MARQ MERVIN

ARTIST • EDUCATOR • ACTIVIST

Research Philosophy

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Introduction

"These are all our children. We will profit by, or pay for, whatever they become."—attributed to James Baldwin.

The focus of my research is directly tied to the root of my advocacy - access to Art & Design education for marginalized and under-resourced youth. Through my experiences in the halls of higher education institutions, K-12 classrooms, and small talk with parents of creative kids, I've been asked many questions. Three of the most common are - "What can you do with art?", "What is graphic design and animation?", and "Can you make a living doing this?" These questions are robust, but they can be answered. However, it leads me to wonder about the information gap between the disciplines and understanding their prominence and relevance to our lives.

I'm interested in researching educational strategies and using digital media to propose actionable resources towards this pursuit. I'm also interested in identifying other potential gaps that are either underlying and/or "hidden in plain sight", such as societal, interpersonal, cultural, and systemic influences. This endeavor holds a special place in my heart. I did not attend schools specializing in Art or Design. Nor did I learn from many Art or Design educators who were Black, gay, or male. Now that I've become what I didn't have, I have the ability to ease the difficulties of future marginalized and underrepresented creatives by building bridges towards resources, assistance, and support. The heartbeat of educational institutions are students. But in order for that to continue, students must be shown what is possible and provided pathways to reach those possibilities. Below, I will discuss my previous work in digital media and education, my current work towards my advocacy, and ideas of what I hope to pursue alongside colleagues within the university's vast network.

Past Research

I've always been a dreamer and a lover of school. I've, also, always been tenacious and wildly curious. These values have guided me along my artistic journey, pushed me beyond my limits, encouraged me to learn as much as I can from others, and to embrace the challenge of self-tutelage. A pivotal moment for me was graduate school. I was not adequately prepared to teach, to enter the animation industry, nor did I discover my focus as an artist. However, this became the fuel for me to bridge those gaps and to do my best to ensure that I would not perpetuate the same experience when I stepped into education. In my pursuit of identity and belonging, I've developed multidisciplinary projects that combine my interests of visual art, visual design, poetry, music, storytelling, animation, and interactive technology. These varied experiences informed my activism and my pedagogical approach as a Digital Media educator.

I began my pursuit to understand accessibility gaps in my **2016** TEDx talk, *Represent! Diversity and Equity in Arts Education.* There, I researched the faculty of three prominent art schools to document the amount of educators of color in their departments and expressed the vibrant future of the Arts when diverse and equitable practices are implemented. This led to my work with AIGA's Diversity & Inclusion Task Force. As the Education and Community Lead, I learned these gaps are influenced by factors beyond hiring practices. Obstacles such as financial costs for higher education, a lack of discipline-related information, and the absence of Art & Design career awareness in STEAM initiatives are among the factors that create inaccessibility. This work guided me towards my current service to education and my local community.

Current Research

Imagination, tenacity, and curiosity also guide my steps as an educator. I currently teach Digital Media in an open access institution. The ingredients of a broad program combined with students with varying skill levels creates a challenging recipe. But, being the curious person I am, I'm engrossed with identifying what gaps exist and learning why they exist in the first place. To identify the gaps, I actively contribute to the Digital Media program's curriculum by offering suggestions for sequence changes that align with in-class observational data and program outcome measures. To gather this data, I help identify "markers", courses where the most substantial information can be gathered, to identify problems in the program pipeline. Our program is workforce centered, so I've pinpointed areas where students are missing skills near graduation. To help address this concern, I developed *Behind The Scenes*, a series of programming where I invite guest creatives to share their career highs and lows with students. But I also wondered, "What happens at the beginning of the pipeline?" This is where I engage with K-12 schools.

I have an ongoing relationship with River City Science Academy Innovation, a K-8 STEM-centered school based in Jacksonville, Florida. I'm invited annually to talk with students about Art & Design and facilitate maker challenges to nurture their creativity. Additionally, I participate in the GEAR UP program, an initiative from Duval County Public Schools to support K-8 youth by promoting graduation from high school and providing access to college education. I use those opportunities to host Art & Design workshops or information days about the Digital Media program. Participating in these initiatives are fulfilling, but illuminate an area of concern - the absence of Art & Design as valid pursuits in students' educational experiences. With this continued learning, I believe the next step is to build relationships with collaborators to propose solutions for existing and future gaps.

Future Research

Education, much like culture and language, is a living, evolving being. More complex problems arise and more canyons form as it evolves. I intend to continue learning about the valleys that exist and will form over time. Additionally, I hope to better understand how the appropriate bridges can be built to form connections across this changing terrain. My ideas are expanding beyond my initial thoughts. Not only is it the educator's responsibility to help form bridges and guide students across them. It is also our responsibility to learn from whom we are in service to. Areas that I look forward to collaboratively exploring involve social and systemic factors, such as race, class, ability, linguistic/literacy differences, digital literacy, cultural influence, and socioeconomic status. Outcomes could include, but are not limited to, curriculum proposals for after-school programs, designing games to promote learning through play, and tapping into VR and AR technology to bring museum spaces to communities without access.

Two of my primary goals for the coming years are to collaborate with creative professionals to: A. Establish better strategies of community presence and awareness to non-Art & Design practitioners (bridging a communication gap) and B. Develop initiatives to encourage more engagement with educational institutions beyond portfolio reviews (bridging an interaction gap). In these endeavors, I hope to be a better designer, artist, teacher, and student. But, most importantly, I hope to be a better human and assist in making things a bit easier for the world around me.

"Teaching is often bridge-building. Beginning on one shore with the knowledge, experience, know-how, and interests of the student, the teacher moves toward broader horizons and deeper ways of knowing; The intellectual challenge of teaching involves becoming a student of your students, unlocking the wisdom in the room, and joining together on a journey of discovery and surprise."—William Ayers, Ryan Alexander-Tanner - *To Teach: The Journey, in Comics*

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