

The *heART* of Social Movement and Learning

by

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University of Victoria

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## **Supervisory Committee**

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### **Supervisory Committee**

Dr. Jutta Gutberlet, (Department of Geography)  
**Co-Supervisor**

Dr. Budd Hall, (School of Public Administration)  
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Dr. Nidia Pontuschka, (Faculty of Education, University of São Paulo)  
**Committee Member**

## Abstract

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Worldwide, the collection, separation, and sales of recyclable materials is a survival strategy for many unemployed and impoverished families, especially in urban landscapes. They are called recyclers, and their work is often associated with social exclusion objectively manifested through discrimination by the public, which negatively impacts recyclers' perceptions of their own self-worth. Discrimination places the recyclers within a marginalized social space and perpetuates poverty and social inequity. Such discrimination is best evidenced by the lack of open dialogue between recyclers and the public. The present research was designed to open spaces for these dialogues to occur, with the ultimate goal of decreasing discrimination suffered by the recyclers from the greater metropolitan region of São Paulo, Brazil.

Working collaboratively with recyclers that are affiliated with the Brazilian National Recycling Social Movement (MNCR), and using arts-based research interwoven with theories of social movement, environmental adult education and transformation, I explore the learning that goes along when we use visual arts to bridge the gap between the recyclers and public. During seven months (March–September, 2012), 50 recyclers participated in three different arts-based workshops (abstract painting, impressionism painting, and mosaic) and seven art exhibits in different cities in Brazil. These art workshops and exhibits were video and audio recorded and represent the primary data source in this research project. Discourse analysis combined with a cognitive developmental approach to understand peoples' free conversation was used as an analytical tool to explore the recorded materials.

The artworks produced in this research illustrate recyclers' stories of poverty, social exclusion, and their victories toward a better future for themselves. The process of creating and exhibiting their paintings mediated the construction of their visual thought, and in this way, they were able to (re)imagine a different reality for themselves. This empowered recyclers because it added value to their work as environmental agents, increasing their sense of self-worth. Additionally, through the art-making process, it was possible to identify moments of realization in one's life (i.e., epiphanies). By mapping out epiphanies throughout the lifespan of an individual, we can explore their moments of transformation, which is critical in environmental adult education processes.

Finally, my findings suggest that community art exhibits are dialogical spaces, where knowledge is co-constructed and mobilized. These exhibits are also alternative

sources for income generation for the recyclers and are in fact, environmental adult education practices.

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## Dedication (I)

*In memory of*

Dona Telma

Martha Farrel

Chang Yhwa

Ana-Elisa

Four very powerful women that left this planet way too early, but while here, they  
taught me how to see the world differently

## Dedication (II)

To Marly,

## Frontispiece

“Que a arte nos aponte uma resposta  
mesmo que ela não saiba,  
e que ninguém a tente complicar  
porque é preciso simplicidade pra fazê-la florescer.”

~Oswaldo Montenegro

## Chapter One – Introduction

Heart: a hollow, pump-like organ responsible for the circulation of blood through the body. It is composed mainly of rhythmically contractile smooth muscle. This organ, in human beings, is located in the chest between the lungs and slightly to the left of the body. The noun heart, is translated into the Portuguese language as “coração”, which in its turn, is derived from the *Latin* word “*cor.*” “*Cor*” refers to the core of something, like the central part of a fleshy fruit, containing the seeds, or the innermost, or most essential part of anything. Heart has been also romanticized metaphorically throughout western culture and history as the place where humans’ feelings and emotions are felt: for example, love. From this perspective, the word heART, embodied in the title of this dissertation, relates to the core or the essence of social movements and learning and environmental adult education, which to me, is individual learning. Paulo Freire agrees that individual learning is fundamental to the process of transformation. Once in an informal interview Freire said that education does not transform the world. Education transforms the individual. Individuals transform the world. In other words, there is no learning, thus, no social change without individual transformation. My studies extend Freire’s point of view by suggesting the use of visual arts as a catalyst for individual transformation in group learning contexts. This is what I demonstrate throughout the main Chapters of this dissertation.

In this context, my studies encompass three different and yet interrelated spheres:

- 1) The arts, and how it can open dialogue for courageous conversations;
- 2) Social movement, and how it operates as environmental adult education organizations, and
- 3)



Learning, and how it is a cultural, social, and historical process, even when it unfolds internally in the individual. These three spheres also illustrate the interdisciplinary character of my research, in which I combine the visual arts, geography, and education, to produce a series of three independent studies, that together, form what I call “The heART of Social Movement and Learning.”

These three studies, in which I use arts-based research (Greene, 1995; Butterwick and Dawson, 2006; McNiff, 2008; Leavy, 2009; Clover 2011) interweaved with environmental adult education (Brandão, 1982, 1987; Loureiro, 2004), social movement learning (Hall & Clover, 2005) and transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1995) to first explore the potentialities of visual arts in social movements and learning, and second, to understand how individual transformation unfolds in the context of social movements. Videotaped art workshops that I facilitated with members of the National Recycling Social Movement (MNCR) in São Paulo, Brazil, as well as videotaped art exhibitions showcasing their art work, photographs of all art pieces, and my field notes form my database. I used discourse analysis (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Roth & Alexander, 1997) with a cognitive development approach (Vygotsky, 1978) as analytical tools to explore discourses that emerged during the art making and exhibit process.

My studies are rooted in Participatory Action Research (PAR) driven *Participatory Sustainable Waste Management (PSWM)* program, a Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA-AUCC) partnership between the University of Victoria and the University of São Paulo (USP), in collaboration with recycling cooperatives affiliated with the National Recycling Social Movement (MNCR) in the Greater Metropolitan region of São Paulo, Brazil. This research was funded by the Social

Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). The present research was designed and applied to generate dialogue amongst the general public and members of the MNCR who also work at the recycling cooperatives and are called recyclers. This dialogue is aimed to bring forth recyclers' stories of poverty and social exclusion, and to decrease the prejudice they suffer by the public. Even though the recyclers contribute to a healthier planet by collecting, separating and reintroducing materials that would otherwise end up in the landfill back into the stream of production, they are marginalized. Their marginalization is due to the fact that their work is often associated with filth. The recyclers also represent one of the most impoverished demographics within Brazilian society, and the recycling industry represents their only source of income.

Worldwide, Participatory Action Research (PAR) in conjunction with Arts-Based Research (ABR), have been applied and considered as critical research methodologies to help marginalized communities like the recyclers, to fight for social inclusion. This is because such frameworks mediate a shift in paradigms associated with democracy, citizenship, environmental and social justice. Social inclusion in the context of this dissertation is perceived as opportunities for citizen participation in public decision-making processes that may affect their well-being. This is achieved by empowering marginalized communities to become active agents in their own lives through capacity-building initiatives promoted by NGOs and environmental education organizations, such as the MNCR. From an epistemological perspective, the processes of social inclusion and community development mediated by these groups can chart explorations around the nature of knowledge creation and mobilization that goes on within these organizations.

The arts, as it is demonstrated throughout the main Chapters of this dissertation, have the potential to get to the core of these processes of social inclusion, which is individual transformation. For Freire (1978) individual transformation refers to “conscientização”. That is, the individual becomes able to recognize hegemonic social, political, cultural, and economic constraints and to act and react upon these constraints. This is achieved through individual empowerment, a key concept in social inclusion, thus crucial throughout this research.

Empowerment in the context of this study refers to a process where individuals experience an increase of control or power in their lives, enabling them to self-discover new perspectives and abilities to bring forth their history and personal knowledge to the benefit of society as a whole (Israel et al., 1994). Empowered individuals “understand and transcend constraints placed upon them by particular ideologies, structures, and cultural practices” (Clover, de Oliveira Jayme, Fallen & Hall, 2013, p. 14). Throughout this study, empowerment is evident in participants’ self-esteem in its emphasis on the development of a positive self-concept, but goes on to include an element of recognizing human agency for positive change. Research on people’s empowerment has been vastly explored in the literature (Miraftab, 2004; Cornwall, 2007; Nunn & Gutberlet, 2013; Tremblay & Gutberlet, 2010). All these previous scholars have encouraged careful (re)consideration of the ways that empowerment can be misrepresented and how it reifies the marginal position of those who are the focus of empowerment. This is because too often the concept is employed from a western liberal perspective that overlooks the tendency of those employing ‘empowering’ methodologies to reproduce forms of

hegemonic control. In my studies, I take extra care against misrepresenting empowerment to avoid producing and reproducing unbalanced power structures.

In this introductory Chapter, I provide a brief outline of the three studies that form this dissertation and how they are interrelated. These three studies are: a) *“Individual transformation in social movements – examples from the recycling cooperatives from São Paulo, Brazil”*, b) *“‘Zap! I cut one of her ears off’ – Epiphanies as tools in environmental adult education”*, and c) *“Recycling stories: Lessons from community arts-based process and exhibition in Brazil.”* At the end of this first Chapter I explain my positions in the world(s) and how they inform my research. In Chapter Two, I introduce the two territories in which these three studies unfold: the recycling cooperatives and the Brazilian National Recycling Social Movement (MNCR). Next, I outline an overview of the theoretical and methodological framework that guided these three studies, along with my analytical tool and explain how data was generated. I avoid extensive explorations of my frameworks, however, because I further describe and articulate them in the individual Chapters throughout the dissertation. Chapters Three, Four, and Five even refer to the three main studies where I further expand on the individual research participants and my frameworks, and provide the data analysis, and description and articulation of research findings. Chapter Six contains some final considerations and collates the key findings of my research project as a whole.

### **1.1 Outline of the three studies**

The results of my research are presented here in the form of three independent but interconnected studies that focus on the role of visual arts in individual transformation in the context of social movement and learning. In the first study found in Chapter Three,

*“Individual transformation in social movements – examples from the recycling cooperative from São Paulo, Brazil,”* I explore how individual transformation unfolds within social movement learning, a territory that mainly embodies learning as a collective practice. In this study, I intertwine social movement learning and transformative learning, informed by Vygotsky’s cognitive development approach to describe and articulate discourses that emerged during arts-based workshops facilitated with members of the MNCR in São Paulo, Brazil. My findings suggest that during the art making process, recyclers construct their visual thought, which enables their empowerment and agency.

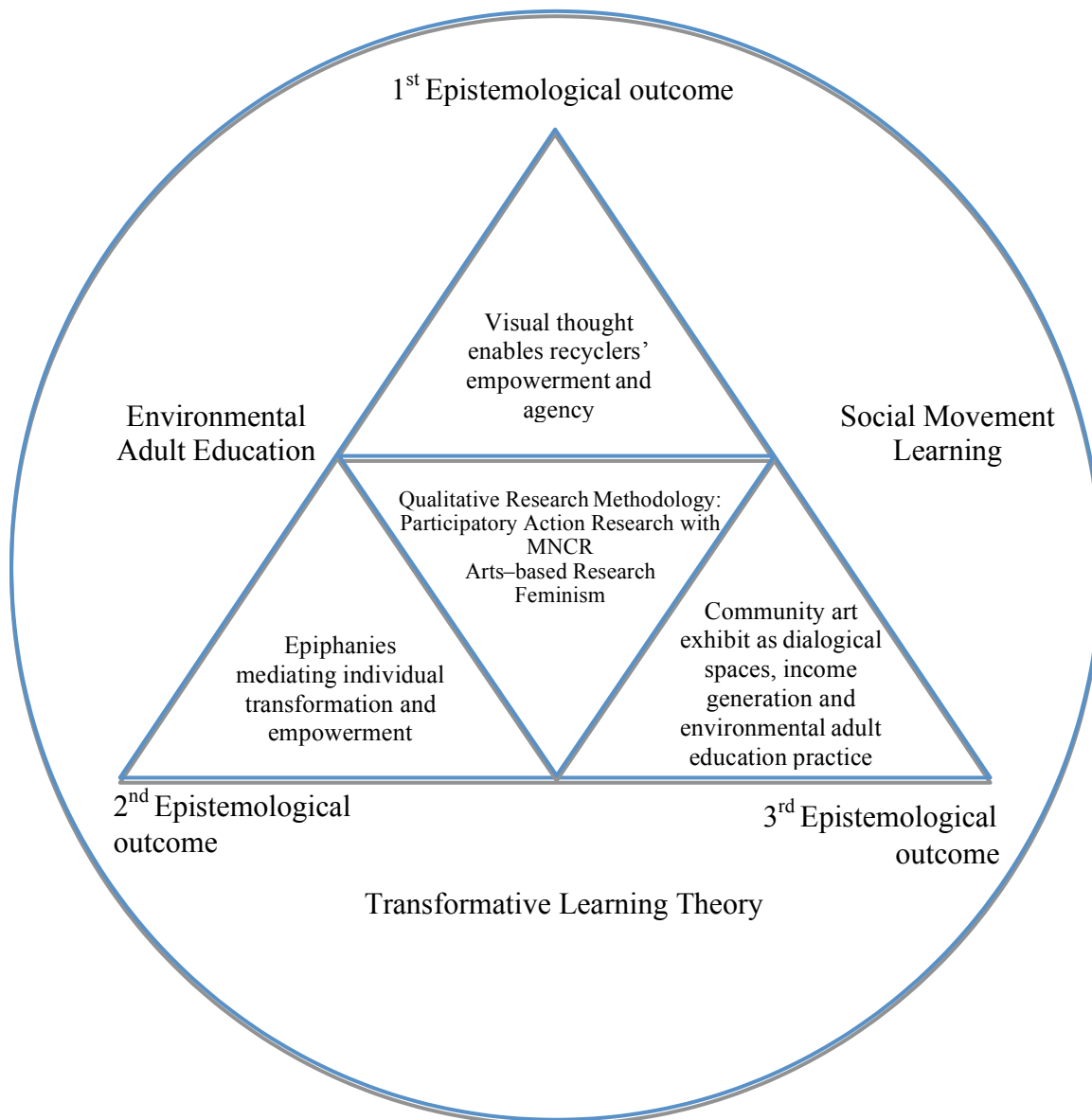
My second study, *“‘Zap! I cut one of her ears off’ – Epiphanies as tools in environmental adult education”* demonstrates how individual transformation plays out in the context of environmental adult education, as well as the tools that mediate such transformation. This study is framed through transformative learning theory and arts-based research to suggest that epiphanies – moments of realization and self-discovery in one’s life – are important tools that mediate individual transformation. More specifically, in this study, I claim that epiphanies mediate “conscientização” and individual empowerment, help to heal negative experiences in one’s life, while enabling participants involved in the process to (re)imagine alternative realities for themselves and their communities.

My third study, *“Recycling stories: Lessons from community arts-based process and exhibition in Brazil”* shares the story of two recyclers and how they experienced the potential of art-making and art public exhibits. Through the lenses of environmental adult education, my findings suggest that alternative art exhibits are dialogical spaces

where knowledge is co-constructed and mobilized. I conclude this Chapter by suggesting that the art making process enables recyclers' income generation.

## **1.2 Integration of the three studies**

The core Chapters of this *manuscript style* dissertation is formed by three independent and yet interrelated studies, each written for publication in peer-reviewed journals, and as such they are oriented towards different audiences and present different structures. Hence, the organisation of this dissertation is not chronological or linear and does not read as a progression. That is, these three studies can be read as stand alone papers, or together, as a dissertation. These three studies are individual papers but are interrelated, as illustrated in Figure 1.1, where the circle represents the big theoretical umbrella that guided all three studies; the small centered triangle illustrates my methodological framework and research participants, this small triangle represents the tie that enables the integration of my individual studies. The bigger outer triangle represents the main findings in my studies, shown here by three different epistemological conceptualizations.



**Figure 1.1** This diagram illustrates the three epistemological outcomes from three different and yet interrelated studies that form this dissertation.

The integration of the three studies is a reflection of the fact that they share the same theoretical and methodological background, research participants, analytical tools, and crucially, they explore the same theme, which is how individual transformation plays out in the context of social movement. Hence, even though these studies were written for different audiences, my readers should anticipate little repetitions throughout, around the

research background, framework, and tools I used to analyse the data. All my findings and discussions, however, are unique, original, and cutting edge, and together, they form what I call “The heART of Social Movement and Learning”.

### **1.3 Reflexive positioning**

Throughout my 20 years working in the field of education and arts, I have often heard the motivational speech: “We are all artists.” I disagree with this claim. In the same way that not everybody is a lawyer, or a dentist, or a teacher, not everybody is an artist. It takes many years of professional training, self-discovery, and world(s) explorations to “become-ing” an artist. I do however agree with Pina (2009) that historically, humans create things out of desire or necessity, and that imagination plays an important role in this process. For Pina, creating things is human nature and making art is an aptitude that can be explored, taught, and developed. This is because as humans, we all have the capacity to use our imagination to create things that are not physically really there at the moment, but it could be if we use the right tools. This reality informs my research approach.

I have been becoming an art educator every day through my connections, misconnections, and interconnections in, out, and all around my physical world(s). The dirty and noisy streets of São Paulo, the uncomfortable-comfortable Canadian way of life, and the struggles and fights and victories of social movements in Latin America inform my art education practices. Born and raised in Brazil, I studied education and arts in the same country where Paulo Freire developed his studies. My experience imbues a strong understanding of how Brazilian social dynamics operate in the context of social movements and in the broader context of the Brazilian social class war. Additionally,

since feminists are committed to troubling the apparatus that produce and reproduce asymmetrical power relations, being an active member of the LGBTQTTA community, enabled me to use my personal experiences with discrimination and marginalization when I approach my field of studies. I consider these experiences an asset to my research.

Not just in my research, but also in my teaching practices, and personal life, I attempt to decrease unequal power structures within the social dynamics in the different world(s) I am part of. Reflexivity, a tool in feminism, helps me to accomplish this. Reflexivity is a process of thinking that enables me to positioning myself and my research within the structures of power (Moss, 2002). Through such awareness I can perceive how my position(s) in the world(s) can influence my research.

## **Chapter Two – Research background**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In this Chapter, I provide the context of my research. My intention here is not to overwhelm my readers with a heavy literature review of the main theoretical and methodological frameworks that guide my studies. Rather, I will introduce my research participants, provide some broad definitions about the frameworks I use throughout, and explain how the data was generated and analysed. The following sessions are just an overview of these elements, because I explore them thoroughly in my three subsequent Chapters.

I then talk about the recycling cooperatives and how the Brazilian National Recycling Social Movement (MNCR) represents an important environmental adult education organization that improves recyclers' livelihoods. Next, I discuss the Participatory Sustainable Waste Management (PSWM), an environmental education research project that mediated the present research. In the section that follows, I suggest why and how the visual arts can be an important research tool in environmental adult education. I finish this Chapter by explaining how the arts-based workshops materialized and how the data was generated and analysed.

### **2.2 The Recycling Cooperatives and the Brazilian National Recycling Social Movement (MNCR)**

While the UN-HABITAT claims that waste is one of the biggest challenges in our contemporary world (UN-HABITAT, 2010), the impoverished outskirts of big cities in the Global South struggle with waste management, which is often not collected by the City, accounting for serious health and sanitation problems. The International Solid

Waste Association (ISWA) affirms that self-driven recycling work done by this part of the population accounts for a significant portion of these areas' total recycling rates, up to 20% and 30% in developing countries. That is, up to 30% of the recycling that is done in major cities, is informally performed by citizens (ISWA, 2012). This type of work accounts for the employment of approximately 1% of the world's urban population (Gutberlet 2013, 2012, 2008; Scheinberg et al. 2010; Wilson et al. 2012). São Paulo is one such city, where waste management, including the collection and sale of recyclable materials is an informal practice of everyday life, performed by many unemployed and impoverished families, women and men, children and seniors of all ages. Thus, the recycling industry represents a survival strategy for thousands of disfranchised people in Brazil. In the Global North, they are called recyclers. Working in this industry is not only a way of making a living, but it is also a contribution to a healthier planet, because these workers rescue materials that would end up in landfills otherwise. In this sense, the recyclers are also environmental agents. Although performing an important role in society, they still represent one of the most oppressed and vulnerable cohorts of the population because their work is associated with filth. In addition, their history of poverty perpetuates their marginalization and discrimination, which produces and reproduces inequity and uneven development.

In this context, ground-breaking and participatory solutions are necessary to trouble social norms and the apparatus that sustain unbalanced power dynamics that perpetuate the oppression suffered by these environmental agents. In Brazil, for example, a vast number of NGOs, governmental initiatives, recycling cooperatives, universities, community and arts based research projects (such as this one), and social movements

(e.g., National Recycling Social Movement – MNCR) advocate environmental adult education to create dialogical spheres fostering conversation between recyclers, the general public, private and public sectors, and policy makers. These dialogical spheres provide safe and yet challenging spaces for sharing personal stories. In this study, from an epistemological perspective, the art making process and exhibits created these dialogical spheres, where the individual learns within a group context, thus constituting spaces for knowledge creation and mobilization. I demonstrate this throughout subsequent main Chapters.

The organization of recyclers into recycling cooperatives is an important strategy for individual and collective learning, because these cooperatives, through a feminist lens, work hard to improve the lives of their workers. This is accomplished through capacity-building initiatives, such as courses, workshops, and conferences, which reinforce the importance of recyclers' work to society as a whole. In this context, one can predict that empowerment is the overall umbrella that guides these capacity-building initiatives. (Tremblay, 2013).

The recycling cooperatives that participated in this study are partnered with the City, which sometimes provides warehouses, equipment, and trucks for the collection, separation and commercialization of recyclable goods (Ribeiro & Basen, 2007). In response, the associated recyclers offer their work organized into recycling cooperatives. Nevertheless, in Brazil, recyclers are encouraged to work as cooperatives. For instance, the Article 5<sup>th</sup> from the Federal Constitution (Brasil, 1988), law XVII, states that cooperatives can be organized without the need of City authorization, as long as the cooperatives follow specific and local bylaws. In addition, the recycling cooperatives

have a differentiated treatment in terms of City taxes (Federal Constitution, Article 146, III, item c) and the already expressed support to this kind of association, according to Brazilian legislation (see Article 174, paragraph 2<sup>nd</sup>, Federal Constitution). Moreover, the Solid Waste National Policy, through the Law 12.305/2010, regulated by Federal Decree 7.404/2010, enables the Union and municipalities the responsibility of integrating the recycling cooperatives into the collection of recyclable goods in the city, as well as to provide better working conditions for the recyclers. More so, the Federal Law 5.576/71 (Brasil, 1971), establishes the so called “cooperativism” legislation, which also highlights the state taxation support to the cooperatives and in the specific chapter about the associates, it this Federal Law brings forth the possibilities of employment tides. Such possibilities represent exceptions to the classic cooperative model, in which the rule is that all the participants in a cooperative are perceived as an associated member, and so, have equal rights in voting during the assemblies, collaboratively deciding the ways in which actions should be taken within the cooperative.

In this context, the recycling cooperatives from the metropolitan region of São Paulo, represent a ground-breaking inclusive waste management alternative, because the recycling cooperatives along with the National Recycling Social Movement (MNCR), not just work hard to promote collective and solidarity experiences to its members, but also tackle issues around poverty and recyclers’ marginalization. Although the recycling cooperatives represent a powerful survival strategy for thousands of associated recyclers, there are still many challenges faced by these organizations, for instance, the inconsistency of government support, in addition to payment delays for the recyclers (Gutberlet, 2008, 2016). If this is the case, government support is vital for the success of

the recycling cooperatives because the recyclers themselves do not have the means to invest in structure and capacity building initiatives.

In summary, the recycling cooperatives are inscribed in the Brazilian national program of social and solidarity economy and they are supported by federal policies and institutions, such as the Secretariat for Solidarity Economy that facilitates the organization of the recyclers in cooperatives and mediates their access to funding equipment and capacity-building initiatives (Gutberlet, de Oliveira Jayme, Tremblay, 2016). Hence, the recycling cooperatives are active participants in the policy design for waste management in Brazil. Additionally, within the recycling cooperatives, the recyclers participate in all the decisions regarding their work within the cooperative and in and around the city. From this perspective, the recycling cooperatives are indeed open windows for individual empowerment and collective agency (Trembaly & de Oliveira Jayme, 2015).

The recycling cooperatives that participate in my research project are affiliated with the National Recyclers Social Movement (MNCR); a new social movement formalized in 1999 (Gutberlet, 2008). The MNCR works at a national level, towards the social inclusion of recyclers by highlighting the need of inclusive waste management initiatives and generating dialogue between government, recyclers, and the general public on issues around environmental health. The MNCR uses participatory, solidarity, and action-oriented approaches toward the inclusion of recyclers in political discourses and policy outcomes that impact their well-being. To avoid repetition, I point out that a broader scope of the MNCR is provided in Chapter 3.

### **2.3 The Participatory Sustainable Waste Management program (PSWM)**

My studies were mediated by a broader research program on waste management in São Paulo: the *Participatory Sustainable Waste Management* (PSWM) program. A collaboration between the University of São Paulo and the University of Victoria, along with other important partners, such as organized recyclers, local governments and NGO representatives. Between 2005-2011, the program developed multiple initiatives to strengthen and to address issues faced by the recycling cooperatives. Primarily funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (UPCD-AUCC-CIDA), the program aimed to: a) improve the organization of recyclers and strengthen their networks; b) empower the recyclers to improve workplace safety; c) promote collective commercialization of recyclable materials; d) create networks of recycling cooperatives; and e) generate dialogue amongst recyclers, the general public and policy-makers to construct public policies for participatory solid waste management.

The PSWM was managed by a deliberative Management Council (MC), composed of various representatives, including the recycling cooperatives, local governments, the two universities and NGOs closely related with cooperative recycling. New interdisciplinary knowledge was collectively generated during regular MC meetings (3 to 4 meetings per year; each of a duration of 2 to 3 days) and during various specific participatory interventions carried out by members of the program. The discussions and actions of the MC often focused on key issues about solid waste policy and management, including challenges regarding participatory management, social inclusion, gender aspects, and collective commercialization. The research activities developed throughout

the program were characterized by community-based, participatory, and action research methodologies, applying a wide range of arts-based methods.

#### **2.4 Environmental Adult Education (EAE) in Brazil and the Pedagogy of the Oppressed**

In Brazil, most environmental organizations and networks sprang up in the 1970s and became stronger with the end of military dictatorship in 1980, when citizen participation and emancipation became the core of environmental adult education (Rede, 2011). Through participatory actions, environmental organizations and networks, set out to question consumerism and mediate public's "conscientização" (Freire, 1978) regarding social and environmental issues. For Freire, "conscientização" refers to a type of individual transformation in which a person becomes able to recognize hegemonic social, political, cultural, and economic constraints and to act and react upon these constraints. For instance, the recycling cooperatives and the MNCR perform their functions while offering learning spaces where power structures are more democratic and shared amongst participants (Gonçalves, 2005; Barbosa & Barco, 2009). This is critical in/for EAE.

