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Thinking in, through, and with art: challenges, discoveries, and knowledge construction in graduate arts-based research

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**Thinking in, Through, and with Art: Challenges, Discoveries, and
Knowledge Construction in Graduate Arts-Based Research and
Practices**

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Introduction

In this presentation, we will discuss the design and experience of the collaborative facilitation of an arts-based research capstone course created in 2018 for an online graduate program in Art Education and taught for the first time in Spring 2019.

Guided by the question, "in what ways were our students invited to explore, embed, and integrate the arts in their research?" we will discuss how the course design functioned as a creative map that provided direction yet allowed a flexible structure for student guidance. We will elaborate on the artistic and epistemological challenges students encountered in contextualizing their practice within a broader research sphere,

as they worked to maintain “internal consistency and coherence that represent[ed] a strong and seamless relationship between purpose and method” (Cole & Knowles, 2008. p.67). Examples of students’ artistic research will illustrate the concepts presented.

The presentation will highlight the various ways that the facilitation team interpreted the course modules to support the students’ design of their artistic research and help them integrate ideas and practice. In designing the course, readings and visual resources were selected for their international voice and wide perspectives, inferring that traditions of artistic practice as research are challenged differently and often with great buoyancy in other cultural and academic environments.

Course design

I used these guiding questions as I prepared the first plan of the course. They emerged from intensive reading on the subject of arts-based research. At first, I thought of the design as referencing traditions of qualitative research but expanded from this basic structure towards unknown possibilities that would first and foremost allow creative approaches and challenges to rules.

At Boston University, the faculty members who teach courses in the Master of Arts in Art Education program online are given the freedom of structuring their course with the content for which they have mastery, with the results that our only Masters Research Project course had become over time a very academic and rigorous course focused on qualitative research methods invested in the traditions of the Social Science and Education methodologies. Students have been conducting case studies, surveys

and historical methodologies to write their research paper, using schools, colleagues, and students as their research subjects.

The Masters Project in Arts-Based Research and Practices course was created as a counterpoint to that course. It introduces students to research methods that use the artistic process as the primary way of understanding and examining experience and the creation of knowledge. As a program that maintains the goal of nurturing the development of the artist-teacher, this second choice of capstone Master's Research serves students whose interests lean towards artistic practice as a mode of inquiry.

The design of the course allowed students the choice to pursue their own artistic investigation as research or use art-based educational methodologies that engaged with others' artwork and practices. These would primarily be investigated through an artistic or creative voice/medium. We intended for their project to invite a flexible yet well-articulated process that started with a question, that could be experienced and explored via a system of their own design, to be implemented and documented in such a way as communicating with some clarity with other researchers (McNiff, 2008).

I borrow from Henk Borgdoff (2010) as he clarifies the differences between artistic practice and artistic research. He suggests: "We can justifiably speak of artistic research (research in the arts) when that artistic practice is not only the result of the research but also its methodological vehicle when the research unfolds *in and through* the acts of creating and performing" (p.46).

More importantly in the context of the design of our course, Borgdoff (2010) adds,

Research takes place when a person intends to carry out an original study to enhance knowledge and understanding. It begins with questions or issues that are relevant in the research context, and it employs methods that are appropriate to the research and which ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings. An additional requirement is that the research process and the research findings be documented and disseminated in appropriate ways. (p.54).

In connecting their research to other teaching artists and artistic practices in the discipline, students would contextualize what is fundamentally an introspective process and use a standard of scholarly exchange to document their observations.

Keeping in mind that the benefit of art-based research is often in its complex unearthing and examination of issues and assumptions more than it is in providing permanent answers (Eisner, 2004), inviting “unfinished thinking” (Borgdorff, 2010, p.44), students would be invited to explore questions from multiple perspectives, gleaning knowledge from both inner experience and external sources.

In selecting this research project, they would engage in an exploration that expanded the boundaries of the art education discipline and affirmed the legitimacy of the artistic experience as a way of knowing.

Borgdorff’s (2010) idea about the difference between artistic practice and artistic research is integrated to the course learning outcomes. Much of the course design was inspired by the extensive work of Ardra Cole and Gary Knowles (2008) and their *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research*.

But artistic practice and artistic research do not maintain clear boundaries. Before moving on, allow me to contextualize the project further, and point to where most of our students stood in regard to their practice, by introducing what has often been perceived as a perennial debate surrounding artistic research as a discipline. In his chapter entitled *Aesthetic of Resistance*, Hito Steyerl (2010) expresses concern about

the transformation of artistic research into an academic discipline. There are discussions about curriculum, degrees, method, practical application, pedagogy. On the other hand, there is also substantial criticism towards this approach. Basically, it addresses the institutionalisation of artistic research as commodified education, creative and affective industries, administrative aesthetics, and so on. (p.55)

Steyerl (2010) is suspicious of this movement because he sees it as normalizing, generalizing and regulating, all things contrary to the needs and nature of artistic practice.

