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Author

Blatt-Gross, Carolina Eve

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MAKING CONTENT RELEVANT (OR NOT):
EXPLORING THE OUTCOMES OF A PROJECT-BASED CURRICULUM IN POST-SECONDARY ART
APPRECIATION

Carolina Blatt-Gross
The College of New Jersey

Abstract

Because college students often struggle to understand the relevance of isolated and abstract art content to their programs of study and daily lives, this study explores the potential to generate meaningful education through a project-based curriculum in a college Art Appreciation course. Informed by research from educational psychology and neuroscience, this curriculum design was intended to help students (all non-art majors) connect course content to their social, emotional and physical realities and offer the potential to improve them. In class, students explored forms of visual communication, various media, and the relationship between art and culture before applying their findings to the design of a public artwork for their nearly art-free campus. Based on a constructivist epistemology and a phenomenological methodology, this study utilized participant observation, student projects and illustrated reflections as data sources. The results suggest positive outcomes, such as demonstrable understanding and application of course content as well as shortcomings, specifically the potential to fortify and actualize these connections.

Introduction

In reality, many college students fail to see the import of required coursework beyond their major requirements. Often this is especially true for non-art majors taking arts appreciation courses to fulfill a humanities requirement, where personal disinterest may be compounded by societal disincentives to embrace arts education (Eisner, 1985, 1994, 1997). Post-secondary students often struggle to understand the relevance of isolated and abstract content to their programs of study and daily lives (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000), challenging educators to find pedagogical approaches that seek out and build upon personal connections.

The study summarized in this article looks at a project-based curriculum design for Art Appreciation, which was informed by research from educational psychology and neuroscience. Intended to help students (specifically non-art majors) connect course content to their social, emotional and physical realities, it offers the opportunity to envision improvements to their campus through the design of original public art. Using an immersive, hands-on approach in class, students explore forms of visual communication, use of various media, and the relationship between art and culture before applying their findings to the design of a public artwork for their nearly art-free campus. Based on a constructivist epistemology and a phenomenological methodology, this study utilizes participant observation, student projects and illustrated reflections as data sources to explore the potential to generate meaningful education through a project-based curriculum in Art Appreciation. The results suggest positive outcomes in students' understanding and application of content as well as shortcomings, specifically the potential to fortify and actualize these connections.

Purpose of the Study

Research tells us that, to maximize student learning, course content should be emotionally and socially relevant (Damasio, 2003; Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007; Storebeck & Clore, 2007). According to Minuet Floyd (2002), "the curriculum must get as close as possible to the lives of all students. Opportunities for students to make personal connections

are enhanced through learning that is used in conjunction with personally relevant themes” (p. 45). Making such connections, however, can be a daunting task when one is teaching required introductory courses to non-majors. The Art Appreciation course discussed below is one of four introductory-level arts options available to meet a humanities requirement at the state university system where I taught—and a challenge for professors hoping to cultivate student engagement.

Because my particular institution lacked an art major, minor or department, few enrolled students had artistic aspirations. There were even fewer incentives for disenfranchised students to become engaged with the objective of appreciating art. As a result, students could struggle to find the relevance of course content to their intended careers and future lives. This artistic apathy may have been compounded by the sterile aesthetic and noticeable lack of public art on our young campus, which was established in 2006 and has yet to invest in any significant public art on campus. Under these circumstances, it was often challenging to connect the Art Appreciation class to the lives of students who had little experience with the arts, in part due to the diminishing role of arts education in primary and secondary schools (Center on Educational Policy, 2007; Eisner, 1997, 2002).

One could argue that the obvious antidote is a project-based curriculum (Bender, 2012; Boss & Larmer, 2018; Helle, Tynjälä & Olkinuora, 2006). Despite a growing body of research supporting experiential and contextualized modes of learning (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2004; Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005) and a growing number of textbooks that lend themselves to more experiential pedagogy (DeWitte, Larmann & Shields 2018; Frank 2009; Smith 2008) the academic tradition of lecture-driven courses remains a powerful force in higher education. While there is little data available on how Art Appreciation courses are usually taught in higher education (e.g. Quinn, 2009), in many institutions academic precedent can influence and even dictate pedagogy. Even in institutions that theoretically value high-impact learning, putting experiential practices into place can be difficult.

In my experience at four different colleges/universities, Art Appreciation was always taught as a lecture class, even at institutions with small class sizes of 30 or less; also, it was most often taught by junior faculty or adjuncts, the instructors with the least experience and agency to take pedagogical risks. I suspect my experiences were not unique. In the setting for this particular study, the expectation of senior faculty that Art Appreciation would be a lecture class was made evident. Initiatives to teach it through more experiential methods were met with resistance, despite the stated mission of the college to engage students. It took many persuasive conversations with the dean to secure materials, as the art faculty had never previously requested studio materials or considered hands-on projects as a pedagogical approach to Art Appreciation.