EAE projects are crucial for individual capacity-building and participation, aiming to change individuals' relations with the environment towards more sustainable ways of living (Guatarri, 1997; Brasil, 1998). These initiatives open opportunities for debate, reflection, and the continued generation and mobilization of knowledge. They also encourage local and individual and collective participation in decisions regarding local environmental issues, leading to individual learning (Baeder, 2009). EAE takes into consideration the emancipatory character of education, which is critical and context-

specific, containing the potential to spark a more democratic and respectful dialogue amongst participants (Baeder 2009; Brandão, 1982, 1987; Loureiro, 2004).

Since contemporary EAE is rooted on feminism (Clover, 2011), my research develops through feminist lenses because feminism problematizes power structures by confronting, resisting, and subverting social, cultural, and political injustices. Feminist theory, regardless of gender, brings forth personal experiences (here, mediated by art marking), social structures, and relationships, while “fostering multiple, on-the-ground responses in people to enable them to work towards more respectful, healthy, equitable and sustainable conditions” (Clover, de Oliveira Jayme, B., Fallen, S., Hall, B., 2013, p. 15). Feminist theories (de)construct and (re)configure the lives of marginalized women (and men) and help them create new knowledge and to (re)act upon the patriarchal “status quo” that perpetuates oppression. Broadly, feminism embraces the empowerment of people that have, historically, limited access to power (Moss, & Al-Kindi, 2008; Ackerley et al., 2006). From this perspective, unveiling gendered injustice and the empowerment of those that suffer from it and are excluded, are core concerns in feminist theories.

The recycling cooperatives that participated in this research project indeed trouble the *status quo* of gender work binary, in which men often assume more venerated roles such as engineering, constructions, etc.) and women are limited to the less valued paid roles (domestic, services, etc.) By offering individual empowerment opportunities to equally, men and women to participate in labour-based roles; opportunities created in the cooperative that are hard. In so doing, the recycling cooperatives produce and reproduce

spaces for recyclers' empowerment. Thus, feminist theory guided the three core chapters of this manuscript.

These commitments to emancipation and democracy found in many EAE discourses emerged from long-standing traditions of popular education, especially following the studies on “conscientização” presented by Paulo Freire in his book titled “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” (Freire, 1978). For Freire, “conscientização” is achieved through a “truly liberating education” (p. 35) that opens up opportunities for individuals to become part of their “historical process as responsible subjects” (p. 36). It empowers the individual to see that he or she is not merely a part of history, but that they are history. In other words, for Freire, history is considered as possibility and not determinism, which is vital for fostering action and reflection toward positive human transformation. It is based on the idea that humans are conditioned by our cultural and historical contexts, but not determined by these factors.

From a Freirian perspective on epistemology, knowledge is constructed in dialogue and it is not linear (e.g., knower → learner). These ideas are different from the traditional approach to education, where the knower knows and the learner learns. In this way, learning does not happen through the transfer of knowledge but within dialogue. Hence, learner's knowledge is valued and everybody involved in this process can learn (including the “knower”). In other words, knowledge construction emerges from human interactions and ensuing critical thinking regarding pertinent historical, cultural, and political dynamics. It is thus necessary to reflect critically on the relationship between theory and practice, and how they interact in mutually dependent ways. For Freire, when opportunities are opened, every person can critically engage in meaningful dialogue

about issues regarding the world in which they inhabit – these include questions of inequality, gender relations, environmental justice, among myriad others. In so doing, people are empowered to create personal and collective social change, because each person becomes more “conscientie” of her or his own reality.

### **2.5 Learning in social movements: A theoretical framework to understand the MNCR**

Social movements are neither a stable political party, nor a disorganized mass fad without goals. Rather, social movements are somewhere in between these two ideas (Miller, 1999). Snow, Soule & Kriesi, (2004) define social movements as “the collective acting with some degree of organization, and continuity outside of institutional or organization channels for the purpose of challenging or defending extant authority, whether it is institutionally or culturally based, in the group, organization, society, culture or world order of which they are part” (p. 11). Such initiatives make power structures visible to people both within and outside of the movement by challenging the dominant systems or symbols of contemporary everyday life. In so doing, “they translate their action into symbolic challenges that upset the dominant culture codes” (Melucci, 1988, p. 249). Della Porta and Dianni, 1999, argue that social movements “contest for ownership of specific social or political problems in the eyes of the public, by imposing their own interpretation on these [social and political problems]” (p. 70). Moreover, they can be seen as “social actions from where new knowledge including worldviews [and] ideologies originate” (Eyerman & Jamison, 1991, p. 14).

Social movements, as I demonstrate throughout this dissertation, are indeed learning spaces. From this perspective, Hall & Clover (2005) argue that “social

movement learning is both learning by persons who are part of any social movement and learning by persons outside of a social movement as a result of actions taken or simply by the existence of social movements” (p. 584). Finger & Asún (2001) agree that social movements are catalysts for individual transformation and the surroundings where such transformation occurs. Learning by people in or outside a social movement can happen informally or incidentally (Hall & Clover, 2005). On the one hand, learning in social movements may happen because of “stimulation and requirements of the participants in a movement” (p. 584). Organized or intentional learning also takes place as a direct result of educational activities organized within the movement itself (Hall, 2006). On the other hand, learning within a social movement may occur experientially, such as when people negotiate their daily lives with others involved in social movements or by large scale media events. (Hall, 2006). In addition, for Holford (1995) “the very process by which a movement is formed, by which it establishes an identity for itself, is a cognitive one” (p. 104). This cognitive process enables movements to construct their own identities, mediated by the production of knowledge that goes on inside and outside the movement (Holford, 1995). Such cognitive praxis, as I demonstrate in study 1, is critical within social movements because they mediate individual and collective transformation.

Most scholars have perceived SML only as a theory of collective transformation (Kilgore, 1999), while taking for granted how the individual learns within the group. This is because, according to Kasl and Marsick (1997) individualized learning theories do not adequately explain a group as a learning system, nor do they necessarily situate the learning process correctly between ‘learning’ and ‘doing’ (Brown, Collings, & Duguid, 1989). In my studies, I do not underestimate the role of collective learning within social

movements, but I do value individual transformation as an important framework to understand learning in social movements. The main chapters of this dissertation are concerned with individual transformation, because according to Boyer and Roth (2005), “collective learning [within social movements] fosters individual transformation and vice-versa, whereby individuals produce resources in action and as outcomes of [group] activities. These resources expand the action possibilities of the collective and thus constitute learning” (p. 75). Accordingly, I perceive that social movements are ‘privileged sites’ of individual transformation and collective and emancipatory praxis (Welton, 2006). Thus, collective learning cannot be understood apart from individual transformation.

## **2.6 On individual transformation**

Research on individual transformation rose to prominence in the 1970s as the epistemology of how people become critical adults by learning to think for themselves, rather than act upon assimilated beliefs, values and feelings, and judgments of others, (Mezirow, 1995; Mezirow and Associates, 2000). Thus, it is a process where people change in significant ways by taking into consideration their previous experiences, their history, and culture (Scott, 2001). In addition, further research on individual transformation, framed through feminist lenses, as previously mentioned, have considered transformative learning as lifelong journeys, taking into consideration individuals’ feelings and holistic ways of knowing, and how it mediates the construction of individual identities. (O’Sullivan, 1999; Dirkx, 2000; Tisdell, 2003). I explore individual transformation deeper throughout the main body of this dissertation.

## 2.7 Visual arts, tools in/for research

There are many different approaches to the use of arts as a research tool, such as arts-based methodologies, visual methodologies, image-based research, arts-informed inquiry, among others (Carole, 2002; Butterwick & Dona Telman, 2003; Clover, 2006; Grace & Wells, 2007; Guillemin & Drew, 2010; Woolery, 2006). These varying approaches fall within two broad conceptualizations: arts-informed inquiry and arts-based research. These two concepts are similar in the sense that both challenge positivist approaches to research (which failed to address issues of power relations and oppression), by having artistic forms as tool for data gathering (Clover, 2011; McNiff, 2008). In other words, these two concepts emerged in the social sciences as an alternative way of “qualifying the unquantifiable” and a better way of addressing research questions in a holistic and engaged way (Huss & Cwikel, 2005; Leavy, 2009).

Although similar in the ways mentioned above, arts-informed inquiry and arts-based research are different in the following ways. On one hand, arts-informed inquiry is a research methodology that incorporates different forms of arts into the research process. That is, the arts serve as “add-ons” to qualitative research. McNiff (2008) defines arts-informed inquiry as: *“a mode and form of qualitative research in the social sciences that is influenced by, but not based in, the arts. (p. 59)*. In this case, the central purpose of arts-informed inquiry is to *“enhance understanding of the human condition through alternative process and representational forms of inquiry (p. 59)*. In other words, arts-informed inquiry is often used to “illustrate” other qualitative approaches to research. On the other hand, arts-based research uses different forms of arts as primary data source, rather than “add-ons” to the research, and it is used throughout the research process.

McNiff (2008) defines arts-based research as *“the systematic use of artistic processes, the actual making of artistic expressions in all of the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies”* (p. 29). While Leavy (2009) shows us that arts-based research is *“a set of methodological tools used by qualitative researchers across disciplines during all phases of social research, including data collection, analysis, interpretation, and representation.”* (p. 9).

Arts-based research has been used around the world in the context of power relations, oppression, social exclusion, community development, empowerment and the inclusion of participants in the decision-making processes that affect their own lives (Clover, 2011; Huss and Cwikel, 2005; Telles, 2006). These previous researchers agree that arts-based research can *“uncover or create new knowledge, highlight experience, pose questions, or tackle problems,”* generate trust, build community, and inspire individual and collective empowerment (Clover, 2011, p. 13). More importantly, artistic approaches mediate communication amongst participants, because the arts bring together verbal, behavioural, and visual modes of expression in a group setting (Huss & Cwikel, 2005). Silverman (2000) extends the concept of arts as a communication tool by claiming that arts-based research is drawn from what people have to say, which may not be otherwise accessible in certain situations. In addition, Clover, Stalker and Macgauley (2004) argue that these dialogues, within arts-based research process, bring forth (and challenge) bias and show us *“things that we might not want to see”* (p. 282). Moreover, Finley (2005) claims that arts-based research is becoming a *“socially responsible, politically active, and locally useful research methodology”* (p. 4). While Greene (1995),

suggests that due to the critical thinking that occurs during the process of art making, different ways of understanding issues might emerge.

Arts-based research requires participants to move beyond disciplinary borders, which forces them to leave their comfort zone and explore other possibilities (Hesse-Biber & Leave, 2008). According to Leavy (2009), “*the best of arts-based practices calls on scholars to work with professionals outside their disciplines in order to maximize the aesthetic qualities and authenticity of the work*” (p. 18). This is a very important aspect of arts-based research because it brings together people from different backgrounds and they collectively have the chance to explore, through the arts, different ways of knowing. In addition, it enables people without previous art experiences to engage in the process of producing art.

Butterwick and Dawson (2006) suggest that one important aspect of arts-based research is the fact that arts have two dimensions: process (the act of making) and product (the resulting work). Based on my experience as an art teacher, the process of making art sparks curiosity in participants, which leads them to research, experiment, ponder, wonder, fail, and try again, while the resulting product often gives them a sense of empowerment and confidence. These two dimensions are evident throughout the three studies.

## **2.8 Data Collection and Analysis**

### **2.8.1 Overview of the arts-based workshops**

To explore the potentialities of visual arts in generating dialogue amongst recyclers and the public, I designed and facilitated three different arts-based workshops: abstract painting, impressionism painting, and mosaic for 50 recyclers affiliated with the

MNCR, as well as 7 mobile art galleries, as shown in Table 1. All the research participants were self-selected during a recyclers' meeting in February 2012 at the MNCR headquarters in São Paulo. The workshops happened once a week, from March to September of 2012. The duration of each workshop depended on their nature, location, and date, ranging from one to two days, and approximately four hours per day. The goal of these workshops was to teach three art techniques to those interested in learning how to express themselves through an artistic form, and to create a mobile art exhibition of their works.

	#Participants	# Women	#Men	Duration (hours)	Total
Abstract painting	50	47	3	4	14
Impressionism painting	12	11	1	4	14
Mosaic	300 (~)	–	–	–	7
Art galleries	–	–	–	–	7 shows

**Table 1:** Overview of number of participants per workshop and mobile art gallery

The first workshop taught abstract painting. Incorporating an assemblage of recyclable materials, modeling paste, and acrylic paint, recyclers created unique images that illustrated their experiences working in the cooperatives. Throughout the workshop, I kept asking: “What does this object represent to you? Why did you decide to assemble those objects in that way? What do those images mean to you?” These questions kept the conversation flowing and mediated recyclers' conversation about what they were creating. The final artworks embodied their stories of poverty and oppression, but above

all, stories of their fight for social inclusion. Finally, recyclers described their artworks and reflected on their creative process.

The second workshop focussed on impressionism painting. For this workshop, participants brought photographs from magazines, newspapers, or personal family photo albums that they felt emotionally connected to. These images were spread onto a table, and each chose one image, which they would use later on, to produce their own artwork. I also asked them the reasons they chose that specific image. Their artwork was powerful and visually voiced their stories.

The third workshop focused on mosaics. For this workshop, each recycler received one square of canvas and painted symbols or words that responded to the overall theme “what does it mean to be a recycler and what are the challenges you face?” Once painted, the squares were assembled together forming a unified image. Later, during the art exhibits, the recyclers reproduced the mosaic technique with gallery visitors by asking attendees to paint their impressions about the art shows.

## **2.8.2 Methods**

Below I describe in detail the art workshops discussed above

### *2.8.2.1 Abstract painting workshop*

Materials used:

- Acrylic paint: buffer white and metallic colours;
- paint brushes;
- empty containers and water to wash the brushes;
- cloth;
- modeling paste;

- canvas or plywood (any size);
- found objects;

Time: Approximately 4 hours

During the workshop: Split into two different days to allow the modeling paste to dry.

First day:

I had previously asked participants to bring to the studio any object they found at home that somehow they felt an emotional connection to. Later, sitting in a circle, I asked participants to lay their objects on the floor and asked them to describe their objects and the reasons they felt a personal connection to them. Next, I invited participants to go out into the field and look for more objects. Once everybody was back from their field experience, I asked them to place their new objects beside the ones that they had brought. Now, each participant had two different groups of objects sitting in front of them. I then asked everybody to assemble their objects on the floor to form a unified image. Next, I asked participants to apply the modeling paste onto the canvas and play with it to discover what the modeling paste can do. They spread the modeling paste onto the surface and made marks on it using their fingers and brushes. Then, I asked participants to place all the objects onto the canvas, reproducing the images they previously created on the floor. We let it dry overnight, but before we left for the day, we reflected on the process, in which participants verbally described their experience.

Second day:

On the next day, participants covered their canvas entirely with the white acrylic buffer and let it sit until this layer of paint was completely dried. Next, they chose one of the metallic colours and covered the entire piece with it. Before this second layer of paint

was completely dried, I instructed them to rub off the excess the metallic paint until the first layer of white buffer started shining through the metallic paint. Let it dry. The final product was absolutely powerful, because each piece embodied the stories told by participants. These were stories about poverty, oppression, racism, stigmatization, but above all, stories of fight for social inclusion. Finally, I asked participants to describe their artwork and reflect on the process of creating it. These reflections, later on became part of my data corpus.

### *2.8.2.2 Impressionism painting workshop*

Material used:

- Acrylic paint (colours: burnt sienna ultramarine blue for the background and mix colours for the foreground);
- primed stretched canvas (any size and one per participant);
- easel (one per participant);
- a plate or any surface that can be used to mix the paint;
- a wide brush (1 for each participant);
- paintbrushes (1 middle size for each participant);
- cloth;
- empty container;
- photographs (reference image)

Time: Approximately 4 hours. It can be split into two days as I describe below.

During the workshop:

- 1) On the plate, and using a paintbrush, mix some of the burnt sienna with water. The mix should be very watery.

- 2) Using the wide brush, spread the mix of burnt sienna evenly on the canvas.
- 3) Looking at the reference image, search for contrast in light and dark. For instance, if it is a picture of a landscape with sky and mountains, which part is lighter, the sky or the mountains? Probably the sky is lighter than the mountains.
- 4) Once participants recognized the lighter and darker areas in their images, I asked them to look at their canvas and using the cloth, clean off the burnt sienna in specific areas of the canvas recreating all the lighter areas that they found in their image.
- 5) Next, I asked participants to mix the ultramarine blue with burnt sienna and water. This mixture should be as dark as possible.
- 6) Participants turned their attention to the dark areas that they created on the canvas. Holding their paintbrush very lightly in their hands, they added the mixture to the canvas only on the darker areas, trying to match the dark areas of their images. Slowly, participants were able to perceive the contrast between light and dark that they were creating. This did not need to be perfectly matched with the image on the paper. The less perfect those paintbrush strokes were, the more interesting the final product became, simply because in this process, participants only highlight the most remarkable impressions from the original image using loose brush strokes. I advised participants to be very playful with the paintbrush, and to welcome “mistakes,” because they make the image more interesting.
- 7) Let the paint dry completely. This is a good time to split the workshop into two days, if necessary.
- 8) I asked participants to squint their eyes and look at their photographs. When they squinted their eyes, they were not able to see the details of the images, and all they were

able to see was a rough fuzzy image. I asked participants to describe what they saw, which is mostly shapes that resemble the objects from their photographs before squinting their eyes. And these shapes and forms are what I asked them to transfer to the canvas.

9) At this stage, participants mixed their different colours of paint with water. Then, squinting their eyes and looking at their photographs, they searched for recognizable shapes which were transferred to the canvas using the paint and paintbrushes. Let it dry.

10) Participants contemplated each others' final products and reflected upon their processes of creating them

### *2.8.2.3 Mosaics*

Materials used:

- Acrylic paint (different colours);
- paintbrushes (different sizes and shapes);
- empty containers, water, and cloth;
- 2 pieces of same size of unstretched primed canvas;
- scissors;
- pencil;
- ruler.

Time:

Approximately 4 hours but it can be done in 1 hour depending on the goals and number of participants.

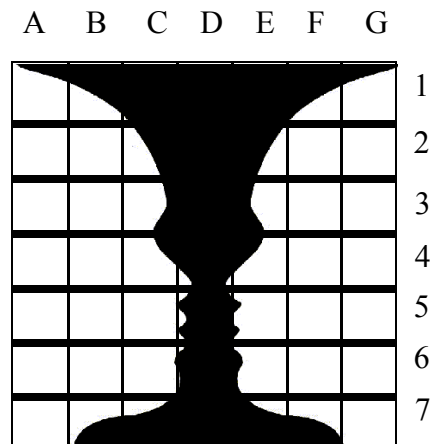
Before the workshop:

Draw and paint a shape of a desired image using light colour acrylic paint. With the ruler, divide the canvas, into 10cm X 10cm squares. Identify each square with letters and

numbers A1–B1, A2–B2, as shown in Figure 2.1. Precede exactly the same with the second canvas. Using the scissors cut all the squares of one of the canvases. Do not cut your second canvas because the second one is the template where the squares will be assembled back together.

During the workshop:

Each participant received one or more squares and was invited to create symbols or words using the brushes and the acrylic paint that they understood to visually represent their ideas about a specific topic. They glued onto the canvas that had not been cut, the recently painted squares following the numbers on the back. The audience was invited to contemplate the mosaic and reflect upon their individual piece and how they see it fitting into the whole.



**Figure 2.1:** Shaded and “squared” desired image.

### *2.8.2.3 Recycling stories – a mobile and community-created art gallery*

Seven art exhibits were set up to travel to three cities: São Paulo (one public library, two City Halls in two municipalities (Ermelino Matarazzo and São Paulo City),

one public square, and one public elementary school); Rio de Janeiro (one exhibit during Rio+20 Conference); Londrina (one exhibit during the MNCR Conference). At the exhibits, the paintings were hung onto easels or carefully laid on the floor, enabling visitors to mingle amongst them. A mosaic-making station was set up on the side with paint and brushes so visitors could visually express their impressions about the artworks. Recyclers helped to facilitated all the mosaic-making stations by engaging visitors in conversation around the themes presented in the paintings. Music, food, and performers contributed in making the Recycling Stories a lively space.

During the art exhibits, visitors were able to interact with the recyclers in person. Most of the conversation centered on the politics of their work as recyclers, and their experiences in producing art.

### *2.8.3 Data generation*

Two camcorders were positioned in opposite sides in the art studio and exhibits and focused on the group as a whole to capture participants' interactions amongst themselves, with the art supplies, and their artworks as they were being created. In addition, I carried all the time, attached to my shirt, an audio recorder to capture my own voice as I explained the painting techniques, as well as my close conversations with individual participants. I decided to video and audio record the workshops because in this study, I am interested in the discourse that emerged from free conversation between recyclers during the art-making processes and what can be learned from these interactions. Over 221 hours of video and sound material were recorded, serving as my primary data source. My field notes, lesson plans, and photographs of all artworks produced during the workshops comprised my secondary data source.

The use of the camcorder for data collection allowed me to play the recorded material on the computer. I used iMovie11 version 9.0.9, a free software package for Apple computers to watch the videos frame-by-frame. This software allows playing videos back and forth as needed. This same software also facilitated playing the movie during transcribing. For the audio files, I used iTunes version 12.10.50, also open access software that allowed me to move along back and forth in each audio file. As the videos and audio data were being generated, I created a “content list”, where, right after the data collection, I made any pertinent annotation and explication of the events about everything that happened during the workshop. My content list was indexed by the time and location of each video or audio file. Each index consisted of a heading that gave identifying information, followed by a rough summary listing of events as they occurred on the videos and in the audio files. I followed this procedure consistently recording the events that had happened in the art studio, right after each workshop, while my memory was still “fresh.” My content list was useful in providing me with a quick overview of the data corpus, for locating particular sequences and issues, and as a basis for doing full transcripts of particularly interesting segments. Although my data corpus was formed by hours of conversation amongst research participants, I have chosen specific segments to showcase in this dissertation. This does not mean that the episodes I show here are better than the others or that I have chosen them randomly. It means that they best illustrate the claims I make further ahead. The episodes I present in this dissertation are not a reflection of participants’ knowledge about art. Rather, they illustrate everyday situations in which real people may find themselves when they are collectively and collaboratively working in an art-making environment.

#### *2.8.3.4 Analytical tool: Cognitive development approach to discourse analysis*

Recorded sections that illustrated individual transformation within social movement were fully transcribed and translated. Once the video and audio segments were created and selected, I used discourse analysis (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Roth & Alexander, 1997) as an analytical tool for interpreting the videotaped and audio recorded workshops. This, helped me to understand what was going on during each art class. Discourse analysis is the study of language in use, in the sense that language cannot be understood apart from the context in which it is used, thus the researcher must be able to understand the context. In practice, the process of discourse analysis could be generally split into different stages that are not sequential steps but phases (Potter & Wetherell, 1987):

Setting assertions: My assertions were generated by watching the videos or listening to the audios accompanied by respective transcripts. Having no pre-determined assertions, throughout the viewing of the videos or listening the audios, I gave priority to discourse as it happened in the videos or audios. That is, I described only what was shown and/or heard in the videos and audio files. My assertions were refined as I watched and/or heard the events that appeared in the files as well as through the writing process, always backing up with the literature review.

Collection of records and documents: By collecting documents from many sources, it is possible to build up a more accurate description of the way participants' discourses practices are organized compared to one source alone. Hence, more than one camcorder and additional audio recorder was employed, and every single workshop was

recorded, both audio and video. Photographs of all the artworks were produced and contrasted with the artists' reflections about their artworks.

Transcription: The content of transcripts depended on what I intended to articulate. In general, the ratio of video time to transcription time was about one to ten. This means that ten minutes of video took about one hour to transcribe. However, this means the ratio also depends on the detail of the transcription.

Coding: The goal of coding is not to find results but to compress the large body of discourse into manageable parts. In this study, for instance, I coded episodes that illustrate how individual transformation plays out in the context of social movements, and I chose the episodes that best illustrate the claims I make ahead.

Analysis: During data analysis, I did a lot of careful reading and re-readings of the transcripts and watched the videos over and over again. While watching the videos and reading the transcriptions, I searched for patterns in both the consistency and regularity of events.

The cognitive development approach to discourse analysis elaborated by Vygotsky (1978) helped to deconstruct the events on the videos as they unfold, because this approach seeks to understand how individual learning plays out in the material world. According to Vygotsky (1978), cognitive development is context bound. That is, individual learning is mediated by the environment in which he or she is part of. Hence, individual learning is a social construct even when this type of learning unfolds internally, because all the tools that mediate learning are historical and cultural artifacts. Vygotsky also believed that all higher mental functions (consciousness) are initiated by *external stimuli* in the form of social events. These social events are then internalized into

an individual's thinking through the use of language. This dialectical relationship (internal and external) is continuous throughout the individual's life span and it increases, becoming more and more complex over time (Wink & Putney, 2002). Therefore higher functions originate. From this perspective, the individual is a learning system. I further explore Vygotskian approach to cognitive development in the next Chapter.

## **Chapter Three – Individual transformation in social movements: examples from recycling cooperatives from São Paulo, Brazil**

### **[Abstract]**

How does individual transformation unfold within social movement learning, a territory that mainly embodies learning as a collective practice? Intertwining social movement learning and transformative learning theories informed by Vytoskyan's cognitive development approach as analytical tool, I answer this question by exploring discourses that emerged during arts-based workshops and exhibits facilitated with recyclers in São Paulo, Brazil. My findings suggest that during the art making process, recyclers construct their visual thought, which enables their empowerment and agency.

