opportunity?	Our civic concern is to identify the cultural characteristics of Riverview and give people the hope to work together for the challenges they have to deal with.	What do you mean by saying “cultural characteristics”? You can consider looking for ways to observe and experience the lifestyle of a typical Riverview long-term local resident.
What are the goals and outcomes agreed upon by arts and community partners?	It seems that the homegrown artists of Riverview are either resistant to the artists and residents who newly moved into the neighborhood or do not have the capacity to work together. Our goal is to give the long-term local residents more opportunities to meet each other through the arts and cultural activities they feel familiar and useful.	Please pay close attention to who are perceived as artists by the long-term local residents of Riverview and whether they use the word “artist”.
What role(s) will the art, art activities, artist, and/or art experience play?	We think the artists should be the catalyst for conversations between the residents. We don't want to impose our programs. We hope to find out what arts and cultural activities the long-term local residents of Riverview like.	Trying not to impose your programs is a good guiding principle for programming. You may consider partnering with human service organizations trusted by the residents.

For most students in the course, this was the first time they realized the close relationship between arts management, community development, and public policy. The case method placed them in the nexus of creativity, space, economic development, and social justice to explore the functionality of the arts and arts administrators in the public realm. The process of analyzing challenges, assets, and stakeholders of the community offered a gateway for the students to

experience how careful research and interpretation of community context can effectively inform arts and cultural programming about the needs of local communities. The arts and cultural practices of a particular group of people are embedded in the everyday lives of people and contexts of their communities, which need to be carefully studied by arts administrators and artists for equitable managerial and artistic decisions. The reflection writing of the students suggests four themes about their learning experience. First, the details of the case story gave them a concrete and realistic idea about how displacement and gentrification disrupt the social fabric and shatter the hope of an Urban Appalachian community for revitalization. Second, the case story raised their awareness of the complexity of placemaking and the responsibilities of artists. Third, the worksheets of *Art & Civic Engagement Tool Kit* and the outcomes of the *Continuum of Impact* provided an effective planning structure for developing arts-based civic engagement programs.

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