In the design and facilitation of our arts-based research course, I was intent on expanding and opening possibilities for our in-service students who, we inferred – correctly, I might add – are teaching, living and operating within systems and structures of education defined through policies, rules, and expectations. The same students were also accustomed to being asked to complete their graduate assignments following pre-established guidelines and exemplars.

So, to come back to Steyerl's (2010) argument, many of our students were in fact in need of stepping outside their disciplinarian practices of art education and engage in a research process for which a structure was initially provided to give them a sense of safety, a map with landmarks and boundaries to guide their journey.

As the story will show, for many of our students, artistic exploration in inner uncharted territory proved frightening. Some expressed the desire for the safety of the normalizing and regulating mode of productions. The arts-based research forced them to ask questions they were often uncomfortable asking. In many ways, these were art teachers that did not yet believe or trust in the capabilities of their discipline to reveal deep and important understandings.

Organization and structure of the course

The course is designed to lead students through the design of a visual and textual research project over the 14-week course that culminates with the presentation of an online art exhibition in an individually designed e-portfolio space that is accompanied by a support paper.

During these 14 weeks, students complete assigned readings and meet weekly in Live Classrooms using Zoom[®]. The course is constructed on the Blackboard[®] platform. When they cannot attend due to time zone differences or other activities, students can watch the recordings uploaded to the course site, in their own time. Our students are located in international locations or scattered all over the country.

Every facilitator is given the responsibility of advising five students. The Live Classrooms are at first with the entire cohort, (we had 28 students in 2019), and would meet later on with their advisor only, in small groups or one-on-one, as they wish. The first weeks offer a general overview of arts-based research. As we advance, students delineate a research question, begin defining their own strategies guided by the questions they wish to focus on and are supported in their effort to balance contextual inquiry and analytical reflections with time for visual and fully embodied practices. They alternate writing and studio time, attempting to allow the complementarity of the two languages.

The first weeks of the course are punctuated by shorter assignments that build students' understanding of arts-based research and are designed to increase their self-confidence. These early weeks feature intense reading expectations as well. Our in-service art teacher/students might not have any knowledge of what is qualitative research, therefore, it becomes imperative to give them a "crash course" so to speak to explain the territory covered by the approach, contrasting its philosophy against the normalized scientific research that everyone is more familiar with, through their courses rooted in social sciences. Accompanying these essential readings, students need to familiarize themselves quickly with various forms of arts-based research. The modules are enriched with narratives, videos, websites and photographs as is possible and students explore as they can to familiarize themselves with the material.

In retrospect, for many students, this force-feeding was a struggle, as they attempted to integrate all this toward the formulation of a tentative research question by Week 4.

However, students enjoy and benefit greatly from the hands-on assignments which, in 2019, included a mind map, attentive observation practices in a public setting, practicing reporting and analyzing their fieldnotes. At the conclusion of our presentation, I will circle back to these early exercises, what we observed and will be improving upon for Spring 2020.

Leadership and facilitation

In this arts-based research course, Dr. Rebecca Bourgault has been our fearless leader! As instructors, we each came into the experience from a different place and brought to the experience our various strengths and expertise as researchers-- especially our individual backgrounds in arts-based research. We had no idea what the outcome would be. It was exciting, because not only were we coming together as a diverse team with varying backgrounds, each of the students' interests, experiences, and where they were starting from were also very different.

- We had to be willing to be uncomfortable with the unknown; guiding them but holding it loosely
- ...to wrestle with ambiguity and let go of control and our expectations of students and the path they decided to take, even when they got stuck on an idea, sometimes lost their way.
- We practiced flexibility,

Developing trust in our work together and in themselves was a big part of the initial work. Through our conversations, our questions and rephrasing theirs, keen listening (!) and reading between the lines sometimes, offering ideas for research articles, books, or websites related to their artistic and/or research interests, and guiding them into making work around what they cared about deeply, it was both exciting and challenging. Each facilitator's experience was a bit different.

We met weekly with students as a large group, the first 7-8 weeks using Zoom[®]—students with facilitators, including Rebecca who served as the primary facilitator, leading the group into deeper thinking about the topics of the module that week and involving students in sharing their ideas. After a few weeks, a few of us as facilitators also shared our ideas or expertise that might expand the students' ideas around arts-based research.