**Keywords:** Social Movement Learning, Arts-based Research, Recycling Cooperatives

### **3.1 Introduction**

The international encyclopaedia of adult education defines social movement learning (SML) as “learning by persons who are part of any social movement and learning by persons outside of a social movement as a result of actions taken or simply by the existence of social movements” (Hall & Clover, 2005, p. 584). Such learning may happen informally, incidentally, and in experiential ways (Hall & Turray, 2006). From an epistemological perspective, Eyerman and Jamison, (1991) also agree that social movements are indeed sites of learning, because movements are “social actions from where worldviews, ideologies, religion, and scientific theories originate (Eyerman & Jamison, 1991, p. 14). Social movements as epistemological fields of study, emerged mostly in the late 90s and early 2000s, aiming to understand how knowledge is constructed and mobilized in and out of a social movement. Current research, however,

explores SML primarily as a theory of collective learning (Mezzirow, 1989; Finger, 1995; Kilgore, 1997, 1999; Kasl & Marsick, 1997; Figland, et al., 2009), and little attention has been given to how individuals learn within a group (Welton, 1993; Finger & Asún, 2001). This is because, according to Kasl and Marsick (1997), individualized learning theories do not identify a group as a learning system, nor do they bridge the gap between learning and doing (Brown, Collings & Duguid, 1989). Contrary to this, scholars who advocate the potential of individual transformation within social movements, speak of social movements as spaces of “cognitive praxis” (Eyerman & Jamison, 1991). Through this lens, they highlight the creative role of consciousness and cognition in all individual actions (Hall & Clover, 2005). In this study, I do not underestimate the role of collective learning, but the focus of this paper is on individual transformation as a mediator of learning in social movements. In this study, I am interested primarily in individual transformation through collective processes, because according to Boyer and Roth (2005), “collective learning [within social movements] fosters individual transformation and vice-versa, whereby individuals produce resources in action and as outcomes of [group] activities. These resources expand the action possibilities of the collective and thus constitute learning” (p. 75). In other words, learning within social movements is a dialectic process, in which individual transformation and social practice happen continuously and inseparably. From this perspective, collective learning cannot be understood apart from individual transformation. In order to understand how individuals learn in groups, I accept that social movements as environmental adult education organizations, are not just ‘privileged sites’ of collective learning, but also

individual transformation and emancipatory praxis (Welton, 2005), and I demonstrate this in my study.

To capture individual transformation within social movements, I intertwine social movement learning theory and transformative learning theory, informed by Vygotsky's approach to cognitive development to frame discourses that emerged amongst members of the Recycling Social Movement (MNCR) from São Paulo, Brazil. These discourses unfolded over a period of seven months in arts-based workshops and exhibit as part of this research project. I begin this Chapter by explaining how the MNCR came about and how it is improving the livelihoods of thousands of marginalized families for whom the recycling industry is their only source of income. Later, I highlight how the MNCR represents a space for learning, and opportunities for individual transformation. Next, I explain how visual art generated discourses amongst participants, forming my primary data source. Discourse analysis in conjunction with Vygotsky's approach to cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978), is used here as an analytical tool to deconstruct the dialogues that happened freely amongst participants during the art making process and art exhibits.

Since individual transformation is mediated through social process, and social movements are sites of cognitive praxis, one way to understand how an individual learns in a group is through Vygotskian cognitive development approach. For Vygotsky (1978), individual learning is a social construct, and individual internal cognition is mediated by *external stimuli*, externalized by "learned" actions performed by the same individual. Thus, learning is a dialectic process. According to Vygotsky, such dialectic processes enable the individual to achieve higher levels of consciousness, which Freire (1978)

identifies as “conscientização.” That is, when people become able to recognize hegemonic social, political, cultural, and economic constraints and act and react upon these constraints. This is critical in social movements.

The key findings in this study broadly respond to the following questions I asked participants during the art-based workshops and exhibits: “What does it mean to be a recycler, and what are the challenges that recyclers face?” These two questions set the context of this study, because they bring forth recyclers’ reality of discrimination, and fights for social inclusion. Another question I asked the participant recyclers that framed my research was: “What does your artwork mean to you?” From this question I was able to understand how individual cognition plays out when participants are engaged in collective praxis.

### **3.2 Recycling Cooperative in Brazil and the National Recycling Social Movement**

Industrialization and the increasing populations in urban areas, which densified through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has led to higher levels of consumption, materialism, and waste production. Consequently, vast amounts of recyclable materials are thrown in the garbage every day (Gutberlet, 2008). Worldwide, the collection, separation, and sales of these recyclable materials represent survival strategies for many unemployed and impoverished families, men and women of all different ages, including children, and seniors, especially in urban sites (Gutberlet & de Oliveira Jayme, 2010; Gonçalves, 2005). In Brazil, any person who makes a living of such an activity is called *catador(a)*, which literally translates into the English language as collector. These individuals separate recyclable goods from garbage, and reintroduce these materials into a stream of new production. In

the Global North, other nouns are employed to address these workers, such as dumpster divers, waste pickers and scavengers, however, *recycler* is the terminology I use throughout this Chapter whenever I refer to their work. Collecting recyclable materials represents not only income generation for the recyclers, but it also improves overall environmental health, because the recyclers save materials that would end up in a landfill if not reintroduced into the production stream through the recycling industry. Although working as environmental agents (Baud et al., 2001; Medina, 2001), the recyclers still represent one of the most oppressed and vulnerable groups of the population (Rodrigues, 1998, Tremblay & de Oliveira Jayme, 2015). Their history of poverty perpetuates their marginalization and discrimination, which produces and reproduces inequity and uneven development.

In this context, the organization of recyclers into cooperatives represents a significant mobilizing strategy because the recycling cooperatives have the potential to improve the livelihoods of recyclers by valuing their work and reinforcing the importance of it to the environment as a whole (Gutberlet, 2008). Beyond resource recovery, recyclers also provide an environmental service via environmental education initiatives promoted by the cooperatives. In addition, when partnered with local government, private sectors, non-profit organizations and the general public, the recycling cooperatives can be an important partner, with the cooperatives creating inclusive solutions to waste management (Gutberlet, 2008). More so, the recycling cooperatives operate on principles of participation, capacity building, and democratic decision-making, and thus are in themselves motors for individual empowerment, generating collective agency (Tremblay & de Oliveira Jayme, 2015).

Most of the recycling cooperatives in Brazil are affiliated with the National Recyclers Social Movement (MNCR); a new social movement that became formalized in 1999 (Gutberlet, 2008). The MNCR emerged as an anti-discrimination, poverty, and social exclusion movement during the first national meeting of recyclers in Brasília in June, 2001 (Gutberlet, 2008; MNCR, 2011). At that time, over 1700 recyclers got together to discuss their livelihoods, and to produce a document called *Carta de Brasília* [letter from Brasilia (MNCR, 2011)]. The Carta de Brasília aimed to legalize the work of the recyclers as *catadores de materiais recicláveis* (collectors of recyclable materials) and to establish that countrywide, selective waste collection should be accomplished primarily by local recycling cooperatives and not by the City or by a private firm. More recently, in 2007, the National Sanitation Law (11.445) was established to support the recycling sector. This policy authorizes all municipalities in Brazil to contract recycling cooperatives to perform collection, separation, and the sale of recyclable materials (IPEA, 2010). In 2010, the former Brazilian President, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, approved the National Solid Waste Legislation (Law number 12.305/2010), a new policy recognizing the formal inclusion of recyclers. All these governmental initiatives aim to further the social inclusion of recyclers by reinforcing the urgency of inclusive waste management initiatives and by generating dialogue between government, recyclers, and the general public on issues around environmental health. The MNCR is a very dynamic space where immediate goals are debated and actions and strategies to tackle these goals are decided in participatory processes. Out of this dynamic many new leaders emerged (Baeder, 2009). One of the main characteristics of the MNCR is its participatory, solidarity, and action oriented approach to the inclusion of recyclers in political discourses and political

participation in decisions that impact their well-being. Nunn (2011) suggests that the cooperatives in conjunction with the MNCR have created “a space for a common identity” (p. 33). Such common identity has the potential to mediate recyclers’ *individual understanding* of who they are, their struggles, and assist them in finding shared ideas to challenge authorities that prevent their access to tools of empowerment (Baeder, 2009). In other words, MNCR works towards the individual transformation and “conscientização” by making power structures visible to individuals that are part of the movement, as well as to those outside of the movement. From this perspective, individual transformation becomes the core of social movement learning.

### **3.3 Social movements and individual transformation: the case of the MNCR**

As a space for learning, the MNCR can be conceptualized as cognitive praxis for individual transformation. Cognitive praxis in the context of this study refers to “the relations to knowledge that characterize particular social movements, the concepts, ideas and intellectual activities that give the social movements their individual and cognitive identity” (Eyerman & Jamieson, 1991, p. 3). Klandermans *et al.*, (1988) similarly refer to this key aspect of social movements as packages of ideas, clusters of issues, organizational ideologies or profiles. That is to say, “the very process by which a movement is formed, by which it establishes an identity for itself, is a cognitive one” (Holford, 1995, p. 104). This is evident in the MNCR. These scholars also explain that cognitive praxis is critical within social movements because they mediate individual transformation giving the social movements their particular meaning or consciousness.

Research on individual transformation emerged in the 1970s when Jack Mezirow developed the transformative learning theory [TLT] (Mezirow, 1975). This theory of

transformation is the epistemology of how people become critical adults by learning to think for themselves, rather than act upon the assimilated beliefs, values, feelings, and judgments of others (Mezirow and Associates, 2000). Thus, it is a process where people change in significant ways by taking into consideration their own previous experiences, their history, and culture (Scott, 2001). Moreover, TLT explores *“how to negotiate and act upon our own purposes and meanings, rather than those we have uncritically assimilated from others”* (Mezirow and Associates, 2000 p. 8). These are also core concepts in social movement learning.

Much research has extended the work of Jack Mezirow (Vygotsky, 1978; Daloz, 1986; Boyd and Meyers, 1988; Kegan, 1994; O’Sullivan, 1999, 2012; Dirkx, 2000; Tisdell, 2003). Scholars consider TLT as a lifelong journey, taking into consideration contextual influences such as feelings and holistic ways of knowing, and how it mediates the construction of individual identities. Moreover, the concept of “conscientização”– a process in which an individual learns to recognize social, political, and economic constraints and to (re)act upon these constraints (Freire, 1978), has expanded TLT into an even stronger political framework.

Under the bigger umbrella of TLT, I use a cognitive development approach (Vygotsky, 1978) to analyze our data, because individual learning is a social construct and a dialectic and cognitive process. I explain this approach for analysis later in this paper. Additionally, our study is strongly informed by feminist approaches to individual transformation (Clover, 2011) because feminism troubles power structures by confronting, resisting, and subverting social, cultural, and political injustices. Feminist theory, regardless of gender, brings forth personal experiences (here, mediated by the art

marking), social structures, and relationships, while “fostering multiple, on-the-ground responses in people, enabling them to work towards more respectful, healthy, equitable and sustainable conditions” (Clover, de Oliveira Jayme, B., Fallen, S., Hall, B., 2013, p. 15). Feminist theories (de)construct and (re)configure the lives of marginalized women (and men) and help them create new knowledge and (re)act upon the patriarchal “status quo” that perpetuates oppression. Broadly, feminism empowers people that have, historically, had limited access to power (Moss, & Al-Kindi, 2008; Ackerley et al., 2006). From this perspective, empowerment is the core of feminist theories.

In the context of this study, empowerment is a process where individuals experience increased control or power over their lives, enabling them to self-discover new perspectives and abilities to bring forth their history and personal knowledge to the benefit of society as a whole (Israel et al., 1994). Empowered individuals are transformed individuals, able to “understand and transcend constraints placed upon them by particular ideologies, structures, and cultural practices” (Clover, de Oliveira Jayme, Fallen & Hall, 2013, p. 14). In my study, empowerment is evident in participants’ self-esteem in its emphasis on the development of a positive self-concept, but also includes an element of recognizing human agency for positive change. Research on people’s empowerment has been vastly explored in the literature (Miraftab, 2004; Cornwall, 2007; Nunn & Gutberlet, 2013). All these previous scholars have encouraged careful (re)consideration of the ways that empowerment can be misrepresented and how it reifies the marginal position of those who are the focus of empowerment. This is because too often the concept is employed from a western liberal perspective that overlooks the tendency of those employing ‘empowering’ methodologies to reproduce forms of hegemonic control.

In the present study, I take extra care to avoid misrepresenting empowerment to avoid producing and reproducing unbalanced power structures.

### **3.4 Arts-based research methodology**

My research study is arts-based, that is, using art as a critical and creative means to share stories, “uncover or create new knowledge, highlight experiences, pose questions, or tackle problems” (Clover, 2011, p. 13). Arts-based research is about generating trust so participants feel comfortable in sharing their stories, and inspiring individual imagination for empowerment and transformation. Artistic approaches to explore SML “uncovers biases, power relations and ideological obfuscation that people cannot or may not even want to see” (Clover, Stalker, & McGauley. 2004, p. 282). What this means is that at the heart of arts-based research are opportunities for empowerment (Gallo, 2001; Wang & Burris, 1994) and this was very important to my study.

Over the course of seven months, three different types of arts-based workshops (abstract painting, impressionism painting, and mosaics) were conducted in public spaces, such as public libraries and community centers, involving 12 recyclers from the metropolitan region of São Paulo. The first question that guided the art-based workshops was: What does it mean to be a recycler? My aim in particular was to use their artworks to help them verbalize their personal stories of individual transformation, making visible the importance of their work to the public with the ultimate goal of decreasing the prejudice they suffer from, as a result of their work with waste. By using creative and arts-based tools, new ways of knowing and exchanging knowledge are applied to interdisciplinary studies, often with foci on social and environmental justice issues. Thus new ways of conducting the research as well as positioning the researchers within anti-

oppressive, community-engaged scholarship help co-create and disseminate knowledge, further contributing to social and environmental action for change.

### **3.4.1 From data generation to analysis of key findings**

After Research Ethics approval, once a week, during the months of March to September of 2012, I facilitated abstract and impressionism painting and mosaic workshops with 50 members from the recycling cooperatives from different locations within the metropolitan region of São Paulo. I rigorously followed the ethical protocol in terms of informed consent and research process. Two camcorders were positioned in opposite sides of the art studio and focused on the group as a whole to capture participants' interactions amongst themselves, with the art supplies, and their artworks as they were being created. In addition, I carried all the time, attached to my shirt, an audio recorder to capture my own voice as I explained the painting techniques, as well as my close conversation with individual participants. I have decided to video and audio record the workshops because in this study, I am interested in the free discourse that emerges from a free conversation amongst recyclers during the art making process and what can be learned from these interactions. Over 221 hours of video and sound material were recorded, serving as my primary data source. My secondary data source is comprised of my field notes, lesson plans, and photographs of all art works produced during the workshops.

The use of the camcorder for data collection allowed us to play the recorded material on the computer. I used iMovie11 version 9.0.9, a free software package for Apple computers to watch the videos frame-by-frame. This software allows playing videos back and forth as needed. This same software also facilitated playing the movie

during transcribing. For the audio files, I used iTunes version 12.10.50, also an open access software that allowed us to move along back and forth in each audio file.

As the videos and audio data were being generated, I created a “content list”, where, right after the data collection, I made any pertinent annotation and explication of the events about everything that happened during the workshop. My content list was indexed by the time and location of each video or audio file. Each index consisted of a heading that gave identifying information, followed by a rough summary listing of events as they occurred on the videos and in the audio files. I followed this procedure consistently recording the events that had happened in the art studio, right after each workshop, while my memory was still “fresh.” My content list was useful in providing us with a quick overview of the data corpus, for locating particular sequences and issues, and as a basis for doing full transcripts of particularly interesting segments. Although my data corpus was formed by hours of conversation amongst research participants, I have chosen just two segments to explore in this paper. This does not mean that these two episodes are better than the others or that I have chosen them randomly. It means that they best illustrate the claims I make within. The episodes I present here are not a reflection of participants’ knowledge about art. Rather, they illustrate everyday situations that real people may find themselves in when they are collectively and collaboratively working in an art making environment.

#### *3.4.1.1 The workshop*

The first workshop taught abstract painting. Incorporating an assemblage of recyclable materials, modeling paste, and acrylic paint, recyclers created unique images that illustrated their experiences working in the cooperatives. Throughout the workshop, I

kept asking: “What does your art mean to you?” To keep the structure of this workshop (as illustrated in Chapter 2 of the dissertation), I also asked follow up questions, such as: “What does this object represent to you? Why did you decide to assemble those objects in that way? What do those images mean to you?” These questions kept the conversation flowing and mediated recyclers’ thinking about what they were creating, as well as generated the discourses that I used for further analysis. The final artworks embodied their stories of poverty and oppression, but above all, stories of their fight for social inclusion. Finally, recyclers described their artworks and reflected on their creative process.

The second workshop focused on impressionism painting. For this workshop, participants brought photographs from magazines, newspapers, or personal family photo albums that they felt emotionally connected to. These images were spread onto a table, and they chose one image as a reference for their artwork, explaining why they chose that specific image. Their artworks were powerful and the visuals helped voiced their stories.

The third workshop focused on mosaics. For this workshop, each recycler received one square of canvas and painted symbols or words that responded to the overall theme “what does it mean to be a recycler and what are the challenges you face?” Once painted, the squares were assembled together forming a unified image. Later, during the art exhibits, the recyclers reproduced the mosaic technique with gallery visitors by asking attendees to paint their impressions about the art shows.

#### *3.4.1.2 The art exhibits*

After the conclusion of the arts workshops, seven art exhibits called “Recycling Stories” were set up, and travelled to three cities: Metropolitan region of São Paulo (one

public library, two City Halls in two municipalities, one public square, and one public elementary school); Rio de Janeiro (one exhibit during the 'Rio+20' Conference); Londrina (one exhibit during the MNCR Conference). At the exhibits, the paintings were hung onto easels or carefully laid on the floor, enabling visitors to mingle amongst them. A mosaic-making station was set up on the side with paint and brushes so visitors could visually express their impressions about the artworks. At least one of the recyclers helped to facilitate all the mosaic-making stations by engaging visitors in conversation around the themes presented in the paintings. Music, food, and performers contributed in making the Recycling Stories a lively space.

During the art exhibits, visitors were able to interact with recyclers in person. Most of the conversations focused on the politics of their work as recyclers and their experiences in producing art, and their role as a community leader. All art shows were also videotaped.

#### *3.4.1.3 Discourse analysis through Vytotsky's approach to cognitive development*

Recorded sections that illustrate individual transformation within social movement were further fully transcribed and translated. Once the video and audio segments were created and selected, I used discourse analysis (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Roth & Alexander, 1997) as an analytical tool for interpreting the videotaped and audio recorded workshops. This helped me to understand what was going on during each art class. Discourse analysis is the study of language in use, in the sense that language cannot be understood apart from the context in which it is used, thus the researcher must be able to understand the context.

The cognitive development approach to discourse analysis elaborated by Vygotsky (1978) helped me to deconstruct the events on the videos as they unfold, because this approach seeks to understand how individual learning plays out in the material world. According to Vygotsky (1978), cognitive development is context bound. That is, individual learning is mediated by the environment in which one is part of. Hence, individual learning is a social construction even when this type of learning internally unfolds, because all the tools that mediate learning are historical and cultural artefacts. Vygotsky also believed that all higher mental functions (or consciousness) are initiated by *external stimuli* in the form of social events. These social events are then internalized into individuals' thinking through the use of language. This dialectic relationship (internal and external) is continuous throughout the individual's life span and it increases, becoming more and more complex over time (Wink & Putney, 2002). Through this process, higher functions originate. From this perspective, the individual is a learning system. I further explore Vygotskian approach to cognitive development later on in this Chapter.

### **3.5 What does it mean to be a recycler and what are the challenges the recyclers face?**

In this section I address the above question by presenting an episode extracted from my database. My intention in presenting this episode is to illustrate recyclers' history of poverty and stigmatization. The recyclers suffer from prejudice at the hands of the general public, despite performing a very important work that contributes to the community's overall environment health.

The following conversation unfolded at the end of the impressionism workshop in which participants were asked the above question. Here, I transcribe my exchange with

Nenê, a 60 year old woman who works at a recycling cooperative in a low-income district of São Paulo. Nenê is also an active member in the MNCR. This is what she said:

*Nenê: The other day, we were in a diner: myself and a group of women that I didn't know very well. We were just chatting; getting to know each other. And we were talking about each others' lives. And a woman asked me: "what do you do?" I answered: "I'm a recycler." She was resting her hand on my arm, but when I told her I was a recycler, she abruptly removed her hand away from me. I asked her why she did that when I told her I was a recycler, she said: "No. I didn't remove my hands when you told me you were a recycler." But she did, like saying: "your hands are dirty." And that hurt so much.*

Although working as environmental agents, recyclers still represent one of the most oppressed and vulnerable parts of the population (Rodrigues, 1998). Their history of poverty perpetuates their marginalization and discrimination and this is evident in the previous episode narrated by Nenê.

Nenê starts her discourse by plotting the context of her story: a diner and people she did not know well. She explains that they were starting to get to know one other. In the beginning their conversation seemed to run smoothly, until they started asking each other what they did for a living. At this point, the conversation takes a negative turn when Nenê declares she is a recycler. According to Nenê, when she disclosed to the other women in the circle that she was a recycler, someone moved away from her, which Nenê noticed. She inquired about this reaction, but the other woman denied her action. Nenê explained her interpretation of this interaction, attributing the word "dirty" to the work she performs. Being associated with dirtiness is part of recyclers' daily routine, as they often deal with unclean products. Such association contributes to increased prejudice and stigmatization suffered by the recyclers, which devalue their work. According to Nenê, such association not only devalues her work, but it also causes her pain.

Keeping Nenê's story in mind, I turn to Vygotsky, who explains that the individual becomes herself or himself through others (Vygotsky, 1989). That is, who we are as human beings is mediated by our interactions with others. For instance, the different discourses in which we engage with our material world(s) help us to construct who we are as human beings, and also inform how others perceive us. In this context, I can infer that the prejudice Nenê suffers, as well as other recyclers, is an external *stimulus*. Such *stimulus* does not only "hurt" and disempower recyclers, but it also associates them with social exclusion, objectively manifested through discrimination by the public, which negatively impacts recyclers' perceptions of their own self-worth. This was evident in the episode above. Such discrimination places the recyclers within a marginalized social space (Bourdier, 1994; Lefebvre, 1991) and perpetuates poverty and social inequity. Such discrimination is best evidenced by the lack of open dialogue between recyclers and the public (Gutberlet & de Oliveira Jayme, 2010).

The present study has the potential to help recyclers overcome discrimination, because the artwork they produce not only brings forth their stories of poverty and prejudice, but also highlights the importance of their work, sparking communication between recyclers and the general public. This was achieved and evident during the art exhibits, because it was through the exhibits that recyclers encouraged the general public to critically (re)think their perceptions about the recyclers, with the ultimate goal of decreasing discrimination they suffer.

Next, I introduce Helô and Bahia, two lively community leaders in their fifties. Their story exemplifies the problematic *status quo* of gender work binary that can happen in arts-based workshops within social movements, in which men are often perceived as

“serious”, while women conversation as frivolous gossip. This story also offers a counter narrative, challenging such patriarchy *status quo*.

Helô and Bahia have been married for many years and they met each other while working as recyclers on the streets of São Paulo. Although they no longer act as recyclers, their work is intimate linked to a recycling cooperative. Currently, Helô and Bahia are two community leaders at União de Vila Nova, a low-income community in the outskirts of São Paulo. They both are key actors within the MNCR because they are representatives of this social movement in their community. For instance, they keep their community informed about all the decisions made by the MNCR as well as political decisions that are made by the City that involve the well-being of all the residents of União de Vila Nova. Additionally, with public participation, they choose the political candidate they would support in elections and so forth. These are only a few of the many responsibilities they have as community leaders.

At União de Vila Nova, Helô and Bahia run a vibrant sewing studio that have been established by the City to train free of charge, anyone who is interested in the fashion industry. Helô and Bahia, with help from the City, participates and facilitates numerous sewing workshops, ranging from customizing second hand clothes, to the production of completely new outfits and accessories. Most of the materials they use during the workshop, such as fabric and second hand pieces, are provided by a closed by recycling cooperative that receives these materials from and pass them onto Helô and Bahia. They, in turn, use all these materials to create new pieces to be sold at a local market, fairs, and conventions.

The following conversation emerged when Helô and Bahia were participating in the abstract painting workshop. There were other 10 participants in the art studio, but Bahia was the only man. For the purpose of this Chapter, however, I focus only on what Helô and Bahia have to say. It is important to highlight here that the episode I present next unfolded just a few weeks prior to the elections for São Paulo City Councilors. Here, I invite my readers to observe how Helô and Bahia negotiate their perceptions in and around a women's circle during a sewing workshop facilitated by the City, and through a feminist lens, I will make sense of what they are saying to explore how their conversation can contribute to the field of Social Movement Learning.

**Bahia:** *I quit the course. That one led by the women, because they would arrive here, and instead of sitting on a <<<sewing>>> machine and think of something to do. You know what I mean, Have a though, say something like, look, create something and show it to their peers, but they don't. They start gossiping. Real gossip.*

**Helô:** *Yes, because in every women circle is like that.*

**Bahia:** *We have the time to work and the time to sit and articulate. We both and our group to chat.*

**Helô:** *To have ideas.*

**Bahia:** *Yeah! To have ideas. That is where good things come from. It is when we sit around and have a good dialogue.*

**Helô:** *With no disagreement*

**Bahia:** *Otherwise – Looking into other people's lives. Let's look into our own lives.*

**Helô:** *Well. This is how I think. I had one–. I had one experience with the women Bahia is talking about. We were a little bit separate, because we were not just involved with crafts making. We were involved with politics as well.*

**Bruno:** *What do you mean by politics, Helô?*

**Helô:** *Politics? I am always involved with it during the elections. I give my support to a candidate for our community. I work for him, why? Because I am a community leader (...) and as a community leader I try to find out about our community needs.*

Transcript annotation:

<<<>> means comments from the author

(...) means that part of the discourse was not used in the analysis

Bahia does not directly articulate which course he refers to in his opening sentence, however, one can infer that it is a course on anything that deals with sewing,

since he argues that he quit the course due to the fact that women that were also enrolled in that same course would not sit on the sewing machines. Rather, they would engage in something else that later on he describes as gossiping. It is clear in Bahia's opening speech that the gossiping the women were engaged amongst themselves, and most likely not involving him in the conversations, is not something graspable since, they (women) did not have a complete or a physical piece to show to their peers. Neither was it anything thoughtful, meaning intellectual. In other words, according to Bahia, the women in that circle were just minding other people's business. Hence, for Bahia, the conversation the women were having was useless talk at that time, because it was not relevant to the course they were engaged. Bahia ends his opening speech by confirming that the women were gossiping indeed. At this point of Helô and Bahia's negotiation, it is clear the male dominant discourse placing the conversation women have as just gossip, devaluing not just what the women have to say, but also the importance gossip have in Social Movement Learning. From this deceptive perspective, the women were accomplishing nothing concrete or intellectual. If this is the case, a hierarchical status is established in their discourse in which the man is placed in a higher or more intellectual position than the women. This is evident in the previous episode when Bahia states that while the women were gossiping, thus not producing anything intellectual or thoughtful, he was not. In other words, he was the only one in the room who was producing something tangible to show to the other participants (because he was not gossiping). More so, the fact that the women were gossiping upset him so much that he even did not conclude the course, and women's gossip was the only reason he presented for quitting the course.