The lack of empirical data to be found on Art Appreciation pedagogy or teaching conditions might serve as evidence of the attitudes and values that institutions of higher education commonly hold in regard to this class. In addition, institutions can make it difficult to integrate studio work into Art Appreciation courses by scheduling them in lecture halls and enrolling large numbers of students. In this case, the space itself – a carpeted lecture room with no sink or storage – did not welcome messy studio work. The pedagogical and logistical obstacles that faculty may face when implementing experiential approaches to teaching Art Appreciation underscore the need for data detailing the benefits of a project-based curriculum.

This study explores the potential to generate meaningful education through a project-based curriculum in a post-secondary Art Appreciation course. Informed by research from educational psychology and neuroscience, the culminating project was intended to: 1) connect course content to students’ cognitive contexts through their social, emotional and physical

realities, and 2) offer the potential to improve those realities through the original design of a meaningful work of public art for their nearly art-free campus.

Based on a constructivist epistemology and a phenomenological methodology, this study utilized participant observation, student projects and reflective, illustrated writing as methods for obtaining data. Because the learning outcomes of project-based curricula at the post-secondary level have received little empirical attention (Helle, Tynjälä & Olkinuora, 2006), this study explored the particular nature of learning that results from such a curriculum, namely by addressing the following research questions: How might a project-based curriculum facilitate meaningful learning in the Art Appreciation classroom? What is the nature of the learning that occurs as a result of implementing a project-based curriculum in Art Appreciation?

Ultimately this data might inform the many professors who teach this ubiquitous class and give them the capacity to reach their students in more meaningful and authentic ways (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2004). Through this line of research perhaps we can transform the relationship students have with the arts and perhaps partially repair the damage done to a generation of students who have borne the brunt of a dwindling dedication to arts education in schools. It may further benefit faculty who are already pursuing high-impact teaching by providing data to support these efforts.

Theoretical Framework

From a cognitive perspective it is becoming increasingly evident that our ability to learn and apply information is quite dependent on social and emotional context (Damasio, 2003; Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007; Storebeck & Clore, 2007). Immordino-Yang and Damasio (2007) state that “learning in the complex sense in which it happens in schools or the real world, is not a rational or disembodied process; neither is it a lonely one” (p. 4). Termed “emotional thought,” affect couches our most prized cognitive processes, enabling us to maximize and apply “learning, attention, memory, decision making and social functioning” (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007, p. 3). Without social and emotional context, learning is meaningless. Further, for deep understanding, the content we learn has to get close to the things that already matter to us (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2004).

Even when at odds with contemporary understandings of brain-based learning, the legacy of Cartesian dualism is a lasting one – ingrained in academia’s pervasive neglect of embodied and affective cognition and evidenced by the lecture format that still dominates most college classrooms (Katz, 2013). According to Sir Ken Robinson “as children age we tend to educate them progressively from the waist up. Then we focus on the head. And slightly to one side.” (2006). As a result, college curricula rarely take the role of affect into consideration and often depend on decontextualized scenarios in which learning is isolated from the problematic nature of the real-world where, more often than not, information must be applied rather than memorized (Damasio, 1994). It behooves educators to take this into consideration as we reconsider the traditional methods of schooling students through means that emphasize individualized, rote learning (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2004; Katz, 2013). Immordino-Yang and Damasio (2007) argue that teaching students in contexts devoid of emotional and social content will reduce learning and recall, and that such knowledge does not transfer well to real-world situations. The consequences of emotionally and socially deprived learning are not just educational, but also psychological. As cognitive psychologist Jerome Bruner (1996) warned, “a failure to equip minds with the skills for understanding and feeling and acting in the cultural world is not simply scoring a pedagogical zero. It risks creating alienation, defiance, and

practical incompetence” (p. 42-43). In brief, as educators we *need* social context and emotional thought to make our educational efforts meaningful.¹

Art-making, on the other hand, has long been associated with satisfying social needs and communicating emotional content (Dewey, 1934; Dissanayake, 2000, 2003, 2007; Donald, 2006; Dutton, 2009; Langer, 1953, 1996; Plato, 360 BCE/1994; Solso, 2003; Tolstoy, 1896/1930; Vygotsky, 1971). Plato was among the first to decry the emotional appeal of art as an affront to rational thought, a stigma that seems to have haunted the arts ever since (Eisner, 1995). More positive associations between art and emotion have recognized that art conveys social norms from one generation to the next and bonds us together through ritual and aesthetic elaboration (Dewey, 1934; Dissanayake, 2000, 2003, 2007; Langer, 1953; Carroll; 2004). Vygotsky, most notable for his advances in social learning theory, stated “art is the social within us” (1971, p. 55). According to Tom Anderson and Melody Milbrandt (2004),

Human beings are programmed, biologically and psychologically, to seek and make meaning. Art is decorative or beautiful for its own sake; in addition, one of its primary functions in all cultures around the world has been to tell our human stories, to help us know who we are and how and what we believe (p. xxiii).