On top of the weekly large group meetings, as facilitators, we started to meet with our individual groups and/or with individual students using Zoom[®] to get to know them and what they were interested in pursuing. I personally, really relied on getting to know students individually through their journals (written to me as a private conversation room, set up in Blackboard[®]) and their discussion posts. Using the journals, as well as frequent individual Zoom[®] meetings and weekly all-group meetings, and as trust was built, students research processes were both deeply personal as well as collaborative.

Student experiences

As mentioned, we had 28 graduate students enrolled in the course. And while we would love to share all of their projects with you, we will be here for the rest of the day.

Therefore, we selected the final projects by six students that we feel showcase the breadth and depth of what transpired from this course.

Just in terms of materials and or artistic processes, the works we will share with you here include sculpture, embroidery, painting, “live” painting, installation, and virtual reality. In our examples, you will also see two students who coincidentally chose to delve into the theme of home, but they approached their inquiries in different ways.

For the last Live Classroom, all of the students were asked to make a short 1-minute video to showcase their work. We will share a few of the videos that we feel clearly describe the students’ works in a succinct manner. Some of the other students’ works we chose to explain to you through images and journal entries.

Anais

Anais is a middle school art teacher who learned to use a product called Google Tilt Brush®, which she had prior exposure to. Google Tilt Brush® allows the user to produce a room-scale virtual reality painting and create an immersive environment for both the artist and the viewers.

Since it was not possible for all of us to have a Google Tilt Brush® and a headset to truly experience Anais’s work in virtual reality, she created the following short video to give us a peek into what it might look like when someone steps into her painting.

(video)

In this project, Anais created a fictional character named Lucy. Her methodology was partly informed by Laurel Richardson’s contextually constructed narratives.

The viewer, through the use of the Tilt Brush application is able to navigate inside the world of Lucy—even walk into her “head” and read her mind in the form of text. In her supporting paper, Anais took an artistic approach by presenting her findings in a narrative form in the voice of Lucy—thus blurring the line between fiction and reality, as well as toggling between Anais’s experience as an artist-researcher, and Lucy’s experience as a character that was being painted in a virtual reality world.

Erin

When Erin realized that she can make art for her research, she immediately knew that she wanted to work around the idea of HOME.

In her arts-based research, she sought to discover the phenomenon of feeling at home through the use of objects, created, kept, or remembered as instruments or vessels of memory.”

Erin immediately started asking, “What makes something feel like a home? and How do we attach our memories and personalities to places and things?

As she was surrounding herself with questions, she shared the following in her journal during the earlier weeks,

“This idea started to formulate in my senior year of college when I took a live-in position with an elderly woman who had advancing Alzheimer’s. The home had been the house that she had raised her children in and had lived in for over fifty years. She often pointed to objects and personal items around the house and told stories to help illustrate the memories of her life. Although she remembered what each item was and what its’ significance was to her personally, as her state began to unravel, and the

disease took hold—she no longer realized that she was still “at home” and she would ask to be driven home to alleviate her feelings of unfamiliarity. In these moments I would attempt to anchor her to the present by pointing out familiar objects in her house so she could remember that these were her items and she was in the place she belonged. I began to wonder which items I could use to hold her in the present, by connecting with familiar parts of her past” (journal entry, 2019).

Here are some pages from the many sketches she shared on a weekly basis. The bottom drawing, she described as follows:

“...I attempted (unfinished) about a reoccurring dream I have, involving being in my grandmother’s house alone at night. In the dream I am haunted by spirits and loud noises and none of the comforts are there from before. In my most recent dream I was half awake and I could see into the closet of my real bedroom in front of me, but I could not wake up” (journal entry, 2019).

Erin further explored her interest in the notion of “home” from many angles—looking at contemporary artists like Do Ho Suh, Mohamed Hafez, Linda Stein, and Derrick Adams who make works that are about “home” but they are also about displacement and loss. While doing her research on contemporary artists that work around the theme of home, she became increasingly interested in objects that are tied to memory of home—which she called “object memory”.

She wrote, “I started writing down all of the places I’ve lived and I was surprised how many memories were sparked, and how many things I thought I had forgotten, but were somehow in the archives of my brain” (journal entry, 2019)

In another journal entry she wrote, “I seem to keep going back to miniatures and shadow boxes- I made model cities out of cereal boxes and Styrofoam as a child and in my undergrad I continued with cardboard shadow boxes and small wooden shadow boxes. I was intrigued by Joseph Cornell’s arrangements inside boxes and anything that was like looking into a small separate world” (journal entry, 2019).

For her final art project, she decided to create a dollhouse.

“I have an unassembled dollhouse in my basement that I was thinking of putting together for this, so I started looking at miniature artists like Lori Nix and Charles Matton. It reminded me of the Harvard Forest Fisher Museum in Petersham, MA- the same town my grandparents’ farmhouse was in. We used to go as children to this museum where they had intricate dioramas of the history of the land “(journal entry, 2019).