At this moment two things happen in Bahia's discourse. He first brings forth the subject gossip to the conversation, which later on invites Helô to produce a counter-narrative to what he just said, just like a passport or a membership for her to articulate her own previous knowledge about women's circle. Second, Bahia overlooked the power of gossiping in women's circle by stating that the women just gossip. However, "gossip plays a key role in human society" (Jelasiy, 2011, p. 9), and it is not a new topic of research in the Social Sciences (Besnier, 1989; Gluckman, 1963; Haviland, 1977; Levin & Arluke, 1985; Loudon, 1961; Stirling, 1956). Historically, gossip has been perceived as double side of the same coin. On one side of the coin, gossiping is just individuals minding other people's business with, most likely, no confirmation of evidences. On the other side of the coin, there is more in gossiping that is not just talking about each other's lives, which according to Helô, political articulations were taking place during their conversation. A paradox of gossip is that it is ubiquitous, as confirmed by the previous episode, though there are numerous social sanctions against it. However, they all agree that, virtually all of us frequently find ourselves producing, hearing, or otherwise participating in some kind of gossip. Some research (Foster, 2004) argues that it is often valuable (and sometimes unavoidable) be part of such communication and to function efficiently in a complex of social environment, humans require information about those around them. Therefore they gossip.

Following, Helô confirms that the women were indeed gossiping, and she goes on by explaining to Bahia that this is a normal behaviour for that group of women, since, according to her, "every women circle is like that". Helô's statement at this point of their conversation illustrates the importance of informal women's circle, because according to

hooks (2000), in times and places where women do not have access to women's studies classes or even feminist literature, "individual women learn about feminism in groups" (p. 19), or through "word-of-mouth". According to Freire (1978) moments like this (e.g., women's circle) spark liberation and emancipation because learning happens freely, informally, and incidentally through the sharing stories and through each other's personal experiences. Even though such experiences are not characterized as gossip, in our previous episode, Bahia, unknowingly, characterized the political conversation the women were having as such. And this is exactly where gossip comes into the scene of Social Movement Learning, because it mediates dialogue amongst participants, therefore learning by people inside and outside a social movement.

Next, Bahia picks up on what Helô previously said by confirming that they do have time to work as well as time for chatting, which according to him, a time for articulations. Bahia perceives the work they perform in the sewing studio as something completely different from the conversation women were having in the room, so much so, he allocates different times for each activity (e.g., time to chat and time to work). In so doing, any conversation women were having (while at work) is devalued because it is not part of the job itself or it is not related to it, or at least, that was not the time to do so. Hence, any discourse that may emerge in the art studio, if not directly related to the work itself, is not relevant. If we insist on looking through this perspective, we take the risk of neglecting the richness of women's circle and shut close windows for dialogue, thus ignoring possibilities for teaching and learning in an environment like this.

Bahia does not detail the kind of articulation the women were having. He just identifies it as gossip. However, Helô explains to Bahia that through conversation

individuals can get new ideas, thus individual learning. In so doing, Helô begins to provide her counter-narrative to what Bahia refers to as gossip. For her, the women were sharing their stories and learning from each other and having ideas. Bahia confirms that conversation is important because it allows brainstorming amongst participants, and he completes by stating that conversation represents indeed moments of “good dialogue”. In other words, for Bahia, it is through “articulation” and “chat” that good ideas come to the surface and not through gossiping. Here, Bahia makes a distinction between gossip and something else that he calls articulation/chat, in which the former should not be encouraged in the work place because it is useless talk, whereas the latter generates good dialogue. This is evident when Bahia keeps on saying that instead of people chat about each other’s lives (gossiping), they should look into their own lives. In addition, what Bahia just said confirms that according to him, the conversation the women were engaged had little or nothing to do with the work they were performing around the sewing machines. Helô insists in her counter-narrative by offering a different perspective about the conversation that was going on amongst the women. She first announces that whatever she is going to say next is based on her own previous experience, which is a key feature in gossip conversation, because gossip is based on individual’s knowledge around the topic they are gossiping around. This is evident when she announces she *had one experience* working with that group of women that Bahia refers to. She explains that they were working separately because they were not just taking sewing classes, but also talking about politics.

Following, I ask Helô to further articulate what she means by politics. She explains it by illustrating the job she does when she is working with politics. First of all,

it is clear in her discourse that she is talking about governmental politics. This is evident when she tells us that working during the elections is a common activity she does as a community leader. She continues by explaining that she works for a specific candidate, most likely in communications and propaganda aiming to get more people voting for her candidate. This type of work is a common activity amongst community leaders and the general public during elections in Brazil. Here, Helô talks about the upcoming elections for São Paulo City Councillors they would be facing a few weeks after this conversation in the art studio. She finishes her discourse by explaining that it is her duty as a community leader to uncover the needs of her community to pass that information onto this candidate. Helô's counter-narrative brings forth a different perspective on gossiping. According to her, the women from that sewing workshop were indeed engaged in some kind of conversation that was not directly related to the workshop *per se*, but whatever they were talking about had nothing to do with minding people's business, like Bahia had previously stated. She was in fact, at that moment, performing her duty as a community leader that is mediating communication amongst a group of women who were articulating themselves to help elect their candidate, hence, talking about politics.

In sum, there are two aspects in their conversation that is worthy highlighting. First we have evidence on the male dominant discourse that establishes a hierarchy amongst men and women, where the conversation that goes on within women's circle is taken for granted. Indeed, gossip encompass what Foster (2004) calls "idle talk" or "chit chat" about one's ordinary daily life. Dunbar (2004) extends its definition by broadly defining it as conversation about social and personal topics. Etymologically speaking, gossip is mistaken referred specifically to women, and it is often used as synonymous to

“girl talk” or “women talk”, whereas it is culturally accepted, especially in Latin countries (and this is evident in Bahia’s speech) that the men, instead, just “kill some time together” or “shoot the breeze” (Fine & Rosnow, 1978), or “posturing”. These latter jargons do not even use the term “talk” in them when referring to men conversation, reinforcing the idea that men do not *talk* about people’s lives, they rather do something else when they are gathering. More so, there is no specific terminology to describe men’s gossiping in the literature. This reinforces the idea that men do not mind people’s business. In other words, they do not gossip. If this is the case, there is the distinction between women and men conversation, whereas women talk is devalued in relation to men’s conversation. However, as I have described earlier in this section, everyone independently of gender, eventually will engage in some kind of gossiping and it is indeed from these free conversation that learning takes place, because it is a co–construction of individual stories and people’s previous knowledge about the topic they share.

Second, there is the role of gossip in Social Movement Learning. Gossip plays a very important role. According to Jelasity (2011), gossip is a social phenomenon where the “*community acts as a collective intelligent*” (p. 2) and it can be an effective alternative way of spreading information when emails, pamphlets, or propaganda are not possible. Hall & Clover (2005) have argued that learning within a social movement context can happen informally and in experiential way, such as, during free conversation that may happen amongst members of a social movement, or even in a gossip circle. In other words, the previous episode illustrates alternative or experiential ways of learning, where through gossiping in a context of an arts workshop, the information is spread

through informal conversation, and brings forth people's personal knowledge and individual stories. Therefore gossip goes beyond of useless talk and it can indeed help social scientist to explore and understand what is going on in different communities of practice.

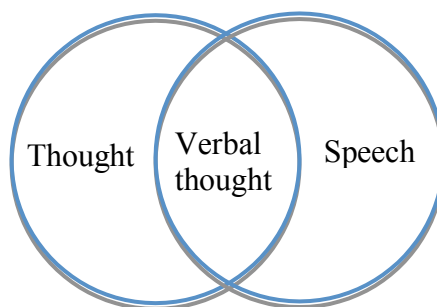
### **3.5.1 What does your art work mean to you?**

#### **3.5.1.1 Inter- and intrapersonal cognition and the construction of visual thought**

Vygotsky's cognitive development approach to understand how individuals learn within a group recognizes two processes of human cognition: *intrapersonal* and *interpersonal* (Vygotsky, 1978). The *interpersonal* (or experiential) cognition refers to the interactions between an individual and his or her environment, including other individuals as well as artefacts; for instance, the interactions between a painter and an empty (white) canvas, and all the infinite possibilities that could happen on that canvas. The interpersonal cognition develops when mental processes exist first in external and shared contexts (e.g., involving a certain community or certain artefacts), and then are internalized. In this case, individuals are active agents in their learning because they are immersed in a social context. That is, in an interactive and experiential manner, learning is mediated by the close relationships between the individual and the community he/she is part of, as well as the artifacts available (Vygotsky, 1978 & Brooks, 2005, 2009). The *intrapersonal* (or internal) cognition refers to new knowledge that is internalized, sparking an internal dialogue at a metacognitive level, and this is when critical thinking unfolds, which leads to individual transformation (Brooks, 2005). From this perspective, the intrapersonal movement is initiated by and through interpersonal movements, via *external stimuli*. If this is the case, both movements happened concomitantly,

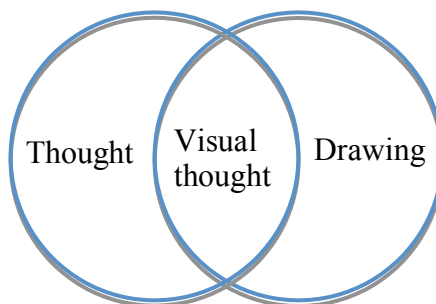
continuously, and in inseparable ways with and within the individual at any given time. Take a piano player, for example. Even though he or she may play the piano in isolation, he or she is not really participating in an *isolated individual* mental process; rather, he or she is operating within a social and historical context, because the piano itself is a cultural and historical artifact (Leont'ev, 1981, Vygotsky, 1978). The same concept is applied to the visual arts. Even if the recyclers who participated in this study were standing alone in the recycling cooperative working independently, they would be still bound to the context in which their actions are performed and to the context in which their materials (e.g. recyclables, recycling machines) are defined.

Traditionally, the interpersonal and the intrapersonal movements have been understood as primarily verbal (Brooks, 2009), since verbal language (i.e., speech) is perceived as primary mediator of communication amongst individuals in a community. In this sense, the interface between thought (intrapersonal movement) and speech (interpersonal movement) establishes what Vygotsky (1962) identifies as *verbal thought* as shown in Figure 1. For Vygotsky, verbal thought is key to human nature because once verbal thought is established within the individual, he or she achieves a high level of consciousness (Vygotsky, 1978), enabling the individual to critically think and make sense of his or her world(s). For Vygotsky, this does not mean that thinking is an intramental activity, whereas speech is vocalizing thinking. Rather, thinking and speech comprise a unit that contributes to the developmental process of the individual's learning, and is always bound to the social context. Moreover, it is within this interface (i.e., thought and speech) that thought becomes verbal (Kozulin, 1994), and speech becomes thinking.



**Figure 3.1:** Verbal thought (Bodrova & Leong, 1996, p. 97)

Although Vygotsky focused his studies on the relationship between speech and thought, he listed other tools such as symbols, algebraic systems, and the arts (Vygotsky, 1962), in which the verbal thought, thus individual learning is co-constructed. In positioning drawings as a learning meditational tool and language, Brooks (2009) extended Vygotsky's work by suggesting that drawing contributes to the formulation of thinking and meaning, and the interface between thought and drawing initiates what she identifies as *visual thought*, as illustrated in Figure 3.2. In the same way that verbal thought awakens a higher level of human consciousness, it operates in the individual's mental development by offering new and different possibilities for an extended dialogic engagement that speech cannot afford (Brooks, 2005). For instance, when the individual for any reason cannot verbally articulate what he or she has to say, then visual thought, which is mediated by the process of creating art, offers a possible tool for communication, meaning-making, and critical thinking because the arts "*uncover or create new knowledge, highlight experience, pose questions, or tackle problems*" (Clover, 2011, p. 13). In addition, such visual thought helps participants to critically think about their position in the world and to (re)imagine new possibilities for himself or herself.



**Figure 3.2:** Visual thought (Brooks, 2005, p. 81)

To understand the relationship between speech, thought, and art making, and how knowledge is created in these environments, the researcher must be able to deconstruct the discourses that emerges in these contexts. This is because discourse is indeed a central part of our lives, and what we do with others is always mediated through some kind of communication. Based on this premise, discourses amongst my research participants provides us with robust material to understand how individual learning plays out within the group to which they belong. Next, using excerpts extracted from my database, I analyze participants' discourses taking into consideration the Vygotskian cognitive development approach described above.

As an example of how the intrapersonal and interpersonal movements play out in the material world, I present the following episode that unfolded during the impressionism painting workshop. Here, I introduce Dona Telma: a 56-year-old recycler from the União de Vila Nova, and an active member of the MNCR. I had spent a whole day with Dona Telma (and 11 other recyclers in the art studio) when she uttered the following words:

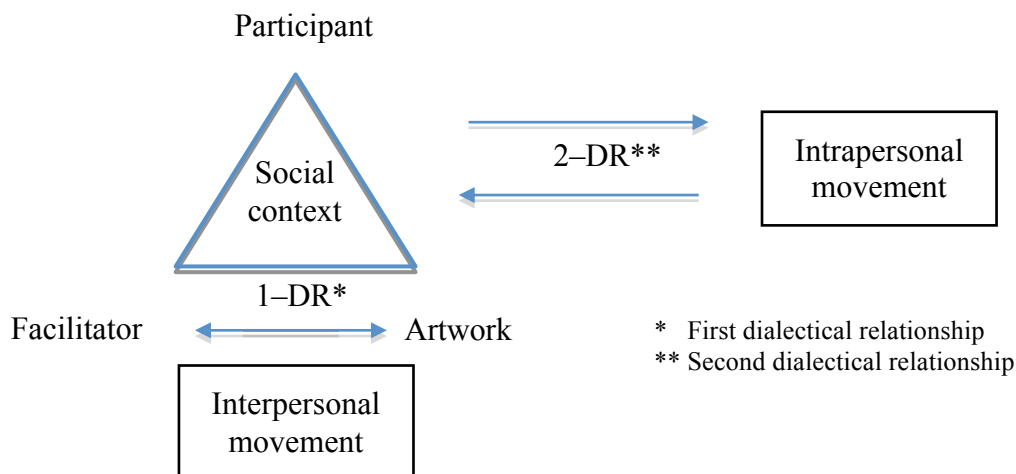
***Dona Telma:*** *I think it is very important to show that [art making] is possible by showing one [artwork] already created in addition to just saying: “art is free, you create, you invent”. You show it: “Look, a universe of possibilities.”*

At the moment that Dona Telma verbally expressed her perceptions about the abstract painting workshop, we were already approaching the end of the session, and had gathered in a circle to reflect back on our day together in the art studio, and to talk about the individual artworks created on that day. Dona Telma starts out by providing her own opinion about what was important for her during the workshop. According to Dona Telma, it is critical that the art facilitator shows one previously created artwork or a concrete/finalized piece to participants, rather than *just* talking about what can be done. Here, through her speech, Dona Telma brought forth three different and yet interrelated units: the individual (i.e., whoever participates in the workshop), the facilitator of the workshop, and an already created artwork (i.e., artefact). These three units establish a possible social context (e.g., an art studio). This social context is important because it can initiate the individual's interpersonal movement, in the same way that the piano player and his piano interact, as I described above. This is because movement often begins with an exploration of the artefact, accompanied by verbal dialogue between the participant and the facilitator (Brooks, 2005), opening up opportunities for the co-construction of new knowledge.

In addition, Dona Telma's words present us with two dialectical relationships. The first dialectical relationship evolves between the physical "artwork already created" (i.e., a concrete visual artefact), and its concept ("art is free, you create, you invent"). This first dialectical relationship helps the individual to internally construct "a universe of possibilities," because he or she would not just hear from the facilitator about this universe, but would actively help to construct this universe of possibilities through the art-making process. By articulating "in addition to," Dona Telma suggests that there is a

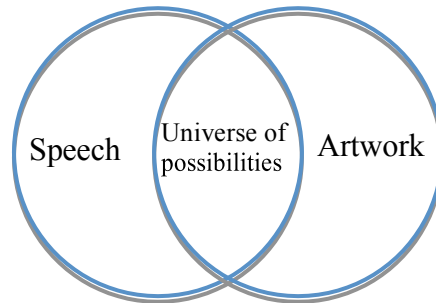
complementary relationship between the concrete visual artefact and its concept. That is, they (should) exist in inseparable ways during arts-based workshops. For Dona Telma, the complementary relationship between the concrete visual artefact and its concept, can help participants to create their own artwork, or at least to realize a universe of possibilities, because in this way, participants would have a visual reference of what is possible.

Although Brooks (2005) argues that it is difficult to perceive and to provide examples of intrapersonal movement, since we cannot see what is going on inside someone's mind, this was not the case with Dona Telma. This is because she verbally externalized what helped her during the workshop. Dona Telma was able to articulate what is important for her because she was operating within her internalized visual thought, which according to her is represented by a universe of possibilities. This universe of possibilities was established by the facilitator's speech and the artwork itself, as shown in Figure 3.3. In other words, the fact that Dona Telma verbally expressed what is important to her is evidence of her internal dialogue or her intrapersonal movement. This relationship between inter- and intrapersonal movement represents a second dialectical relationship. In other words, this dialectical relationship is in fact observed within the dynamics of the individual's intrapersonal movement in relation to the interpersonal movement; the former sparks the latter, continuously and simultaneously.



**Figure 3.3:** Intrapersonal and interpersonal movements and their dialectical relationships that mediate the co-construction of new knowledge by individuals involved in an art-based workshop.

In summary, although the interpersonal movement happens between the individual and his or her environment, thus externally and the intrapersonal movement refers to the internalization of new knowledge, they both happen simultaneously and continuously in a dialectical relationship. The interface between both movements is what Vygotsky recognizes as verbal thought. Brooks (2005) expands Vygotsky's concept of verbal thought by suggesting that the interface between speech and drawing establishes what she identifies as visual thought. In addition, whenever, for any reason, the individual cannot verbally express himself or herself, visual thought offers alternative ways of communication in a context of an arts-based workshop. In Dona Telma's case, visual thought was established after the interface between the intrapersonal and the interpersonal movement, which opens spaces to a universe of possibilities, as shown in Figure 3.4.



**Figure 3.4:** Universe of possibilities established by the interface of the interlocutor’s speech and a previously created artwork.

Finally, as demonstrated by Dona Telma’s episode, by identifying interpersonal and intrapersonal movements of individuals in arts-based environments we can understand what is really going on amongst them; how they relate to each other and how they engage with the tools that mediate their communication, the production of artworks, thus the construction of new knowledge. This can help us tailor relevant arts-based workshops that will spark meaningful dialogue between participants.

### 3.5.1.2. *Imagination and the pedagogy of possible dreams*

In this section, we illustrate the role of visual arts in mediating individuals’ transformation. To do so, I introduce Luiza, a 55 year old recycler and a former kindergarten teacher. Luiza is one of the members in a recycling cooperative located in a low-income neighborhood in the city of São Paulo. The following episode took place toward the end of the abstract painting workshop when participants and the facilitator gathered in a circle to debrief about the event they had just experienced. This is what Luiza said:

***Luiza:*** *The imagination of anyone who participates in an impressionism workshop will take [she or he] to other horizon. The dolls stayed in my imagination. Not an imagination I dreamed of, but an imagination I know it is possible.*

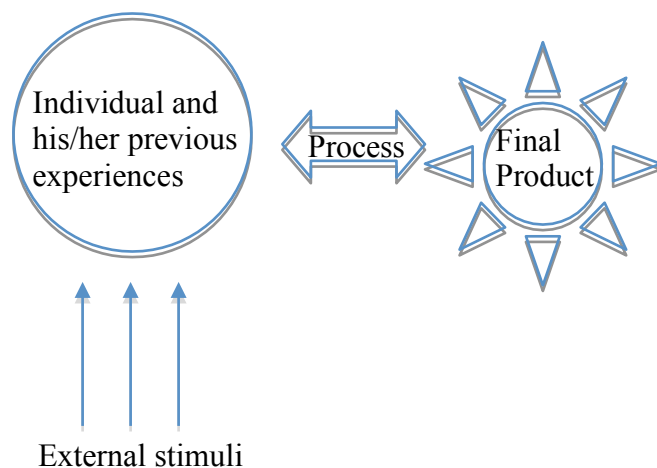
Luiza starts out by using the term “imagination”. For Vygotsky (2004), imagination refers to a resourceful faculty or action of constructing new ideas, images, or concepts of external artifacts by someone’s creative thought mediated by external *stimuli*. That is, “*the ability of our brain to combine elements*” (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 9), and this ability is mediated by our environment, such as tools and the community we are part of, as shown in Figure 3.5. In Luiza’s case, her community refers to everybody else that was part of the workshop and the tools refer to all the materials (e.g., art supplies) she used during the workshop. In line with Vygotsky’s definition of imagination, Luiza claims that one’s ability to construct new ideas can move you to another place. Here, she does not refer to a geographical place, but a state of being or an alternative way of perceiving the world: not a simple move from one place to another, but an internal individual transformation. Such transformation is possible when the individual perceives and understands his or her position in the world as an active historically situated agent of internal and external revolution; what Paulo Freire calls *conscientização* (Freire, 1978). Luiza identifies this new state of being as “other horizons.” It is important to note here that the transformation Luiza talks about does not imply that the individual loses what he or she already knows about the world and/or all the elements that constitute him or her as a human being, the individual’s previous knowledge formed by his or her history and culture. Rather, his or her views are integrated into this new experience (moving to another horizon), which in this case was mediated by the process of art making. Such mediation is evident when Luiza states that “the creativity workshop will take her to other horizons.” Seeing other horizons (*ver por outros horizontes*) in the Brazilian Portuguese language is an idiom culturally accepted as “seeing things through other perspectives” or

“different ways of seeing.” Seeing things through different lenses mediates individual transformation because it requires moments of critical reflection upon our personal interpretations of what is seen, of our milieu. And these moments of critical reflection occur when we attempt to make sense of our surroundings, taking into consideration our own culture and history (Vygotsky, 1962; Freire, 1978). In the previous episode, Luiza implies that the process of art-making that unfolded during the arts-based workshop mediates people’s critical thinking because it helps individuals to see the world through different lenses, thus leading to individual transformation.

Next, Luiza talks about her final product. By assembling recyclable materials during the workshop, she created a doll on a canvas. Here, she claims that her final product was memorable because it stayed in her imagination. Here, I can infer that the process of creating her art piece mediated her construction of internal new ideas or concepts (imagination), because as she had previously stated, the process of making art moved her to other horizons.

Then, Luiza makes a clear distinction between what is concrete (possible) and what is “dreamed of” (impossible). In Luiza’s words, everything that is unachievable is nothing but a mere dream. Once again, Luiza brings forth the word “imagination”, but this time, she explains that in these new horizons, her new ideas and concepts are concrete and therefore achievable. That is, her new ideas are “possible” to achieve. In this last part of Luiza’s speech, I can conclude on one hand that her process of constructing an artwork mediated her internal transformation because it moved her to see the world differently; and on the other hand, her artwork, as a final product, is external evidence of such transformation because her artwork materializes all the concepts and new ideas she

constructed during the workshop. In other words, it represents all the possibilities of everything she “witnessed” when she was moved to other horizons, marking her internal transformation; a kind of transformation she now knows is possible.



**Figure 3.5:** Process of individual transformation is illustrated here. In addition to an individual’s previous knowledge, she or he is also affected by external stimuli (e.g., community or art supplies), enabling the individual to perceive alternative realities. The final product is a concrete evidence of these alternative realities.

This previous episode illustrates what Freire (2001) identifies as “pedagogy of possible dreams,” which refers to a type of learning that emerges from the individual practice aiming to make “possible, what may sound impossible” (p. 27) at first glance. This type of education, through dialogue, allows the educator and his or her participants in the education process to (re)imagine another reality for themselves, perceiving alternative ways of operating in the world. The pedagogy of possible dreams is achieved through “conscientização”, which leads to individual transformation, thus social change.

There are also other three remarkable points that emerged from Luiza’s discourse above. First, there is the role of the arts in transformative learning. As alluded to above, people who are involved in transformative learning processes experience a series of meaningful events that change the way they perceive the world around them. In Luiza’s

case, for instance, her participation in the arts workshops helped her to see things differently. This is a very important event in social movement learning because social movements are spaces for learning through collective and emancipatory praxis (Welton, 2005). In Luiza's case, such experience happened when she was moved to other horizons, a non-geographical place where she was able to perceive her world differently, where an alternative reality, not just for herself, but anyone involved in the art making process was possible. The kind of transformation that Luiza experienced is often felt as a liberating process and as emancipation (often from oppressed situations) of the human spirit (Freire, 1970; Jung, 1954). Such human liberation is achieved by learning the language necessary for the individual to "name" his or her experiences and world-s (Freire, 1970; Wilbur, 1986; Scott, 2001). Luiza uses words such as "imagination," "other horizon," and "dream of" to describe her own experiences during the workshop and other worlds and alternative realities she knows are possible.

Second, Luiza's episode illustrates the role of the visual arts as research tools because arts-based research draws from what people have to say, which may not be accessible in certain situations (Silverman, 2000). For instance, if I had approached Luiza with a pre-formatted and standardized group of research questions this may have had constrained or limited what she had to say. Arts-based research opened the space and triggered free conversation amongst participants. Moreover, Pink (2001) suggests that the arts are reflections of people's different word(s). From this perspective, social science researchers can use art to get at how people see and create their own realities, the kind that Luiza calls "other horizons", which she knows are possible.

Finally, Luiza's episode contributes to the debate around two important dimensions of arts-based research: process (the act of making) and product (the resulting work) [Figure 3.6]. For Butterwick and Dawson (2006) the process and product of arts-based research represents *a more holistic approach to learning and inquiry* because arts-based research *draws on an aesthetic, non-instrumentalist orientation where the heart, mind, spirit, and body are engaged*" (p. 282). This aspect of arts-based research is evident in Luiza's story, because the process of making her doll moved her to other horizons helping her to see other possible realities, while the doll (the final product) is the materialization of these possibilities.