Ironically, art has long been rejected as a fundamentally cognitive practice because of its social and affective associations, which educational neuroscience now reveals as a cognitive strength (Blatt-Gross, 2010). Hence, in the post-secondary classroom, incorporating art-making and its potential package of emotional and social content (not just the study of art-specific concepts and vocabulary) into the curriculum offers a valuable conduit for emotionally significant and socially-situated learning (Blatt-Gross, 2010) in addition to better preparing students for the complexities of the 21st century world (Boss & Larmer, 2018).

Further, art-making is a natural fit for project-based learning. Project-based learning is characterized by a curriculum that asks students to solve a problem and create a concrete artifact (Helle, Tynjälä & Olkinuora, 2006). Although Art Appreciation is often taught in a lecture format, which was the status quo at this institution, I sought to redesign the curriculum in accordance with the mission of my institution to engage students in high impact learning and afford them a variety of learning experiences, including hands-on art-making opportunities. According to a study conducted by Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005),

Students report higher levels of engagement and learning at institutions where faculty members use active and collaborative learning techniques, engage students in experiences, emphasize higher-order cognitive activities in the classroom, interact with students, challenge students academically, and value enriching educational experiences (p. 153).

This curriculum is further intended to situate course content in an emotionally and socially relevant context. Derived in part from my interest in experiential learning and my experience mentoring students reluctant to take required liberal arts requirements, this method was intended purposely to connect student interest with course content. Specifically, the culminating project of designing and proposing a site-specific work of public art for our nearly art-free campus allowed each student to express his or her specific views of their college experience and to actualize it in a public form using course concepts as their tools. Hence, the hope is that the highly theoretical and abstract ideas that students typically learn in an Art Appreciation class might gain emotional significance and social relevance as they are applied to an opportunity to create an original work of art to meet the needs of the students and enhance their visual environment. By tasking students with the challenge to design and create works of art

for their campus, they gain agency in the aesthetic decisions that are made about their visual context, a rare opportunity for students (outside of the Bauhaus).

In *Studio Thinking 2: The Real Benefits of Visual Arts Education*, Hetland, Winner, Veenema and Sheridan suggest that good teachers in any subject “propose problems to think about that are currently being grappled with by contemporary practitioners and engage students in understanding how the work, patterns of interaction, and thinking taught in classes operate in the world beyond the classroom” (2002, p. 7). This project mimicked the real-world opportunities that artists so often pursue as they generate proposals to secure grant funding, exhibitions and community-based opportunities. In addition, such an ambitious project required an interdisciplinary approach, drawing together the application of skills in a multitude of fields beyond the arts, including math, physics, history and the social sciences. In order to make a successful proposal, students needed to apply basic concepts from a range of disciplines as they considered the project budget, the logistical viability of the proposed work, as well as the context



Figure 1. Student model of proposed work of public art.

and setting in which it would be situated. My goal was that students would eventually “bring artful thought and attitudes to bear on real-world problems and projects,” (Hetland, Winner, Veenema & Sheridan, 2013) ultimately allowing the richness of artistic thinking to impel more creative problem-solving and collaboration in their lives and future careers.

three units of inquiry and a final project, students explored the nature of visual communication (unit 1), acquired hands-on experience with various media and techniques (unit 2), and researched the relationship between art and culture (unit 3) before applying these findings to the original design of a meaningful work of public art for their campus. Each unit of inquiry was accompanied by an applied project and concluded with a written reflection, encouraging active monitoring of their learning experiences. During the course of the class, pedagogical methods provided students with as much real-world exposure to artists and works of visual art—

Methods and Modes of Inquiry

According to Bransford, Brown and Cocking (2000), the challenges for making learning meaningful and facilitating transfer are present from the beginning: Learners, especially in school settings, are often faced with tasks that do not have apparent meaning or logic (Klausmeier, 1985). It can be difficult for them to learn with understanding at the start; they may need to take time to explore underlying concepts and to generate connections to other information they possess. (p. 58)