Erin wrote fewer words about her process in her journal after Week 6, as she pushed herself to visually explore her memories pertaining to Home. She started to connect storytelling through collages and drawings—her artwork and prose were both delicate and emotive.

To be honest, as a facilitator, I was not able to fully visualize her dollhouse, which she never shared any progress photos of. Week after week, she told me that “she is working on the dollhouse”

In week 7 she shared this photo at the bottom with the caption:

- “My childhood friend - Luke and I, making popcorn
- Her final artwork is titled, “Relics of Home”

The image on the left is the front of the house, and the image on the right is the back, which has five different compartments or rooms. Each room contained a story.

- This room is called, Grammy & Grandad's House

Erin's artist statement (2019) reads...

"An embroidered napkin, a sewing thimble, an old guitar pick; these things could be hurriedly shoved into a junk drawer or displayed proudly behind a frame. One item may bring a person to tears only to be thrown away by someone else. Why do we keep? Why does a beloved stuffed animal from our childhood cause us to clutch it to our chest, breath in and close our eyes in overwhelming nostalgia? Do things have a spirit that is evoked through physical engagement and are our minds wired to store our memories within things like buried time capsules for safekeeping?"

"...Through this piece I seek to discover the importance of object memory by confronting my own past, the homes I've lived in and the objects within them that have illustrated the memories of my life. Through this work I have remembered, I have grieved, and I have found closure to feelings of homesickness and displacement for the lost homes of my past" (artist statement, 2019)

-This room is called Mom and Dad's house

-This is "Dorothy's house"

"When I was in my senior year of college I lived with an elderly artist named Dorothy. This woman had wonderful paintings from her career, scenes of markets, singing choirs and people walking in the rain. We had a morning routine of meeting in the kitchen for instant coffee, this was also when I would monitor her pill intake- Dorothy

had dementia and was taking medication to slow the symptoms of Alzheimer's. I recorded my experience with her in three red notebooks that I kept. Every surface in her house had at least one doily" (artist statement, 2019)

"My best friend growing up had a big brown bunkbed in a room with a sliding glass door to outside and octagonal windows. We played dinosaurs with plastic figurines, wrote fantastical stories on copy paper that we stapled together and built forts of sticks and ferns in the woods outside. We created maps of faraway lands and pretended we were pirates on a raft floating out into the pond behind their house. We covered his ceiling with glow in the dark stars and dreamed we were in space. Luke passed away at age 19, when I was 20 in a biking accident.

Soon after his death... I remember lying on his bed staring at the ceiling for twenty minutes, wanting to sink into the blanket to become part of the furniture and simultaneously never go into his room again. (...) The only object I have left of his is a small club chair where he used to sit and play guitar" (artist statement, 2019).

And the final room is her "first apartment" where she "dreamed of living like a bohemian artist and [where she] used [the] living room as a studio space" (artist statement, 2019).

Tim

The mentoring process is intuitive and a collaborative process as we support students' research interests. One student that stands out in exemplifying these ideas is Tim. Early on, Tim's body of artwork was inspired by his interest in the concept of layers and his photos taken during his travels, but he just hadn't realized how his arts-

based research might embrace his ideas more personally. In his online journal, he wrote: “I was inspired by the layers of time from the rotting of material to new and old paint, to graffiti covering those layers as a symbol of contemporary day. I have always been inspired by matching and combining old and new” (journal entry, 2019)

During Week 4, Tim wrote: “For my own artistic inquiry my plan is to research what it was like to be a member in the LGBTQ community in Boston as far back as 20 years vs. contemporary day. I hope to interview members of the gay community that experienced this shift in time and culture. I want to examine what adversities/social issues affected this population of people in the 80’s into now” (journal entry, 2019).

Tim tells that is when his ah-ha moment began. He wrote: “These timeless layers connect to my interests in understanding contemporary issues of society and how they were molded from layers of discrimination, segregation, power structures and age-old wounds throughout time” (journal entry, 2019). His lived experience and study of the gay community and the social issues that affect them were connected to this theme of layers, saying that “where we stand in the present is a production of many layers of social and political hardship and triumph” (journal entry, 2019).

Tim’s body of work represented “both experience and experiment” (journal entry, May, 2019). He referred to this work as *Live Painting*—working continuously over several days, and adding new narratives and layers each day. I will speak more about this idea of layering in his and other students’ work later in the presentation.

Research as a Collaborative Act

Themes of Self-Acceptance, Layers of Identity vs. Conformity as a man who identifies as gay (Tim Chaves)

(video)

Whitney

"I want to evoke empathy and understanding of students' personal worlds."