**Figure 3.6:** Luiza's artwork. Title: Untitled. Dimension: 50cm x 40cm.

### 3.5.1.3. Art echoes individual experiences and empowerment

The next episode I present belongs to Agostinha, a 73 years old woman, a recycler and a member of the MNCR. This episode unfolded in the context of the impressionism painting workshop as we reached the end of the work and were informally debriefing

about the day in the studio. This is what Agostinha said about her participation in the workshop:

***Agostinha:** My story is beautiful. I was able to put my story into this painting and now it is echoing everywhere and everybody want to know about my work. I will remember this forever.*

Agostinha opens her statement by acknowledging that she is proud of her story and claiming that it is beautiful. She then explains that she successfully accomplished the goal of that workshop, which was to reproduce onto the canvas a photograph she chose herself; an image that speaks to her own personal journey as a recycler (Figure 3.7). She claims that since she created the artwork, everybody wanted to know more about her story. She concludes by saying that she will never forget about her experience making art.

Although short, Agostinha's speech is insightful because it contains important clues about the importance of the arts in decreasing stigmatization suffered by the recyclers. Since her personal story has been externalized into an art form, it is now accessible to the general public, and according to her, it echoed everywhere. From an epistemological perspective, this is an important aspect of the art because it sparks curiosity about the work the recyclers do in the viewer, and generates dialogue, thus knowledge, amongst recyclers and the public about the politics surrounding the work performed by the recyclers.

From a methodological perspective, Agostinha's speech informs us that the art-making environment created a safe space in which Agostinha felt comfortable in sharing her story and acknowledging the beauty of it. This may be due to the playful nature of the workshop where participants engaged freely with the materials at hand and the other participants. In addition, Agostinha's speech is evidence that the workshop requires no

previous art experience from participants; Agostinha successfully created her artwork without previous formal art training. Finally, this art workshop was remarkable for her, perhaps because she has never done anything like it before, and therefore, she may pursue it further, even with different materials or art genres. Since Agostinha never had produced art before, this process may have moved her out of her comfort zone. Moving people out of their comfort zones is crucial because it is during those times that participants can critically think of their daily routines, an opportunity which they may not have otherwise. If this is the case, participants may pinpoint what is not working for them in their lives, and move toward a change, if they so choose.



**Figure 3.7:** Agostinha's painting producing during the impressionism painting workshop. Painting title: "Quem dera uma borboleta." Dimension: 60cm x 75cm.

### **3.6 Two epistemological conceptualizations**

The 50 recyclers who participated in this study are associated with recycling cooperatives and are members of the Brazilian National Recycling Social Movement (MNCR) in São Paulo. Although they contribute to overall environmental health they still suffer from stigmatization by the general public. This is because, historically, low-income

families do this type of work and also, such activity is often associated with “filth” as illustrated in the first episode in this Chapter.

Numerous governmental and non-governmental institutions, universities, and environmental education organizations such as the MNCR have been working closely with the recycling cooperatives, promoting capacity-building initiatives and community and participatory-action research projects (such as the one I present in this Chapter). All of these institutions not only respond to the prejudice suffered by recyclers on daily basis, but also work toward the inclusion of recyclers in public decision-making about recycling, so public policies around waste management all across the country are strengthened.

The Brazilian organizations (i.e., recycling cooperative and MNCR) that contributed to this study operate through the lens of environmental adult education, informed by feminist theories, in the sense that these two organizations work as political and educational spheres and represent openings to question hegemonic ideologies and power structures. These two organizations also bridge social-cultural-ecological issues to raise awareness within the general public that waste management and the social inclusion of recyclers is a civil right and everybody's responsibility.

My findings reinforce the idea that stigmatization is indeed a social construction and suggest that the arts can help to decrease such stigmatization as the images created by the recyclers brought forth their stories of struggle, hardship, and fight for social inclusion. This was accomplished through dialogue amongst recyclers and the general public, initiated during the art exhibit. My findings also suggest that the art-making process helps participants to socially, culturally, and historically situate themselves in

contrast with the Brazilian social context. This helps them to think critically about the power structures and the hegemonic *status quo* that produces and reproduces their social exclusion. In doing this, they can perceive a different reality for themselves. From these explorations through the arts, the recyclers constructed their visual thought, which empowered them to (re)imagine a different reality for themselves. This is evidence of individual transformation. From this perspective, two general epistemological conceptualizations emerge: human power and human agency, which are not separate phenomena, but operate internally and simultaneously, growing as the individual grows into a critical subject.

### **3.6.1 Power on dirty hands and in dirty places**

As demonstrated above, being associated with “dirtyness” is a common externalization of the discrimination suffered by the recyclers. This is because their work deals with unclean materials, often found in dumpsters. Pushing carts of recyclable materials under the Brazilian sun, operating heavy machinery in the recycling cooperatives, and having very limited access to public health does not help the recyclers to achieve a clean and groomed look. Constantly having their hands dirty, contributes to their social exclusion as illustrated in the first episode. In addition, anyone who ever visited a recycling cooperative would immediately notice the strong smell of waste. Their workplace does not always look clean, because of course it is not clean. On a daily basis the recyclers receive tons of materials that need to be washed before being reintroduced back into the stream of production. In this case, their physical workplace and ultimately, their bodies, are socially constructed spaces of marginalization. As one of the recyclers mentioned during one of the workshops: “*people look at us as we were worms.*” Such

ways of perceiving the recyclers is evidence of the lack of dialogue between recyclers and the public. Agostinha also mentioned during the workshop: *“We are caterpillars, ready to become butterflies.”* This quote inspired her to produce the art shown in Figure 3.7, a depiction of a very colourful caterpillar.

The artworks and exhibits produced during this research potentially bridge the gap between recyclers and the public because the arts do not only contain recyclers’ personal stories but they also (re)present dialogical spaces where learning happens, emotional connections are established due to the holistic and humanistic character of the arts workshops, and working networks are created. For instance, agreements between different institutions and recycling cooperatives were established after the art exhibit, so these institutions are now committed to saving and sending their recyclable materials to the recycling cooperatives.

Despite all the discrimination the recyclers suffer, they remain strong community leaders, involved in public decision-making processes, and engaged environmental agents. As one of my research participants explained during one of the arts workshops: *“I do environmental education in the schools. To me collection of recyclable materials is sustainability. We are growing as a group. We are constantly seeking new knowledge through the MNCR. The MNCR teach the recyclers about public policies and a bunch of other things that I didn’t know before being part of the movement. We have many different partners, but the MNCR is the most important in the life of a recycler.”* This is evidence of how the capacity-building initiatives promoted by social movement is catalyzes positive change in the lives of many citizens for whom collecting and selling recyclable materials represents their only source of income. Through courses on public

policies and waste management, the recyclers are empowered to take action: teach environmental education in the schools, for example. These courses also encourage recyclers to perceive their work as more than just income generation, accepting that they indeed are involved with “sustainability,” thus overall environmental health.

Empowerment of the recyclers in my study was also mediated by the arts, because it was through the art-making process that their visual thought was constructed.

Empowerment fed their agency because after the workshops they were capable of doing something that they were not able to do before.

### **3.6.2 Agency becomes visual and visual reiterates agency.**

While exploring his approach to cognitive development, Vygotsky (1978) highlights that during an individual’s learning process within a group, she or he experiences a great sense of worthiness which materializes into human agency, and this sense of agency adds imagination to individual consciousness (Kilgore, 1999). This is critical to help recyclers to imagine a different reality for themselves. By imagining a different reality, recyclers to fight and change their present. From this perspective, we can infer that agency is both socially constructed and dialectic. Agency is a social construct because, as I explained earlier, humans, even when they experience loneliness, their actions are still mediated by artifacts that are cultural and historical products, (even their thoughts), and thus social by nature. Agency is also dialectics, because the recyclers, for example, while producing their artworks were in fact, (re)producing onto the canvas their stories of empowerment. In turn, the artworks empower the recyclers because they represent newly gained skills. As one of the recyclers exclaimed while contemplating her artwork at the gallery: *“I didn’t know I could do this.”*

Finally, as active agents in their learning process, the arts help participants to perceive their environment differently. As a participant said during one of the workshops: *“We need to see beyond what our eyes can see. For example, I never noticed before that this table is divided into smaller squares, just like our mosaic. Producing art open my eyes to perceive the details, the shapes and forms. The arts open my mind. It open to new horizons.”* This excerpt illustrates that this recycler is actively (re)discovering her own world, as well as adding imagination to her own individual consciousness. And this is important to the broader context of social movement and learning because it adds values (new shapes and forms) to the work the recyclers produce, while enhancing their sense of self-worth, because now they can perceive things that they did not perceive before. In this way they can act and react upon whatever is not working for them.

### **3.7 Final considerations**

Paulo Freire once informally said in an interview that education does not change the world; it changes the individual, who changes the world. This means that in order for social change to happen, transformation must first take place at an individual level. Individual transformation was the focus of this study, because individual transformation in the literature has been explored primarily as a theory of group learning. My study reveals that individual transformation is indeed social, but without internal cognitive process, learning would not unfold. Therefore, individual and group learning happens continuously and in inseparable ways.

Moreover, due to the organic and holistic approach to the arts-based workshops described in this study, safe places were created where participants felt comfortable in sharing their deepest fears, frustrations, and hopes for social inclusion and better working

conditions as recyclers. This impact was possible because of the arts-engaged approach toward qualitative research. Even though the art workshops we presented here did not require any previous art experience from participants and facilitators, these workshops still moved people out of their comfort zones and helped them to situate themselves into historical contexts, and dream and fight for different realities.

I hope that my study inspires further research on the role of individual transformation in the context of social movement learning, and that individual transformation is no longer overlooked within the context of social movements. More importantly, we hope that that arts-based research receives growing attention in interdisciplinary research as an emancipatory and empowering tool to help understand the process of individual and collective transformation.

## Chapter Four – “Zap! I cut one of her ears off”. Epiphanies as tools in environmental adult education

*\*in memory of Dona Telma*

### **[Abstract]**

Environmental adult education (EAE) is a political educational process that invites participants to question and act upon hegemonic ideologies, aiming individual transformation to foster social change. From this definition, two questions are raised: a) how individual transformation plays out in EAE contexts? And b) what are the tools that mediate such transformation? Intertwining transformative learning theory and arts-based research in the context of a national social movement, the Brazilian National Recycling Social Movement (*Movimento Nacional dos Catadores de Materiais Recicláveis – MNCR*), this article answers these questions, not yet fully addressed in the literature. My findings suggest that epiphanies – moments of realization and self-discovery in one’s life – are important tools that mediate individual transformation. More specifically, epiphanies mediate what the popular educator Paulo Freire termed “conscientização”, and individual empowerment, help to heal negative experiences in one’s life, while enabling participants involved in the process to (re)imagine alternative realities for themselves and their communities.

**Keywords:** environmental education, recycling, individual transformation, arts-based research

### **4.1 Introduction**

Environmental adult education (EAE) is a deeply political and intentional educational process that creates opportunities to question hegemonic ideologies as a

means to construct new knowledge aiming individual transformation and social-environmental change (Baeder, 2009; Clover, de Oliveira Jayme, Fallen & Hall, 2013; Loureiro, 2004). EAE brings an ecological perspective to the studies of adult learning by underlining the deep interconnections that exist between people's everyday experiences with environmental impacts and the related political and economic destructive powers. Although these scholars provide us with a robust definition of EAE, they do not fully explore the tools that mediate such transformational process. For instance, how individual transformation plays out in the material world, as well as the tools that mediate such transformation? The present study fills this void in the literature by suggesting epiphanies (i.e., moments of realization, self-discovery and changes in one's life) as tools to map out meaningful events in one's lifetime that mediate individual transformation. Although epiphany moments have been largely explored in the literature (Denzin, 2014; McDonald, 2005; McDonald, 2008; Natali, 2011), but little research has been conducted in the field of EAE. If we are able to identify these moments of self-discovery, we can better understand the process of transformation, helping us tailor even more effective environmental adult education programs.

Through the lenses of transformative learning theory and arts-based research, I describe and articulate four epiphanies that happened in Dona Telma's life, a former sex trader who became a recycler and a powerful community leader in the city of São Paulo, Brazil. These four epiphanies unfolded throughout her life and empowered her to abandon a life of sexual and drugs abuse to become a well-known environmental agent, artist, and a strong political figure in that city. Throughout Dona Telma's epiphanies that we present further, the reader may also notice how Dona Telma's discourses evolved. It

started as simple as a mundane description of her relationship with her husband, but gained political and artistic momentum as she grew within the recycling social movement in which she was affiliated, as well as her engagement in the three arts-based workshops as part of this study. This new and evolved discourse that Dona Telma presented us is what Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) identifies as social capital. That is, the “sum of resources [e.g., speech] that accrue to an individual the possession of a durable network of institutionalized relationship of mutual acquaintance, and recognition” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, 118). In Dona Telma’s example, the social capital granted her the membership to network first with other recyclers to inspire them to be environmental activists, and second to be part of the artistic community. These four epiphanies were narrated by Dona Telma and video recorded during her participation in arts-based workshops, conducted in 2012 with different groups of waste pickers in the metropolitan region of São Paulo.

I start out by interweaving epiphanies with transformative learning theory and arts-based research and their implication to EAE broadly. Following, I introduce Dona Telma and explain why her story matters to the field of EAE. In addition, we provide a background of this study to situate the reader within the social, historical, and cultural context in which Dona Telma’s story unfolds. Finally, we present Dona Telma’s four epiphanies to illustrate her critical moments of self-discovery and empowerment while explaining how these epiphanies mediated her individual transformation and their implications to the field of EAE.

## 4.2 Environmental adult education (EAE)

Environmental adult education (EAE) emerged from the work of the International Council for Adult Education in the 1990's, as a response to the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, as well as the need of incorporating ecological and environmental issues into adult education discourses. Far from simply focusing on environmental issues, bridges social, cultural, and ecological issues is critical for EAE, because the problematic, dominant and 'normalised' ideologies that bring about inequalities and injustices cannot be truly understood if examined in isolation.

The EAE organization in which Dona Telma is affiliated (i.e. National Recycling Social Movement - MNCR), is predicated upon the ideas of "conscientização" (Freire, 1978), which refers to a type of individual transformation in which a person becomes able to recognize hegemonic social, political, cultural, and economic constraints and to act and react upon these constraints. Before one can act, one must see and understand. But environmental issues and actors, particularly people such as 'recyclers'<sup>1</sup> have been all but invisible to the larger society and therefore ignored as both people and, we would argue, as environmentalists. Freire, however, believed "conscientização" could work as a "truly liberating education" (p. 35) for those who are oppressed and ignored, as well as for the oppressors. EAE in the context of the MNCR is therefore about opening windows for new ideas, for individuals to be part of the process of building communities as visible, responsible and active subjects.

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<sup>1</sup> Recyclers are people who collect from the streets, separate, and sell recyclable materials. They are often from very low-income background. They can work informally or affiliated to a recycling cooperative, which is the case of Dona Telma.

Feminist approaches to individual empowerment and transformation (Clover, 2011) also play an important role in EAE because feminism problematizes power structures by confronting, resisting, and subverting social, cultural, and political injustices. Feminism, regardless of gender, brings forth personal experiences, social structures, and relationships, while “fostering multiple, on-the-ground responses in people to enable them to work towards more respectful, healthy, equitable and sustainable conditions” (Clover, de Oliveira Jayme, B., Fallen, S., Hall, B., 2013, p. 15). Feminist theories (de)construct and (re)configure the lives of marginalized women (and men) and help them create new knowledge and to (re)act upon patriarchal “status quo” that perpetuates oppression. Broadly, feminism empowers people that historically have had limited access to power (Moss, & Al-Kindi, (2008); Ackerley et al., 2006). From this perspective, empowerment is at the core of feminist theories, which is often initiated by epiphany moments.

For the purpose of this study, empowerment is perceived as a process in which participants have more control over the power structures that may affect how they operate in the world (Israel *et al.*, 1994; Cornwall, 2007; Nunn & Gutberlet, 2013; Tremblay & Gutberlet, 2010). Throughout this research, empowerment is evident in participants’ self-esteem and human agency for positive change. Therefore, in the context of this study, empowerment is reflected on the increase of Dona Telma’s self-confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy. This is evident in her discourse as she grows as a strong community leader, and activist through the construction of her social capital. These considerations are also supported by the literature (Kroeker, 1995; Zimmerman, 2000; Itzhaky & York, 2002; Tengland, 2008).

### **4.3 Epiphanies and Transformative Learning Theory**

Epiphanies are not a new topic of research. They have been looked, define, and refined through many epistemological perspectives, from psychology to literature (Denzin, 2014; McDonald, 2005; McDonald, 2008; Natali, 2011). In this study, however, I define epiphanies as moments of realization or revelation in ones' life. The word 'epiphany' derives from Greek meaning "to come into view" (McDonald, 2008, p. 91). And they are "ruptures in the structure of daily life (Denzin, 2014, p. 53), when "underlying tensions or problems in a situation or relationship are revealed (Denzin, 2014, p.37). Moreover, in an epiphany moment "something new is always coming into sight, displacing what was previously certain and seen" (p.1). For Unrath & Nordlund (2009) series of challenging and troubling experiences in one's life culminate in an epiphany moment in which self-discovery and empowerment takes place. These moments emerge from "sudden discontinuous change, leading to profound, positive, and enduring transformation through reconfiguration of an individual's most deeply held beliefs about self and the world" (Jarvis, 1997, p. V). MacDonald (2008) too agrees that an epiphany is a "profound illumination of self-identity" and "an experience made significant and enduring by the ascription of personal meaning" (p. 89). In other words, epiphanies mediate people's meaning making in the world and empowerment, leading to individual transformation. The concepts around epiphanies I explore further as my data analysis evolve.

The process of individual transformation received much attention in the early 1970's. By describing the process of individual transformation, Jack Mezirow developed the transformative learning theory [TLT] (Mezirow, 1991). This theory of transformation

is the epistemology of how people become critical adults by learning to think for themselves, rather than just acting upon the assimilated beliefs, values, feelings, and judgments of others (Mezirow and Associates, 2000). Thus, it is a process where people change in significant ways by taking into consideration their previous experiences, including their epiphanies, their history, and culture (Scott, 2001). Moreover, TLT addresses the ways in which we “negotiate and act upon our own purposes and meanings, rather than those we have uncritically assimilated from others” (Mezirow and Associates, 2000 p. 8). People who are involved in transformative learning processes may experience epiphanies, or in other words, a series of events so meaningful in their lives that old ways of thinking no longer apply (Scott, 2001), because they find themselves in rapidly and dramatically changing circumstances (Gabriel, 2008; Mezirow, 1995).

Much research has extended the work of Jack Mezirow (Daloz, 1986; Boyd and Meyers, 1988; Kegan, 1994; O’Sullivan, 2012; Dirkx, 2000; Tisdell, 2003). These scholars have considered TLT as lifelong journeys, taking into consideration contextual influences such as feelings and holistic (including spiritual) ways of knowing, and how it mediates the construction of individual identities. The spiritual aspect of individual transformation was evident in my studies and we articulate it further. Moreover, concepts of “conscientização” (Freire, 1978), as alluded to the above, have expanded TLT into an even more political, participatory, and emancipatory framework.

#### **4.4 There is something about Dona Telma I need you to know: Research participant and context**

Dona Telma was 56 years old when I first met in 2012 at the headquarters of the National Recycling Social Movement (MNCR) in São Paulo–Brazil. At that time, I was a

recruiting members of that social movement to participate in an arts-based research project as part of the first author's doctoral studies. She volunteered her time to participate in this study. That year, Dona Telma was working as a recycler in a local recycling cooperative. As part of her duties in the cooperative, Dona Telma used to collect from the streets, separate, and sell recyclable materials, reintroducing these materials into the production stream through the recycling industry (Gutberlet & de Oliveira Jayme, 2010; Gonçalves, 2005). Although contributing to an overall environmental health, the recyclers, including Dona Telma, still represent one of the most oppressed and vulnerable groups of the population (Tremblay & de Oliveira Jayme, 2015) because their work is often associated with "filth". However, working as a recycler is a survival strategy for thousands of low-income marginalized families because recycling represents the main income generation for them, and this is not different for Dona Telma.

The recycling cooperative where Dona Telma works is affiliated with the MNCR, an environmental adult education organization, which through participatory capacity building initiatives, helps to strengthen the recycling cooperatives affiliated to this social movement and empower recyclers with the ultimate goal of promoting their social and economic inclusion. The MNCR is one of the largest social movements in Brazil with approximately 60,000 associated recyclers (Gutberlet, 2011). To overcome marginalisation of the recyclers, the MNCR along with numerous recycling cooperatives engage them and the general public in dialogue around social and environmental issues that affect recyclers' livelihoods. These conversations help to create collaborations with the government and with non-governmental sectors, creating opportunities for inclusive

solutions to solid waste management (Gutberlet, 2015). In addition, in the last decades, these dialogues have been mediated by arts-based projects, (including the one we present in this paper and other participatory action research projects) in which Dona Telma is an active participant. All these initiatives have opened new spaces for sharing the stories of the recyclers, and thus for knowledge creation and mobilization (Gutberlet, 2015). This belief in the power of EAE across sectors forms the foundation of the MNCR and the formation of recycling cooperatives and recycling cooperative networks. These two environmental adult education and advocacy organizations work most closely with recyclers to challenge power structures that are non-democratic and empower recyclers as political actors in Brazil (Gonçalves, 2005).

Being a strong community leader and an MNCR representative was not always the case for Dona Telma. Before getting involved with the recycling industry, she used to run a meat shop in her home town in the State of Pernambuco in the Northeast of Brazil in the late 1970's. However, a series of events, which we articulate further, forced her to abandon the meat shop and move to São Paulo, the Southeast of Brazil. Upon her arrival in São Paulo, Dona Telma worked as a maid, but that job did not last long. Soon, she found herself living on the streets, where she became heavily involved with narcotics and where she also became a sex trader. At that time, she was also involved with robbery, leading her to spend 12 years in prison.

Within this short overview of Dona Telma's life that I provided in the previous paragraphs, three questions can be raised: What are the tools that mediated her individual transformation (leaving a life of prostitution and drug addiction to become a powerful political figure)? How does such individual transformation "look like"? and What can we

learn from her story? To answer these questions, I consider epiphanies as important tools to uncover individual transformation. Therefore, I explore Dona Telma's moments of realization, self-discovery, and empowerment. In this case, Dona Telma's story matters and it matters a lot to the field of EAE because her story is not an isolated phenomenon, and it was not chosen randomly. In fact, her story is very important because it best exemplifies everyday situations that real people may find themselves immersed in when they are engaged in arts-based and EAE practices. In this light, Dona Telma's story can inform future arts-based workshops and environmental adult education programs. Moreover, if understanding one's epiphany moments, we can further explore all the events that lead to personal empowerment and discovery, thus uncovering the process of individual transformation, which is critical to EAE.

#### **4.5 Arts-based research**

To explore Dona Telma's epiphanies in the context of EAE, I use a research methodology called arts-based research, which is a critical and creative tool to "uncover or create new knowledge, highlight experiences, pose questions, or tackle [social] problems" (Clover, 2011, p. 13). Like EAE, arts-based research is also about generating trust so participants feel comfortable in sharing their stories, and inspiring individual and collective imagination for empowerment and transformation. Artistic approaches in EAE research "uncovers biases, power relations and ideological obfuscation that people cannot or may not even want to see" (Clover, Stalker, & McGauley. 2004, p. 282). What this means is that at the heart of arts-based research is empowerment, and this was very important to my study (Gallo, 2001; Wang & Burris, 1994). Empowerment in the context of the present study, refers to an individual process in which the person critically thinks

about the power structures that constrain their lives so they can deconstruct such power relations enabling them to operate differently in the world. All of these created a safe place for Dona Telma to share her story without being judged or criticized, while bringing forth issues around EAE that may not have emerged in a different research context.

Over the course of seven months, three different types of arts-based workshops (abstract painting, impressionism painting, and mosaics) were conducted in public spaces, such as public libraries and community centers, involving 50 recyclers from the metropolitan region of São Paulo, including Dona Telma. A question that guided the art-based workshops was: What does it mean to be a recycler and what are the challenges recyclers face? My aim in particular was to use their artworks to help them verbalize their personal stories of self-transformation, making visible the importance of their work to the public with the ultimate goal of decreasing the prejudice they suffer, in view of their work with waste. By way of using creative and arts based tools, now also in Human Geography, new ways of knowing and exchanging knowledge are applied, often with foci on social and environmental justice issues. Thus new ways of organising the research as well as anti-oppressive, community engaged scholarship help disseminate co-created knowledge, contributing to social and environmental action. In this context, Dona Telma's epiphanies surfaced.

#### **4.6 Data collection and analysis**

To explore the role of epiphanies in EAE, I designed and facilitated three different arts-based workshops: abstract painting, impressionism painting, and mosaic. Other 49 recyclers affiliated to the MNCR participated in this research project, and Dona Telma

was one of them. Dona Telma volunteered to participate in this research project when I first presented this project to her in 2012 during a recyclers' meeting at the MNCR headquarters in São Paulo. The workshops happened once a week, from March to September of 2012. The duration of each workshop depended on their nature, location, and date, ranging from one to two days, and approximately four hours per day. The goals of these workshops was to teach three art techniques to those interested in learning how to express themselves through an artistic form, and to create a mobile art exhibition of their works.

The first workshop taught abstract painting. Incorporating an assemblage of recyclable materials, modeling paste, and acrylic paint, recyclers created unique images that illustrated their experiences working in the cooperatives. Throughout the workshop, we kept asking: "What does this object represent to you? Why did you decide to assemble those objects in that way? What do those images mean to you?" These questions kept the conversation flowing and mediated recyclers' thinking about what they were creating. The final artworks embodied their stories of poverty and oppression, but above all, stories of their fight for social inclusion. Finally, recyclers described their artworks and reflected on their creative process.

The second workshop focussed on impressionism painting. For this workshop, participants brought photographs from magazines, newspapers, or personal family photo albums that they felt emotionally connected to. These images were spread onto a table, and they chose one image, so they can use this chosen image to later on, produce their own artworks. We also asked them the reasons they chose that specific image. Their artworks were powerful and visually voiced their stories.

The third workshop focused on mosaics. For this workshop, each recycler received one square of canvas and painted symbols or words that responded to the overall theme “what it means to be a recycler and what are the challenges you face?” Once painted, the squares were assembled together forming a unified image. Later, during the art exhibits, the recyclers reproduced the mosaic technique with gallery visitors by asking attendees to paint their impressions about the art shows.