With this in mind, this course began with an extensive exploration of content that could be applied to the final project. Based on

specifically public art—as possible. These methods included class discussion, research and presentations, hands-on studio activities, visits from experts in the field, and excursions to

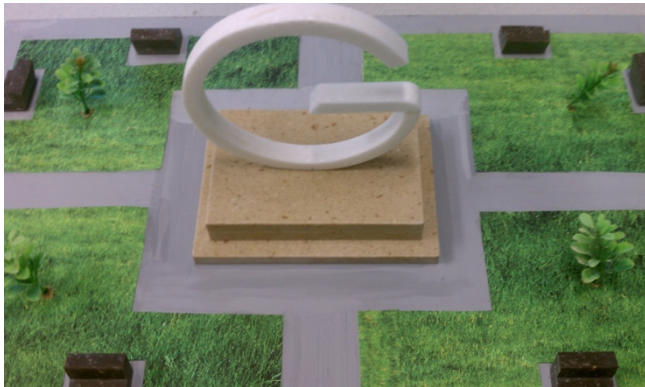


Figure 2. Model of proposed public sculpture for campus, a key part of the final assignment.

cultural institutions and museums, all with a focus on grappling with the bigger issues surrounding public art. In addition to investigating well-known controversies of modernist sculpture, such as a *Tilted Arc* and the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*. Because students who have little training in visual art tend to resort to clichés, these investigations also helped to broaden their visual vocabulary by exposing them to public art that went beyond expected imagery. Students often gravitated towards representations of a bear, the college mascot, but examining alternatives to literal and representational imagery (for example, comparing Maya Lin’s

abstract *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* to the representational approach of Frederick Hart’s *The Three Soldiers*) pushed students to explore more metaphoric and abstract symbols for our campus community. We also focused on more localized public art issues, including hearing from community organizers, examining local public art movements and critiquing nearby murals that were unpopular with residents to understand what made them problematic. These experiences both illuminated the complex nature of public art and revealed to students how easily visual communication can become visual miscommunication.

For the culminating project, students worked in groups to create a proposal for the work of art including a two-dimensional rendering, a three-dimensional model (see Figures 1, 2 and 3, for example), a written description of the work’s form and content, a photograph and description of the proposed location, and a budget detailing the cost of materials and labor. The students could propose a work in a medium and technique of their choosing and select any location on campus as their proposed site. Throughout the course, students were asked to reflect on their progress and learning through illustrated reflections, which offered metacognitive insights into students learning. Course assignments in conjunction with reflections and informal interviews constituted primary



Figure 3. Model of proposed public sculpture for campus in which a student recreated our signature building, designed by famed modern architect John Portman, and proposed an abstract sculpture alluding to the building blocks of education.

sources of data. The intention was for students' work and reflections to portray understanding and ability to apply course concepts and—upon data analysis—illuminate the nature of learning that occurred.

This research study is situated within the theoretical perspective of hermeneutic phenomenology, which aims to understand both the experience of the participant and the essence of a specific phenomenon—in this case the nature of learning that occurred within the course. Informed by Husserl's (1976) notion of intentionality, Heidegger's (1962) interest in the nature of being and Merleau-Ponty's (1964, 1968, 1981) existentialism, this study draws particularly from the reflective lifeworld research of Dahlberg, Drew and Nyström (2001).

Data Sources

Dahlberg, Drew and Nyström (2001) suggest a combination of fieldwork, interviews, observations, drawings and narratives as methods for collecting meaningful data. The research study utilized participant observation, including informal interviews with students during studio time and while working on course projects, student projects and illustrated reflective essays as methods for collecting data.

Although this curriculum was implemented during the traditional academic year, data was collected during summer session of 2014 in an Art Appreciation class that met four days a week for two and a half hours for four weeksⁱⁱ. The number of participants was dictated by the number of students enrolled in the class (18), with one student electing not to participate. Although it would have been preferable to collect data within the traditional academic year, as a predominately commuter campus, student demographics of summer courses are generally consistent with the rest of the academic year and outcomes of this curriculum seemed consistent across semesters.

Data analysis consisted of whole-parts-whole hermeneutic phenomenological thematic analysis, which resulted in the identification of emergent themes, primarily the development of artistic modes of thinking and an increased sense of the value of this type of thinking. Data was also evaluated using Wiggins and McTighe's (2005) six facets of understanding and William Perry's (1968) scheme of intellectual development. Both provided frameworks for evaluating the types of thinking that resulted from the project-based curriculum and provided clear benchmarks for student learning.