In a word, Whitney's arts-based research project was about empathy. She developed what she called, "an empathetic approach to inquiry." Her goal was to capture her students' lived experiences in her work, in order to "help her establish a presence for them..." Inspired by everyday experiences in her diverse, Title I classroom and recent international travel to Mexico.

It was during the Week 4 module and a worksheet that students completed in which Whitney's ideas around art-based research and her own artistic practice took form. Her ah-ha moments came during readings from our text by Savin & Wimpenny (2014) and my suggestions that her research could follow more of her OWN personal perspectives and interest in visually narrating human experience, identity, memory, and inclusion. She wrote about her possibility thinking at the time, saying: "I thought: what if I reverse this idea and try to find the interdisciplinary connections my students make organically? And what if I expand the idea of interdisciplinary to extend to outside of school to students' life experiences? This is where I began to feel like I engaged my artist self in the mix." (Journal entry, February 16, 2019)

Whitney switched away from involving her students in the research study directly (her original thinking), toward a practice that reframed her understanding of arts-based research and embraced Savin and Wimpenny's (2014) argument that "the artist as researcher can use their work to "disrupt and dislodge perspectives to take up alternative lines of inquiry" (p. 34).

Being highly influenced by and inspired by the diverse, lived experiences of the students in her art classroom, and she strove to interpret their voices through her own work.

She wrote, "I am interested in portraying the human experience, particularly in times of struggle or growth. This is challenging because I only truly understand my own experience. Along the same theme, I am interested in the different experiences of people from diverse backgrounds, locations, and races. Even after researching, portraying these ideas is sometimes challenging because I do not want to appropriate or misrepresent an experience that I do not fully understand because I have not experienced it." [Module 4 worksheet] She was immediately situating herself in the work.

Whitney would come to delve into a/r/tography and her holistic and lived experience as an artist, teacher, and researcher. Her art became a painterly, empathetic montage of her observations of students' artworks that depicted what they cared about, which in turn showed what Whitney cared about—a compilation of their imaginary and real worlds of diverse, childhood experiences.

Stephanie

In her support paper, Stephanie introduces her work with the following words:

“Fiber artist Sheila Hicks states that, “textile is a universal language” (Ford Foundation, 2014, 0:07). When fibers are woven or sewn together, meaning is intertwined into textile work through colors, textures, and symbols. Manipulated by the artists’ hands, textiles become a form of communication. How do artists convey expression through fiber and textile art successfully? It is not just for viewing. It is art that arouses several of the senses such as sight, touch, and sound” (Furniss, 2011, p.20)” (Journal entry, 2019).

“As weaving and embroidery create a sense of calmness through a repetition that quiets the mind, interacting with textiles acts not only as a form of self-expression for the artist but a therapeutic method as well.

Exploration of self-expression through textiles is deeply meaningful to me. Having problems with self-expression, I hope to discover how fiber can become the medium through which I can communicate. I often hold my feelings and thoughts inside as a result of self-doubt. I am looking to discover ways of creating meaning within my art through textile manipulation. Having grown up around textile art, I feel there is a significant generational connection between my relatives and myself.

To conduct my art-based-research, I explored three themes: metaphors within weaving, encoding meaning, and therapeutic qualities of tactile art. I chose to gather resources from artists who work directly with textile arts.

As I immerse myself in creating each page, it becomes a process of healing. As embroidery takes time to complete, the feelings aroused by each page needs to be

revisited until the page reaches completion. The content reveals a progression of thoughts as the pages are flipped through” (Journal entry, 2019).

And again, (...) “The materials’ colors and textures stand for the emotions ‘for they represent best the kind of energy and vibrancy that emotions bring to our inquiring’” (Yob, 2000, p. 131)” (journal entry, 2019).

For her contextual analysis, Stephanie discovered that she could now express something personal, but it needed the form of poetry. She introduced her work with the explanatory quote:

“The goal of the poet is to present his/her experiences, both internal and external, in such a way that the reader may enter the work as if it were their own” (Furman, Langer, Davis, Gallardo, & Kulkarni, 2007, p. 303).

Cynthia

In her artist statement, Cynthia (2019) offered:

“Since my recent move from Georgia to Wisconsin, I have found myself thinking a great deal about the word “home.” What does the word “home” mean to me? My art is a personal journey that explores the meaning of home through past experiences and memories.”

“As a child, I enjoyed making shoebox houses, I would design rooms with furniture, windows with curtains and matching rugs. I would sit for hours constructing, evaluating and rearranging items used in a home. It seemed appropriate to begin my journey by creating a box house” (journal entry, 2019).