Once I completed all the workshops with the recyclers, seven art exhibits to showcase the artworks produced by the recyclers during these workshops were set up and travelled to three cities: São Paulo (one public library, two City Halls in two municipalities [Ermelino Matarazzo and São Paulo City], one public square, and one public elementary school); Rio de Janeiro (one exhibit during Rio+20 Conference); Londrina (one exhibit during the MNCR Conference). At the exhibits, the paintings were hung onto easels or carefully laid on the floor, enabling visitors to mingle amongst them. A mosaic-making station was set up on the side with paint and brushes so visitors could visually express their impressions about the artworks. Dona Telma helped to facilitate all the mosaic-making stations by engaging visitors in conversation around the themes presented in the paintings. Music, food, and performers contributed in making the Recycling Stories a lively space.

During the art exhibits, visitors were able to interact with Dona Telma in person. Most of the conversation regarded the politics of her work as a recycler, her experiences in producing art, and her role as a community leader. In the next section, I present four stories told by Dona Telma during the art-based workshops and art shows. These four stories represent four epiphanies that mediate her individual transformation.

The workshops and art exhibits described above were video and audio recorded and was used as y primary data source. My secondary data source was formed by my observations recorded in the field notes. These written observations explained and/or highlighted any pertinent event, conversation amongst participants, and public reactions and voices during the exhibits. These observations were written during and after the workshops and exhibits. In so doing, my memories were still “fresh” about the events that had happened during the data collection. Photographs of all the artworks produced in this study are also part of the data corpus. Although my data corpus is formed by hours of conversation amongst participants, the general public and workshop facilitator,, I present here, just the episodes that illustrate Dona Telma’s epiphanies. This is due not just because of space constrains of this publication, but also because the following episodes clearly illustrate how epiphanies mediate individual transformation in the context of EAE and arts-based workshops.

Recorded sections that illustrated Dona Telma’s epiphanies were further fully transcribed and translated. I used discourse analysis (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Roth & Alexander, 1997) as an analytical tool for interpreting the transcripts. Discourse analysis is the study of language in use, in the sense that language, in the same manner of EAE, cannot be understood apart from the context in which it is used, thus the researcher must be able to understand the context in which discourses are performed.

Throughout the three workshops, Dona Telma created two artworks (abstract and impressionist painting) and collaborated in the production of seven mosaics. Her artworks became part of seven art exhibits.

#### 4.7 Dona Telma's epiphanies

This first episode emerged during free conversation amongst participants at the beginning of the abstract painting workshop. Their conversation was about the places they came from and how they ended up working as recyclers. Following, I present the first excerpt extracted from Dona Telma's discourse in which she talks about her relationship with her ex-husband and her motivation for leaving her hometown and move to São Paulo.

##### [Epiphany 1]: The fleeing: "Conscientização" and empowerment

*"I was 17 and he was 23 when we got married. We had three kids, but just one is still alive. We ran a meat shop in Pernambuco<sup>2</sup> and we worked well together. He had a little bit of money, but he did not want to grow with me, raise a family. He just wanted to spend money. When I was pregnant with our last child, he used to hit me a lot. He used to drink a lot and I was very naïve and never did anything about it. He hit me so much when I was pregnant for nothing and even more after giving birth. He used to have a lot of women, and I was always mad about that. I was so angry that he would almost kill me one night and I would, in the following day, find his women and hit them as well. I wanted to get blood out of his women. That's how mad I was. After a while, I would show up to work and he would not. I would start working alone, and do everything alone. He would arrive at home drunk at the end of the day. He would hit me again and would want to have sex with me at night. He hit me and I thought that was absurd. It was not fair. He would hit me and then wanted to sleep with me. Since I was his wife, he wanted me to have sex with him no matter what; even with my face covered in blood. And that would spark hate inside my heart and he would hit me again. So every time he hit me, I would go out and hit his women. One day, at the meat shop, I saw an older lady negotiating some meat with him. She got the meat she wanted and did not pay for it. I thought that was strange. Later on I found out that that was the mother of one of his women. He was supporting this other family, the whole family. They never paid for the meat they bought. That day I said to myself: 'you know what, I'm gonna leave him, I can't do this anymore'. And I promised to myself that I would leave my mark forever in one of his women. So, one night, I took my kids and brought them to his mother's and I told her that I would go into town to do some work and would come back later to get the kids. But, while I was away he went there with one of his women, took my kids and ran away. When I went to pick them up, they were gone. I went crazy. I felt so lost. I didn't know what to do. So I put some clothes in a bag and came to São Paulo and stayed with one of my sisters who lived in Carapicuíba. And I stayed there for three years. But I was missing my kids. So, I decided to go back to see them. When I got there, he did not allow me to see my children. So I*

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<sup>2</sup> State in the Northeast of Brazil.

*waited for him to leave the house and I walked in his house with a knife in my hand. I saw his new woman there. She did not notice me. I grabbed her head from her back and with the knife, 'zap!' I cut one of her ears off. I saw her ear on the floor. So, I had to run away to avoid going to jail. And again, I came to São Paulo and this time for good."*

Dona Telma was born and raised in the state of Pernambuco, in the Northeast of Brazil. She got married at the young age of 17 to a slightly older man, who seems to come from an higher social class than her. Together, they ran a small business, which according to her, worked well together. However, such working dynamics changed as her husband started to invest his day time in drinking, leaving her running the business on her own. In addition, from the episode above, one can gather that they had different goals or perspectives in life. On one side, Dona Telma wanted to raise a family, meaning having children. On the other side, her husband, "just wanted to spend money". Dona Telma did not quite articulate where/how/what her husband was spending money on, but one can infer that that had nothing to do with raising a family, even though they had three children after all. Throughout her third pregnancy, she suffered violence from her husband who spanked her especially when he was drunk. Up to this point in Dona Telma's story, she has not taken any action to change her situation of violence, because according to her, she was "naïve", meaning she lacked experience, wisdom, judgment or she was just innocent, even though her situation was getting worst. It is also very clear in her discourse that she was completely aware of the love affairs her husband was having with other women, so much so, she was angry about it and wanted to hurt those women.

Her relationship with her husband evolved, and so the violence she was suffering at home, which escalated to sexual violence. Although at any moment she did not use the word "rape" to describe those sexual encounters, she was clearly being sexual abused

because they were having sexual intercourse carried out forcibly or under treat of injury against her will. This is evident when she utters: “that was absurd”, “it was not fair”, and even “he wanted to have sex with me even with my face covered in blood.” At this point, she started reproducing outside, the violence she was suffering at home by physically hurting the women her husband was having affairs.

These series of events in Dona Telma’s life highlighted in the previous paragraphs were so meaningful in her life that culminated in one epiphany when she found out her husband was financially supporting another family while preventing her from seeing her children. That moment of realization and discovery, empowered her to act in ways that would change her life completely: she cut someone’s ear off and had to flee her hometown to avoid being prosecuted.

If I simple narrow the above episode to the moment in which Dona Telma attacked someone else with a knife, in other words, ignoring her social context and the series of events that led to that moment, one could perceive Dona Telma as a bad or insane person; someone that would need psychological treatment, and probably not able to function in society. But if I take into consideration all the power structures, her long history of sexual abuse, and her relationship with all the members of her community (e.g., abusive alcoholic husband, children, and a mistress) in that specific time and place one start to perceive Dona Telma as product of her own environment. That is, we, as human beings, in Goethe’s words (cited by Vygotsky, 1989, p. 67) have “nothing within ourselves. All that is in us, is what is outside us”, and Vygotsky (1989, p. 67) explains that “we become ourselves through others” and through our social interactions throughout our lives. In other words, who we are as human beings is co–constructed by

and bounded to the context in which we are part of. For instance, in the midst of being betrayed, spanked, and sexual abused by her husband, and having lost contact with her children, Dona Telma had an epiphany: “I’m gonna leave him. I can’t do this anymore.” In Freirian words, at that very moment of self-revelation and empowerment, Dona Telma achieved a high level of “conscientização”, because she realized that old ways of operating in the world (being exploited and abused by her husband) was no longer working for her. Therefore, she transformed. Dona Telma was empowered to deconstruct and reconfigure her life by assuming more control over her life, in ways in which she first understood and second transcended patriarchy structures. In so doing, she was able to move forward into a new life as she developed self-awareness, recognizing her human agency for positive change, thus individual transformation.

**[Epiphany 2]: The Streets, the train station, cheap hotels and a divine encounter: the geography of individual transformation**

The following episode unfolded in the context of the abstract painting workshop.

Here, Dona Telma highlights important events that happened to her upon her arrival in São Paulo and her first years living in that city.

*“I was in my late 20’s when I started to meet people here, girlfriends, young men, older men. We just chatted. I told them I worked as a maid. We exchanged numbers. And on weekends, someone always phoned me and said: “are you coming out on Sunday? Wanna hang out? We could go to the park instead”. Then I started to know São Paulo. We started to go places. However, in the middle of all of this, I started to drink beer. Someone would arrive, sit beside me, and we would start to chat. Things would start growing, and that’s when I faced prostitution for the first time. Suddenly I was hanging out here all the time, and immersed in all the marginalization that happens here at the train station. There were the orgy nights, the bars, and I would come here and would not go back to work. I would sleep in one of these cheap hotels. In the morning I would take a shower, find a man to buy me something and would ask him: “wanna come over and check my hotel room?”*

[...]

*“We didn’t have much money to buy crack- cocaine, so we would make it our own. I would get the cocaine and mix with a table spoon of ammoniac, cook it, turning it into a*

*stone, so we could smoke it. It was always too strong. When I was high, I would do the hell I wanted [...] I would do anything without thinking first. I wouldn't think about my human condition. Wouldn't think about my family. Didn't think about a thing, really. My life turned into this. I forgot I existed. Just the drug existed. Living here [on the street] was my existence [...] Back here, it used to be a house. The marginalized women's house. We could go there and have a shower, eat, have a coffee, and do some crafts. Some women chose to stay all day long there. There, I met a woman called Odete. She was the coordinator of this house. So, instead of being on the streets during the day, Odete let do some crafts. I used to love it and I was already teaching other women some crafts at that house. So, I would get free lunches, shower and some clothes. I would do my hair and nails. So, I would spend the days in the house, but would always come back to "cracolândia" at night. I was clean, well dressed, cute, with perfume. All the men would come after me, and I started to make a lot of money [out of prostitution]. That's when I started to learn how to deal with drug dealers and the pimp. And I spent 19 years of my life here on these streets, this train station, in those cheap hotels. The thing that marked my story here at "cracolândia", with crack on the streets, sleeping on these floors, was this hotel. It was my life. Because I've been arrested so many times here, but always come back here."*

*[...]*

*One of my worst memories was when I had to tear a garbage bag to find food. That moment I felt like that garbage bag. I felt like I was the garbage of life.*

*[...]*

*That morning, I smoked so much crack. I remember the sun shining on my head. I was high and walking down this street here when I saw a cop. He stopped me. He said I couldn't go further. I said: 'yes, I can'. I remember when I said that, I stepped on the road and a car came very fast and hit me and through me in the air. My body fell on the top of another car. The last thing I saw was a very bright light. Almost like God was talking to me. I broke one arm and one leg. They took me to the hospital. After that accident I couldn't come to the streets anymore. My body was completely broke. Then, I went to seek help in a support home. I found it and I was living in this home. They cured me. They freed me [from the drugs]. I started seeing a psychologist.*

Dona Telma started out by narrating events of her life when she just arrived in São Paulo in her late 20's. That time, she was working as a maid, but weekends and days-off she would spend at a park near the train station. There, she made her first friends who kept inviting her to get to know the city. In the midst of all these discoveries in, around, and about the new city, Dona Telma started to drink, which apparently, soon became out of control. According to her, at that same time, she also became a sex trader. She did not quite articulate the reasons she turned to prostitution (or even whether it was her own

choice), but one can infer that it was because she was no longer going back to her primary job as a maid. This was maybe a result of being already too involved with “orgies” and “marginalization” around the train station <sup>3</sup> with high levels of criminality. So, Dona Telma did not have time to go back to her former job. One thing is clear however, prostitution became a common activity for her. This is evident when she explained that she would spend the nights in cheap hotels and would find someone else to pay her bills the following day.

Next, Dona Telma declared her involvement with narcotics. She claimed she had to produce her own drugs because she could not afford [pure] cocaine. Whenever she was under the influence she would not consider anything and anybody, not even her own life: “I forgot I existed.” At that point she was already living on the streets.

Later, Dona Telma commented about the “marginalized women house”. She did not explain what that place was and how it operated, but one can conclude that it was an NGO for support women at risk. This is evident because Dona Telma explained that the women in that house were fed, had showers, and learnt some kind of craft. Although Dona Telma was a regular in that house, that did not prevent her from also being on the streets, where her involvement with prostitution and narcotics reached bigger proportions to the point she was searching for food in the garbage.

These series of events highlighted above culminated in an epiphany after a car accident she suffered. After having arms and legs broken and spending time in the hospital, thus, not able to be on the streets anymore Dona Telma herself, decided to seek

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<sup>3</sup> Estação da Luz train station: Since the end of the 19th century a neighborhood, characterized by mostly low-income, dense and substandard rental housing (cortiços), homeless, unemployed and drug dealers and consumers (e.g. the famous cracolândia or crack-land)

treatment. At that moment, Dona Telma realized she no longer could function on the streets not just because her “body was completely broken”, but also because she had an encounter with some kind of a divine form. Previous research (O’Sullivan, 2012; Tisdell, 2004) have explored the role of spirituality in people’s emancipation and individual transformation. Spirituality, in the context of this study, refers to a connection to what is experienced and culturally accepted as a Lifeforce, God, a higher power or purpose; a sense of wholeness, healing and interconnectedness (Tisdell, 2004). Additionally, Tisdell (2004) explains that spirituality is part of human experience and culture, therefore, it should not be taken for granted when it comes to research on EAE and individual transformation. This is because the “connection between spirituality and social transformation challenges systems of oppression by bringing forth human experiences” (p. 2). For instance, the possible experience Dona Telma had with some kind of divine form, or what she calls God and “very bright light” may have empowered her to seek other ways of operating in the world, or in other words, as we explore further, different ways of seeing things. Dona Telma had an spiritual epiphany, therefore she transformed. Her transformation is evident when she assumed she started seeing a psychologist for healing. Such epiphany mediated her freedom from drug addiction, and helped her to realize that living the oppression of the streets and working as a sex trader was no longer working for her. From that moment on, Dona Telma once again started to operate differently in the world.

Insofar, Dona Telma’s epiphanies are around her personal freedom and liberation. Politics, environmental education, and the arts was not yet part of her discourse, maybe because she neither had hitherto any training in arts, other than the crafts making at the

“marginalized women house”, nor had she any involvement with the MNCR, which happened just later in her life. Her engagement with the MNCR as well as her participation in the arts-based workshops helped her to acquire a new and polished discourse about her work as a recycler and artist. The process in which such new discourse is co-constructed is what Vygotsky (2004) identifies as verbal thought. For Vygotsky (2004), verbal thought is formed by two parts: the speech and the thought. This is evident in the next excerpt in which the speech refers to Dona Telma’s environmental education discourses acquired through capacity building initiatives promoted by the MNCR and the thought refers to the ways in which she perceives herself as a proud recycler and artist. According to Vygotsky (2004), the verbal thought is key to human nature and it plays an important role in individual transformation, because it is through the verbal thought that the individual can reach a high level of conscientização. This enables the individual to critically think and make sense of his or her world(s). The visual thought, as I articulate next, can also work as a community membership, granting the speaker, in this case Dona Telma, to take position within different communities and inspire members from these communities to take action upon constraints that hinder their livelihoods. In the following example, I show how the visual thought can operate within the context of EAE.

**[Epiphany 3]: Epiphany mediating dialogue about politics of recycling and recycling of politics**

This episode unfolded during a final debriefing at the end of a mosaic workshop. Here, participants are discussing their working conditions and their desire for change. This is what Dona Telma said during the conversation:

*“I do not agree with recyclers pushing carts, we are in a huge city, which produce a huge amount of waste. I think that those recyclers who have a “closed mind” he or she has the obligation to open it. We should not have to do the collection with carts. Whoever approaches us offering us carts, we must say no. What we really need is a truck or an electric car. We want the best [equipment] because our city offers us 7000 tons of recyclable materials per day and it is impossible for us to collect it all in carts. So, we need to start perceiving ourselves as entrepreneurs, because we are entrepreneurial women, and women entrepreneurs have to study, have to learn, she needs to open her mind and realize she is an entrepreneur woman. I am an entrepreneurial recycler. I am proud to be an entrepreneur in recycling.”*

*[...]*

*“If we do not take action, all these recyclable materials will be sent to the green power plant. We need to say no to incineration, but from all the conversation behind the scenes of the politics that we are hearing, myself, as a community leader and a representative of the MNCR in my community, I know that they want to burn our materials. But we will say no. We took so many courses and workshops at Instituto Polis, and we learnt it, so we can fight against incineration. Our working materials cannot just be incinerated. The City needs to help us to teach other recyclers to work with environmental education, because we are way more than recyclers, we are environmental agents, because we clean the planet, but we need more support.”*

*[...]*

*“We need social inclusion. We need them [City] to have a closer look into the cooperatives, and mostly, for those recyclers who are working on the streets and on the margins, because they are out there suffering, living under bridges, just like me, a few years ago. They sell all their work to the middle man. I want some kind of politics that includes them as well, bringing them to the cooperatives; some politics that teaches them, take care of their health, and educates them.”*

This preceding episode unfolded many years after the divine encounter and the car accident that mediated Dona Telma’s decision to seek help and abandon her life on the streets, her drug abuse, and prostitution. She was 56 years and already working as a recycler when she verbalized the above.

Dona Telma started out her discourse by providing her own opinion about the outdated equipment recyclers use to perform their work. She explained how obsolete the carts they use to collect the recyclables are, because these carts cannot handle the amount of garbage that is produced by the city. Ideally for her, the recyclers would need trucks or electric cars to help them to do their job in a more effective way. Dona Telma also called

out her colleagues to perceive the work they perform differently. She suggested their work goes beyond just collecting, separating, and selling recyclable materials, meaning they are environmental agents also responsible in promoting environmental education. This is evident when she utters: “to teach other recyclers to work with environmental education”. Dona Telma accomplished her invitation by suggesting that the recyclers should open their minds. Opening someone’s mind, in the Western world is culturally understood and accepted as a way of perceiving things from a different perspective. For Vygotsky (2004), mind opening refers to a resourceful faculty or action of constructing new ideas, images, or concepts of external artifacts by someone’s creative thought mediated by external *stimuli*. In the episode above for instance, these external stimuli can be represented by Dona Telma’s speech itself, because she is offering an invitation to other recyclers to perceive their work beyond the recycling cooperatives, and they are in fact social activists.

For Dona Telma, the recycling cooperative is indeed an entrepreneurship, and they should all be proud of the work they do. However, to become a proud recycler, she suggested they needed to study as well as seeing things from different lenses, as alluded to the above. She did not fully explain what those courses could be, but later on she mentioned courses at Polis Institute (Instituto Polis), an NGO dedicated to teaching and learning about public policies, human resources and small business logistics and management. Therefore, Dona Telma possibly is talking about capacity building workshops. Here is an evidence of yet another epiphany from Dona Telma, because it was through these capacity building initiatives that she “learnt” to fight against public policies that constrain her work as a recycler, for instance the new green power plant

project. It was also through these courses and workshops that she gained the vocabulary/discourse to inspire other recyclers to do the same.

Additionally, Dona Telma invited her peers to take action upon the new politics around the final ending of the recyclable materials, in which the City plans to install what is known as waste to energy plants to incinerate recyclable materials. This is very problematic for the recyclers because these power plants would destroy their main source of income. This is evident when Dona Telma claimed: “our working materials cannot just be incinerated.”

Dona Telma ended up her speech by stating that the recyclers need more support from the City, because they are at risk; some of them are still living on the streets (under bridges). She also demanded new and more inclusive politics that also include those recyclers that are not affiliated to any recycling cooperative, so they can be educated to switch their working dynamics and affiliate themselves to a recycling cooperative.

Finally, as an epiphany moment, the previous episode illustrates the evolution of Dona Telma’s discourse, meaning the co-construction of her verbal thought, and how this discourse can spark critical thinking, thus, epiphany moments in other recyclers. For instance, in this third episode, Dona Telma uses terminologies in her speech that are inherently: a) feminists, when she claimed she is a proud women entrepreneur, while inviting the other women to also perceive themselves as entrepreneurs; b) activist, when she demanded her colleagues to take action against the waste to energy plant; and c) empowered, which is evident when she said they should not be pushing carts to collect recyclable materials. These three features in Dona Telma’s discourse were not evident in excerpts 1 and 2. In other words, I can infer that the richness of the discourse above was

possible due to her engagement with the MNCR. This is evident when she explained that the recyclers, including herself, participated in capacity building courses and workshops promoted by the MNCR through the Polis Institute. All these capacity building initiatives promoted by this social movement was a turning point in Dona Telma's life because before, she described herself as a prostitute, drug addict and scavenger, and now she perceives herself as a female entrepreneur, who is proud of the work she performs. More so, through her discourse she is able to invite other recyclers to do the same. This is evident when she tells them that they have to study, learn and open their minds.

Up to now, I have presented three epiphany moments for Dona Telma's transformation by freeing her from an abusive husband as well as motivating her to leave the streets, the life of prostitution and drug abuse, and helping her to co-construct her verbal thought so she could also inspire other recyclers to seek empowerment and freedom. Next, I present the fourth and final epiphany to illustrate how the arts making process and art exhibit enabled her to perceive her environment through different lenses, thus constructing new knowledge.

#### **[Epiphany 4]: The arts mediating possible dreams**

The following episode illustrates a conversation between Dona Telma and the first author of this paper that unfolded during one of the art exhibits. In this episode, Dona Telma explained her artwork and talked about her experience as one of the art students.

***Dona Telma:** It's someone sitting in a room. I'm not quite sure what she is doing, but it makes me think about myself. If that was me, what would I be doing? I wanted to work on my painting like that one I did about the environment, that I removed everything that was pollution from the environment and leave everything clean, so in the future I can relax while someone else continue the work.*

[...]

*About this painting, there are more people interested in something similar. But know, I will have to wait for Bruno to come back to paint more.*

[...]

**Bruno:** *No. not really. You don't need to wait for me to come back. You have all the materials. You have the canvas, the paint.*

**Dona Telma:** *Yes! That's right, what is stopping me from painting? All I have to do is to choose a photograph and make another one similar.*

**Dona Telma:** *It was during the art show at the City Hall, I realized that our art is another form of income generation. It was very popular. Our word and our work as recycler was all over the place.*

[...]

*So many positive aspects, that enable our minds to fly to create. Before I wondered: "how does this work?" It was very positive. I was anxious to understand how. Bruno showed us his [artwork]. At school, we learned how to make colours, but to actually make it, it is different, right? Because at there [school] they just say that if you mix this colour to this colour you get this other colour. But now, now we got to actually do it. So, it was different, in practice, we started to understand the technique. So, it was very positive.*

[...]

*Once we learned [colour theory and painting techniques] it was so easy, because our mind started to work on its own, without you [art teacher] explaining it to us. To me, it was easier because we started to invent new colours, and when we started to invent new colours, we became more open.*

[...]

*If we haven't learned this [painting technique] we would never know that we were artists.*

[...]

*My favourite class was the colour theory, because we have to perceive beyond what our eyes can see. Before, I never paid attention to details. For example, I could be sitting here for hours and never notice that this table is divided in parts [...] You [teacher] talked about lines, and now I am here observing; everything [pointing to chairs and table] is line and squares. It opened my mind. Opened new horizons. New knowledge for us. Things that I have never dreamed of.*

Dona Telma started out the previous episode by describing one of her impressionist painting she produced during one of the workshops. The painting she described depicts a senior woman holding a book, while sitting on a chair in front of a house. Dona Telma compares herself to the women in the painting. For her, the painting is a reflection of herself in the future. She explained that she wants to keep doing a good job as a recycler so she can relax just like the lady in the picture, while the new generation continues her legacy as a recycler. In uttering "someone else continues the

work”, Dona Telma provides another evidence of her verbal thought around environmental education that establishes that caring for the environment should be a lifelong journey (O’Sullivan, 2012).

Two epiphany moments, in fact, can be perceived in this episode. The first one happened when Dona Telma explained that visitors at the art exhibit demonstrated interest in purchasing her paintings. However, she explained that in order to produce more artworks similar to that one, she would have to wait for Bruno (the art teacher) to help her with it. At this point of her speech, Dona Telma demonstrated low confidence in herself as an artist, because according to her, she could not do it alone, even though she already had participated in the painting workshop and had produced her own artworks, thus had the capability of doing it herself. Bruno cuts Dona Telma’s discourse short, by claiming that she does not need to wait for the teacher to produce more artwork, because she already had all she needed to continuing her work as an artist, including art supplies and most importantly, the skills. At that moment, Dona Telma realized that, in fact, she can produce more art and that there is nothing preventing her to do so. Such a moment of self-discovery or epiphany is confirmed in the following sentence in which she verbally repeated the process of making art: “All I have to do is to choose a photograph and make another one similar”. The fact that Dona Telma verbally confirmed this process is important for her because she is externalizing the core concept of the steps for impressionist painting she studied during the workshop, as noted earlier in this paper. Following Dona Telma’s realization that she can produce art on her own is confirmed. She indeed learned the painting technique, so much so, that she called herself an artist. Taking a closer look at this part of Dona Telma’s speech, one can notice a shift on the

way she perceives herself. Before her epiphany (the realization she learned the painting technique and is able to produce art on her own), she did not believe she could do it, whereas after her epiphany moment, she considered herself an artist. The second epiphany is evident when she explained that during the art exhibit she realized that making art can be another source of income, other than just working at the recycling cooperative.

Another aspect of Dona Telma's discourse that is important to highlight here is the fact that she considered her participation in the art workshops as a positive experience. For her, when she studied art at school (most likely elementary school, since she never entered high school), she learned about colour theory and it was through the practice, that she truly understood the process. From that moment on, painting was easier for her, helping her to unleash her imagination ("our minds started to work on their own" and "we started to invent new colours"), thus they "became more open" and able to perceive things differently ("open new horizons").

This previous episode illustrates what Freire (2001) identifies as "pedagogy or possible dreams", which refers to a type of adult education that emerges from the individual practice aiming to make "possible, what may sound impossible" (p. 27) at a first glance. This type of education, through dialogue, allows the educator and his or her participants in the education process to (re)imagine another reality for themselves, perceiving alternative ways of operating in the world. The pedagogy of possible dreams is achieved through conscientização, which leads to individual transformation, thus social change.