Results

Data analysis revealed that students developed increased capacities for explanation, interpretation, application, perspective, empathy and self-knowledge (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Wiggins and McTighe explain that "[i]n teaching for transfer, complete and mature understanding ideally involves the full development of all six

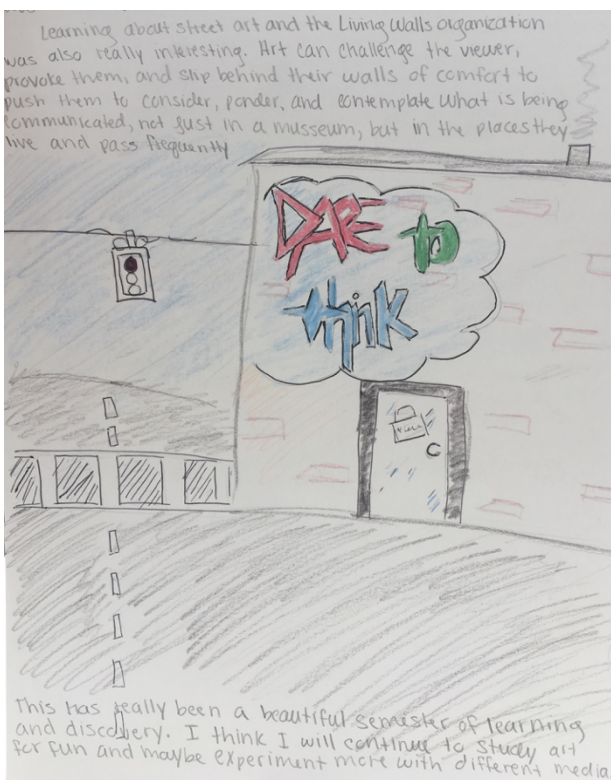


Figure 4. Illustrated final reflection, "Dare to Think."

kinds of understanding” (p. 85). Wiggins and McTighe (2005) describe understanding as the ability to “teach it, use it, prove it, connect it, explain it, defend it, [and] read between the lines” (p. 82). Reflections and final projects revealed that students acquired factual information and vocabulary and were able to explain, interpret and apply its relevance. Nearly all final reflections included an abundant use and application of art-specific vocabulary with relevant illustrations of course concepts. One student, for example, after listing a number of elements of art and principles of design, stated “I learned that the house I live in has a balloon-frame to hold up the ‘bones’ of the house” (Figure 7). Another student illustrated relief printing and described the etching process (Figure 6). Numerous reflections described different media or the use of the elements of art and principles of design. In a handful of examples students independently chose a famous work of art (that had not been discussed in class) then analyzed and interpreted it using course vocabulary (see Figure 6). According to one student, who found inspiration in our visit to the Michael C. Carlos Museum,

It’s fascinating to see the environment, culture, and events of the time reflected in the art from the chosen mediums [sic] to style and content. Greek and Roman free-standing sculpture I found really captivating – especially when the shift happened to contrapposto. I love the intensity in some of the figure’s faces when they are captured in a certain moment – their whole bodies communicate through an implied tension, positioning, etc.—almost as if they want to say something.

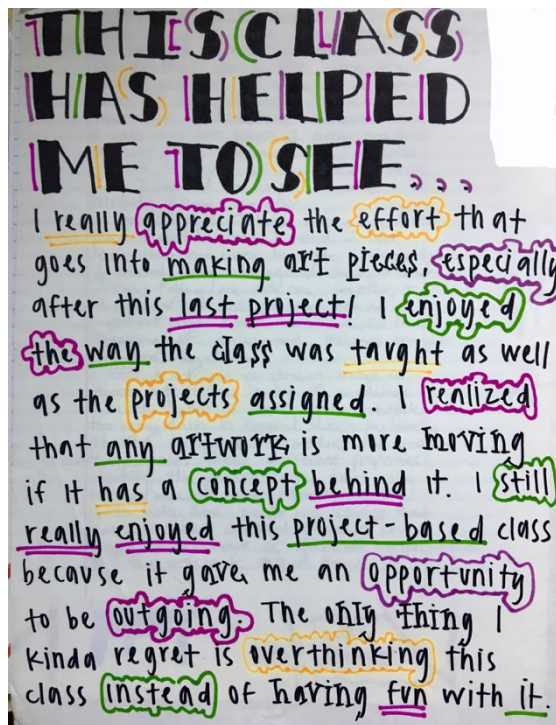


Figure 5. Illustrated final reflection indicating that the final project gave the student new appreciation for the process of artmaking.