“I expanded my thoughts about home by drawing the floor plans of places where I had once lived. I found the process of making the floor plans to be helpful in analyzing

my memories and experiences. Each floor plan is placed on the wall in a linear timeline, beginning with my grandmother's home, childhood home, first apartment, family home, and current home. The floor plans overlap with the next plan creating a modular web connecting the memories. The personal artifacts and photos displayed reflect my memories of a person or experience" (artist statement, May 2019).

In working with students like Cynthia, I endeavored to have them explore beyond their own sense of individual making by expanding their awareness of other artists' use of the theme, perhaps as an equivalent of what a literature review would be in an academic research. She was one student whose work she seemed bent on her own choices and it took a little work to have her look beyond her own ideas. Eventually, limiting her search to the videos of Art21, she found inspiration in the work and words of artists Do Ho Suh and Pepón Osorio among others.

In her support paper she bridged concepts from psychology and memory with commentaries about Do Ho Suh's work:

"His memories brought him back to his childhood home in Seoul, Korea. Suh describes his need to physically make art to understand what he refers to as his "issues of longing" (Art21, 2003). Marcus (1995) states that, "we hold on to childhood memories of certain places as a kind of psychic anchor, reminding us of where we came from, of what we once were, or how the physical environment nurtured us..." (p.20). By exploring the meaning of home through art making, a door is opened for psychological self-analysis that leads to new discoveries and richer understandings of ourselves and others" (support paper, May 2019).

For her Interpretation section of the support paper, Cynthia used the format of letters that she wrote to her former homes. The tone of the letters is similar to those we send to persons we cherish. In them, she reminds the houses of how she felt within their walls and of what happened there. For a former home that has since been demolished, she wrote the letter as an obituary. Through these letters she also revisits her past and reorganizes the memories of her life passages according to the houses that witness them. In her work, houses are family.

One is reminded of Gaston Bachelard and his *Poetics of Space* (1958), who lends to objects a phenomenological reverie that animates them. He writes: “A house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability. We are constantly re-imagining its reality; to distinguish all these images would be to describe the soul of the house” (p. 17).

Challenges

Alongside the important artistic discoveries our students made, every week brought challenges. Some were shared by many students, others were individual. They all at some point or another found themselves lost and frightened. Beside perhaps the obvious lack of experience and self-confidence with arts-based research, it bears repeating that most of our students are in-service teachers who spend their working days being organized, in charge of children, shouldering responsibilities and rewarded for being in control. As a result, our students pushed back, at times unwilling to see their insecurities, and resisting the process of opening. They resisted the need to let go of their teachers' identity.

As graduate students, letting go of controlling all aspects of their research was a difficult skill to learn. Some had planned the outcome before they began. We reminded them often that the “risk-taking” they ask of their students who engage in school art projects was now becoming real for them too. Suddenly, these values that are promoted to bolster the importance of art in schools became values that they had to integrate and make real.

Irwin and O’Donoghue (2012) have noted the same. They write:

“While many artists working in our time are committed to finding or creating openings to that which exists beyond the present, we found that for the most part our art teachers [candidates] showed signs of resistance to thinking without structures, to thinking beyond structures, and to imagine a different idea for the structures they perceived (...) of their experience in school classrooms” (Irwin & O’Donoghue, 2012, p. 233).

The systems of schooling they were used to and the demands that are made on these art teachers “placed them at odds with the unpredictable nature of art and its experience did not move our [candidates] students to change” (p. 233), but to resist the expansion into living curiously, to imagine new contexts for the relationship between artistic research and pedagogy.

Another challenge came in helping students navigate the ambiguity associated with understanding their artmaking as research. They were challenged to *seeing* their own artwork as data; then trusting themselves to further create as a method of analysis.

Academically, they needed to expand their understanding of how to situate and contextualize their work. Shortcomings inherent to their previous knowledge preparation

became apparent as some students were unable to realize that their interest was not universal and that their work fitted in a specific time and place alongside the thought and processes of other artists.

The facilitation team also explored many ways to help students understand what a theoretical framework is. Asking questions and holding a mirror to their personal philosophical positions was a first step in having them become attentive to the theories underlying a text or an artwork by another. We spend much time helping them situate their work.

Three of the salient themes and takeaways we observed as researchers became the themes of *Layering*, *Unknowing*, and *Unlocking*. We will unpack these ideas for you in the following slides.

Layering

As facilitators, the concept of *layering* was a recurring theme, as we assisted students in addressing their layered identities as artists, teachers, and researchers and their coming into, becoming, and finding their own way as arts-based researchers. One of the first challenges was to help students think about their own practice as research and encouraging them to prioritize their own artistic practice—to let go of their focus on research as being connected solely to their educational practice as teachers. Helping them find or re-find their teacher identity meant helping them peel back the layers of identity, as they sometimes struggled to leave their teaching as the focus of the research.