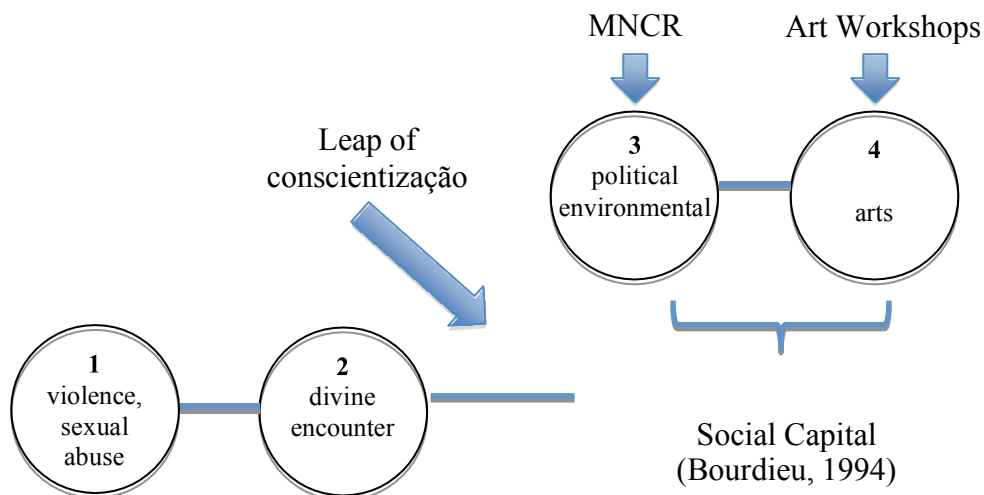
#### **4.8 What can we learn from Dona Telma's epiphanies?**

Although, little is still known about how individual processes of transformation unfold in everyday life situations, the present study is a good example of how EAE initiatives can use visual arts to spark individual transformation. This is because throughout the art making process and exhibition, participant's personal stories are shared, and knowledge is constructed and mobilized. My research extends the state of knowledge on this topic by suggesting epiphany as a tool to better understand such processes of individual transformation, thus contributing to the field of EAE broadly. To do so, in this study I describe and articulate the stories told by one recycler, Dona Telma, through four different epiphanies that happened throughout her life. These stories emerged during art workshops and exhibits in which Dona Telma was involved as one of the art students.

The first excerpt illustrated epiphany mediating empowerment and individual transformation. This epiphany exemplified the fact that individual transformation cannot be understood apart from the history, culture, and context in which it unfolds. More so, for transformation to occur, the individual needs to achieve a high level of self-awareness and empowerment, which Freire (1978) identifies as *conscientização*. In Freirian words, *conscientização* enables the individual to recognize power structures that may affect their well-being and to react upon these structures so transformation happens. The second epiphany highlights the role of spirituality in individual transformation. In this case, such process of wholeness and interconnection mediate individual transformation by healing the negative experiences in Dona Telma's life, and offering new perspectives for her. This is because spirituality connects the individual with his or her own self, while

bringing forth social dynamics that produce and reproduce oppression. The third epiphany illustrated Dona Telma's verbal thought that granted her the membership to inspire her own community to take action upon the politics that affect their work, by perceiving their environment through different lenses, or in Dona Telma words "other horizons". The fourth epiphany exemplified the moment of Dona Telma's discovery when she realized that she is able to produce art on her own and that her artworks can be an additional source of income. This fourth epiphany also suggests that participants involved in the arts making process can imagine other realities for themselves and for their communities, what Freire (2001) identifies as pedagogy of possible dreams.

Looking at these four epiphanies that unfolded throughout Dona Telma's life and narrated by her in the context of arts making workshop, one can notice a leap (i.e., change) in her consciousness as she advanced in her life, as illustrated in Figure 1. This leap is characterized by the construction of Dona Telma's social capital. That is, the discourse she needed to network with her own colleagues as well as participating in the arts workshops and (re)imagine an alternative reality for herself.



**Figure 4.1:** Circles and numbers represent Dona Telma's four epiphanies, while lines represent her discourse and level of conscientização.

In Figure 4.1, one can notice a leap on Dona Telma's discourse in between epiphanies 2 and 3, where Dona Telma's social capital is constructed. For instance, Dona Telma's discourses evolved from an ordinary narration about series of events that mediated her individual transformation, to political and artistic discourses. Dona Telma's social capital was constructed through capacity building initiatives promoted by the MNCR, Dona Telma acquired the environmental education discourses that enabled her to communicate to her peers important issues, including public policies that can affect their working conditions. These discourses of empowerment are carried on to epiphany 4, when she acquired artistic discourses that empowered her to perceive art as another source of income generation, being open to new horizons, meaning, perceiving alternative ways of operating in the world, and finally, to inspire her peers to pursue further education through the programs offered by the MNCR.

#### **4.9 Final considerations**

Epiphanies are moments of realization, self-discovery, and empowerment in one's life. These moments emerge from series of events so meaningful in one's life that old ways of operating in the world no longer work for them, therefore, they change. If this is the case, epiphanies may not be neglected in the field of environmental adult education because they mediate conscientização, empowerment, and discourses on environmental education and the arts.

Due to the organic and holist approach to the arts-based workshops described in this study, safe places were created where participants, including Dona Telma, felt comfortable in sharing their deepest fears, frustrations, and hopes for social inclusion

and better working conditions as recyclers. This impact was possible because of the arts-engaged approaches of doing qualitative research. Even though the art workshops I presented here did not require any previous art experience from participants and facilitators, these workshops still moved people out of their comfort zones and helped them to situate themselves into historical contexts, to dream and fight for different realities.

I hope that Dona Telma's epiphanies inspire other environmental adult education programs as well as participants in any other social movement. It is important not to ignore the role of epiphany moments in the process of individual transformation. More so, my research reiterates the fact that the arts continue to represent an important tool in the research arena.

## **Chapter Five – Recycling stories: Lessons from community arts-based process and exhibition in Brazil**

### **[Abstract]**

How can we create meaningful education and engagement opportunities for people who work in the recycling industry in Brazil but suffer marginalisation? This question guided the development of a series of community arts-based workshops and public exhibits in São Paulo. In this article, I share the stories of two workers from the recycling industry (i.e., recyclers), and how they experienced the potential of art-making and public exhibits. They worked in collaboration with an environmental adult education organization that aims to expose their realities of poverty and the difficult working conditions of ‘recyclers’, and fight for greater visibility and their social inclusion. The stories show the community created art exhibits constructed important visual meaning making openings, attracted broad public attention and even provided income generation for those involved in the recycling industry.

**Keywords:** arts-based adult education, community art, environmental adult education, recycling

### **5.1 Introduction**

It’s 10:00 in the morning, 22 June, 2012 in a metropolis where rush hour is every hour. There are people everywhere rushing to get to places and being shoved into public transportation. The air traffic with its helicopters is chaotic as cars and motorcycles honk their way onto the pavement. Street vendors try to sell anything they can to make a living. An audience contemplates a preacher who loudly announces: “Jesus is coming”. Sirens of police cars and ambulances are heard from kilometres away. Although it is not summer in this city, the heat is unbearable, the air

pollution is heavy, it lacks green space. The heat accentuates the stench of garbage that has not yet been collected. A group of executive men sweating inside their suit jackets ignore a panhandler begging for food.

This could be just an ordinary day in the city of São Paulo, Brazil, except that at this moment, a van drives through the crowd onto the main public square and parks in front of City Hall. Five people alight and begin unloading art supplies. A set of 12 easels is unfolded and artworks are carefully hung on them. On the other side of the square, an old bus is parking. Its door opens and a young crowd jumps out and blasts hip-hop music. Each one grabs a can of spray paint and starts to graffiti the bus. In between two light poles, a big banner has been strung, titled in bold letters: *Recycling Stories – A community created art gallery*. At that moment the chaos in that public square seems to stop, transformed now into an open air art exhibit.

In this article, I share the stories of two workers from the recycling industry (i.e., recyclers) affiliated to the National Recycling Social Movement (MNCR) in São Paulo. Through workshops, these recyclers, along with 48 others, produced artworks and curated a mobile art exhibit. Through these stories, I explore how arts-based workshops and exhibits act as spaces for environmental adult education and how these temporary exhibits work to empower people such as the recyclers; I draw on arts-based adult education and consider how it understands the potential of using the arts and I explore these alternative exhibitions as spaces of knowledge mobilisation and dialogic engagement.

Although recyclers contribute to overall environmental health by collecting, separating, and selling materials that otherwise would end in a landfill, their work is

associated with ‘dirtiness’ because they work directly with waste. This reproduces stigmatisation from the general public, leading to social and economic marginalisation and recyclers’ dis-empowerment (Gutberlet, 2011). In this context, the objective of this study is to explore the potential of using the arts and a community created art exhibit to generate dialogue between recyclers and the public around the prejudice suffered by the recyclers.

I begin this article by describing and articulating the National Recycling Social Movement (MNCR) and recycling cooperatives as environmental adult education organisations that promote recyclers’ empowerment. In so doing, I introduce the research context and participants. I then explore the role of community created art exhibitions, primary tools used by traditional art galleries, as politico-pedagogical spaces. Following this, I present two stories that emerged during the art workshops/exhibits. These stories highlight the continuum of experiences and learning that emerged from the community created art exhibit, while offering an alternative to traditional art galleries and exhibits by inviting the viewer to question who can produce art and who has the power to exhibit them. Artworks produced in this project represented recyclers’ experiences of discrimination, harsh working conditions, and hope for a better future. Our findings showed that alternative exhibits acted as mediators of dialogue and reflection amongst participants, thus individual transformation, as well as the construction of their visual thought, a process in which, through the arts making, people make sense of their environment. Finally, our findings showed that the art making process enable recyclers’ income generation.

## **5.2 Environmental adult education (EAE)**

One of the important theoretical lenses of this study was environmental adult education (EAE). This organization emerged from the work of the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) in the 1990s in response to the Earth Summit that was held in Rio de Janeiro (1992) and a deficit in ecological understandings overall in the field of adult education (Clover, 1999). Twenty years later, EAE was again the main focus of the Rio+20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro (2012), a United Nations conference aimed at poverty reduction, advancing social equity, and ensuring environmental protection. EAE has worked as a deeply political and intentional educational process that creates opportunities to question, and render visible, hegemonic ideologies as a means to promote knowledge and action for change. Far from simply focussing on environmental issues, EAE connections between social, cultural, and ecological issues is critical, because the problematic, dominant and ‘normalised’ ideologies that bring about inequalities and injustices cannot be truly understood if examined in isolation. In other words, the ideological apparatus behind environmental destruction – and for this paper the stigmatisation and marginalisation of ‘recyclers’ – is exposed when it is made visible – through art – in relation to the broader socio-politico-economic and cultural contexts in which it operates. Such hegemonic ideology, then, which justifies unfair realities for those who are exploited, can be exposed pedagogically (Clover, de Oliveira Jayme, Hall & Follen, 2012). To challenge recyclers’ marginalisation, requires that EAE be a participatory, collective process of learning that goes beyond individual behavioural change and transmission of scientific information but rather is an organization that engages with the politics of environmental destruction and broad discussions about how it

operates and its impact on people's daily lives and the entire planet (Clover, 1999). Thus the process begins with people's knowledge and experiences with recyclers and recycling as one means to create new understandings about their world(s), but it adds, as Freire and Horton (1990) suggested, new knowledge through arts-based dialogic and dialectic engagement with the complexities and contradictions of our lives. Freire also believed that new understandings and dialogue could be enhanced through the power of art and its ability to render visible these often hidden hegemonic ideologies that govern our lives. Critical to EAE since its inception has been the use of creative interventions and arts-based practices. These creative devices, used also by social movements worldwide, employ the imagination, metaphor, visuality or performance to open up the gap between 'appearance' and 'reality' to expose the structures and ideologies of ecological inequality and injustice (Clover, de Oliveira Jayme, Hall & Follen, 2012; Milibrant, 2010).

### **5.3 Community art, art exhibits, and knowledge mobilisation**

In many parts of the Western world, the arts have been historically defined by European standards, and professional trained artists – that is, predominantly produced and judged by elitist, “white”, and masculine measures, aimed at or supported by the wealthiest and the most powerful institutions (Dewey, 1938; Benjamin, 2008). From this perspective, the arts are individualistic in both process and product, that is, “artist-centred”, and are largely inaccessible to marginalised communities financially, culturally, and physically. When it comes to the exhibition of artworks, most are confined in Euro-centric art galleries and museums that follow specific elitist standards and categorisations that decide which art and knowledge count and which do not (Borg & Mayo, 2010). This is problematic because this elitist perspective perpetuates traditions that may not portray

communities' artistic realities, and disconnects them from history and culture. This is certainly true in Brazil where traditional art galleries, through their exhibits, perpetuate European canons of knowledge which can be disconnected from the Brazilian reality. In São Paulo, art exhibits are situated both ideologically and physically far from marginalised communities and the cost of admission to galleries can be high.

However, the second half of the 20th century has seen the arts in a different light. Contributions from the Black art, feminist, environmental, and community arts movements since the 1960's have reconnected individuals to the use of the arts to mobilise and tell new stories in favour of human rights, justice, and change. These movements have challenged the elitism and standardisation of art while inviting the public to use the arts to perceive their own cultural and historical lives. Once people are culturally and historically situated, they can reimagine new realities for themselves and their communities (e.g. Clover, de Oliveira Jayme, Hall & Follen, 2012). In this context, the arts become "community-centred", collaborative, and socially concerned (Clover, 2011; Raven, 1993). Adult educators call this practice arts-based adult education. While scholars note that this socially-concerned arts-based practice has no specific definition, Clover et al (2012) characterise it as "an imaginative, participatory aesthetic approach to individual and social transformation, and emancipation. It is about people using collective artistic processes to understand a particular social, cultural, or environmental issue" (p. 29; see also Lawrence, 2005). Arts-based adult education has the potential to enhance transformative and emancipatory objectives of feminist and radical adult education by providing aesthetic spaces to bring about what Freire (1978) called "conscientização".

Building on the above, adult educators have come to see the value of exhibitionary practices as used by art galleries, and in particular, alternative types of exhibits as means to generate and mobilise knowledge about injustices in society but also as means to empower the creators and allow them to speak out in creative ways (e.g. Clover 2015; Styles, 2011). In other words, community art exhibits act and speak with the individual viewer, representing very different types of discourses around social and political problems as well as who has the right to create art and exhibit their works (Clover, 2011; Rothmüller, 2014), thus challenging norms by inviting people to perceive different realities for themselves and the world around them. In particular, as alluded to, public or alternative exhibitions are understood to be a powerful form of knowledge mobilisation (KMb), defined by Bennet and Bennet (2007) as a complex, inclusive process of collaboration where all partners are considered equal and where output reflects community voice and contributes to meaningful change in concerned communities. For Cole and McIntyre (2003), the arts, when shared in public, are powerful because of their innate ability “to evoke relational, emotional, cultural, social, and political complexities [as knowledge]” (p. 18). Frequently in community arts-based pedagogical processes, professional artists work collaboratively with community partners in grassroots settings to create both the art as well as curate the exhibition. These alternative forms of exhibitionary practice are not only more accessible to a wider public, but create, as noted above, a space for dialogue that can engage an “audience in meaning making and knowledge construction [and mobilisation]” (Cole & McIntyre, 2003, pp. 60-61). The more stimulating or engaging this process, the more likely it is to have a holistic and deeply felt personal or social impact (Clover, 2011). Further, scholars such as Styles

(2011) argue that the type of knowledge co-creation and mobilisation that unfolds through dialogue around and through exhibition setting is, in fact, dialogical learning. In Freirian dialectical pedagogy, dialogical learning is the core of people's liberation and emancipation because it helps people to critically think about the cultural, historical, and social positions they take upon in their world(s).

#### **5.4 Brazilian Recycling cooperatives and the National Recycling Social Movement (MNCR): Environmental adult education organisations**

Along with Earth Summit and Rio+20 conference in 1992 and 2012 respectively, in Brazil, environmental adult education (EAE) has been strengthened over the decades by capacity-building projects, community meetings and engagement, as well as research with NGOs and social movements (Baeder, 2009). Such initiatives have created pedagogical openings for sharing experiences, public dialogue, and knowledge mobilisation. Like all EAE, in Brazil it is predicated upon the ideas of “conscientização” (Freire, 1978), which refers to individuals being educated and learning to recognise hegemonic social, political, cultural, and economic constraints and the power of collective action to help loosen these constraints. Before one can act, one must see and understand. But environmental issues and actors, particularly people such as ‘recyclers’ have been all but invisible to the larger society and therefore ignored as both people and, I would argue, as environmentalists. Freire, however, believed “conscientização” could work as a “truly liberating education” (p. 35) for those who are oppressed and ignored, as well as the oppressors. EAE in Brazil is therefore about opening windows for new ideas, for individuals to be part of the process of building of their communities as visible, responsible and active subjects. That is, history is not deterministic and the future is for

everyone to make. This belief in the power of EAE across sectors forms the foundation of the National Recycling Social Movement (MNCR) and recycling cooperatives. These two environmental adult education and advocacy organisations work most closely with recyclers to challenge power structures that are non-democratic and empower recyclers as actors on the stage of Brazil (Gonçalves, 2005).

The MNCR works along with the recycling cooperatives. Through capacity building initiatives, the members improve recyclers' working conditions and increase environmental education in different districts from the metropolitan region of São Paulo. The MNCR is one of the largest social movements in Brazil with approximately 60,000 associated recyclers all over the country (Gutberlet, 2011). In the recycling cooperatives, the recyclers are responsible for collecting recyclable materials from the streets, separating, classifying, and selling these materials. Such activity is their main source of income and the only survival strategy for thousands of impoverished families.

To overcome marginalisation suffered by recyclers, the MNCR and recycling cooperatives engage them and the general public in dialogue around social and environmental issues that affect recyclers' livelihoods. These conversations help to create networks with government and non-governmental sections, creating inclusive solutions to recycling management and recyclers' social inclusion (Tremblay, 2013). In addition, in the last decades, these dialogues have been mediated by community arts projects that open new spaces for knowledge mobilization. I explore this in the next section, illustrating how these arts-based practices help others to recognise the importance of recyclers' work and their strong political and leadership roles in this

sector.

### **5.5 Arts-based research**

My research study is arts-based, that is, using art as a critical and creative means to “uncover or create new knowledge, highlight experiences, pose questions, or tackle problems” (Clover, 2011, p. 13). Like feminist research, arts-based research is also about generating trust, building community, and inspiring individual and collective imagination for empowerment. Artistic approaches to research are important means to mediate communication amongst participants to help them to say things in new ways, things that might be difficult to articulate verbally (Silverman, 2000). Clover (2011) also reminds us about the importance of arts-based practices in knowledge mobilisation. Additionally, Clover, Stalker and McGauley (2004) argue that the arts in community research “uncovers biases, power relations and ideological obfuscation that people cannot or may not even want to see” (p. 282). What this means is that at the heart of arts-based research is empowerment, and this was very important to our study (Gallo, 2001; Wang & Burris, 1994). Empowerment in our arts-based research context meant creating opportunities for the recyclers to reflect critically and creatively upon the power structures and practices that perpetuate their oppression.

A question that guided the study and the art creation projects was: What does it mean to be a recycler and what are the challenges faced by recyclers? Our aim in particular was to use the stories and artwork shared by the recyclers by curating them into an alternative exhibition as a dialogic space for recyclers and the general public to talk about the work performed by recyclers, and make visible the importance of their work to the public. In other words, I wanted to attract the public’s attention to what goes on in

recycler's life, to their daily struggles working on the streets and in the recycling cooperatives with the ultimate goal of decreasing the prejudice they suffer.

### **5.6 Data collection and analysis strategies**

All the recyclers who participated in this research were self-selected when the project was presented to them at the MNCR headquarters. Once a week, from March to September of 2012, I facilitated three art workshops with 50 recyclers affiliated with the MNCR. The duration of each workshop depended on their nature, location, and date, ranging from one to two days. The goals of these workshops was to teach three art techniques to those interested in learning how to express themselves through an artistic form, and to create a mobile art exhibition of their works.

The first workshop taught abstract painting. Incorporating an assemblage of recyclable materials, modeling paste, and acrylic paint, recyclers created unique images that illustrated their experiences working in the cooperatives. Throughout the workshop, I kept asking: "What does this object represent to you? Why did you decide to assemble those objects in that way? What do those images mean to you?" These questions kept the conversation flowing and mediated recyclers' thinking about what they were creating. The final artworks embodied their stories of poverty and oppression, but above all, stories of their fight for social inclusion. Finally, recyclers described their artworks and reflected on their creative process.

The second workshop focussed on impressionism painting. For this workshop, participants brought photographs from magazines, newspapers, or personal family photo albums that they felt emotionally connected to. These images were spread onto a table,

and they chose one image as reference for their artwork, explaining why they chose that specific image. Their artworks were powerful and visually voiced their stories.

The third workshop focussed on mosaics. For this workshop, each recycler received one square of canvas and painted symbols or words that responded to the overall theme “what it means to be a recycler and what are the challenges you face?” Once painted, the squares were assembled together forming a unified image. Later, during the art exhibits, the recyclers reproduced the mosaic technique with gallery visitors by asking attendees to paint their impressions about the art shows.

The workshops described above were video and audio recorded and were used as our primary data source. Our secondary data source was formed by our observations recorded in our field notes. These written observations explain and/or highlight any pertinent event, conversation amongst participants, and public reactions and voices during the exhibits. These observations were written during and after the workshops and exhibits. In so doing, our memories were still “fresh” about the events that had happened during the data collection. Photographs of all the artworks produced in this study are also part of our data corpus.

Although my data corpus is formed by hours of conversation amongst participants during the workshops and exhibits, I explore just two segments in this article that clearly illustrate the exhibits as mediators of individuals’ transformation and the construction of their visual thought, which enabled individual empowerment. These segments also illustrate community art exhibits representing alternative sites for income-generation for the recyclers. In other words, these two episodes were not chosen randomly. They are very important because they are the best examples of real situations that real people may

find themselves immersed in when they are collaboratively engaged in arts-based adult education practices. In this light, the stories I present in the next section can inform future arts-based workshops and help us to further understand the role of community art in creating and mobilising new knowledge, thus constituting important teaching and researching tools. Additionally, they challenge the hegemonic and exclusive practices of conventional art exhibits by inviting the viewer to question who can create art and who has the power to exhibit them.

Recorded sections that illustrated the claims I make were further fully translated and transcribed. I used discourse analysis (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Roth & Alexander, 1997) as an analytical tool for interpreting the transcripts. Discourse analysis is the study of language in use, in the sense that language, in the same manner of EAE and arts-based adult education, cannot be understood apart from the context in which it is used, thus the researcher must be able to understand the context in which discourses are performed.

Over 100 paintings were created in this project. Participants chose one of their paintings to be part of the mobile art exhibit. Choosing the artworks was a very personal process. I, did not establish any criteria for the curatorship so as to avoid competition in terms of the aesthetics of their work. This also helped us to avoid forcing participants to share in public stories they did not feel comfortable sharing. For instance, one of the participants chose a painting that responded to his community needs over a painting that reflected his past struggle with drug addiction, simply because he did not feel comfortable in sharing this second story in public. Fifty paintings representing 50 participants composed the exhibit titled Recycling Stories. Next, I explore these art shows

through two stories that emerged during the workshops and exhibit. These stories illustrate what can be learned from this arts-based research engagement experience.

### **5.7 Recycling Stories – What it means to be a recycler?**

Seven art exhibits were set up outside the boundaries of traditional art galleries and institution and travelled to three cities: São Paulo (one public library, two City Halls in two municipalities, one public square, and one public elementary school); Rio de Janeiro (one exhibit during Rio+20 Conference); Londrina (one exhibit during the MNCR Conference). At the exhibits, the paintings were hung onto easels or carefully laid on the floor, enabling visitors to mingle amongst them. A mosaic-making station was set up on the side with paint and brushes so visitors could visually express their impressions about the artworks. At least one recycler was present during the exhibit to engage visitors in conversation around the themes presented in their paintings. The recyclers also facilitated mosaic workshops during the art shows. In total, seven mosaics were created representing the seven cities visited by the exhibits. Music, food, and performers contributed in making the Recycling Stories a lively space.

During the art exhibits, visitors were able to interact with the recyclers in person. Most of the conversation regarded the politics around recyclers' work. From these dialogues, new recycling networks for cooperation were established and many stories emerged. In the next section, I present two of these stories to illustrate the numerous potential of community-created art exhibits as spaces of dialogical learning and income-generation for marginalised communities.

### **5.8 Story 1: Community art exhibits mediating people's transformation and construction of visual thought**

In this first story, I introduce Luiza, a 55 years old recycler associated with the MNCR. According to Luiza, the MNCR, through capacity building initiatives, empowers her to be a strong and active community leader as well as a skilful environmental agent because she helps this social movement to organise community events and promote environmental education programmes in the city.

The following episode unfolded upon Luiza's return from the cities of Rio de Janeiro and Londrina in Brazil, where she participated at the Rio+20 and the MNCR conferences respectively. At these events, Luiza hosted the Recycling Stories and facilitated mosaic workshops with visitors. This is how she began:

***Luiza:** Today, I perceive that there are different ways of seeing things. My views have expanded after we went to Rio+20 and to Londrina. It was cool. Now, let's create our mosaic, I said. And then we called everybody to paint. So, we started to perceive that there are other universes that we can work together to help those who are trying to discover their own values. And that makes me feel with a more open mind.*

Luiza begins by using the noun "today" followed by her own perception about the ways in which she sees things. In so doing, she suggests that whatever she perceives in the present is not the same as how she used to perceive. Something has changed for Luiza that shifted the ways she operates in her environment. She neither explains what the things she sees differently are, nor how she used to see them. However, she indicates that her point of view has changed. This is evident in her following sentence when she affirms that her views have expanded. She also explains that this shift was mediated by her participation in two events (e.g., Rio+20 Summit and MNCR Conference), where she hosted the Recycling Stories and facilitated mosaics workshops.