Several students made the connection that the visual elements are tools to express something meaningful. One student said “The main lesson I learned is how art is more important than just expression of feelings, it’s about conveying to the future about what is important now.” In addition, they seemed more apt to apply this information to real-life scenarios. Describing a visit from a guest speaker, one student wrote “She gave me inspiration to more aggressively pursue my passion for the arts and also gave me hope that art can impact the community and in return give you the exposure you need to move people.”

As evidence of increased empathy, one student wrote “I really appreciate the effort that goes into making art pieces, especially after this last project!” Another student who demonstrated increased self-awareness explained, “This class has help [sic] me see how creative I am and how I can actually see myself making a ‘work of art.’ I had fun learning the different aspect [sic] of art and just drawing for fun, which I do a lot now. This class made me love art and understand it more.

These observations, which focused on shifts in self-knowledge, empathy, application and perspective (Wigging & McTighe, 2005) seem to

support the notion that the content was made meaningful for students through personal connection.

Perhaps what is most surprising as an emergent theme is the idea that students learned to think like artists and valued the opportunity to do so. Students expressed an increased appreciation for experiential learning and the opportunity to think in divergent and creative ways. As one student stated in her reflection titled *Dare to Think*, “Art can challenge the viewer, provoke them, and slip behind their walls of comfort to push them to consider, ponder, and contemplate what is being communicated, not just in a museum, but in the places they live and pass frequently.” She concluded, “This has really been a beautiful semester of learning and discovery” (Figure 4). Although not classified as a studio course, emergence of the eight studio habits of mind described by Hetland, Winner, Veenema and Sheridan (2013) —the ability to understand art worlds, stretch and explore, reflect, observe, develop craft, engage and persist, envision and express —demonstrate that similar cognitive patterns can emerge from an experiential approach to Art Appreciation. This interest in artistic thinking was most evident in the illustrated reflections, which in many cases revealed a dynamic transformation and increased sophistication as the course progressed. One student who evinced many characteristics of studio thinking (understanding art worlds, reflecting, observation, stretching and exploring, developing craft) said, “This class has helped me to see art in a new way! I never realized how complex it could be of how much we use it, it’s even in our history and culture. I also enjoyed the hands on style of the class.”

Appreciation for the opportunity to engage in experiential learning may remind readers of Elliot Eisner’s (1985) statement that “the enduring outcomes of education are to be found in consummatory satisfactions—the joy of the ride, not simply arriving at the destination” (p. 34). In fact, many student comments reveal a capacity for what Eisner (1985) terms “aesthetic modes of knowing,” an ability to think in ways that are constructed by sensory experience. Eisner loosely defines aesthetics as a sense of rightness of form specific to a discipline and the content it is intended to communicate, both within the arts and beyond. The student’s obvious joy in this new understanding of communication consequently shifted the focus of my curriculum to cultivating the capacity for aesthetic modes of thinking—and emphasizing the value of aesthetic

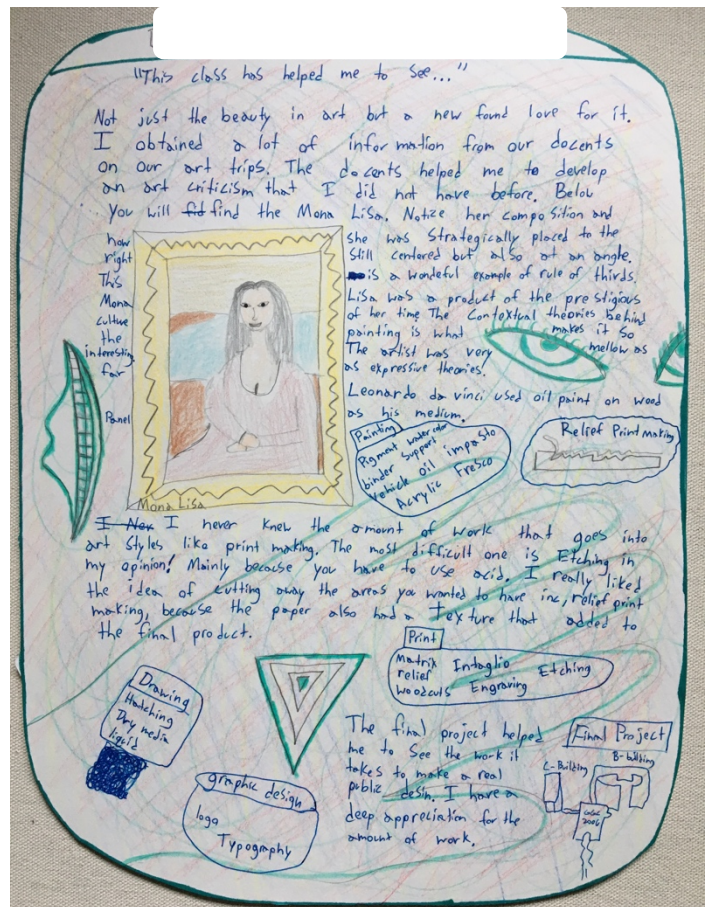


Figure 6: Illustrated final reflection in which student transfers course concepts and vocabulary to a description of a work of art that was not discussed in class.

thinking to all career paths— in subsequent offerings of this course.