Secondly, each of the student examples we have shared represent layers and complexities of these graduate students' inner lives, experiences, and dreams. Actualized through arts-based research, their ideas grew into layers of possibilities. I witnessed how important it is as a facilitator to help novice arts-based researchers listen to their own heart in this process.

At the same time, a level of un-layering was needed to help students understand that arts-based research is by nature, a generative, *layered* process—especially when it comes to data analysis—one that some students found difficult to embrace (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008, p. 99-100). In arts-based research, we know that creating art can become the data, which in turn “may also be a method of data analysis as well as a means of data representation.” Sameshima and colleagues (2019) talk about peeling back the layers of meaning of collected data by “materializing and representing” the learning (p. 5).

However, I found it difficult to coax several students out of their preconceived ideas about research to accept that in arts-based research analyzing or interpreting the data could “result in the creation of new artifacts based on the original data,” as Sameshima reminds (2019, p. 7). Those students who did embrace this layered process, kept making to understand, and kept pushing to ask the questions seemed to generate work that seemed to get richer with each layer of meaning they unearthed.

Unknowing

I once read that in order to find one's own way, it is important to get lost. The image was always that of a forest or mountains. I am sure it is from the mythological

writings of Joseph Campbell. To show our students that their quest for something beyond what they already knew was the labor of any hero's journey would have probably made them roll their eyes in disbelief. The truth though, is that for research to reveal new understandings, one has to start with *unknowing*. We have already seen how reluctant our students were in letting themselves being taken by a research of which they knew not the outcome nor controlled the process. Loss of control, loss of solid ground under their feet was a difficult threshold to cross.

Anthropologist Tim Ingold (2018) suggested that for anthropologists as for artists “the destination of a research can never be known in advance, that the conditions under which it is carried out are largely beyond their control, and that it never really reaches any conclusion” (Ingold, 2018, n.p.).

In the process of reading his article, one also encounters research as a way of living curiously, as well as the necessity “to be attentive to that which always escapes, always overflows our most determined attempts to pin things down” (n.p.). We need to find the truth of what we are looking for from “being-inside it. This kind of knowing-in-being”, he contends “is the essence of research” (n.p.)

In their 2012 paper, “Encountering pedagogy through relational practices”, Rita Irwin and Donal O'Donoghue write about starting a project for teacher candidates from a position of 'being with'.

“The position of 'being with' does not imply that one is closed to experiences that have the potential to shape, extend, confirm, problematise, undo or make uncertain the knowledge one has. Rather, 'being with' recognizes that encounters are processed and made sense of

through certain knowledge frameworks that teacher candidates have been introduced to, and to which they have become attached over time. (...) In processes of undoing, making uncertain or extending knowledge, there is always the potential for other ways of knowing to emerge.” (p. 226).

Unlocking

Mika Hannula (2009) describes that in artistic research, there is “democracy of experiences” (p. 4), which means that there is no *a priori* hierarchy of experience. While the three salient themes that we metaphorically call, Layering, Unknowing, and Unlocking are not linear or hierarchical, the *unlocking* cannot happen without the prior two themes that have been described.

In order to unlock, or arrive at the “aha” moments, which happened at different phases for each student, they had to democratically gather their lived experiences as artists, teachers, and other roles that they identify as individuals. Not all of the experiences were relevant to the research, but in order to unlock the answers to their research questions, or rather, to arrive at their research questions, they had to be “willing to put [their] views and works out there, [and] transparently...articulate and communicate...” what they were doing with us.

Students were encouraged to explore in multiple directions and foster plurality in their doing and thinking while they created their works and informed themselves through reading and discovering other artists’ works. Students were encouraged to repeat the process of making, reflecting, comparing, and contextualizing.

Since many of them were artists in their own right, this almost cyclical process of making and reflecting in a self-critical way was not a real stretch when they got back into the groove of artmaking. However, since they were almost all novice art-based researchers, we, as the instructor and facilitators, had to eventually guide them to specificity while they were simultaneously still *layering* and *unknowing*.

Thus, the *unlocking* moments happened when students were able to democratize their artistic experiences *and* contextualize their inquiry within existing research frameworks.

Here I take a few lines from the journal entries by Brittney to show you moments of *unlocking* that happened throughout the course. Brittney came in with several ideas for her research topic, but I urged her to go with the most personal one which had to do with her experience involving an athletic injury from 12 years ago in high school. Brittney had been painting her injured legs over the years without investigating why. Her transparency in sharing her experiences in her weekly journal entries helped me guide her to reach several “Aha” moments.