As evident in the previous episode, the workshops and exhibits are indeed process

in which, through dialogue and reflection, a person transforms, becoming a critical adult able to recognise social, political, and economic constraints and to (re)act upon these constraints. Transformative learning mediates peoples' "conscientização" and emancipation. As Scott (2001) suggests, something needs to change in order for transformation occur. More specifically, the process of transformation involves some kind of significant energy (ex)change, in which, those involved may experience the occurrence of a series of events so meaningful that old ways of thinking no longer apply (Scott, 2001). In Luiza's episode, her engagement with gallery visitors was a tool for her transformation, because such engagement mediated her critical reflection so deeply that her point of views has changed. In Luiza's case, the energy exchange refers to her dialogical engagement with gallery visitors enabled by the art-making process. The series of events that mediated Luiza's transformation or what she poetically identifies as "perceiv[ing] other universes" refers to her participation in those two events.

Luiza affirms that her participation in those events was impressive ("it was cool"). Then, she revisited what she said to visitors: "Now, let's create a mosaic". Luiza has never facilitated an arts workshop before. She gained greater skill through a previous mosaic workshop in which she participated that helped her confidently offer her own workshop. The fact that Luiza facilitated the workshop on her own is evidence of her learning process about mosaic construction and how it can be used as methodology to share people's stories, since visitors' perceptions about the exhibit were illustrated on the mosaics. What happened cognitively with Luiza is what Brooks (2005), informed by Vygotsky (1962), identifies as visual thought, that is, the combination of meaning-making and art-making processes. In other words, visual thought refers to the process in

which the individual makes sense of their surrounding through an artistic process (Brooks, 2003). The fact that Luiza was able to facilitate mosaics workshop is evidence of her visual thought construction mediated during the workshops she participated in as a learner as well as a facilitator. Additionally, Luiza's visual thought empowered her to facilitate mosaic workshops in the future, so much so, that she participated in two conferences. For Vygotsky (1962), such visual thought awakens a higher level of human consciousness, or what Freire (1978) calls "conscientização", where people can reimagine alternative realities for themselves.

Another important aspect in Luiza's speech is how she scaffolds her sentences by describing three events that happened at the exhibits. First she validates her participation in the conference as well as hostess of the exhibits by saying that it was cool. Second, she says she invited visitors to participate in the mosaic activity. Later, she initiates her next sentence by using the conjunction "so", meaning that whatever she is going to say next is a consequence of what it was said or done before. That is, perceiving another universe happened because everybody started to paint. This is a strong evidence of how art making processes mediated, according to her, visitors' and her own transformation, as well as how the collective art making process fostered people's construction of new knowledge, or what Luiza calls 'discovering their own values'. Conceptualizing Luiza's speech within a KMb framework, producing and exhibiting the mosaic collaboratively with visitors, empowered them to perceive that there are indeed other universes of possibilities to explore their own values. She does not fully articulate what those values are, but we gather that she refers to visitors' perceptions about the work recyclers perform, since that was the theme of their artworks. Luiza concludes by stating that her experience of hosting

the Recycling Stories and facilitating mosaic workshops made her feel “more open minded”, which is also a reassurance of how this experience has empowered her to perceive differently her surroundings.

Luiza’s story is important because it highlights three potentials of community created art exhibits. Firstly, the potential that alternative galleries have to empower participants to move out of their comfort zones by experiencing art in an authentic way, meaning they created their own artwork without previous formal art training. Secondly, since recyclers created their art and curated their art show, they had ownership of the stories they wanted to tell, not leaving it to someone else to share them, thus not taking the risk of misrepresenting these stories. Thirdly, Luiza’s story illustrates the potential of alternative exhibits in mediating individual transformation while helping visitors to construct new knowledge, through dialogue, aiming to decrease stigma around marginalised communities.

### **5.9 Story 2: Community created mobile art exhibit – alternative sites for income generation**

The second story comes from Dona Telma, a 56 years old recycler and a community leader in a low-income neighborhood. In addition to being a recycler, she is an active MNCR spokesperson. Her following discourse emerged during one of the exhibits in São Paulo when she hosted one of the Recycling Stories. Here she is talking to the public who attended the exhibition:

***Dona Telma:** We didn’t think about it<sup>4</sup>. We just thought about sustainability. I will collect, separate and sell. So this became such an absurd vicious cycle that we couldn’t see other horizons. We couldn’t imagine that our mobile art gallery could be an event that would generate income for the recyclers.*

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<sup>4</sup>“It” refers to the possibility of using the arts as income-generation.

Dona Telma recognized that they (i.e., recyclers) had not yet reflected upon the potential of a community art exhibit as income-generation. When she says that they have thought only about sustainability, she is in fact referring to the sustainability of their work as recyclers. This is clear in her following sentence when she explains what they normally do as recyclers, i.e., collect, separate, and sell recyclable materials. This activity represents the main source of income for thousands of Brazilian recyclers, so much so that it became an embodied activity or what Dona Telma calls an “absurd vicious cycle”. For her, such embodiment did not allow them to see other alternatives for income-generation, which she calls “see[ing] other horizons”. Dona Telma concluded that recyclers did not anticipate the commercialization of their artworks through the mobile art gallery. That is, in addition to addressing sustainability and income-generation, the recyclers were also sharing their stories with exhibit visitors.

When I designed this project collaboratively with recyclers, our intention was to explore the potential that visual arts could have in sharing their stories, with the ultimate goal of decreasing the prejudice they suffer. However, once the Recycling Stories started to travel to different communities, visitors showed interested in the artworks themselves and shared their desire to purchase some of the pieces. This was a remarkable moment for the recyclers because it added valued to their work not just as environmental agents, but also as artists<sup>5</sup>. When recyclers started receiving monetary offers for their artwork, it enhanced their confidence in their art-making process, as well as in their final products. In the beginning of the project, they were unsure about producing art because they did not

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<sup>5</sup> We use the term “artist” not in the sense of professional trained artist, but to refer to our research participants who actively engaged in our art classes.

have previous formal art training. However, such lack of confidence shifted throughout the project as one recycler said at the end: “I did not know I could do this”. Most of the artworks were sold during the exhibits and the price depended on the negotiations amongst recyclers and their clients, but the average cost of each artwork was CAD\$100.00. Having monetary value added to their artwork empowered them to break through what Dona Telma refers as a “vicious cycle”. That is, instead of just working in the recycling cooperative, the mobile art exhibit represented an alternative site for income-generation for those recyclers interested in visually exploring their personal stories.

The fact that the recyclers received monetary reward for their artworks contributed to the debate about arts-based research that refers to the process (the act of making) and product (the resulting work) in community art. These two dimensions, according to Jones (1999) and Butterwick & Dawson (2006), embody different values, which was evident in our study. For instance, while the process of art making and exhibiting encompassed the construction of participants’ visual thought, invited viewers to change their values, and mediated recyclers’ transformation, the final product empowered participants to visually express themselves. Dona Telma, in an informal conversation during one of the exhibits, kept calling herself an artist, adopting the pseudonymous “Dona Telma da Vinci”, a reference to the painter Leonardo da Vinci. I asked her at the end of one of the art shows what she thought about her painting and she answered: “I didn’t know I could do it”. From Dona Telma’s response, I can infer that she has developed a new skill that she was not aware was possible. This is evidence of how the process and product operate in inseparable ways in the context of arts-based

research.

### **5.10 Importance of community arts and exhibitions**

An important aspect of community art and community exhibits is the way they can highlight values and ideological messages that are opposed to hegemonic standpoints and bystanders, crossing boundaries of age, gender, class, and geography. A community art exhibit is what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe as a “minor” art form. For them, the term “minor” refers to arts created and exhibited by minorities or marginalised people, and is characterised by “deterritorialisations”, that is, art that disrupts territories once exclusively occupied by traditional art institutions. In this case, minor arts are also political. For instance, when an art exhibit takes place within marginalised communities, away from elitist areas, it indeed challenges socio-geographical spaces because, as noted above, traditional art is “artist-centred” and confined in Euro-centric institutions while community art is not (Mandell, 2014). This aspect of community art was evident in this study because the Recycling Stories indeed “deterritorialised” traditional art standpoints by challenging peoples’ views of who can produce art and where art can be displayed. This was accomplished because recyclers created all the artwork in this study with no professional training in arts, making art more democratic by entering into a territory once occupied by formally-trained artists only. Such democracy of the arts welcomed recyclers from different backgrounds to express themselves through artistic forms. This is not to say that after the arts-based workshops all the recyclers suddenly became professional artists, but it reinforced the idea that we all have the ability and the right to produce and exhibit works of art as a form of protest, community engagement, and social justice.

Additionally, due to its mobility, the Recycling Stories created alternative and effective spaces within everyday life. This was evident when our gallery disrupted a public space in front of São Paulo City Hall, gaining the attention of politicians, media, and the public. At that moment, at that public square, conventional public spaces were challenged, power questioned, alternative social dynamics established, and a hopeful atmosphere was created.

#### **5.10.1 Community art exhibits as dialogic spaces**

As illustrated in Luiza's episode, the Recycling Stories exhibit represented a site of knowledge mobilization enabled by dialogic interaction amongst participants, both artists and visitors. This is evident because, according to Luiza, the mosaic construction that happened during one of the exhibits helped them (visitors and herself) to see things differently. From this one can infer that old ways of operating in the world were no longer working for them. Thus, knowledge about new possibilities of perceiving the world was mobilised. More so, the exhibit mediated Luiza's perceptions about her own world by expanding her point of view, enabling her to have a "more open mind" and to learn from the visitors as well as from her own experience. This is further evidence that the art making and exhibit process mediated her construction of new knowledge because she was now able to perceive things that she did not perceive before. Thus, transformation occurred, which can lead to liberation and emancipation from old ways of operating in the world.

In addition, as a mobile art exhibit, the Recycling Stories travelled to different cities and marginalised communities. This enabled different dialogues, contributing to the generation of new knowledge about all these new landscapes and contexts. Moreover, as

opposed to reading academic reports, which presents static final results and defines authors as producers and owners of knowledge, community created exhibits, through dialogic engagement, enabling a more democratic, creative, and interactive knowledge construction and mobilisation.

### **5.10.2 Community art exhibit as a tool in arts-based adult education**

As a pedagogical site, through dialogical engagement, the art making process mediated the construction of Luiza's visual thought. This was important because the visual thought enabled Luiza to achieve a high level of "conscientização", where she could creatively reinvent a different reality for herself. This is an indication of Luiza's emancipation, a key concept in arts-based adult education. In addition, Luiza's visual thought also functioned as a membership in the art community, warranting her participation in other events as facilitator of mosaic construction and hostess of the community art gallery.

As shown in our field notes, during one of our mobile exhibits viewers expressed their opinions about the Recycling Stories. According to one visitor, it is "something you don't see everyday, everywhere". Another visitor uttered: "you always see traditional paintings". In other words, viewers found the Recycling Stories engaging because it was an innovative approach, an event outside of their known lives. Visitors' reviews about the Recycling Stories provided a counter-narrative for the current state of traditional art exhibits, which according to them only display traditional paintings. These two visitors did not verbally explain what they meant by traditional painting. However, one can infer that they were referring to artwork that has been long-established, which quite often does not reflect local community realities. From this perspective, there is a disconnect between

the 'real world' and what is commonly exhibited in traditional art galleries. On the contrary, the Recycling Stories shared contemporary and relevant stories about the recyclers with the public, including their daily struggles working on the streets and living on the edge of extreme poverty.

One last remarkable action-oriented result from the Recycling Stories emerged after the exhibit at a public school, where Dona Telma talked to the students and teachers about the importance of recycling and environmental education. During her presentation, a few students felt connected with her story because they either knew, or had a family member who worked as a recycler. Dona Telma's story also got attention from the principal of that school, who decided to donate their recyclable materials to Dona Telma's cooperative. This partnership is still happening today.

### **5.10.3 Community art exhibit as environmental adult education practice**

Historically, in cases of extreme oppression, people have found ways of resisting dominant forces through community art (Scott, 1992; Milbrant, 2010) because the arts empower people to understand and commit to their own ideologies (Milbrant, 2010). Empowerment is a key concept in environmental education practices because it helps people to question and challenge power structures that constrain their freedom and liberation. Empowerment was evident in both stories I presented above. First, Luiza used mosaics to help people change their values. She did not explain what those new values were, and what they replaced, but having them shifted is a reflection that former power structures were no longer as dominant, thus these old values were changed. Second, when Dona Telma suggested that the exhibit helped them (recyclers) to "see other horizons", releasing themselves from a "vicious cycle", she is in fact challenging the power

structures that used to perpetuate this vicious cycle. In doing so, she invites her audience to perceive alternative ways of valuing and generating income using the arts. Having monetary value to their artwork was also another empowerment tool for the recyclers.

### **5.11 Conclusion**

In this study, I challenged the notion of traditional art exhibits as elitist sites, as well as formal art training, as the only alternative way to produce art while reinforcing the idea of community art exhibits as being spaces for dialogical learning and valuable sites in EAE. The Recycling Stories indeed made visible the injustice and indignity faced by recyclers while also (re)conceptualizing what constitutes legitimate knowledge and art practices. With the occupation of public spaces, the recyclers confronted the public, challenged hegemonic use of the arts, and empowered the voice and stories of participants. Since the Recycling Stories was mobile, it was able to travel to unexpected places, inviting people to engage in dialogical learning about recyclers' well-being.

Due to the playfulness of the art-making environment described in this study, safe places were created where participants felt comfortable in sharing their deepest fears, frustrations, and hopes for a different reality. This impact was possible because of the arts-engaged approaches of doing qualitative research. Even though the art workshops I presented here did not require any previous art experience from participants and facilitators, these workshops still moved people out of their comfort zones and helped them to situate themselves into historical contexts and dream and fight for different realities.

I hope that these stories encourage social movement organizers to include community art and exhibits as strategic spaces of contestation and empowerment and also inspire traditional art galleries to explore ways to challenge social injustices reinforced in their own exhibits.

## **Chapter Six – Conclusion and final considerations**

### **6.1 On transformation**

My research emerged and developed out of the desire and necessity to illuminate and positively contribute to the lives of men and women, children and seniors that make their only (often not enough) source of income in the recycling industry. This dissertation sheds light on the challenges that recyclers face on a daily basis, such as discrimination, social exclusion, and poverty. These problems emerge from the lack of dialogue between recyclers and the general public. This dissertation also argues for the potential of visual arts to bridge this gap.

Much happened during the months in which I worked with the recyclers: protests on the streets for better working conditions, art classes, art shows, life events delaying the process, illness, conference participations and presentations, the establishment of working networks, war waged between drug lords and the police during our art classes and Brazilian presidential elections. There was never a dull moment. Doing arts-based and participatory action research with marginalized partners is not easy. Much negotiation needs to be done before, during, and after the research process: trust from both sides (researcher-participants) must be co-constructed, reflexivity is mandatory, and flexibility must exist. As a young scholar working in the field of arts-based environmental adult education, I have noticed that in the context of social sciences research, there is a perceived “romance” attached to the arts. This is because, historically, in qualitative research methods, the arts have been applied only as an add-ons or to illustrate research findings. This was not the case in my studies. There was no “romance,” despite the fact that the recyclers learned the painting techniques and in fact produced really beautiful,

and most importantly, powerful imagery. Being alone on the field, I was at once in charge of: teaching art, dealing with the technical equipment to video and audio record the workshops and exhibits, keeping the conversation going by asking follow up questions, dealing with meltdowns that frequently happened in the circles, clean up, organizing art shows and writing field notes. It was, quite simply, hard.

The results of this arts-based and participatory action research with the recyclers are beyond what I anticipated. As one of the participants during one of the workshops said: *“I want to keep painting, and enjoy moments like these. It has been so wonderful, so much learning happening.”* Another participant remarked: *“I never knew I could be an artist.”* During one of the exhibits, one of the recyclers mentioned: *“I love all of this. It is sensational. We are so used to be invisible in the city, and suddenly, with an easel, some paint, and people see us. They see our stories.”* These claims are strong evidence of transformative power of the arts.

Individual transformation and how it unfolds in the context of social movements when participants are producing and exhibiting art, was a key take-away of this dissertation. In this sense, this manuscript style dissertation also contributes to the current state of knowledge on transformative learning. This epistemological framework understands how adults learn taking into consideration individuals’ personal knowledge, history, and the culture to which he or she belongs. In this context my findings operate and are empowered by two major epistemological conceptualizations that were evident throughout my main studies: a) individual transformation is “conscientização”; and b) individual learning is a cognitive developmental process. These two conceptualizations I will discuss next.

### 6.1.1 Individual transformation is “conscientização”

The concept of “conscientização” originated from the work of Paulo Freire on the literacy education of marginalized communities in Brazil. I have decided to not translate the word “conscientização” into the English language throughout my dissertation, simply because there is no “good” translation for it. The closest translation would be “consciousness-raising” or “awareness-raising” but these words still do not capture its meaning. “Conscientização” informs transformative learning, making the case that learning is not about transferability of information or content teaching. Rather, transformative learning fosters critical dialogue amongst individuals and groups while teaching them how to “read” their world(s). Once, during an informal interview, Paulo Freire said: *“It is not enough just to learn how to read the words: ‘Eva saw the grapes’. It is necessary to also understand the socio-cultural context in which Eva lives, knows who planted the grapes and who profit from harvesting the grapes.”*<sup>6</sup> I particularly love this quote, and I use it often when I am teaching my courses at the University, because it metaphorically illustrates what education is for. A transformed individual is one who questions, challenges, and contextualizes his or her own world(s) within the different social and political dynamics that unleash or hinder their freedom. By understanding how the “grape system” operates, the individual is able to (re)imagine a different reality for herself or himself. And this is “conscientização.” It is a process of emancipation, political liberation, and freedom from oppression.

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<sup>6</sup> Portuguese version: “Não basta saber ler: ‘Eva viu a uva’. E’ preciso também entender o contexto socio-cultural em que Eva vive, quem plantou a uva, e quem beneficia desse plantio”.

“Conscientização” was evident throughout the three studies that form this dissertation. Throughout the art-making process, participants were able to culturally, historically, and socially, position themselves in the Brazilian social class war, by identifying the different world(s) they occupy and operate within. From this positioning, they (re)imagined and visually (re)created alternative realities for themselves, and perceived different and “possible dreams” for themselves, or what Luiza in Chapter 3 claims “an imagination I know is possible.” Once the individual perceives that there are other ways of operating in the world, she or he, cannot “un-perceive” it moving forward. What is left then, is to fight for this new world of possibilities. This is individual transformation.

#### **6.1.2 Individual learning is a cognitive developmental process**

Individual learning is about meaning-making. It is about how a person makes sense of his or her own worlds. Thus it is a critical self-reflective process. This process functions as magnifying lens in which the individual perceives and understands his or her world(s). From a cognitive developmental perspective, individual learning is co-constructed by the individual social interactions with one’s entire external environment that mediates his or her actions. This is so critical; that even if a person is performing an action in isolation, the event is still a social process, because everything, all of the objects that mediate these actions are cultural and historical artefacts.

A variety of psychological and cognitive elements mediate individual transformation, but in my studies, the “heart” of such transformation was indeed the art-making process, because the art-making and exhibitions fostered: a) recognition (participants situating themselves within their different worlds); b) learning (as in

painting techniques, but also learning about themselves and the other; and c) re-imagining that “dreams” are possible.

Looking at these two conceptualizations of transformative learning (i.e. “conscientização” and cognition), one may perceive them as separate elements. But they are not. They indeed operate internally and externally as the individual develops his or her own understandings about their world(s), because above all, becoming a “conscient” individual is a social and cultural development. Even though part of the process happens internally (interpersonal, as elaborated in Chapter 3), everything that we think, feel, or do is mediated by some kind of a social, cultural, and historical apparatus.

## **6.2 Key findings: an overview**

Since this document was produced as a manuscript style dissertation, and in order to avoid overload my readers with an exhaustive and extensive final discussion, which I already provided within the individual Chapters, next I present an overview of key findings of the three studies that form this dissertation.

By sparking conversation between recyclers and the general public, the visual arts have the potential to bridge the gap between these parties, with the ultimate goal of decreasing the stigmatization and social exclusion suffered by the recyclers on a daily basis. This is because the art works produced by the recyclers not only illustrate their stories of poverty and social exclusion, but also highlight their victories toward a better future. The arts also mediated recyclers’ empowerment, because it was through the art-making process that their visual thought was constructed. Empowerment mediated their agency because they were able to produce something they did not imagine they could. This is evident when one of the participants uttered: *“I didn’t know I could do this.”* This quote marks the

discovery of a new world - a world of possibilities - and also an emergence of imagination in their new discoveries. This is very important in the context of social movement because it adds value by bolstering their sense of self-worth through their work.

Figure 6.1 illustrates the key findings of each study I presented in this dissertation. The first outcome is related to individual transformation in the context of Social Movement Learning. More specifically how the visual thought is co-constructed by two dialectical relationships, the inter and the intrapersonal movement in which both unfolds concomitantly and in inseparable ways. The construction of the visual thought by my research participants was important because it functioned as a membership granting recyclers to participate in different social groups, so much so, they were able to facilitate other arts-based workshops on their own, as well as curate their own art gallery. This aspect of my research empowers recyclers and enables them to perceive and seek a new universe of possibilities, which Freire (2004) identifies as pedagogy of possible dreams. My findings also suggest that moments of realization in one's life, which I identified in Chapter 4 as epiphanies, can give us, researchers, teachers, artists, and environmental adult educators, important insights on how the individual learns within a group. Epiphanies, as I have elaborated in this dissertation, mediate empowerment and "conscientização." If we manage to track all the epiphanies in someone's life, we can understand the social apparatus that promotes his or her learning. In this way, we can design and apply even more powerful art workshops and even stronger environmental adult education programs as a whole.

Another very important aspect of my research was the art shows because they offered moments where the recyclers were able to share their stories with the world. It was during the art shows that the bridge between recyclers and the general public was constructed. The mobile art galleries were indeed dialogical spaces in which knowledge was created and literally mobilized. This was only possible through the interactions between participants and the public. It was also through the art shows that the recyclers were able to commercialize their own artworks and establish working networks that would benefit their cooperatives. This represents alternative income generation for the recyclers and a possibility to strengthen their cooperatives.

One may perceive the epistemological outcomes of my dissertation as separate phenomena, maybe because they are presented here in discrete Chapters. This is not the case. All my findings and outcomes co-exist and operate systematically, continuously, and inseparably. There is no “conscientização” without cognition. There is not cognitional learning without critical thinking. There is no individual learning without the social learning. There is no art-making without imagination. And there is no social change without the arts.

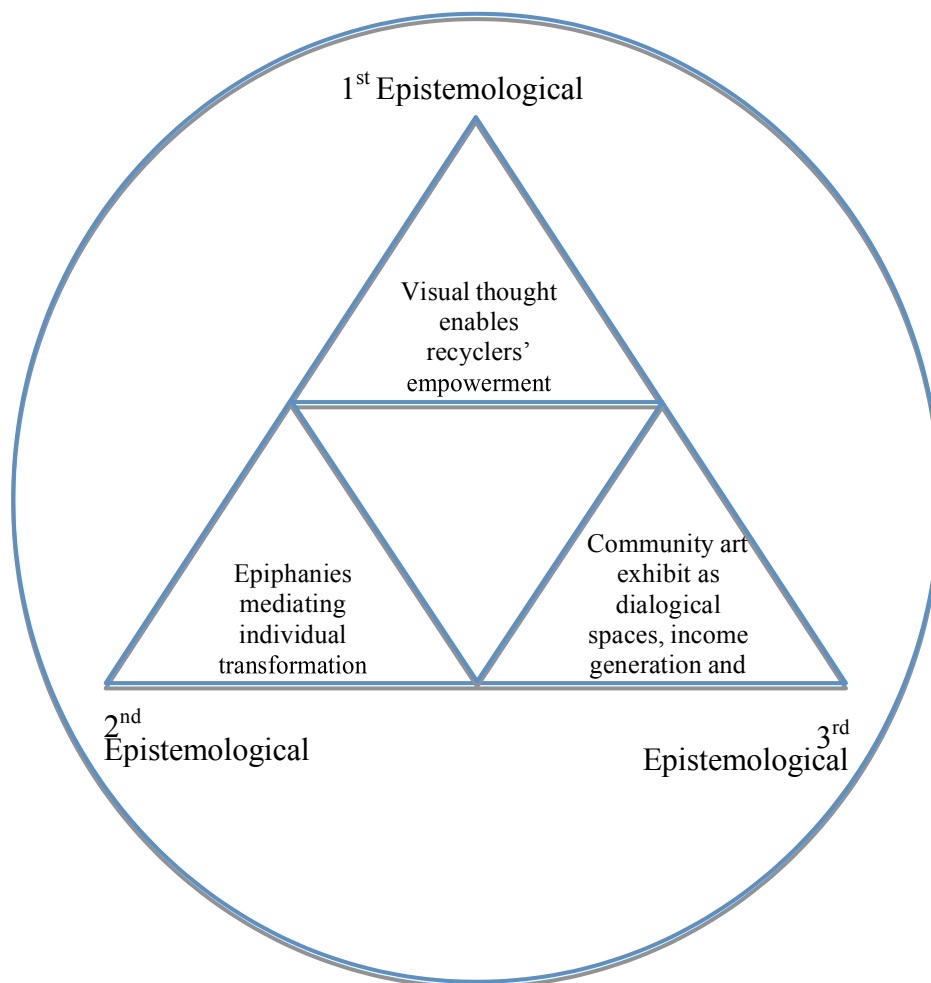


Figure 6.1: Epistemological outcomes from the three main studies.

### 6.3 Final considerations

Both my teaching and research practices are arts-based, because I truly believe in the power of the arts in/for social change. In the same way Paulo Freire does not believe that education changes the world, it rather changes the individual, I also believe that the arts will not change the world, but they have the potential to change the individual, who can then change the world.

In my classrooms and in my research fields, the arts often happen holistically and incidentally. Throughout my many years working in this area I have learned to help my

students and research participants to make art without even noticing that they are making art. This is because, as illustrated elsewhere in this dissertation, it is human nature to make art, out of necessity or out of desire. I anchor this concept to my practices, and it helps me to create a safe and yet challenging space, so that my students and research participants can safely and comfortably share their stories.

I hope that my studies spark curiosity and inspire further research on the themes I elaborated throughout, and that individual transformation is no longer taken for granted in the context of collective practices. I also hope that arts-based research keeps and receives its much deserved attention and that the “romance” that exists around the visual arts does not eclipse the vast potential that the arts can offer to social movements and learning.

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## APPENDIX – PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE FIELD

Recyclers during the abstract painting workshop



Art produced by the recyclers during the abstract painting workshop







Art produced by the recyclers during the impressionism painting workshop









Art exhibit at São Paulo City Hall



Mosaic station during art exhibit at Ermelino Matarazzo, a district in the greater São

Paulo City



Mosaic being constructed