Students also revealed a certain awareness of the pedagogical benefits of project-based learning. The reflection in figure 5, for example, articulates an appreciation for the effort that goes into artmaking following the final project that required them to design and propose a work of public art for the campus and the project-based approach that pushed students to create a work with both conceptual and formal strengths. This awareness of the benefits of project-based learning is somewhat surprising, given evidence that students learn more through active instructional strategies in comparison to passive methods but perceive a lesser degree of learning due to the cognitive effort active learning requires (Deslauriers, McCarty, Miller, Callaghan, & Kestin, 2019). When asked why some students prefer a traditional lecture and test-based format, most concluded that they have never questioned traditional methods because they are the status quo in their educational experiences, and one student concluded “because we have been brainwashed.” Similarly, Eisner (1985) notes that aesthetic modes of thinking are often undermined because students and teachers emphasize and reward test performance. One might surmise that because the primary forms of assessment in this class, namely the proposal of a work of art for the campus, were not exam-driven that students may have felt more open to alternative forms of pedagogy.

While students seemed to be adept at attaining an understanding of the course content, there is room for further interpretation through the lens of William Perry’s (1968) scheme of intellectual development, as the ultimate goal of the curriculum was to encourage students to take personal responsibility for their learning and commit to their work. While slightly dated and overtly homogenous (see also Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1987), Perry presents a classic model for students’ understanding of their relationship to and beliefs about knowledge, which progresses through four distinct phases – dualism, multiplicity, relativism and commitment. According to Kloss, (1994), although most students leave college still grounded in multiplicity or relativism, as educators we might aspire to nudge students toward commitment, which requires students to “integrate the relatively objective, removed, and rational procedures of academia with their more empathic and experiential approaches to all other aspects of their lives” (p. 152). As noted above, this is a challenging prospect, particularly given a required, introductory class comprised mainly of incoming freshmen. There is

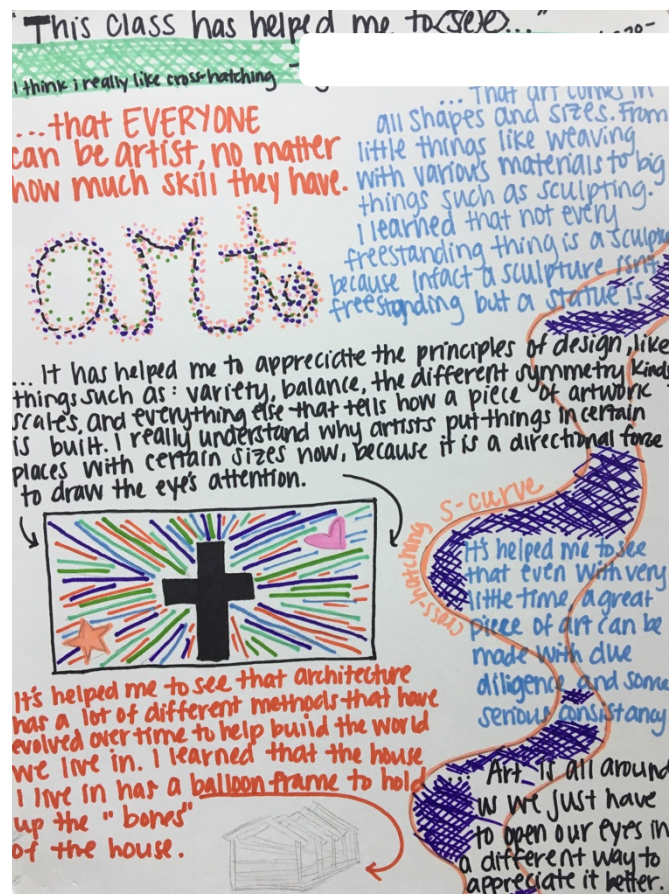


Figure 7. Illustrated final reflection referencing a number of course concepts, particularly vocabulary.

some evidence that this evolution started to occur among participants and a closer examination of midterm reflections in comparison to final reflections would yield valuable information on this development.