Week 4: “My parents are putting an addition on their home and I had some items in the attic that I had to move out and they have since stayed in [a] trunk. One of which is a 4x5' cork board layered and covered with bib numbers, results, notes from my coach, my actual singlet, and other track related memorabilia. I was avoiding it; it brings up great memories of a time before I was injured. I feel like I am uncovering a grave, but I think it's an appropriate time to do so. Today, I removed it from my trunk and dumped its

contents onto a table. I have yet to sift through it, but I think the process is important” (journal entry, 2019).

Week 5: “Making the artwork- so it’s not one hundred percent smooth, but it is challenging, as it should be. It was easy to begin and continue to work (draw, paint, collage). I am letting compositional decisions happen in the process without making too many choices ahead of time. In doing so, I am curious to see what ends up on the wood panel and in what arrangement” (journal entry, 2019).

Week 6: “...I wanted to avoid the burning topic of what that lived experience was for me. I think that has to do with how I view myself and how I want others to perceive me. I think that I am uncomfortable sharing that a running injury has led me to create artwork for over 12 years and affected me psychologically and physiologically. There is some shame in having a traumatic experience in where [sic] I still have both of my legs, still have function, and you cannot see any deficits” (journal entry, 2019).

Week 12: “This is the final (4th) painting I made...I made the screw shiny, similar to the other paintings: the screws in my legs, the safety pins, the bench. The screws in my legs, along with my first surgery, are what caused me to forcibly hang up my shoes. But I hang them up to give them a rest. I need to forgive what will no longer be. I will never be the runner I once was before I was hurt, my mentality and body are significantly altered from the repercussions of injury. I need to let it go, and let that part of me heal” (journal entry, 2019).

While these are only snippets of Brittney's extensive journal entries in which she not only shared her personal experiences as she painted, but she also found literature that pertained to the loss of identity for athletes who have experienced an injury that ended their athletic lives. What Brittney thought was "too personal" and irrelevant to research at first, she was able to unlock by connecting, contextualizing and positioning her work.

Hannula (2009) also stress the importance of "intentional playfulness [that] should be seen as very productive, fruitful opening. It gives us a chance not to be too stiff and uptight...[it] allows us to shift the focus away from putting things into a box and then using all our energy to keep the box locked, solid, and stable" (p. 6). While Brittney's process was not exactly "playful," she literally and metaphorically opened a locked box (in her case, a trunk) that helped her attain multiple "Aha" moments throughout her research process.

Conclusion

A few weeks after the course ended, the facilitation team met for a debriefing. I had been keeping notes of everything that needed to be changed and reviewed for the next iteration of the course, but I also wanted to hear from everyone what they saw necessary to change. As a team, we were consistently collaborative and creative. I very much trusted in their vision and the value of their experience. One thing was certain. We needed to rebalance the importance of text versus art practice and destructure further the expectations of an academic research paper to make way for more imaginative approach to constructing experience, its context and interpretation.

One example of revised modules pertains to early exercises: Week 1-3

What was missing at this early stage was an experiential foray into what it is like to create an artwork through responding to a sample research question, and in so doing, experiencing the process of visualizing an abstract concept.

Facilitating this course was incredibly enjoyable. It is rare that as professors we get to work collaboratively with multiple professors from different colleges and universities—I thank Rebecca for that.

One aspect I realized was how much “easier” it was to work with students who had consistent art practice, or those who saw themselves as artists. Even though many of them were so focused on their teaching, it became evident that the ones that inherently understood the process of artmaking and getting lost in the process were able to come up with more successful projects.

As a facilitator, I was challenged to reach back to my own experiences, and also reset my approach to openness and getting lost. Being part of the teaching team for this course allowed me to flex my “muscles” as an artist, educator, and researcher. Collaborating and sharing experiences and ideas with the team have personally pushed me to embrace the unknown. I also appreciated the technology that allowed me to be part of this dynamic team of professors from all over the United States. It makes me wonder if this type of collaboration can be even more dynamic with advancement in technology.

The course embodied and resonated with how Hannula (2009) describes artistic research-- a multilayered, open-ended process that is cultivated and fostered in interaction” (p. 15)

The opportunity in teaching this course allowed me to identify areas of my own strengths as a researcher, peel back some of my own layers to find the freedom to focus on what I truly care about, and trust both my research *and* social-emotional skills to support graduate students' complex endeavors.

The collaborative work together with Rebecca and the other facilitators was not only life-giving but spurred on my own work as an artist, researcher, and teacher. Again and again, I came back to my love of the questions and my equal love for supporting others' love of the questions. I asked my students to stay willing to live in the questions...and find their voice...to trust that their own inquiries can make a difference in the lives of others. My favorite quote by Rainer Rilke comes to mind here:

“Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves... And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.”

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