Significance

Recalling Floyd's (2002) notion that the curriculum should approximate the experience of the students, this curriculum attempted to employ personally relevant themes to generate emotional connections. In many ways, such as the six facets of understanding (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) utilized above, this appears to have been successful. Although the assignment addressed themes that were potentially personally relevant to students because of their connection to the surrounding campus, from my perspective as an educator, there was something missing, likely the evolution to intellectual commitment as described by Perry (1968). Because we stopped short of making full-scale public artworks for our campus, these final projects remained conceptual and were never actualized. Although students seemed much more invested in this approach to the course (keeping in mind the possibility that the enthusiasm they expressed for this type of curriculum may have been an attempt to please their professor), the attempt failed to approximate my educational fantasy filled with eager, enthusiastic students and they seemed disappointed that their proposals would not be actualized. I suggest that the absence of generating concrete finished objects is what prevented the content from being truly relevant to students' lives and environments, which maintained a performance oriented (rather than a learning oriented) motivation for many students (Dweck, 1989). Although I consider the final project somewhat successful, it ultimately acted more as a stepping stone. The results of this study prompted me to make more effective changes to my curriculum, resulting in the project-based format that I employed thereafter. Inspired by the students' disappointment that their proposals would not be realized, the most significant and dramatic change was moving from the proposal of a hypothetical work to the design and full creation of a permanent work of collaborative, large-scale public art for the campus. Although logistical and financial limitations dictated a two-dimensional painting as the product, under the revised curriculum each class partnered with a campus interest, space, office or organization and produced a mural for a specific site. The actualization of their ideas, and the fact that their work would be on display for the campus and posterity to see, seems to have impelled students to take their efforts quite seriously.

Implications for Practice

For students who think of themselves as non-artists the "discovery" of aesthetic thinking and the development of studio habits of mind alone is significant. The finding that students value artistic thinking as the most important outcome of the class has shaped my general education arts curriculum ever since. Elliot Eisner's (1985) notion that aesthetic modes of knowing are invaluable to all fields of study is now a consistent thread that weaves all of the content together. Because aesthetic thinking tends to be undervalued in formal education, producing students who acknowledge its worth indicates the potential for a positive shift toward valuing arts education and its outcomes in broader contexts.

This insight was the impetus to further modify the project-based curriculum I implemented to include the actual production of works of public art. Although the value of aesthetics as a mode of critical inquiry has been well documented (Anderson, 1998; Ganger, 2006; Housen, 1980; Stewart, 1994), it is the actual making of a work that seems to solidify the

abstractions of philosophy in this case. We have gone beyond mere proposals for public art and have made the leap to democratically creating collective large-scale works of art that are permanently displayed on our campus. By actualizing their design, students generate a visible work of art for the campus. Their work contributes to the production of a real object that is on display, literally changing the aesthetics of their campus, not gathering dust in one of my drawers. In the realization of these projects I have seen students dive in with the enthusiasm that I had envisioned. Such applications of Eisner's aesthetic thinking seem to broaden and deepen their personal investment in not only their coursework but also their peers and campus community. Alternatively, understanding aesthetics as an awareness of "human connectedness to the world" stimulates both self-care and the care of others; Siegesmund writes "Like widening ripples in a pond, the circles of care expand from family and friends, to a classroom and school, and on to a larger community" (2010, p. 81). This conceptualization of aesthetics might also urge art educators toward more community-oriented projects.

Ultimately, Art Appreciation may be one of the few opportunities we have to reach students who have otherwise been deprived of art education throughout their formal education. I urge my colleagues to take that opening seriously and hope that this study will provide valuable insight into how to make this brief opportunity as robust as possible. Many instructors are already making this happen, often in impressive ways despite limited resources. Although I benefited from an ideal class size and a supportive administration, I shared some of the struggle to obtain adequate resources to make such a curriculum possible. Despite a growing interest in high impact practices, the quest for adequate spaces, supplies, reasonable class sizes and pedagogical support for innovative project-based pedagogy is still a battle many Art Appreciation faculty have to fight. Hopefully, this study will allow us to do so with data in hand.

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ⁱ While some elementary and secondary schools are embracing the trend toward Social and Emotional Learning, the influence of SEL is more focused on managing social and emotional situations than the impact of the social and emotional on learning, a notion that is still making its way into curriculum at all levels.

ⁱⁱ This curriculum was initially implemented with larger courses of approximately 28 students during the traditional academic year when courses meet for 3 hours per week. Data collection, which was funded by a seed grant, was originally planned for Spring semester but was delayed to Summer session due to a maternity leave. Based on the consistency of outcomes, I suspect this study could be scaled up and findings would be similar among larger courses.